

**INTER-GROUP RELATIONS OF MBANO IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA AND ITS  
NEIGHBOURS, 1906 TO 2006**

**BY**

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## CERTIFICATION

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## **DEDICATION**

To My God that never fails;

Mbano in diaspora and its neighbours, whose societies were distorted by colonial rule;

Professor Onwuka N. Njoku, and Professor Uchenna C. Anyanwu, my mentors and role models; and

My beloved parents, Sir S.E Mbalisi and Lady L.C Mbalisi, and brothers and sisters, the source of my strength

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## ABSTRACT

Inter-group relation is not an entirely new field in historiography. Scholars of different backgrounds have expressed divergent views on changes that have occurred in this area of study. Investigations and findings on the theme differ from epoch to epoch. Historically, social, political, cultural and economic considerations, account for changes in the nature and form of inter-group relations in human society. Igbo culture, custom, tradition, and belief systems are dynamic and heterogeneous. Facts of history contribute either to a hostile or harmonious relationship among individuals or groups. The Mbano of Imo State, South-eastern Nigeria appears to enjoy some peaceful and harmonious relationship with their neighbours, through their social interactions and economic relations, especially, through cultural festival, marriage, trade and agriculture, though not without occasional skirmishes. Given the nature of their relationship, this study investigates the factors at play in the society in the face of growing conflict in Igboland and Nigeria at large. Two factors account for the changes in the contour and dynamics of relations between the people. These *inter-alia* include colonial rule in the area beginning from 1906-1960 and the Nigeria-Biafra war, 1967-1970. The study examines the issues intrinsic in the changes brought by the two episodes to the form of relationship existing between Mbano and its neighbours. It therefore argues that common claim to history, ancestry and cultural ties account largely for the mutual relationship existing between the people, the impact of the two episodes notwithstanding. The work concludes that, in spite of the marked changes wrought on the society mainly through colonial administrative reorganisation, Western education, Christianity and the Nigeria-Biafra war, the people have maintained mutual relationship as people that share common ancestry. They have also continued to emphasize *umune* as a bond of unity among them and their neighbours. The cordiality of relationship between the people demonstrates the Igbo saying that, indeed, 'peoples' neighbours are their brothers/sisters' -- *agbata obi madu wukwa umunne ha*'. The method adopted in the study combines both descriptive and historical narrative. Qualitative research methodology was used in the re-interpretation and analysis of verifiable information collected from different sources. The approach was interdisciplinary and presentation of findings was both chronological and thematic.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- A.G: Action Group
- A.T.R: African Traditional Religion
- A.W.A.A: Aladinma Women Association, Amuzari
- D.O: British District Officer
- B.F.O: British Foreign Office
- C.M.S: Church Missionary Society
- D.C: District Officer
- D.C.O: Divisional Council Officer
- D.O: District Officer
- D.C: Development Centre
- D.J: Disk Jokey
- E.C.B: Electrical Corporation of Nigeria
- E.C.S: East Central State
- F.G.N: Federal Government of Nigeria
- GSM: Global System Mobile Communications Network
- H.C.N.C: High Court of Native Council
- I.I.U: Ibeme Improvement Union
- I.I.U: Inyishi Improvement Union
- I.M.S.W.C: Imo State Water Corporation
- I.S.E.B: Imo State Education Board
- M.F.N.A: Mbano Federated Native Association



N.A: Native Authority  
N.A.E: National Archives Enugu  
N.A.O: Native Authority Ordinance  
N.C: Native Court  
N.C.A: Native Court Authority  
NCNCP: Native Court and Native Council Proclamation  
NCNC: National Council of Nigerian Citizens  
N.C.R: National Commission for Reconstruction  
NCR: National Commission for Rehabilitation  
NEPA: National Electric Power Authority  
NEPU: Northern Elements Progressive Union  
NNA: Nigeria National Alliance  
NNDP: Nigeria National Democratic Party  
NPC: Northern Peoples Congress  
OGA: Obollo General Assembly  
OOKWD: Old Okigwe District  
OOWD: Old Owerri Division  
RCM: Roman Catholic Mission  
SCPO: Supreme Court Proclamation Ordinance  
TTC: Teacher Training College  
UPGA: United Progressive Grand Alliance  
UNC: Umuduru Native Court  
WCs: Warrant Chief  
WCC: World Church Council.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background to the Study**

Study of pre-colonial and colonial African society emphasise isolation and the general hostilities of one ethnic group or polity against the other. Existing colonial literature in their assessments of Africa wrongly classified pre-colonial and colonial African indigenous communities as immobile, stagnant and averse to change. It is to be stressed that in pre-colonial Africa, inter-relations were not caste-like or closed. Rather, there existed amalgams of proximate towns and community groups that related through various ways. The fulcrum of this study, Mbano in Igboland, is one case in point. Igboland is a territory in the south-eastern part of Nigeria, surrounded by such landmarks as the Cross River at the foot of the Cameroon Mountain in the east, the Kukuruku Hills in the west, the Benue River, and the great Atlantic Ocean in the Bight of Biafra in the south. Most significantly, Igboland lies on the plain near the delta of the famous Niger River<sup>1</sup>.

Igboland has at its northern and northeastern borders, the Igala and the Idoma; in the west, the Edo; the Ijo in the south and the Ibibio in the east. Igboland includes the present Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo states and some parts of Delta, and a large part of what is today called Rivers State. In fact, Port Harcourt, by the Colonial Land Commission of 1952, was confirmed as in Igboland<sup>2</sup>. These different groups have had

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<sup>1</sup>E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976, p. 100

<sup>2</sup>C.N. Ugwu, *Ihiteafoukwu: The Echo of Igbo Culture*, Ibadan: Cypress, 2004, p. xiii



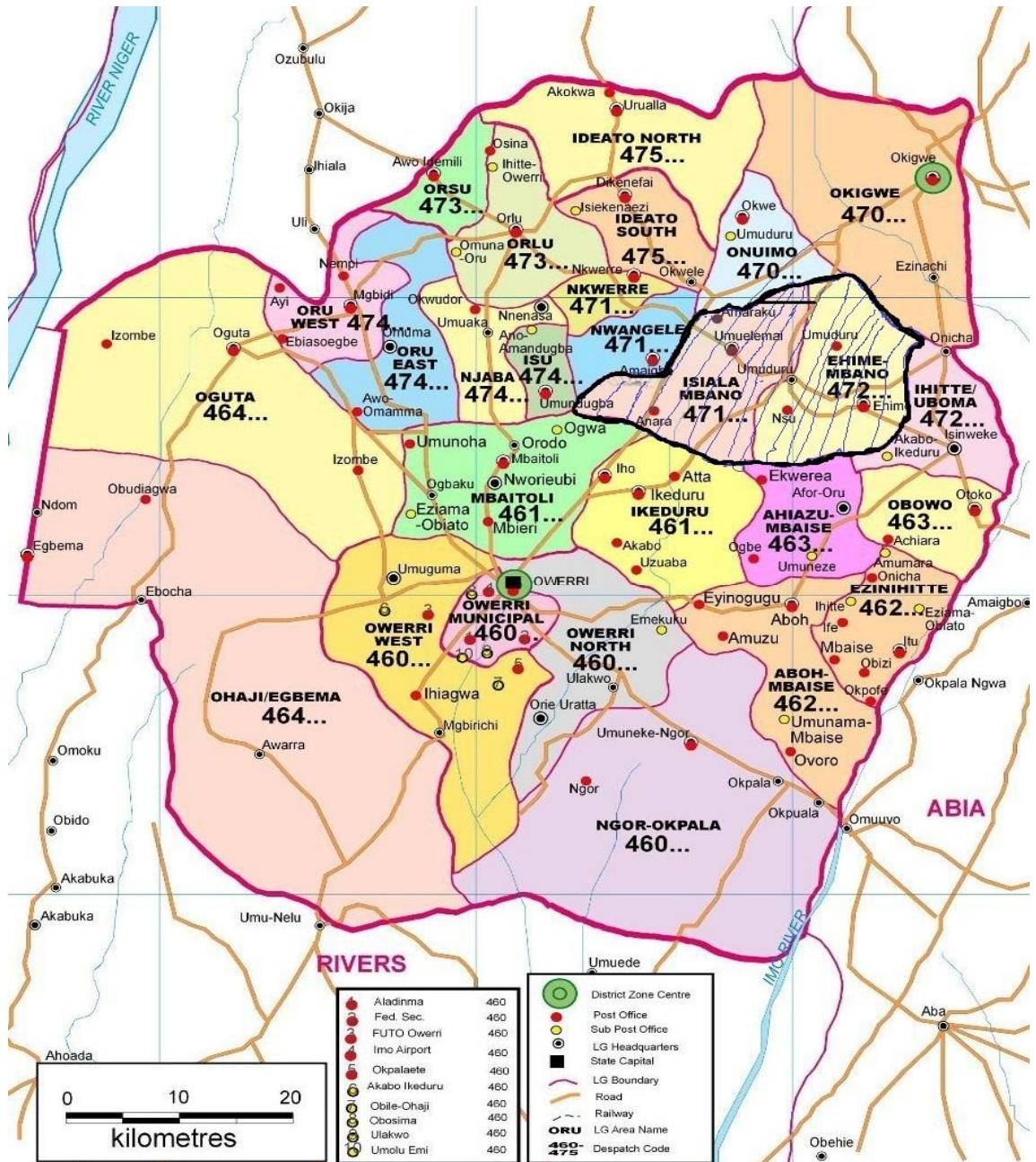
one form of interaction or another, especially in the area of economic pursuits, social-cultural and political relations. These relations, which go way back in history, manifest through marriages, cultural festivals and activities, and also wars. The interactions have been peaceful most times and hostile at other times. On inter-group relations, Afigbo argues that different Nigerian ethnic and cultural groups sought through their richly varied traditions of origin and migrations and through accounts of the rise and expansion of their socio-political system, to preserve, *inter-alia*, their perceptions of the relationships which existed between them and their neighbours.<sup>3</sup> In fact, relations among the Igbo have always been based on some factors either relating to common historical origins, ancestry or to a common language, tradition, and custom, religion, belief system, trade and festivals, among others. These factors tend to bind people closely together but can also lead to war. Wars are in themselves a form of inter-group relations. Most communities in Igboland came into contact through different movements, for instance, the Awka-Orlu movement in which people migrated and settled in different areas. The Mbano people and their neighbours, the focus of this research, have benefited in the course of their socio-political, economic and cultural activities.

Mbano is found in Imo State. It appears to be the only community that shares boundaries with communities in Orlu, Okigwe and Owerri that constitute the three Geopolitical zones of Imo State. Mbano is centrally positioned in Imo state, and is something of the Igbo heart land. The area embraces Isiala and Ehime Mbano local government areas. Geographically, Mbano occupies an expanse of land of more than 205.30 square

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<sup>3</sup> A. E. Afigbo, *The Igbo and their Neighbours: Inter-Group Relations in Southeastern Nigeria to 1953*, Ibadan: University Press Ltd., 1987, p.1

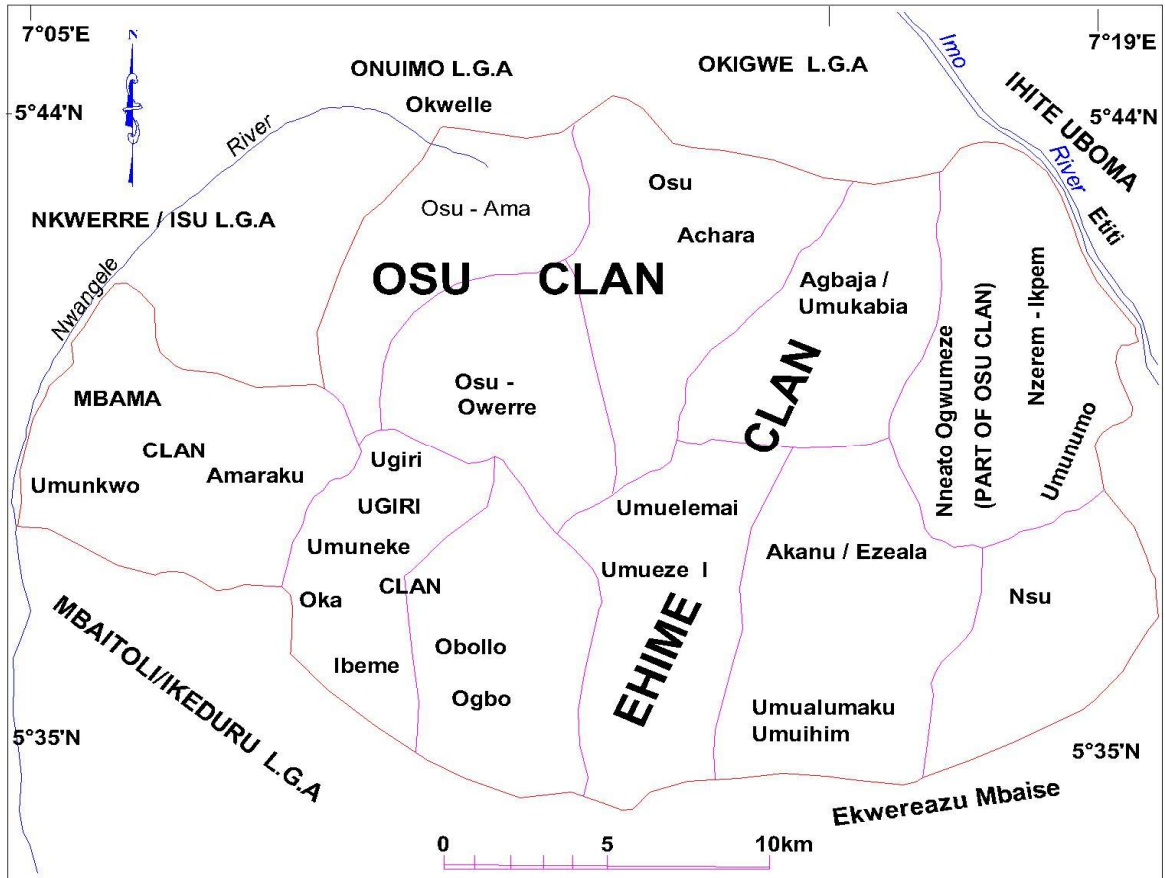
kilometers. It is located approximately between latitudes 7 and 8 E<sup>44</sup>. The map below shows the location of the area of study in Imo State.



**Map no 1: Map of Imo State showing the area of study separated with a black line.**

<sup>4</sup> *The Statesman*, Owerri: 1987, p.12

Mbano consists of Osu, Ehime, Mbama and Ugiri clans. These clans of Mbano and its neighbours are as indicated in the map **no 2**



**Map No 2:** Map of Mbano showing its neighbours.

The people are predominantly farmers. They are known for the production of palm wine (*mmanya-ngwo*), from the raffia tree, and in much smaller quantity, (*mmanya-nkwu*), palm oil and kernels, cassava, yams, three-leaved yams (*una*), coco-yams (*ede*), native plantain (*unyere ojii*) and so on. They also keep live-stock such as goats, dogs, fowl, and pigs which provide them with a means of livelihood. Agriculture in the area fluctuates between subsistence and commercial production. Mbanjo people had been adherents of Igbo traditional religion until Christianity began to gain sway among the people. Mbanjo belief system tallies with those of other Igbo groups. That is, the belief in the sanctity of deities and pantheon of gods.

The name Mbanjo, like Nigeria, is said to be a colonial creation. The area was originally known as Mbasaa. The British colonial rule balkanized Mbasaa through its administrative creations. Mbasaa comprised seven clans namely, Ehime, Osu, Ugiri, Mbama, Isu, Ugboma and Obowo. According to S.A. Ike,

the origin of the name Mbanjo was during (sic) the British administration of Umuduru Native Court created in 1906. A separate native court was established to serve Obowo, Onitsha Uboma, Etitu clans and their neighbours. The Umuduru Native Court Jurisdiction served four clans; namely Osu, Ehime, Ugiri and Mbama. Thus, it was during the sitting of the court at Umuduru, that the name Mbanjo, meaning-four clans, naturally began to be

used by the warrant chiefs in reference to the court's jurisdiction<sup>5</sup>.

Mbano, according to records, had appeared extensively in British colonial records before it was recognized as Mbano Federated Native Authority in 1945<sup>66</sup>. Mbano was carved out of Mbasaa for easy administration by the British and most probably, due to the fact that the people constituting the Mbano Federated Native Authority are closely related.

As traditions of origin of Mbano indicate, the people migrated from the general area of Orlu and settled in their present location. Some neighbours of Mbano also share in this common ancestral origin and belong to the larger Isu-ama clan of Igboland. Hence, it is not uncommon to hear an Mbano elder say *õanyi shi uzo orlu bia-ebea*”, õwe came here from Orlu areaö. An Eziamma Mbaise elder would say; õwe migrated from Mbano areaö. The same is said of Amaimo Ikeduru or by Inyishi elder. Adiele Afigbo appears to support this view stating that,

the tradition of the Isu-ama Igbo (meaning the Isu who had gone abroad ómade up of Mbama, Mbieri, Ikeduru, Osu, Ehime, Uboma, Ugiri and Mbaise) of the Ohuhu Ngwa and of many Cross River Igbo groups indicate that they migrated eastwards from the general area of Orlu. To many communities in this group of Igbo-speaking peoples Ama-igbo in

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<sup>5</sup> See C.TC Annals, District Officer Okigwe Division, Annual Report, 1945 ORLDIST 3/1/89. See also A. E Afigbo, (ed.) *Historic Events List of Local and National Significance*, Enugu: Government Printer, 1973, p.51

<sup>6</sup> Afigbo, *Historic Event List* p. 53

Orlu is a sacred and revered spot. The name itself means the street, meeting place or headquarters of the Igbo<sup>7</sup>.

The saying that Mbano and its neighbours share a lot in common is a fact of history. Mbano and its neighbours fall within Afigbo's description. The neighbours of Mbano are as follows: Ahiazu Mbaise on the West, Ikeduru/Mbaitolu on the South, Okwelle-Onuimu on the North and Agbaja-Isu in Nwangele on the eastern end<sup>8</sup>, in Orlu zone. The contiguous communities that form neighbours of Mbano are, Ezianya in Ekwereazu Mbaise, Inyishi, Amaimo, Atta and Umudim in Ikeduru, Etitu, Abajah Isu, Ogwa, and Okwelle in Onuimo. The boundaries which supposedly divide Mbano and its neighbours are no 'Berlin walls' that could prevent interaction. There were considerable mutually interactive relationship and contact between them.

Boundaries are said to be a thing of the heart; so it is with Mbano and its neighbours. Some border villages in Mbano easily cross these boundaries for different purposes. These include trade, religious, cultural and educational activities, among many others. The relationships and interactions have been largely symbiotic and peaceful, though minor skirmishes and disagreements do occur occasionally. Most of these communities live in such close proximity that enables neighbours fetch amber from one another to make fire. For instance, a person from Umueze<sup>11</sup> can do so from his Ezianya Mbaise neighbour. This is also applicable between an Oka person and his Inyishi Ikeduru

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<sup>7</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*. Ibadan: University Press Ltd., 1981, pp. 12-13.

<sup>8</sup> Nigeria: Demographic and Health Survey 2003, National Population Commission, Federal Republic of Nigeria. ORC MACA, Calverton Maryland USA, 2004, p.16. See C. N Mbalisi, 'Change and Continuity in Isiala Mbano, An Igbo society, 1906-2007.' Unpublished MA Project Report, Department of History and International Studies, UNN. 2008, pp. 8-10.

neighbour. The same close relationship exists between Amaraku and Agbaja-Isu, and between Osu Mbanu and their Okwelle-Onuimo neighbours.

The people cooperate and interact through other ways: exchange of labour- *igba onwo oru*, youth activities, *isusu* contribution, cultural festivals such as traditional wrestling (*ekere mgba*), *Ibo ama*, *mbom uzo*, *ikpo oku*, *nta* and the new yam festival (*ekweji/aruru/awa* or *ahajioku*), dances like the *Alija* dance, *ubo ogazi*, *nkwa otele*, *nkwa inwakiriinwa*, masquerades (*nmanwu*), marriages and numerous other activities. Despite the mutuality existing between Mbanu and its neighbours, there were occasional periods of misunderstanding arising from these activities. In some occasions, they led to conflict and skirmishes between the people. According to Marcel Ibe, in the 1950s, there was a boundary dispute between Osu and Okwelle that led to crisis that lasted till the colonial government intervened and settled the matter by placing the disputed portion of land under government control.<sup>9</sup> Before then the crisis had claimed many lives.

Other sources of conflict between Mbanu and its neighbours include marriages, burial rites, and cultural festivals, among others. Religious conflict has often arisen from the siting of churches. Such churches were usually near shrines or community sacred forest. In recent times, the pursuit of various political interests has been another harbinger of conflict. The creation of autonomous communities in Imo State has divided neighbours, leaving a backlog of unresolved conflict situations between individuals and communities. These conflict situations seem to be introducing new elements in the relationship and interaction between Mbanu and its neighbours.

Mbanu, like most other Igbo communities, was organized on kinship, non-

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<sup>9</sup> Chief Marcel Ibe, Pensioner, 65 yrs, interviewed at Umuduru Iheoma na Ofenku, Okwelle, 24/8/2010

monarchical principle.<sup>10</sup> The people do not have a centralized polity; rather, they have many autonomous communities, each with its own traditional ruler. Some of these institutions are the off-shoot of colonial warrant chief creation. Besides, colonial boundary adjustments and administrative reorganisations placed Mbano in the midst of numerous neighbours who hitherto had been their kin. Chidi Onwubuariri stated that,

Atta community now in Ikeduru Owerri zone used to be the head community for the *Nta* festival that heralds the *ekweji* for Mbama and Ugiri clans. Inyishi also used to be part of Ugiri clan in Mbano. Today colonial rule placed Atta and Inyishi administratively under Old Owerri District and they are today neighbours of Ugiri and Mbama clans in Mbano.<sup>11</sup>

These colonial situations contributed to the ever-changing nature of intra/inter group relations prevalent in the society today. The dialects of Mbano people and those of their neighbours are almost the same, with only minor differences in pronunciation and accent. Each of the groups in the course of their interaction has affected the other through its actions. As Adiele Afigbo observes, inter-group relationship properly understood presupposes contact and interaction between groups each of which has an identity, each of which has the capacity to make some inputs into the relationship, in short, each of which

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<sup>10</sup> A. E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand* p.12

<sup>11</sup> Chidi Onwubuariri, Pensioner, 72 years, interviewed at Amakpaka Umuoti Inyishi in Ikeduru, 24/8/2010.



has some scope and area of autonomous action. Inter-group relationship thus involves giving and taking<sup>12</sup>. It is a truism that inter-group relations entails contact and interaction between groups or peoples. The forms in which relationships manifest notwithstanding, interactions between groups reflect of human actions. These actions are intrinsic in the process of existence and the uniqueness of identity of the interacting groups and the reciprocity of inter-group relations<sup>13</sup>.

The Mbanda and its neighbours, and the various groups inhabiting the area do not present such a complex network of contacts and interaction. The relationships embrace all aspects of historical development, viz, economic, social-cultural, political and religious, gender and so on. A good deal of the history of the contacts and interaction between the people is contained in oral tradition. The story of their migration from the general Orlu area appears to be in line with oral traditions regarding their origin, migration/dispersal and settlement. Afigbo is of the opinion that stories such as these are most likely to have arisen among peoples who were in meaningful contact with one another and who therefore were understandably anxious to build up a working theory of inter-group relationships.<sup>14</sup> Okpe O. Okpe thinks that contact and interaction between groups pre-supposes that each group must consciously or unconsciously, advertently or inadvertently, relate with other groups to survive<sup>15</sup>. This makes contact, interaction and inter-dependence not just a fact but a necessity of life; universally constant and basic.<sup>16</sup> Obaro Ikime writes that no human groups are isolationist in orientation, but that the

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<sup>12</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *The Igbo and their Neighbours*, p. 18

<sup>13</sup> Okpe, O. Okpe, "Conceptual and theoretical Issues of Studies in Inter-Group Relations", in Okpeyemi Akinwumi et al (ed.), *Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria During 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Ibadan: Aboki Publishers, 2006, pp.12-13.

<sup>14</sup> A. E. Afigbo, "Pre-colonial Trade Links Between Southeastern Nigeria and the Benue Valley", *Journal of African Studies* vol.4 No.2, 1977, p.123

<sup>15</sup> Okpe, "Conceptual and Theoretical Issues", p.6-7

<sup>16</sup> Okpe, "Conceptual and theoretical Issues", p.7

mundane needs of daily life bring diverse Nigeria peoples into close and continuous contact with their immediate neighbours<sup>17</sup>. Mbano and its neighbours were not strangers to one another, but lived in close affinity and co-operation. They also developed over time considerable historical commonalities arising from their contact and interaction.

Inter-group relation is dynamic and multi-dimensional. This reflects the mutational nature of man's relationship with his environment. Hence, changes that occur are sometimes products of the nature of happenings at the material time. Inter-group relation is, therefore, a factor of the social, economic, cultural and political conditions and can be critically anchored on geography.<sup>18</sup> Colonialism was one monumental development that brought in its wake radical changes in the form of inter-group relations in Africa in general and Nigeria and Igboland, in particular. It introduced new dimensions of violence in interactions and all forms of endless struggles for political, economic and socio-cultural interests between groups. This in turn brought a number of consequences on the relationship between neighbouring groups and societies. According to Afigbo, relations between neighbours became modified.<sup>19</sup> Isichei opined that 'boundary creation brought a situation in which people were either confused about the actual boundaries or were forced to accept artificial boundaries.'<sup>20</sup> Over time, peace-loving generations appeared quarrelsome and boundary-conscious, resulting in avoidable inter-group skirmishes and a times even wars. Ethnicity and ethnocentrism became implanted in the minds of brothers who, through colonial political activities, began to be seen as neighbours. However, despite these changes, relationships between Mbano and its

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<sup>17</sup> Obaro Ikime, 'History and the Problems of Nation-Building: The Nigerian Situation,' *Bulletin of the Library Association Vol. 9. No. 3, 1973*, p. 116

<sup>18</sup> Okpe, 'Conceptual and Theoretical Issues' p.16

<sup>19</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *Igbo and Their Neighbours* p.5

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976, p.21

neighbours continued to be largely peaceful. But the changes brought by colonial rule are not without challenges to inter-group relations in the area. These problems, as discussed in this work, are considered shortly.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Mbano and its neighbours constitute a group of communities in Igboland located in present day Imo State, Nigeria. From remote antiquity, the different groups have co-existed, interacted and cooperated in various ways in their relationship. The age of their co-existence is difficult to establish because of the dearth of documentary and archaeological evidence that could provide possible and objective clue to the genesis of their contact. Over time, certain events affected relations between the people. One of these is colonial rule that brought far-reaching changes in the area. The other factor was the Nigeria-Biafra War which affected the nature of relationship between the people. Unfortunately, there is no detailed research on the nature of changes brought by these events in the relationship and interaction between the people, during and after colonial era. The dynamics of the newly evolving relations are yet to be brought to historical understanding. There is therefore no literature on the area, with special regard to inter-group relations. Because of the absence of any serious research on inter-group relations for the period (1906-2006) in the area, knowledge of the relations between the people is lacking. This absence of research creates a knowledge gap about relationship between Mbano people and their neighbours at the time.

There are opinions among the elders and the people that Inyishi and Atta, now in Ikeduru, as neighbours of Mbano, were part of Ugiri group of villages before they were transferred to Ikeduru by the British colonial authority. In fact, Umudim and Atta now in

Owerri were said to have been part of Ugiri Mbano. Even Agbaja-Isu town was also said to have been part of Ugiri clan. Intelligence reports in the National Archives, Enugu contain the view that these towns were formerly, either part of Ugiri clan or Mbama. Colonial administrative rearrangements thwarted the hitherto existing political structure and socio-cultural organization in the area. Hence, Atta and Umudim communities were transferred to Ikeduru Native Court which was closer to the people than Otanzu Otanchara at Okigwe. For instance, Bones Ojiahø's compilation of intelligence reports on Ugiri clan provides helpful clues yet to be investigated. He writes that:

During the British colonial administrative reorganisation of Mbasaa, argument ensued on whether the town of Agbaja-Isu belonged to Ugiri. The Ugiri clan claimed that Agbaja-Isu was part of Ugiri. Also, the towns of Umudim and Atta in Owerri Division were visited. Umudim people were divided as to whether to remain as part of Okigwe or be grouped under Owerri Division. Atta was definitely against any change. The main reason expressed by the people was the distance they would cover to attend court at Provincial Headquarters of Otanzu Otanchara at Okigwe. Umudim looked amenable to transfer, but that in view of hostility of

Atta to change, Umudim chose to attend court in Owerri Division.<sup>21</sup>

By this action, some Mbano communities were transferred to Owerri Division which was a different administrative unit. The implications of this colonial action on inter-group relations are yet to be examined. Ojiah provides a list of the original composition of Ugiri clan before colonial administrative re-organization in the following order of seniority: Ugiri, Obollo, Umuneke, Ogor, Oka, Umudim, Atta, and Ibeme. Umudim and Atta are now part of Ikeduru in Owerri Division. Umudim used to be a quarter of Oka Ugiri in Okigwe.<sup>22</sup>

Inyishi in Ikeduru is also surrounded by a similar contention. Oka community in Ugiri clan speaks of Inyishi in Ikeduru as their brothers. Inyishi people again claim they migrated from Amuzari in Mbama clan who they claim to be their brothers. For instance, Onwubuariri of Umuoti Inyishi told the author that their brothers in Amuzari are still part of Mbano but Inyishi is part of Ikeduru. This problem was created by colonial rule that divided the land arbitrarily, thereby separating brothers, and making them administratively spatial neighbours<sup>23</sup>.

Colonial advent and administrative reorganization compounded aspects of relations between these communities which have not been interrogated. The various towns were autonomous and claim almost common traditions of origin. However, due partly to the reorganization of the area for administrative convenience by colonial officials, some communities became neighbours of Mbano. The changes had implications

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<sup>21</sup> Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan, 1900-1950*, Owerri: Luton Press Ltd., 1992, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> Chidi Onwubuariri, Pensioner, 72 years, Akpakama Umuoti Inyishi in Ikeduru, 24/8/2010

<sup>23</sup> Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan* p.21

for inter-group relations in the area. The Nigeria-Biafra war was another event that affected peaceful and smooth relations in the area. The thirty-month war significantly affected political, socio-cultural and economic aspects of inter-group relations in the area. This research identified that the challenge of how the entity called Mbanjo related with the contiguous communities sharing boundaries with them as their neighbours is yet to be interrogated. Besides, studies in Igbo history have concentrated more on the Aro, Nsukka, Awka and Nri, among others. In fact, researchers have said nothing about inter-group relations in the area. From the foregoing, it becomes increasingly necessary to investigate and understand the factors inherent in the relationship between Mbanjo and its neighbours from 1906-2006.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

The study of inter-group relations presents a number of theoretical and conceptual issues among scholars, particularly, with regard to its nature and evolution as a human phenomenon. There is, for instance, the question of what inter-group relations is and how it has been viewed in human societies over time.<sup>24</sup> Human society in all of its forms of existence and nature is predicated on inter-dependence. This is anchored on the fact that human beings naturally are dependent creatures; they depend on their environment and other humans for food, shelter and clothing, all of which give them a sense of purpose.<sup>25</sup> The inter-dependent nature of human beings is as a result of the differentiating factors and the existing polarity in the unequal distribution of natural resources as manifested in

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<sup>24</sup> T. Tesoro, *Tiv and Their Neighbours*, Jos: Pilha Printing Press, 1992, pp.10-11.

<sup>25</sup> Ali Mazrui, 'Violence, Conquest and Politics of Detribalization in Africa' *International Affairs*, Vol. xxviii, No 1.1969. See also, J. I Elaiye, 'Nigeria's Federal Balance, Conflict and Compromise' in *political System*, Jos: University of Jos, Post Graduate Open lecturers Series Vol. 1. No 4 January, 1984, pp. 30-42

boundary delineation and geography.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Theory of Mutual Aid**

The mutual aids theory is one of the contending theories of inter-group relations. The theory postulates that in the all-important question of struggle for the basic things of life, human beings co-operate not just for the sake of social community, but indeed out of necessity.<sup>27</sup> The proponent of the theory, John Locke, in his essay, *Concerning Human Understanding*, argues that necessity rather than mere social association/interaction is the driving force of the co-operation and association humans enter into with their fellow humans in a given society. Thus, human beings become 'interest-driven' as they relate with their fellow humans. In other words, where human interest is not at stake or threatened, they tend to quickly dissociate themselves. Locke's theory is predicated on his belief that, God made human beings, and naturally put them under strong obligation of necessity, convenience and inclination to make their choices. He drove them into the society and also endowed them with understanding and language to mutually continue to enjoy it.

### **Theory of Natural Anarchy and Human Relations**

The theory was propounded by Thomas Hobbes. It sees humans originally as that which lived in a state of nature before the advent of civil society. This theory postulates that, 'the natural state of man is one of unrestricted war and competition; a war of all against all; one based on continued unrest predicated on the survival of the strongest over and against the weakest'<sup>28</sup>. It rules out the possibility of any just action by human since nothing is naturally just in man's life. The idea here is that human society is largely

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<sup>26</sup> Karen, Mingst, *Essential of International Relations*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 102-106

<sup>27</sup> P. Kropkin, *Mutual Aid*, London: Frank Class, 1910, pp.10-20.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, New York: Maril Company Ltd., 1988, pp.105-107

characterized by pandemonium and rancour, arising from belligerence, anarchy and mutual antagonistic awareness among groups and individuals. It thus assumed that since the group has different and conflicting interests, harmonious cohabitation was hardly a characteristic of the society. Hobbes explains man's life as one in its natural state, deeply rooted in solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short episodes. In this state, it is only the fear of death that draws humans towards peaceful interaction with others.

However, humans relate due to natural forces within their environment that inevitably bring them together. This tends to provide explanations for conflict in relationships between groups by exploring sociological, political, economic and historical factors that characterize such relationships.<sup>29</sup> Thus the belief here is that cultural and value differences as well as group interest all influence relationships between individuals and groups in different ways.<sup>30</sup> At the sociological level, the differences between cultural values pose challenges to individuals or group identity formation process. This creates the tendency to see other humans as intruders who should be prevented from encroaching upon established cultural boundaries.

The theory of natural anarchy and human relations appear to perceive society from different narrow and rigid realms. In effect, consensus and conflict may assume bipolar opposites, neither alone could offer full interpretations and explanations for the ever changing nature and scope of inter-group relations in Nigeria and indeed within Igbo society. Besides, human society is composed of economic, socio-cultural and political activities which grant them access to the basic needs of life. The inter-dependence arising as a result of the disparities in natural resources endowments and distribution between

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 107

<sup>30</sup> Faleti, Stephen Ademola, "Theories of Social Conflict" in Shedrack, Gaya Best, (ed.) *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2006, p.54



communities accounts for the context of inter-group interactions. It emphasizes that every human being largely becomes truly a human being by means of his/her relationship with other human beings. Okpe O. Okpe reasons alongside the mutual aid theory that, indeed, humans, by nature, are dependent creatures as they depend on their environment and others for food, shelter and clothing, all of which give them a sense of purpose here on earth<sup>31</sup>.

Human groups therefore, consciously relate with other human groups in their political, economic, and social activities. Most communities and groups in Nigeria and indeed Igboland have had a web of relationships that has already made life possible for them. Pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Igboland, presented different forms of intra/inter-group relations between communities at different epochs. In relation to the nature of relations between Mbano and their neighbours, it should be borne in mind that intra/inter-group relationship is a multifaceted and dynamic concept. These facets, according to Afigbo, are:

í the political (which might be war-like or peaceful), the economic and technological; the cultural (which include arts, dance, music, marriage, custom and mode of dress etc.,). Other facets include interactions between legal and judicial

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<sup>31</sup> Okpe O. Okpe Jr.: "Conceptual and Theoretical Issues Arising from Studies in Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century." A Paper Presented at the first National Conference on Inter-Group relations in Nigeria in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Organized by the Department of History, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, 8-11<sup>th</sup> June, 2005, pp. 1-22.

systems, language and folklore, religion, philosophy  
and cosmology<sup>32</sup>.

Afigbo further explains that different communities in their actual day-to-day experiences have had to co-exist and interact in peace and in war<sup>33</sup>. Given this situation, therefore, it could be suggested that in the absence of war, peaceful co-existence becomes almost inevitable.

Consequently, considering the study of inter-group relations as a process within a broad continuum, five stages could be identified in the process. According to Okpe O. Okpe, they include the stages of,

- a. contact and interaction,
- b. compromise and cooperation,
- c. competition,
- d. conflict, and
- e. integration and assimilation.

He further explained these stages thus:

- a) In the first stage of contact and interaction, social groups evolve out of co-existence and isolation by making contacts with one another. This brings about interaction. These contacts could be by accident, political adventure, migration, trade or through war. This is usually, the threshold of interaction and leads to the second stage.

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<sup>32</sup> A. E. Afigbo, *The Igbo and Their Neighbours* pp. 19-24

<sup>33</sup> Afigbo, *The Igbo and their Neighbours* p.24.

- b) In the second stage of compromise and cooperation, relations between social groups appear very complex but interdependence advance the course of compromise and cooperation. At this stage, social groups relate mutually and the nature of relationship is symbiotic. This brings about the process of giving and taking in inter-group relations.
- c) At the third stage of competition, each group attempts to appropriate the rewards of each interacting group. The mutual reciprocity ceases to be the guiding principle of inter-group relations but competition.
- d) The fourth stage is the stage of conflict. At this stage, competition heightens contradiction between the groups and such interaction fails to be resolved amicably, thereby giving rise to conflict. Each group tries to assert their claims to the detriment of others, by restricting access to the rewards arising from their interactions. This is usually achieved through warfare which involves the conquest and subjugation of the weaker group by the dominant ones.
- e) The last stage of integration and assimilation involves the gradual process, spanning decades if not centuries<sup>34</sup>.

These stages implicitly concern the relationship between Mbano and its neighbours. They are arguably, oftentimes over-lap; and so there is no hard and fast rule about the stages. Group interactions could occur in any form. These forms would provide a guide in assessing, within the confines of inter-group relations, Mbano and its neighbours in Igboland. Given the ever changing nature of inter-group relations, any serious attempt to

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<sup>34</sup> Okpe O. Okpe, *Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria* p.17

study and understand the phenomenon in any society should, as a necessity, take into consideration, the depth and significance of the various interacting groups over time.<sup>35</sup> This study aligns itself with the Mutual Aid and the Hobbesian theories in human relations in its explanation. They would serve as a guide in the effort to study how Mbanda and its neighbours conducted their relations over time.

The concept of inter-group relations has various scholarly interpretations. The interpretations point to interaction between two or more groups. Afigbo writes of inter-group relations as one that presupposes contact and interaction between groups each of which has an identity to make some input into the relationship; in short each of which has some scope and area of autonomous action<sup>36</sup>. R.L. Ellis, M.J. Lipetz and M.J. Herskovits view inter-group relations in the light of the responsive behaviour and interaction of societies or groups towards one another.<sup>37</sup> From the perspectives of M. Sheriff and G.W. Sheriff, inter-group relations is perceived as states of friendship or hospitality, cooperation or competition, dominance or subordination, alliance or enmity, peace or war between two or more groups and their respective members<sup>38</sup>. R.H. Bates, E. Bonacich, and D. Horowitz share a similar view of the concept of inter-group relations as a process within a broad continuum<sup>39</sup>. Hence, the concept of inter-group relations in the writer's opinion is an embodiment of all aspects of peaceful and conflictual interactions between individuals, groups and their enlarged environment from the point of contact as its first

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<sup>35</sup> A.I. Onoja, *Agila òEzza Relations up to 1970: A Study in Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria*. A Ph.D Proposal Presented to the Department of History and International Studies UNN, 2009, p. 22-24.

<sup>36</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *The Igbo and Their Neighbours* p.18

<sup>37</sup> R.L. Ellis and M. J. Herskovits, *Enculturation: The Study of Contact*, New York: np. 1969, p.50

<sup>38</sup> M. Sheriff and G.W. Sheriff: *Social Psychology*, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, U.S. A, 1969, pp. 80-88.

<sup>39</sup> For the see, R. H. Bates, òEthnic Group Edition and Modernization in Contemporary Africaö, in *Comparative Political Studies*, 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1974, pp.344-450. E. Bonacich òA Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labour Market.ö In *American Sociological Review*, 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1972, pp. 500-560, D. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

process to the point of death of the individual or group. It is an endless form of relations in human nature borne out of necessity.

### **Purpose of the Study**

There are no physical walls of demarcation between Mbano and its neighbours. However, colonial rule imposed new identities and boundary delineations within the area. Groups of clans and villages that had been closely knitted together as a people, now refer to themselves as neighbours. In this regard, Afigbo suggests,

It is now considered necessary to establish the existence of actual historical links to investigate how they operated. In other words, the focus of attention is now the network of links between actual historic cultures which the colonial rulers met in existence on their advent. This was a subject, whose scientific study, colonial writers and publicists shied away from, preferring to speculate freely instead.<sup>40</sup>

Some colonial reports nonetheless provide meaningful insight into the nature, structure and form of the relationship that existed between the people.

The purpose of this research among other things is to examine the impact of colonial rule and balkanisation of the area formerly known as Mbasaa before its advent with regard to inter-group relations. The emphasis is on the socio-cultural, economic and political changes that occurred in aspects of their interactions over the years.

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<sup>40</sup>. A.E. Afigbo, *The Igbo and Their Neighbours* . 4

Therefore, what this research examines are; the extent to which British colonial advent and administrative reorganisation affected relationship between Mbano and its neighbours; the factors that sustained the resilience and mutuality in their relations despite the balkanisation of Mbasaa during colonial rule; the effects of the Nigeria-Biafra war, 1967 to 1970, on relations between the people; how far Western cultural implements and infrastructure influenced socio-cultural, political and economic relations in colonial post-colonial and the post-war era to 2006. This is with a view to determining inherent factors in both peaceful and antagonistic relationships in the area. This research is a modest attempt in that regard, to examine the contours and dynamics of inter-group relations in a historian's perspective within a centenary, and to advance knowledge on the area as well as contribute to existing historical scholarship.

### **Significance of Study**

The changes brought about by colonial rule and the Nigeria-Biafra war on inter-group relations in the area have hitherto not received any serious research attention in spite of their far reaching implications on inter-group relations. The history of many Igbo communities today like Mbano, still lives in the hearts of the elders and in oral tradition. This situation is not satisfactory considering the fact that life is transient. It is also an inevitable fact of history that, human memory with time loses count of some historical events. These elders, who are knowledgeable on aspects of the relationships in the past, will not live forever. If the area continues to suffer neglect by researchers, historians and scholars, such first hand information about their past may be lost. As the Igbo would say, *o di nma ka ndi okenye fodu n'obodo ka umu aka ghara iri udele kpoo ya egbe*, (it is good for elders to remain in the land so that children would not eat the

vulture thinking it is the kite). The study would serve as a reference document for further researchers in the area.

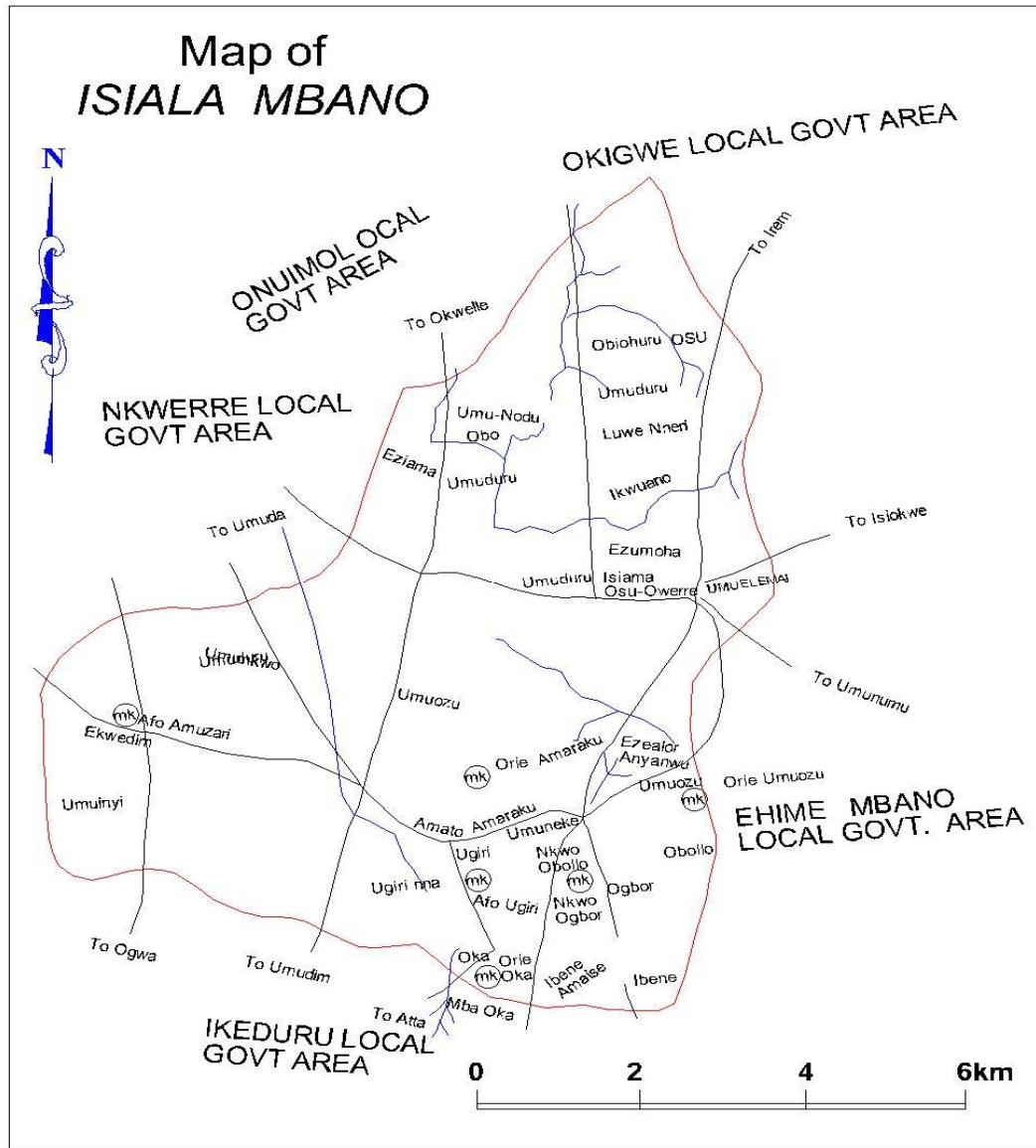
. Though this work would not be a conclusion on further researches in the area, nevertheless, it endeavoured to shed some light on and contributed meaningfully to the study of inter-group relations, using Mbanjo and its neighbours as a model. This work is significant as it investigates, interprets and documents its findings for the use of future generations. It would help the young ones to understand their society and the dynamics of how their people related in the past.

The findings would be useful to historians, tourists, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, missionaries and the academia. It is hoped that this research, which is the first of its kind, would advance knowledge on Mbanjo and its neighbours, especially, the nature and dynamics of relations about the people and their society. Through this research, Mbanjo and its neighbours would be positioned in the right historical perspective in the theme of inter-group relations. The number of Igbo communities whose histories have been reconstructed would increase, hence adding to the existing literature on Igbo, Nigeria and African history.

### **Scope of Study**

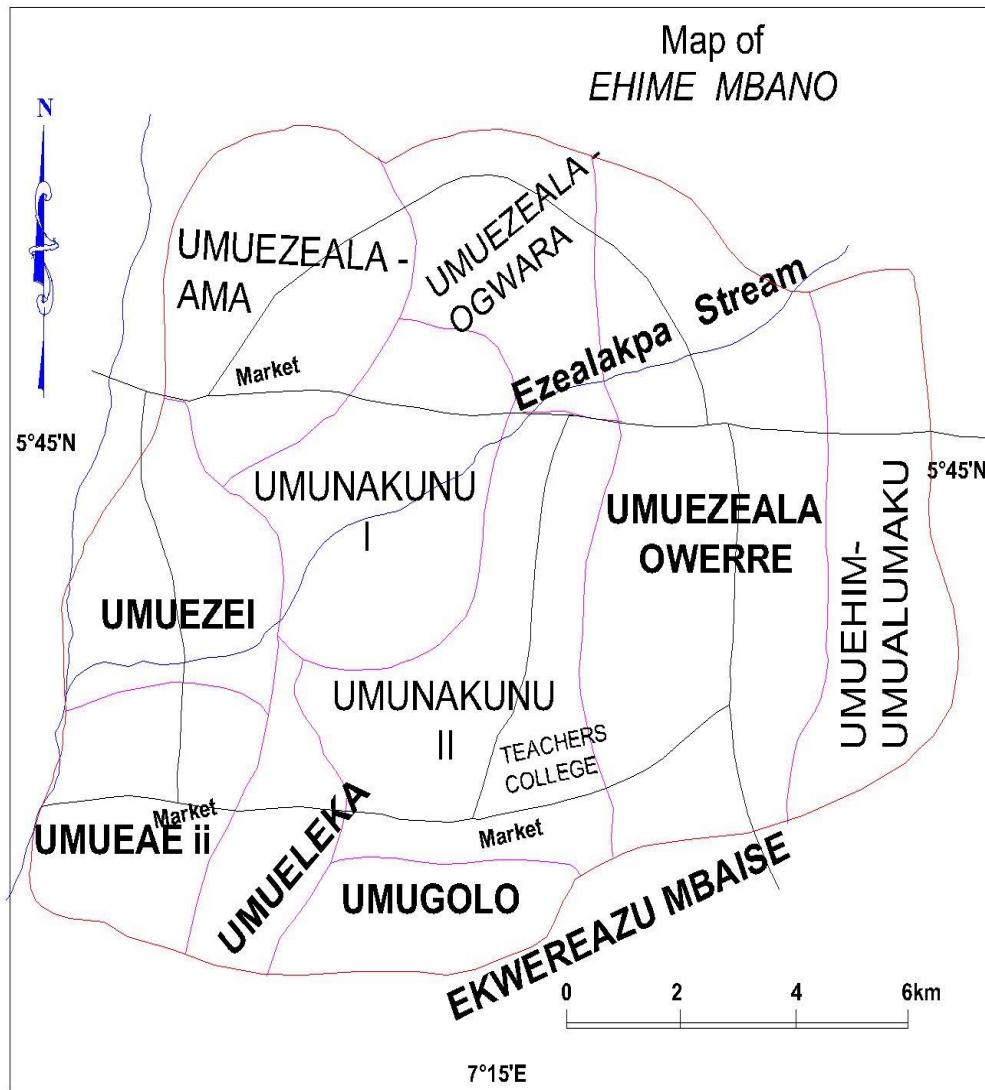
This study essentially covers the two local governments that make up the entity known as Mbanjo: Isiala Mbanjo and Ehimbe Mbanjo created out of the old Mbanjo Local Government in 1991. It also considers aspects of their relationship with their neighbours such as Isu, Atta, Inyishi, Amaimo, Eziamma Mbaise, Ihiteafoukwu, Okwelle and Ogwa, among others. The work begins in 1906 when the communities that comprised the old Mbasaa came under British rule. Umuduru Native Court was created

in 1906 to administer what later became known as Mbano. The study terminates in 2006 which marked a century after the British had established their political, economic and cultural presence that gave birth to the name of the area known as Mbano today.



Map No 3: Isiala Mbano LGA created out of old Mbano LGA in 1991.





Map No 4: Ehime Mbano LGA created out of old Mbano LGA in 1991

### Literature Review

The dearth of written materials is a challenge and limitation to this work. There are no major researches conducted in our area of research. However, a few literatures exist on some communities within Mbano and its neighbours. The literature contributes to the study of the origins of contact and forms of relationships that existed between the

people. Some pertinent literature on inter-group relations in Nigeria, and particularly Igboland are reviewed.

Adiele Afigbo in his *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture* mentions the historical origin, migration and settlement of Mbano and its neighbours. He states that, "the tradition of the Isu-Ama Igbo (meaning the Isu who had gone abroad) made up of Mbama, Mbieri, Ikeduru, Osu, Ehime, Ugboma, Mbaise of the Ohuhu, Ngwa and of many Cross River Igbo groups) indicate that they migrated eastwards from the general area of Orlu."<sup>41</sup> Apart from the above passing comments, Afigbo's book provides no details on the relationship that existed between these people. However, the book provides us with insights into the legends of origin, migration and settlement which reflect in the oral traditions of the peoples of the area.

In *The Igbo and Their Neighbours: Inter-group Relations in Southeastern Nigeria to 1953*<sup>42</sup>, Afigbo considers the nature and forms of relationship between the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria and their neighbours. Mbano is located in Southeastern Nigeria, in Igboland, but the book did not study the situation in the area. However, Afigbo gave some information concerning economic, religious, socio-cultural, and political factors intrinsic in the patterns of contact and relationship which also affect Mbano and its neighbours.

Tony Nwaezeigwe in his book, *The Igbo and Their Nri Neighbours: A Study in the Politics of Igbo Culture and Origin*, discusses the relationship between Nri and other Igbo communities. Nwaezeigwe observes that nearly every aspect of Igbo culture was

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<sup>41</sup> A. E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand* pp. 34-45

<sup>42</sup> Afigbo, *The Igbo and their Neighbours* pp.29-49

linked by early European scholars to òNriö culture complex.<sup>43</sup> He claims that *ofò* as a symbol of authority in many Igbo communities, and is mostly traceable to Nri. Though some Igbo areas may not share the view expressed by Nwaezeigwe, some Mbano communities and its Ikeduru neighbours, especially the Umuri community, claim the power of the *ofò* used by their *nze* and *ozo* titled men as having derived from Nri. Nwaezeigwe though is silent on the influence of Nri in our area of study. The book contains some details on the spiritual role of Nri oracle agents as a factor of contact and known form of relationship and interaction within Igbo communities. Nwaezeigwe states that òí the body of Nri ritual influence was therefore likened to that of the lord of a land using the Eze-Nri as the masquerade of his authority, and influence, the *Adama* was the power behind the mask of Nri influence in Igbolandö<sup>44</sup>. How this played out within Mbano and its neighbours is not captured in the book. Hence, this research examines this claim and the situation in Mbano and tries to bridge the existing knowledge gap.

A few documents exist on the area that touches on inter-group relations which provides culture links and other factors of contact and interaction. One of such books is by C.O. Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan, 1900-1950*<sup>45</sup>. The book is a collection of colonial records gathered from the National Archives, Enugu dealing on the people's origins, migrations and settlements. It discusses some socio-cultural, political and economic activities between Ugiri clan of Mbano and its neighbours. It contains some details of British activities within Mbano and its neighbours. The information in the book though focuses on Ugiri clan remains relevant to our study, especially, on colonial

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<sup>43</sup> N.T. Nwaezeigwe, *The Igbo and their Nri Neighbours; A Study in the Politics of Igbo Culture and Origins*, Enugu: Snap Press Ltd., 2007, pp. 66-67

<sup>44</sup> Nwaezeigwe, *The Igbo and Their Nri Neighbours* pp.147-179

<sup>45</sup> Bones, *Ojiah History of Ugiri Clan* The various chapters of the book provided various details including letters written by the colonial administrators on issues as markets, building of churches and establishment of school etc.

administrative reorganisation and names of warrant chiefs appointed in some communities in Mbano. Some of the processes followed to establish native courts, schools and churches in the area are contained in the book.

Nzewuba C. Ugwuh in his book *Ihiteafoukwu; The Echo of Igbo Culture*<sup>46</sup> discusses the history of Ihiteafoukwu in Mbaise which is one of the close neighbours of Mbano. The book touches on vital issues of origin, migration and settlement, some aspects of culture, religion, education, and politics in their relations with Mbano. The book is a reference material of the various aspects of relationships and factors of contact between Ehime Mbano and Ihiteafoukwu. P.A. Talbot in *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, (Vol.1)* discusses the establishment of British administration in southern Nigeria. He described how the British colonial administration conquered and established a military post at Umuduru in Mbano which began the occupation of the surrounding territory<sup>47</sup>. Talbot did not study the enormous influence of the British administrative reorganisation on the relationship between the people and their new neighbours. This research considers the changes imposed on their relationship.

A.E. Afigbo in *The Warrant Chiefs, Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*,<sup>48</sup> gave a vivid account of the constitution of the warrant chief system in Igboland, including Mbano. However, the effects of the institutional reorganisation on the already existing political order are not captured. The attendant social, cultural and economic distortions it caused between Mbano and its neighbours were not discussed by Afigbo. This research investigates the impact of the Warrant Chief creation on the people's relations with their neighbours.

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<sup>46</sup> Nzewuba C. Ugwuh, *Ihiteafoukwu: The Echo of Igbo Culture*. Ibadan, Cypress, 2004, pp. 1-160

<sup>47</sup> P. A Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, vol. 1*, London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1981, p.315

<sup>48</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chief, Indirect Rule in Southern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, London: Longman, 1972.

Elizabeth Isichei in, *A History of the Igbo people*<sup>49</sup>, G.T. Baden in, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*<sup>50</sup>, Edmund Ilogu in, *Christianity and Igbo Culture; A study of the Interaction of Christianity and Igbo Culture*<sup>51</sup>, provide relevant information on the Igbo people and their cultural heritage. Taken together, they discuss the forms of political, socio-cultural, religious and economic relations that existed between different Igbo communities and their neighbours. Ilogu writes that,

The area has shown the greatest evidence of the interaction of religions and cultures. Within this sub-cultural area are important clans like Isu- Ama, Oratta, Ikwerri, Ohuhu, Ngwa, and Isu-Item. Important towns in his group are; Aba, Umuahia-Ibeku, Owerri, Ahoada, Okigwe, Orlu<sup>52</sup>.

The book mentions clan names, but the micro communities that indeed carried these cultural traits and interactions are not discussed. Besides, a lot has happened in terms of change in the nature and form of interaction overtime. The changes in the form and nature of the interaction are the concern of this work.

The book, *New Brides, More Hopes: Igbo Women in Socio-Economic Change*<sup>53</sup>, edited by E.J. Otagburuagu and A.E. Afigbo, focuses on the changing roles and status of Igbo women in the socio-economic realm of the society. The contributors in the book

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<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976

<sup>50</sup> G.T Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria, Alias The Igbo as seen by the Early White Man*, Lagos: University Publishing Co. 1982

<sup>51</sup> Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture; A study of the Interaction of Christianity and Igbo Culture*, Enugu: Nok Publisher Ltd., 1974, pp.2-3

<sup>52</sup> Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*...p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> E.J. Otagburuagu and A.E Afigbo (ed.), *News Brides, More Hopes, Igbo Women in Socio-Economic Change*, Nsukka: Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, 2008, pp. 136-154.

treat various aspects of women's role in change in Igboland including trade and religion. For instance, Ogbu U. Kalu, in "Gender Ideology in Religion; Changing Religious Role of Women in Igbo land", discusses various aggressive feminist postures of female deity agents. He studies some of these agents in Orlu, Oru, Nkwere, Isu, Mbano, Etiti, Mbaise, and Ikeduru that constitute the nucleus of this study. He describes the workings of these deities, but not how the activities enhanced or hindered relationship between the people. Kalu presents a table of some of the deities found in the area and acknowledges that, "the table could not provide a detailed analysis to indicate the interplay between ecology, dominant economic consideration and religious expression."<sup>54</sup> Traditional religion, especially, oracle consultation, was an important aspect of inter-group relations among the Igbo in general. Kalu enumerates many of the deities consulted by the people. These activities constituted contact points and interaction between the people.

M.O. Ijere, in his *Economic Development in Nsu*,<sup>55</sup> discusses the various economic activities and internal migrations that occurred in Nsu in the pre-colonial times. He describes the people's high level of attachment to agriculture as well as their land tenure system and location of farmlands. The farmlands are scattered far away from homes. Thus some Mbano people traveled as far as Onicha Uboma to farm. In the process, contacts were made and new relationships established. This aspect of the relationships and their impact on the people were not given detailed attention.

V. Uchendu in his book, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*,<sup>56</sup> considered the importance of land to agricultural production which created different forms of

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<sup>54</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu "Gender Ideology in Igbo Religion; The Changing Religious Role of Women in Igbo land," in E.J. Otagburuagu and A.E. Afigbo, *New Brides, More Hopes: Igbo women in Socio Economic Change*, pp 140-141

<sup>55</sup> M.O. Ijere, *Economic Development in Nsu*, Nsukka: np. 1981, p.143

<sup>56</sup> V. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1965, p.22

relationships between communities including inter-group wars. The effect of land disputes in Igboland, of course, on inter-group relations, can hardly be over emphasized. Some examples from Uchendu's book would help explain situations in Mbano.

In their respective books C.K. Meek in, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*,<sup>57</sup> G.I. Jones in, *Trading States of Oil Rivers*,<sup>58</sup> C.C. Ifemesia in, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo: An Historical Perspective*,<sup>59</sup> studies political, economic, and social-cultural aspects of Igboland. The factors the respective books discuss are inevitable aspects of interactions among the Igbo and largely contribute to the nature and form of relationships. Meek emphasized the interconnectivity between Igbo religion, law and most powerful legal sanctions as having derived from the gods. Jones noted the fact that Igbo villages were internally autonomous; no feuds or fighting was permitted within it, and the government consisted of its component sections. Jones's assertion that no fighting was permitted within it seems not to be in agreement with the multi-faceted forms of conflict that existed within the Igbo enclave. These conflicts formed part of relationships between groups or communities. Ifemesia commented on the general expansion outward from Igbo heart-land in many cases due to population pressure, or people fleeing from injustice, or leaving to settle elsewhere after quarreling with their kinsmen<sup>60</sup>. The information contained in these books contributed substantially to this research.

*Nsu Past and Present*<sup>61</sup>, edited by M.O. Ijere, provides relevant information on some aspects of internal migrations within Mbano. These migrations had readjusted and

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<sup>57</sup> C.K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, London: OUP, 1937, p.20

<sup>58</sup> G.I. Jones, *Trading States of Oil Rivers*, London: O.U.P, 1972, p.17

<sup>59</sup> C. C. Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living among the Igbo: An Historical Perspective*, Enugu: F.D.P. 1980.

<sup>60</sup> Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living* p.22

<sup>61</sup> M.O Ijere, (ed.) *Nsu Past and Present*, (Nsukka: University Press, 1965)

62. **Obaro** Ikime, in *Inter-group Relations in Pre-colonial Nigeria: A Call for a Re-Examination of Political Relations Among Nigerian Peoples in the Period up to c.1850 in History, The Historian and the Nation: voice of a Nigerian Historian*. Ibadan: HEBN Publishers Plc., 2006, 17-37.

affected the relationships between the people in the course of settlements. Ijere stated that when the villages of Agbaghara, Ezeoke, Umunumu, Umuopara, Umuezeala, Umuduru, Umuanunu and Umuakagu migrated away from their Ehime brothers they first settled at a place called *Umuota* near Uboma. The reason for this migration, according to Ijere, was that the land was muddy and water-logged. The present location of Nsu, he said, was as result of the search for a more suitable environment to inhabit. Though the impact the movement had on the people's relations and interactions was not studied, the book is useful to our study because migration is a process in inter-group relations.

Obaro Ikime, in *Inter-group Relations in Pre-colonial Nigeria: A Call for a Re-Examination of Political Relations Among Nigerian Peoples in the Period up to c.1850*<sup>62</sup> highlights the various issues bordering on inter-group relations, particularly from the political perspective, which also touches on aspects of economic and social history of the relationship in Nigeria. Ikime explores various themes on the subject of inter-group relations relevant to this work.

Some relevant unpublished materials, such as first degree projects exist on our area of study. This aspect is very important to this research because most of the information they contain are from oral interviews and most of the informants were eye witnesses to events of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, very many of the informants died long ago, while some of those still surviving are too old to speak audibly. Therefore, it is only necessary that we attempt a review of some of these relevant projects concerning the topic.

Duru Cecelia Ugochi in *Inter-group Relations in Mbano from the Earliest Times*,<sup>62</sup> discussed aspects of relations within Mbano. Ugochi limited herself to some

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<sup>62</sup> Duru, Cecilia Ugochi, *Inter-group Relations in Mbano from the Earliest Times*. An Unpublished Projects



aspects of relations such as internal migration stories, traditional and religious life, custom, economic affairs, military affairs, marriages and festivals within Mbano. The work provides information only on intra-group relations but not on interactions between Mbano and its neighbours who made important contributions to shape their society. However, the work is particularly relevant to this research as it contains some background information about some traditional practices that are almost extinct.

Some BA degree projects on aspects of the British colonial activities are considered. One of such projects is by Nwosu Ohanyirim with the title, "Christian Missions in Mbano, 1913-1950". According to Nwosu, by 1918, Mbano, Nkwerre, Etit and Orlu areas constituted one Protestant church district manned by Rev. J.E. Ibeneme, who lived at Arondizogu, about fifty kilometers away and who visited Mbano once in a while.<sup>63</sup> He did not discuss the nature of relationship between the people through these Christian church activities. Besides, the scope covers only a fraction of the colonial period-1913-1950.

Some projects also contain information considered relevant to this work. Egwim Pious, in his project work titled, "Aspects of the Pre-colonial History of Otanzu-Otanchara Communities in Okigwe Division,"<sup>64</sup> highlighted aspects of political structure in the area before colonial advent. Colonial rule distorted the pre-colonial political structure discussed in the work. Emmanuel Nnawuihe Onyeama in his work titled, "The Origins, Migrations, Settlement and Inter-Group Relations of Abajah People in Nkwerre

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Department of History, University of Nigeria Nsukka, 1984

<sup>63</sup> Obaro, Ikime, History, The Historian and the Nation: the Voice of a Nigeria Historian. Ibadan: HEBN Publishers Plc. 2006 pp. 17-37

<sup>64</sup> Duru, Cecilia Ugochi, "Intergroup Relations in Mbano from the Earliest Times." An Unpublished Projects Department of History, University of Nigeria Nsukka, 1984

/Isu Local Government Area of Imo State.<sup>65</sup> Abajah is one of the communities that share boundaries with Mbano and have maintained interactions over the years. However, there is a controversy surrounding the original political grouping of the area, which was said to be distorted under colonial rule. Also, Isu is now a local government area and no longer under Nkwere /Isu as used to be the case. The work provides some clues that would help our investigation concerning the original grouping of Abajah on the eve of colonial rule. Kenneth Chukwudi Iheanacho in, "The Phenomenon of Labour Migration in Abajah Nkwere/Isu Local Government Area of Imo States"<sup>66</sup> discusses labour migration in Abajah which is an aspect in the process of inter-group relations. The work provides information on exchange of labour as a form of contact and interaction between the people. In fact, Iheanacho writes that "exchange of labour between Mbano and Isu was an intricate factor in their relations". Charles Chidi-Obi Obasi in his work, "Origin, Migration, Settlement, and Inter-Group Relations in Amaimo,"<sup>67</sup> examines some salient issues regarding legends of origin in Amaimo neighbours of Mbano. Obasi discusses aspects of their relations which are relevant to this research. For instance, he links Amaimo origin to Mbano area. Ukaegbu Adeline Chioma in her work titled, "Some Aspects of Pre-colonial History of Ezinihite Clan in Aboh-Mbaise LGA,"<sup>68</sup> discussed aspects of relations in the area on the eve of colonial rule. The work is of particular importance to this effort on aspects of relations between the people of Mbano and some parts Mbaise.

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<sup>65</sup> Bernard Ohanyirim Nwosu, "Christian Missions in Mbano, 1913-1950" B.A Project, Department of History and Archeology, UNN 1977. p.20

<sup>66</sup> Egwim, Pius, "Aspects of the Pre-Colonial History of Otanzu-Otanchara Communities in Okigwe Division," B.A Project, Department of History and Archeology, UNN, 1978.

<sup>67</sup> Emmanuel Nnawuihe Onyeama, "The Origins, Migrations Settlements and people in Nkwere/Isu Local Government Area of Imo State," B.A Project Department of History and Archeology, UNN, 1979.

<sup>68</sup> Kenneth Chukwudi Iheanacho, "The Phenomenon of Labour Migration in Abajah Nkwere Isu local Government Area of Imo State" B.A Project Department of History, UNN, 1984.

A number of Bachelor of Arts projects such as 'Nguru-Mbaise under the British 1909-1929: A Study in the Political, Social and Economic Changes,'<sup>69</sup> by Nwachukwu John Uzoma and Chileke Anthony Onyekachi in, 'Some Aspects of the History of Mbaise 1970-1993,'<sup>70</sup> respectively, provides valid data on some socio-economic relations between Mbano and parts of Mbaise which are relevant to this discourse. Onuamechi Ahazuem in 'Origin, Migration and Intergroup Relations in Pre-colonial Ohuhu'<sup>71</sup> discusses some factors inherent in inter-group relations that concern the study area, especially, the long distance trade routes used by Mbano and their neighbours. These projects contain relevant formation mainly on the neighbours of Mbano and aspects of their origin, migration and settlement linking the communities with Mbano and the Orlu legend of origin. This research incorporates, expands, re-interprets and analyzes the information retrieved from these projects, and presents results in a more detailed historical piece.

In addition, there are some projects that discussed other aspects of relations in Mbano. Among these works are those of Ngozi Stanislaus Egerue -'Mbano Under the Warrant Chiefs'<sup>72</sup>, Uzoegbu Nkechinyere Veronica -'Local Craft in Mbano from The Earliest Times'<sup>73</sup>, Ugo Columba -'Some Aspects of Cultural and Political History of Ehime up to the Colonial Period'<sup>74</sup>, Amaechi Chidi Michael -'Oka-Isiala-Mbano:

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Chidi-Obi Obasi, 'Origin, Migration, Settlement, and Inter-Group Relations in Amaimo', B.A Project, Department of History, UNN, 1984

<sup>70</sup> Chileke, Anthony Onyekachi, 'Some Aspect of the History of Mbaise 1970-1993' B.A Project, Department of History, International Studies, UNN, 2000.

<sup>71</sup> Onuamechi Ahazuem, 'Origin, Migration and Intergroup Relations in Pre-Colonial Ohuhu' B.A. Project Department of History, UNN 1974.

<sup>72</sup> Ngozi, Stanislaus Egerue, 'Mbano Under the Warrant Chiefs'. B. A., Project Department of History, UNN, 1984.

<sup>73</sup> Uzoegbu, Nkechinyere Veronica, 'Local Craft in Mbano from Earliest Times'. B. A., Project, Department of History, UNN, 1984.

<sup>74</sup> Ugo Columba, 'Some Aspect of Cultural and Political History of Ehime up to the Colonial'. B.A. Project, Department of History, 1986

Politics and Society in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>75</sup> These projects, respectively, discusses some aspects of colonial political reorganisations and economic activities in some parts of Mbandia that affected inter-group relations. They are useful in the understanding of some past events in the people's relations. C.Y. Iwuh, in his project titled, *Ìwà-Akwá Ceremony in Èhime-Mbandia*,<sup>76</sup> exposes vital information on key cultural issues that indicate areas of common cultural interaction between the people. Besides, the present researcher's work *ÌChange and Continuity in Isiala Mbandia, An Igbo Society, 1906-2007*,<sup>77</sup> serves as an eye opener to the neglect the area suffers due to lack of serious research. These projects complement other sources used in an attempt to bridge the existing knowledge gap in the reviewed literatures with a view to positioning Mbandia and its neighbours in the right context of inter-group relations in Igboland.

### **Sources, Methodology and Organization**

Since the late 1950s, attempts at reconstructing the history of most pre-literate societies in Africa have been based on oral tradition/oral history, supplemented with archaeological data and other available sources. For this study, the main source of collecting data was primarily oral information from interviews conducted in our area of study, viz, Mbandia and the contiguous Inyishi, Amaimo, Etiti, Abajah-Isu, Okwelle, Ogwa, Atta, and Umudim communities. All oral traditions collected from oral interviews were complemented with available written records. Intelligence and annual reports and government documents from National Archives, Enugu were used. All the evidence

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<sup>75</sup> Amaechi, Chidi Michael, *ÌOka-Isiala-Mbandia; Politics and Society in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. B.A., Project, Department of History, UNN, 1992

<sup>76</sup> . Iwuh, C.Y. *Ìwà-Akwá Ceremony in Èhime-Mbandia*. BA Project, Department of History and International Studies, UNN, 2006

<sup>77</sup> . Mbalisi Chinedu N. in *ÌChange and Continuity in Isiala Mbandia, An Igbo Society, 1906-2007*, MA Dissertation, Department of History and International Studies, UNN, 2008.

collated from primary and secondary sources were juxtaposed and analysed to ascertain their historical validity.

The secondary sources include literature articles, books, dissertations and unpublished degree projects on the area and Igboland in general are used. All primary and secondary literatures used are contained in the sources and bibliography. The method adopted in the study is both descriptive and historical narrative which makes for effective description of the inherent issues in their relations. The narrative method helps to ensure a chronological and sequential presentation of the evidence used. Qualitative research methodology was used in the analysis and re-interpretation of verifiable information collected from the different sources to ascertain their validity. The approach is interdisciplinary and presentation of findings is both chronological and thematic. Adequate care was taken to analyze how different events affected inter-group relations in the area.

This work is organized into six chapters and is presented as sequentially and chronologically as possible. Chapter one is the introduction, which includes the background to the study, statement of problem, and theoretical and conceptual framework. It also contains the purpose of study, scope of the study, literature review and sources, methodology and organization. The second chapter examines Mbano and its neighbours on the eve of colonial rule, that is, as a background to the central thrust of the work. The issues of origin, migration and settlements, cultural practices, customs and traditions are discussed as they provide the context for inter-group relations. Also, aspects of economic activities and socio-political organization during the period are investigated. The third chapter discusses relevant issues and trends in the various aspects of relations

during the colonial rule. Chapter four focuses on the post-colonial relations up to the Nigeria-Biafra War, 1960-1970. It considers political relations after independence, the coming of the Nigeria-Biafra War to Mbano, war time relations, refugee problems, post-war developments efforts at survival and the impact of modern transportation as agent of inter-group relations.

The penultimate chapter examines the post-war relations up to 2006. It also examines political expansion and participation, local government creation, the growth of Christian churches and schools. Other issues such as market development, autonomous community creation and traditional stool (*Eze*) tussles, clan associations and conflict resolutions are discussed. Political developments and changes in the culture of the people precede an assessment of the relations between Mbano and its neighbours in the present day Igboland. The sixth and last chapter is the summary and conclusion of the research which terminates in 2006, which marks the 100 years since colonial rule was set up in the area. The issues discussed herein showcase the contours and dynamics of inter-group relations within the scope of the study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MBANO AND ITS NEIGHBOURS BEFORE 1906

#### **Issue of Origin, Migration and Settlement**

Mbano and its neighbours have not escaped the consequences of the absence of alphabetic literacy. This stems from the fact that, like other Igbo people, much of their traditions of origin has not been committed to detailed historical research and settled. The histories of their origin, migration and settlement exist mainly in oral forms. Therefore, reconstructing the history of Mbano and its neighbours depends largely on oral tradition and suffers from defects usually encountered in using oral traditions as a source of history. The most pressing of these challenges is the near absence of a documented reliable chronology. Though the knowledge gap about the people's past persists, there are extant versions of the legends of origin. At least the different clans within our area still retain to some degree, their claims of origin and migration stories and beliefs. In most of these surviving legends, there appear to be large measures of agreement in terms of inter-group relationship in the traditions of Mbano and its neighbours.

Among the people are found existing traditions of origin. These traditions are traced to the Awka-Orlu movement. However, among the Mbano, the most popular version traces their origin to a certain Abba Uruogu, who, it is said, migrated from Abba in the Isu/Orlu area. Abba had led his people, the Osu, and settled in the place called òOböhö (Umuezeala) presently occupied by the parts Osu clan -Isiala Oboh. According to Ebere Nwaeme, he married and had three sons named in their order of seniority: Osu-

ama, Osu-Owerre and Osu-achara<sup>78</sup>. In the same vein, Cyriacus Ukeachu told the author that,

These three sons with their descendants founded the various villages in Osu. The villages founded by Osu-ama (meaning Osu in the streets) are Oboh, the first settlement, Eziama, Anara, Ezumoha and Umunachi. Osu-Owerre and his descendants founded Okohia, Mbeke, Ezihe, Umuokpukpara, Umuelemai, Umuekebi and Umuaro. The third son, Osu-achara founded Umuduru, Obiohuru, Isiebu, Orji, Umuluwe, Umuegbe and Ugwuala.<sup>79</sup>

These villages form part of the communities within Mbanu (now Isiala Mbanu) area that also spread further into other areas, founding more communities as they multiplied. Ukeachu has also noted that the villages of Nneato Ugwumeze, Umunumo, Nzerem and Ikpem are branches of Osu.<sup>80</sup> However, Michael Echerue said Umunumo claim to have migrated directly from Abba and settled in their present location.<sup>81</sup> Probably, due to socio-economic and political reasons, communities tend to claim direct migration status to avoid being ruled by others, and also to affirm authority over their area of settlement.

Nwaneri Nduka avows that Ehime are related to Osu. They are said to be an offshoot of the same wave of migration from Abba in Orlu area. Ehime tradition claims

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<sup>78</sup> Ebere Nwaeme, Eze of Osu-Owerre 89 years, farmer, interviewed at Osu, 30 /9/2010.

<sup>79</sup> Cyriacus, Ukeachu, 91 years, farmer, interviewed Umuezeala Ama, 30/9/ 2010.

<sup>80</sup> Cyriacus, Ukeachu interview cited

<sup>81</sup> Michael, Echeruo, Ogunum I of Umunumo, c.90 years, interview cited in Cecilia, U. Duru, 'Inter-Group Relations in Mbanu from Earliest Times,' Unpublished and International Studies, U.N.N 1984, p.10



relationship with Osu, particularly the Umuekebi village of Osu-Owerre. They were led by a man called Ehim, the son of Elele, their progenitor. Elele was said to have died on the way around Osu area during their movement from Abba. Consequently, Ehim's son led his people further and settled near Afo-Umueze square. Ehim had installed the *Igu Ehim* (black stone) used as an ancestral ground by the Ehime people for socio-cultural, and other ritual ceremonies. This area is today located close to the present site of Mbano Join Hospital.<sup>82</sup>

On arrival they settled and formed the village of Umueze I, while others continued and spread further forming the villages where they are presently located. Ehim's direct descendants founded the group of villages called *Umuehime*. Ehim had six sons who founded the towns named after them. Thus, Eze, the first son, founded Umueze which later split into two; Umueze I and Umueze II. Ezeala, the second son founded Umuezeala; Agbaje founded Agbaja; Akanu founded Umunakanu; Kabia founded Umukabia, while Nsu, the last son founded Nsu community. These villages were named after their ancestors-Ehim. Hence, the Ehime Mbano of the present day as referred to as *Umu-ehime*.

These traditions claiming Orlu origin would appear to have gained some support from notable scholars of Igbo history. For instance, A.E. Afigbo's study of Igbo origins, migration and dispersal suggests that the Awka-Orlu upland was one of the areas first settled by the Igbo group. He opines that Isu-Ama Igbo, (meaning the Isu who had gone abroad), which includes, amongst other groups, Mbama, Mbieri, Osu, Ehime, Uboma, migrated east wards from general area of Orlu.<sup>83</sup> The migration claims by Osu and Ehime

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<sup>82</sup> Nwaneri Nduka, traditional ruler of Umualumaku Umuihim 70 years, interviewed 3 /10/2010.

<sup>83</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand Studies in Igbo History and Culture*, Ibadan: University Press Ltd, 1981, pp.12-13

people from Abba in the general area of Orlu fall in line with Afigboø suggestion. Hence they belong to the group described as Isu-ama Igbo.

The tradition of origin of the Okwelle-Onuimo points to the same Isu in Orlu upland area migration account. Marcel Ibe, the community oral historian,

Okwelle is called ðOkwelle-Ekweghiariri,ö Abba is the father of Osu in Mbano as Isu in Nwangele is the father of Okwelle. So Okwelle migrated from Isu ancient kingdom. The man who founded Okwelle was called ðEkweghiariri.ö The date of this migration is not known to us. It is as old as every other migration account in Igboland from the earliest times<sup>84</sup>.

Ibe was emphatic about the origin and migration of Okwelle from Isu in Orlu area. He, however, opined that ðthe speculation that the Okwelle have some Aro influence in their origin is not part of their history.ö<sup>85</sup> Hence, he attributed the Aro influence to the era of Aro traders who conducted trade in most parts of Igboland. Aro traders passed through Okwelle to Arondizogu and Ndikelionwu. Ibe maintained that, ðhistorically, Okwelle people came from Isu area and settled in their present location. Okwelle though shares a common boundary with Osu community in Mbano. Okwelle do not share the same progenitor. The brothers of Okwelle are Isiekensi, Umuduruegbeaguru, and Ihube in Okigwe. These are our closest brothers, we share the

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<sup>84</sup> Marcel Ibe, Cabinet Secretary/village historian, c. 65 years, Pensioner, interviewed at Umuduruodu, Okwelle, 24/0/2010.

<sup>85</sup> Marcel Ibe interview cited.

same legend of origin from the same Isu area<sup>86</sup>, he concluded. Despite the claim by Okwelle of not being of the same historical progenitor with Mbano, there is a common element in the legends, that is, both claim migration from the same Orlu geographic and culture area.

Again, the Eziam, Ihteafoukwu, Amaimo and Inyishi Ikeduru neighbours of Mbano also claim close relations through common ancestry and historical ties. Their origin and migration accounts point to the same Orlu legend. The legends are almost all linked to Mbano which also points to the Awka-Orlu upland mentioned by Afigbo in his study. For instance, what appears to be the most acceptable legend of origin of the Inyishi neighbours of Mbano, forms part of their oral tradition. Chidi Onwubuariri informs that

Authentic history has it that some of Inyishi-Ikeduru migrated from Amuzari in Mbano, to meet the originator of this area now called Inyishi. In those days, many vast areas were unoccupied, when some Amuzari people arrived. They met the Amaugo people, the original inhabitants of the land now-Inyishi. When Mbro the forefather of Inyishi arrived from Amuzari to join his people, he came with his brother called Eziam. They met the earlier settlers in a part of the village called Amaugo. Amaugo is the oldest community in Inyishi. When Mbro Arrived from Amuzari Mbano, he settled and got married. He had four sons. His first son was

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<sup>86</sup> Marcel Ibe interview cited.

called OZIRI; the second was named IKE (*ike m kere na mbara*). The third was Amaeke, and the last son was OTI. The four sons of MBRO founded the four main villages as follows; Umuoziri, Ikembara, Amaeke and Umuoti respectively as we have them today. So the four villages in Inyishi are the offshoot of the sons of MBRO who migrated from Amuzari in Mbano<sup>87</sup>.

This extract suggests that Inyishi neighbours of Mbano today, historically, claim to be brothers of Mbano. Probably, colonial boundary adjustments and administrative re-organization of the area may have resulted in Inyishi becoming part of Ikeduru in Old Owerri Division, while Amuzari are still part of Mbano in Old Okigwe Division.

Regarding the origin of Amaimo in Ikeduru, Mazi Cyril Agbugbaegbu has an interesting account. He states,

Amaimo is divided into two, known as *ibeama*. One of the *ibeama* is made up of Umu-uri, Egbelu, and Amachara. The other *ibeama* is made up of Umuofo, Umueze and Obodo. These *ibeama* comprising Umu-uri, Amachara, and Egbelu migrated from Ehime Mbano area. Umuofo, Obodo and Umueze migrated from Amuzari in the present Isiala Mbano area. Inyishi too migrated from Amuzari. That is how the villages in Amaimo came

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<sup>87</sup>. Chidi Onwubuariri, c.76 years, pensioner, interviewed at Amakpaka Umuoti Inyishi Ikeduru, 24-08-2010

to inhabit their present abode. Irehioma was the fore-father of Umu-uri and Amachara. Till today, we boast as descendants of Irehioma saying, *anyi bu umu Irehioma jiri opere nkwu maa ji. Irehioma* used palm sticks to stake his yam, this culture is still practiced here till today. Umu-uri did not migrate from Nri in present Anambra area as speculated in some quarters. In the earliest times, it was said that inter-communal disputes occurred during their migration. *Irehioma* came with his children. Some lived at Egbelu and Amachara those who settled at Umu-uri were pushed up and down by other neighbouring villages. As they resisted the push-pull forces from their neighbours, they claimed they were like the *uri*, the strong tree *-uri osisi ike*. The Umu-uri people still boast of their resistance exploits thus: *anyi bu umu-uri oshishi ike* (we are strong people or we are of a strong origin, you cannot push us out). Some parts of Amaimo are said to have migrated from Mbano. One *ibeama* came from Ehime and the other Mbaa and Mbama in Isi-ala Mbano, in fact from Amuzari area precisely. The fact is that it is in our history that Umu-uri

people migrated into their present location from Mbano. Uzoagba in Ikeduru are said to have no relationship with Amaimo. Rather, Avuvu has relationship with Amaimo. In their tradition, Avuvu migrated to their present location from Amaimo. Besides, some parts of Orogwe near Irete and Ohi, near Ubomiri in Mbaitolu, are also said to have migrated away from Amaimo. They are our brothers living in far away lands. They moved because in those days like we have now, some elderly sons of a family could be very selfish and would want to occupy all their lands, alone. This caused many younger ones to move away in search of empty lands in other areas. This is why those our brothers are living in Mbaitolu area today.<sup>88</sup>

Agbugbaegbu further observed that in Umudioma Obodo, there is Umuoparaozurumba. They are descendants of one man. Umuoparaozurumba comprises Umuopara, Umuoka, Umunjoku, Umuchukwuocha, Umuchukwukere and Nwaigwe. They formed what is known as Umuoparaozurumba kindred. Outside his kindred, Oparaozurumba has another son Ezealazuruike, who had many wives that gave birth to Umuduruji and Umuadaka, Amanwoke, and Umuoparaehihe. From Umudimoma emerged Obodo, all of who form Amaimo. He also said Amachara in Amaimo claim they are related historically and culturally with Amachara near Umuahia. Both of them eat

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<sup>88</sup> Sir Cyril Agbugbaegbu, 78years pensioner Obodo Amaimo, 26/8/2010

*achara* stem used in cooking soup. This is one thing the people have in common. Their fore fathers had told them that some Amachara people during that early migration, moved away towards Mbaise and present Obowo. Some were said to have crossed the Imo River to settle at their present location at Amachara. However, this claim is yet to be investigated as this is a bit beyond the scope of this study and focus.

Different versions of the origin of Ihiteafoukwu exist. Some of the indigenes of Ihiteafoukwu claim that the town did not migrate from anywhere and that it has been there since history. This view expresses the autochthony or *mpu-na-ala* theory of Igbo history. A similar view expressed by an Mbaise elder was quoted in Elizabeth Isichei's book thus, *owe did not come from any where and anyone who tells you we came from anywhere is a liar. Write it down.*<sup>89</sup> Presently, Ihiteafoukwu is a town in Ahiazu Mbaise and some elders may have been influenced by the above assertion emanating from an Mbaise elder. Hence, some believe that Ihiteafoukwu did not migrate from anywhere. Nevertheless, other views about the origin of Ihiteafoukwu exist. These views tend to link the people to the Awka-Orlu upland migration account which appears to be popular. These accounts did not only provide a traceable origin, movement and settlement of the progenitor of the town, but provided how the present villages in the town were founded through the sons of the progenitor- Ihite.

Nzewuba Ugwu in his book: *Ihiteafoukwu: The Echo of Igbo Culture* presents another account on Ihiteafoukwu. The account states that, Mazi Ekwereazu migrated from Ugiri-ike in Ikeduru into the region today called Ekwereazu. Ihite's first son was later called Ihiteafoukwu by his offspring to distinguish the town from other Ihite bordering his domain such as Ihite Uboma, Ihite Ubi etc. The name Ihiteafoukwu is a

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<sup>89</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Igbo People*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976, p.3

combination of two words, Ihite, the progenitor, and the Afoukwu, the big market, the centre of commerce and trade among his children. Before Ihite migrated into what later became Ihiteafoukwu region, the settlement at Oparanadim was crowded. It was most likely that majority of his brothers, with their respective families, had migrated to other territories and the instinct of survival and personal acquisition had prevailed on him to find a better territory. Ihite with his family migrated into the area inhabited today by Umuezeariam community. It is certain that Ihite had married at least, three wives and had four surviving male children. He called the children Ogbor, Eze, Nomo and Chieze. There are indications that suggest that the first son, Ogbor was not from the first wife. It was also believed that the third and fourth sons- (Nomo and Chieze), were from one and the same wife/mother. Eze the second son of Ihite is believed to have come from a separate mother- Ihite's first wife.<sup>90</sup>

From the fore-going, it is generally accepted by Ihiteafoukwu people that this progenitor, Ihite, had migrated from Ugiri-ike area in Ikeduru. The issue bordering on his children presents another concern about the relationship between Ihite and his wives. A number of views have been expressed in this regard. In a document obtained during the research, Eze Emeagwara alleged that,

Ogbor was not, after all, the first son of Ihite. Ogbor was able to give a cow demanded by Ihite, and as a result, Ogbor received *Ofo*-Ihite. Some people from both Umuezeariam and Umuediabali did not even agree that Ogbor was the son of Ihite; rather, they alleged that Ogbor migrated from Etitu area. They

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<sup>90</sup> Nzewuba, C. Ugwu, *Ihiteafoukwu: The Echo of Igbo Culture*, Ibadan: Cypress, 2004, pp.1-3



were however, unable to agree or explain how *Ofo-Ihite* came into Ogborø domain. The two communities of Umuezeariam and Umuediabali have consistently mounted strong opposition, that Ezeariam is the first son, and later claim he is the ancestral father.<sup>91</sup>

Furthermore, there is the view that suggests Umuchieze had migrated from Obowo. Also, a prominent Umuemesie son, in an unpublished documentary had alleged that Umuonyeoka migrated from Umudioka in Okigwe area.<sup>92</sup>

Nzewuba Ugwuh concludes on the account of origin and migration from Ikeduru in a somewhat elaborate form, that the Ihiteafoukwu people were sired by Ihite. Ihite had four sons namely, Ogbor, Eze, Nomo, and Chieze in this seniority order. He avows that òat the time Ihite and his children migrated from their family shanty at Oparanadim, they settled near the area, today occupied by Umuezeariam community. It was a small family community of Pa Ihite, his wives and children. From their Umuezeariam home, the family wandered across the open but lonely stretch of land, hunting, fishing, gathering food, vegetables and fruits. The rivers and streams became their regular fishing grounds, and in addition, their major source and supply of good water. Thus, Nneke and Duruoyide streams, plus the Egbeleruru Lake were their regular fishing spots. In fact, it was alleged that the presence and the location of these streams and a lake, were the major factors in the early migration of Ogbor, Eze, and Nomo away from the general family shanty at Umuezeariam. It was also shown that the three family members lived closely

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<sup>91</sup> Eze G.A. Emeagwara, òMemorandum on Ihiteafoukwu Peace Meeting: The Remote and Immediate Causes of the Crisis in the Townò November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1987, p.7

<sup>92</sup> Emeagwara, òMemorandumí ,ò p.7.

together during their early movements, as evidenced in various ancient structures of Ogbor and Eze still littered across, and near the present Umunomo borders. It was from this process that IHITEAFOUKWU expanded to its present level and size.<sup>93</sup>

Another version of the IHITEAFOUKWU tradition traces their origin and migration to Mbano. Jonathan Abanobi, in an unpublished project, presented what he called the most accepted legend of origin in IHITEAFOUKWU. His account shares some similarities with the account presented by UGWUH, but differs in the aspect of the place of origin. In his account, Abanobi states that "majority of the people of IHITEAFOUKWU believe strongly that the town has a definite origin. They support their assertion with IHITEAFOUKWU tradition of origin from Mbano area."<sup>94</sup>

However, from his writing, Abanobi is emphatic about the acceptability and validity of this account. Even in an interview conducted recently in the course of this research, he maintained the tenacity and authoritative position of the account in the people's history.

This legend, as narrated, says that

The people of IHITEAFOUKWU migrated from Mbano area to the present location of the town. This migration probably took place in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century or thereabout, and was occasioned by a severe drought that affected farmers so much that a man IHITE- (afo-ukwu), who was a farmer, left Mbano and moved Southwards to search for water. When he reached the present site of

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<sup>93</sup> UGWUH, *IHITEAFOUKWU*, p.3

<sup>94</sup> Jonathan Abanobi, "The Socio-Cultural History and Tradition of IHITEAFOUKWU", Unpublished Master's Degree Project Submitted to the Department of Library Studies, University of Ibadan, 1985, p.4-5

Ihiteafoukwu town, he found water and thus settled there. Ihiteafoukwu married several wives who gave birth to seven sons from whom the four major villages in Ihiteafoukwu town took their names. The first son of Ihite was Ogor, followed by two sets of twins by his two wives. The first sets of twins were named Umu-oni and Umu-onyioka. Since they were from the same mother, they were called Umulolo (Children of the first wife). The other set of twins were named Umu-ezeariam and Umu-ediabali, and their common name was Umuemesie. Both Umulolo and Umuemesie were together called Umueze (name for the two sets of twins of Ihite-afoukwu). They were grouped as one because they were born at the same period. The sixth son was Umu-nomo, while Umu-chieze became the seventh and the last son. Thus Ogor, Umueze, Umunomo and Umuchieze became the four principal villages of Ihiteafoukwu.<sup>95</sup>

Abanobi refuted the idea or the claim that Ihiteafoukwu migrated from nowhere. He stated that this argument is baseless, as there is no evidence raised in support of this account. Rather, he contends that the oral tradition which gives plausible explanation of the origin of Ihiteafoukwu is supported with some evidence. These, as he posited, derived from the facts gathered from the Ihiteafoukwu tradition of origin. First, the northern most part of Ihiteafoukwu is only a few poles from the southern parts of Mbano. Second, there

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<sup>95</sup> Abanobi, p.4

exists linguistic evidence. Ihiteafoukwu has the same Igbo dialect with Mbano. Third, socio-cultural activities in the two areas are similar. It is interesting to note that Ihiteafoukwu shares the same festivals with the nearest Mbano villages, whereas the same does not apply in other neighbouring Mbaise towns of which Ihiteafoukwu is one. Some of these cultural festivals, *inter alia*, include *Iwa akwa*, *Mbom Uzo*, *Ekweji or aruru*, the same *Aja-ala* deity or *Onugotu* shrine, Iroko as a communication and warning signal among families. There are a number of cultural dances, *egwu onwa* and *ekere mgba*, which the people of Ehime Mbano and Ihiteafoukwu perform jointly because the people see themselves as one and of the same origin.<sup>96</sup>

Without much contention, it is germane to aver that from the available evidence at our disposal, Ihiteafoukwu origin is traceable to the Orlu area migration account. Hence, they share the same ancestry with Mbano both as brothers and neighbours. They are geographically and politically grouped under Mbaise through the accident of colonial boundary delineation.

On their own part, the Mbano towns of Ugiri and Mbama claim to have migrated away from the Osu clan in search of space. Oral tradition about the people suggests that Dimolushi is the *Agbara* of the Osu-Owerre group of towns. Durumburu, his brother, also came from Umuokpukpara town of Osu-Owerre. Mbaa the son of Dimolushi settled at Nkwo Mbaa and founded Ugiri clan. Durumburu moved towards Amuzari and founded the Mbama group of towns. Therefore, Mbama towns naturally, are cousins to Ugiri towns.<sup>97</sup> Ugiri and Mbama clans are thus related in history. Ugiri claims that in the

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<sup>96</sup> Abanobi, p.5

<sup>97</sup> C.O. Bones Ojiah, *The History of Ugiri Clan from the Earliest Times to 1950*, p.100

distant past, their ancestors migrated from Osu area and settled in their present locations in the Mbano.

Bones Ojiah writes that òthe Ugiri are an off-shoot of Osu-Owerre village, their father Mbaa had five sons namely, Ugiri (now Ugirinna), Obollo, Ogor, Oka and Umuneke. These sons founded the villages named after them in Ugiri today<sup>98</sup>. However, Ibeme town at present in Ugiri is an off-shoot of the Ezihe town in Osu-Owerre, who were driven away by their brothers for not skinning a ram killed in the traditional way before cutting it into pieces. It was due to the quarrel that ensued that led to their migration into Ugiri where they resettled to avoid punishment. Here they were shown some portion of land on which they settled by Ogor town. The people of Ogor had allowed Ibeme to settle after they had been rejected by all other towns in Ugiri. Hence, Ogor in a derogatory way were referred to as òOgor *na-eri-Udeleö*- òOgor that eats the vultureö. What Ogor did to the writer's mind was simply a show of brotherly love to troubled Ibeme people. Ibeme had since been integrated into Ugiri clan.<sup>99</sup>

The Mbama towns of Amaraku, Amuzari, and Umunkwo are said to be off-shoots of Ugiri that migrated away from their Ugiri location into the area they currently occupy. The towns of Ugiri and Mbama have a common *Agbara*-deity called *Mbaa*, and a common clan feast to the *Agbara* is known as the *-Ntaö*. This feast is also observed in the Mbama town of Amaraku. When the Mbaa cult was introduced into Amaraku town, Umuokpoba compound of Amaraku claimed to be original descendants from Abba. Hence, the head of the cult resided in the hands of one Iwunwunne Nwosu who was said to be the sole survivor at the time. As Ojiah recorded, òthe kindred of Umuokpoba in

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<sup>98</sup> Bones Ojiah, p.101

<sup>99</sup> Joseph Ezebuike, interview cited in Cecilia, U. Duru, *Inter-Group Relations in Mbano from the Earliest Times*, ö B.A project, Department of History University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1984, p.12.

Umuorsu village of Amaraku town was responsible for announcing the feast of *Nta* from 1880 to about 1910 before a sort of epidemic struck the village and cleared almost the whole inhabitants.<sup>100</sup> Amuzari and Umunkwo did not observe the feast because the towns denied relationship with Ugiri. It was said that like Amaraku, *Nta* feast was introduced into Amuzari from Ugiri. However, Inyishi town in Ikeduru observed the *Nta* feast. As noted elsewhere, oral tradition on Inyishi alleges that, like Ibeme in Ugiri, Inyishi suffered similar fate. Inyishi was said to have slaughtered a sacred ram by the throat and was ostracised from Amuzari. Hence, they had settled in their present location in Ikeduru.

Despite the denial by Umunkwo and Amuzari of a relationship with Ugiri, most of the traditions of origin and cultural festivals appear strong evidence of a common ancestry. Mbama elder, Mazi Zephaniah Uzoeji, states 'our fathers told us that we are related to Ugiri and that we are descendants of *Mbaa*.'<sup>101</sup> In the same vein, Mr. C.T.C Annals reported that 'the Ugiri are an off-shoot of the Osu-Owerre group of towns of Osu and possess a common *Agbara* called as *Mbaa*. They also hold the same feast known as *Nta* in common, every August during the celebration of the yam festival. Thus, the Mbama villages are related to the Ugiri town.'<sup>102</sup>

However, two reasons exist why the Mbama towns are so called. The first, as the writer gathered, is in accord with the oral tradition regarding the Mbaa River which at one time was said to have flowed through Amaraku. The river had demanded the sacrifice of a 'white male and black female' fowl symbolical of a fair and black

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<sup>100</sup> Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri...*p.101

<sup>101</sup> Zephaniah Uzoeji, 93years, farmers, Amaraku, Interviewed 20 /09/2003

<sup>102</sup> C.T.C Annals, 'Intelligence Report on Ugiri Clan,' Okigwe Division Owerri Province, File no., Ep9394A CSE 1/85/4850, 1932, p.3, NAE.

complexioned woman and man. The sacrificial demand was not done and in anger the river as alleged, either changed its direction away from Amaraku or dried up. The surrounding clans therefore gave these towns the name of Mba-ama, corresponding to *Mbaa di-anya* or *Mbaa-otii* (far-away town in the people's dialect).

The second and more probable reason is that these towns are located along the route through which people passed travelling from Umuduru to Owerri. A person who dwells by the road described as an *obi-na-ama*, and the towns were called Mbama (*Mbaa bi na ama* or community which live along the road).<sup>103</sup>

There is even a version of the tradition which claims that Amaraku migrated from Amandugba into their present location in Mbano.<sup>104</sup> But the tradition is scarcely mentioned among the elders. Mr. Fox-Strangeways, while reporting on Mbama clan, noted that the Mbama denied relationship with Ugiri, an Osu extraction, but that trade and marriage have to a great extent, broken down the barrier.<sup>105</sup> But Major Stevenson's further enquires on the relationship between the Mbama and the Ugiri appear to have made a fair attempt to show that the five Mbama towns of Amuzari, Umunkwo and Amaraku with Inyishi and Umudim in Owerri Division were originally in no way related to Ugiri. Stevenson stated that Mbama are definitely of Isu extraction and came from near Isu-Njaba in Orlu. The Mbama said they have not heard of Durumburu and that it is alleged by Isu-Njaba that the Mbama deity, Duruemezuru, is an off-shoot of Njaba of the Isu of Orlu.

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<sup>103</sup> Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri*, p.102

<sup>104</sup> Christopher Azubuike, Arutumibe 1 of Oka, 60 years former, interviewed 30<sup>th</sup>, September, 1983, in Cecilia Duru. Inter-Group Relations in Mbano. p.12

<sup>105</sup> V. Fox Strangeways, Intelligence Report on the Mbama Clan, Okigwe Division and Owerri Province, File No. 9833A/Minloc, 6/1/183, 1952, N.A.E

The *nta* feast is not particularly good evidence of a relationship, as it was also common to many of the Ikeduru towns in Owerri. Further investigation, according available traditions in the area and among the Isu of Orlu, tried to hold unto the view that the towns of Isu and Agbaja-Isu are related to Mbama and originally came from the area of which Isu-Njaba is the senior town- Isu- Agbaja- Isu and Amuzari were known in the old days as Isu-Ofeiyi -that is, Isu that lives across the river. They are in no way related to the Ugiri and, in spite of some inter-marriages in more recent times their sympathies are bound up with those of the Isu rather than those of the Ugiri.<sup>106</sup>

Contrary to the above view, some Mbama claimed that they descended from Duruemezuru and the Njaba title of Ugiri has no connection with Njaba at Isu-Njaba. In support of this, Nwihim of Umunkwo said ðany one may take a name which pleases him. There are other Umunkwo besides myself, there is an Iwuala Ajoku at Umunkwo (Ugiri) which is in no way related to our Umunkwo Njaba and has nothing to do with the river of Njaba of Isu, and our Njaba feast comes firstö.<sup>107</sup> Mr. V. Fox-Strangeways, said that it has not been possible to verify Nwihim's statement, but even if it was true, care should be taken not to attach undue weight to the fact for Isu-Njaba say, ðthey (Mbama) took *Duruemezuru* for themselves when they left us and the clan has for years been covered woefully and sympathetically from the Isu of Orluö.<sup>108</sup>

Continuing with the enquiry into the relations of Mbama to other clans, one Ibezim, an influential figure in Mbama said ðwe are not Isu, nor are we Osu, we are just Mbama and in the olden days, we used to plunder the Isu and all others who came

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<sup>106</sup> Major. Stevenson Commented on Intelligence Report on Ugiri Clan, 1932, in Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri...*, p.101-102.

<sup>107</sup> Bones Ojiah, p. 103

<sup>108</sup> Fox-Strange ways. p.27



near usö.<sup>109</sup> This statement did not at any rate represent the view of the clan, when compared with the statement of Nwihim. It is worthwhile having a recount of the statement by Ibezim. When it was pointed out to Nwihim that some of his information on the origin of the clan did not tally with that given by Ibezim, he quickly retorted ðO Ibezim! Of course he stammers and gets excited too and would rather tell a lie quickly than stammer away the truthö. This was said apparently in all seriousness and was not challenged by Ibezim who was present.

Against this backdrop, it would appear reasonable to consider the views of Mr. V Fox-Strangeways which states, ðin the early times Mbama did not relate well with Ugiri who are said to be of Osu extraction. In years that followed, of course, trade and inter-marriage have to a great extent broken down the clan barriers. But the Okigwe-Mbama have never lost their solidarity and clan sense and this fact is probably at the back of the authentic denial mentioned above in the report.ö<sup>110</sup> In this connection, the following extracts from one of the Okigwe Intelligence Reports, Amaraku 7:10, 26, ðthey say they belong to the Amuzari sub-tribe together with Umunkwo and Amuzariö<sup>111</sup>. Njaba-Isu claims that it is not Isu, but Osu, and therefore belongs to Ugiri clan. Nonetheless, as Ojiah enthused, it has been suggested that the desire on the part of both Mbama towns and Njaba-Isu to ðbreak awayö from Isu arises from their fear and dislike of the influence of the neighbouring town (not clan) of Isu, with its powerful head called Akano.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Fox Strangeways, p ..27

<sup>110</sup> Fox-Strangeways, p.30-35

<sup>111</sup> P.M. Riley, ðOkigwe Intelligence Reports on Amaraku,ö 7.10.26. N.A.E

<sup>112</sup> Ojiah *Early History of Ugiri Clan...* p.104

Arising from the fore-going, the present writer thinks the denial by Mbama of relations with Ugiri may be in order for Mbama to avoid leadership and domination by Ugiri. Hence, denying relations with Ugiri, would enable them maintain independence and group solidarity. Moreover, available evidence from traditions suggests that the clans possess the same *Mbaa* deity which in the two clans appear to be the most important and revered of all minor deities among the people. The deity was carved in the image of *Mbaa* and allegedly brought into Mbama during their migration away from Ugiri.<sup>113</sup> These deities in most parts were factors of common identity and provided avenues for group interactions. G. I Jones observes, though the Igbo are dispersed over a number of relatively small and virtually independent local communities, some of these villages cherish identity with adjoining units by claiming a common origin and common religious cult.<sup>114</sup>

For instance, in spite of how the people are dispersed in the area, the *nta* feast, *Mbaa* deity and *Mbaa* stream served as factors of interactions between the two clans. What would appear a reasonable suggestion is that the Osu-Owerre section of Osu clan was the secondary dispersal centre for the Ugiri, Mbama and Ehime before they migrated either in search of land for human habitation or as a result of quarrels with their kinsmen which is in tandem with the stages in the process of migration and inter-group relations in human society. They Ibeme and Inyishi appear to be two good examples.

There appears to be a re-occurring tradition in many places that most member villages were founded by a common ancestor, usually an off-spring of a famed founder of

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<sup>113</sup> Joseph Ezebuike Interview cited

<sup>114</sup> G.I. Jones, *Trading States of Oil Rivers*, London: O.U.P., p.16

the clan. Such villages and communities share common boundaries, rivers, streams and markets and often each has a major road (*okporoama*) linking it with a market road (*uzo ahia*). There are ties of brotherhood based on common possession of shrines of Ala, Urashi, Mbaa, Ebummiri, Ezeala, Uzzi, Onugotu and other smaller gods. These gods and shrines served as a unifying factor and formed one of the strongest socio-cultural and religious integrative forces in the course of their relationship. Some of these villages claim relations with other neighbouring towns. However, there were other off-shoots which are related to Ugiri. For instance, there are claims of relationship with Atta, Amaimo, Umudim and Mbieri in Owerri Division.<sup>115</sup> Nsu villages also claim to be related to Uboma in Etiti. Among the Mbama, there are claims of relation with Inyishi, Eziamma, and Amaimo- Ikeduru in Owerri Division. It does appear to confine one into a bit of difficult situation to conclude whether these groups are off-shoots of the clans in Mbano or vice-versa. However, one thing is certain, oral tradition and oral evidence, replete in the many cultural festivals in the area, suggest, for instance, that Inyishi migrated from Amuzari and all the villages are linked to the Osu-Owerre secondary dispersal account after initial migration from Abba/Isu in Orlu area.

From an interesting and long discussion on the issues of origin, migration, dispersal and settlement of Mbama, Ugiri, Osu and Ehime, it is reasonable to suggest that Mbama is related to Ugiri and Osu. This is because Ugiri tradition suggests they moved from Osu to their present location. Mbama, according to their tradition claim they are of Isu extraction near Isu-Njaba. Incidentally, Osu the father of Ugiri, is of Isu origin. Therefore, Ugiri and Mbama appear to have a common ancestor- Isu. Fortunately, too, the Mbaa stream and the Durumburu and Duruemezuru deities share common origin

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<sup>115</sup> Christopher Azubuike interview cited.

since their source is from Njaba River, according to ancient belief. Durumburu came to Amuzari first but when Inyishi, the senior town of Amuzari committed an abomination by cutting the throat of a ram, Durumburu left Amuzari just as Inyishi left Amuzari. As Mbaa River in Ugiri clan derive from Dimolushi of Osu, so did Durumburu in Inyishi derive from Njaba of Isu-Njaba. This presents a different line of relationship between Ugiri and Mbaa. Therefore, Amuzari and Mbama towns cannot deny any knowledge of or association with Durumburu deity. The reason is that the first and most senior village or quarter in Amuzari still goes by the name. What is more, they claim Durumburu as their father as exemplified in their communal name, Umu-Durumburu, even at the time of this research. What seems sure is the fact that the search for more land, water, space and disagreement arising from tradition, religious beliefs and leadership and so on, may have caused complex internal migrations and settlement within Mbano and its neighbourhood.

In the foregoing accounts, attempt has been made to trace the origin of the various clans and villages in Mbano and their neighbours. Several factors of necessity have caused the migration and settlement of the various groups. One of the most important of these factors was the search for more land both for farming and settlement purposes. Professor C. C. Ifemesia observes that the general expansion outward from Igbo heartland in many cases was due to population pressure, or of people fleeing from justice and subjugation and left to settle elsewhere after quarreling with their kinsmen.<sup>116</sup>

In the case of Nsu, for instance, the villages of Agbaghara, Ezeoke, Umunumu, Umuopara, Umuezeala, Umuduru, Umuanunu and Umuakagu when they migrated away from their Ehime bloc and brothers, first settled at a place called Umuota near Uboma.

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<sup>116</sup> C.C. Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane living Among the Igbo: An Historical perspective*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980.p.22

The land there was muddy and water logged.<sup>117</sup> It was the search for a more suitable environment that led the Nsu to settle at their present location. The same factors played out at Osu-Owerre where Ugiri and Mbama group of towns claim to have migrated from to settle at their present location. The now neighbouring Inyishi in Ikeduru, Eziama and Ihteafoukwu in Mbaise also moved in the search for land. On the other hand, mention could be made of the fact that not all groups or sections of the clans that migrated away found sufficient land to sustain and provide all their needs. In later years, it became a source of conflict between some of the villages where peaceful negotiations failed as was the case between Ugiri and Mbama. Also, the Mbano as a people, have their dialect of Igbo language, though they varied in ascent slightly from one community to the other in ascent. Their dialect fostered peace, unity and understanding among them and their immediate neighbouring towns. Yet, it could be stated that despite these integrative forces, there existed areas of conflict as the people may not have enjoyed complete relative peace throughout the period before colonial rule, without some skirmishes. Further relations in the area were largely influenced along the lines of their common claim to the same ancestry. The claim to a common ancestry is the strength of mutual peace exemplified in their relations. The denials by some communities were seen as strategies adopted to avoid domination of the weaker groups by the stronger ones. These denials could be responsible for some of the occasional skirmishes between groups of villages. However, their traditions of origin are all linked to Orlu area which scholars like Afigbo suggested to be or is regarded as one of the core areas or centre of secondary Igbo dispersal into other areas, as noted earlier.

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<sup>117</sup> M.O. Ijere (ed.), *Nsu Past and Present*, Nsukka: 1965, p.10

## Political and Social Organization

Mbano and its neighbours are a part of Igbo society. Hence, their political and social organization or structure does not differ much from what obtains in many other Igbo communities. According to H.N. Nwosu, "the primary political unit was the extended family system known as Umunna." The Umunna is a generic and flexible term which includes the children of one father (nuclear family) and the widest range of recognized matrilineal kinsmen. Invariably, many segments of such groups might not only hold significant common estates, but exercise considerable political power and influence among their members.<sup>118</sup> Nwosu further states the leader of the extended family, who was usually the oldest male member, wielded a lot of powers in the administration of family lands, properties, and shrines. In doing this, he was guided by his wisdom, custom and advice of other senior and influential members of the extended family.<sup>119</sup> In the same vein, Olisa writes that, "the largest social and political unit is the community or town (*obodo, ala*) which can be described as an agglomeration of lineage groups occupying one territorial area and bound together by a belief in one common ancestor, one common *ani* (the earth goddess) and all sanctions appertaining to it."<sup>120</sup> On his part, W.G.R. Horton argues that the bond of one *ani (ala)* is a more important factor of communal unity and identity than that of a common ancestry. This is because, he states, in the former case, groups or lineages which did not descend from a common ancestor could (as is the case in almost all Igbo towns) be held together by common *ani*

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<sup>118</sup> H.N. Nwosu, "Politics and Administration in the Igbo Traditional Society" in G.E. K. Ofomata (ed.), *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*. Onitsha: Africana First Publishers Limited, 2002, p. 234.

<sup>119</sup> Nwosu, p. 234

<sup>120</sup> M.S.O Olisa, "Igbo Traditional Socio-Political System", in Ofomata, *A Survey of Igbo Nation*, p. 218

sanctions for purposes of social and political activities.<sup>121</sup> In his analysis of the views of some scholars on the Igbo political and social structure, Olisa extrapolates that

Some anthropologists, such as Meek, have used the term 'communes' instead of towns; others, such as Forde and Jones, have preferred 'village groups' in referring to the Igbo town. The term clan is adopted in referring to a group of towns or villages which form loosely -federated entities which have limited common interest in social and political matters. Clans are more frequent as one moves up North-East of Igboland in Bende, Ngwa and Owerri areas.

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In addition, W. Anderson, describes clans as ranging from 'a close-knit quasi kinship group at one extreme to a group united chiefly by geographical term at the other'<sup>123</sup>. It is within this purview that the political and social organization of Mbano and its neighbours is examined.

The political and social organization of Mbano and its neighbours consists of different levels. The people traditionally live in semi-autonomous villages whose government according to G.I. Jones, 'consisted of a council of elders and heads of the component sections.'<sup>124</sup> However, some scholars of Igbo culture have divergent views on how many levels of government are discernable in Igbo political organization. For

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<sup>121</sup> W.G.R. Horton, 'God, Man and the Land in a Northern Ibo Village-Group', *Africa, Vol.26, 1959*, pp.17-28.

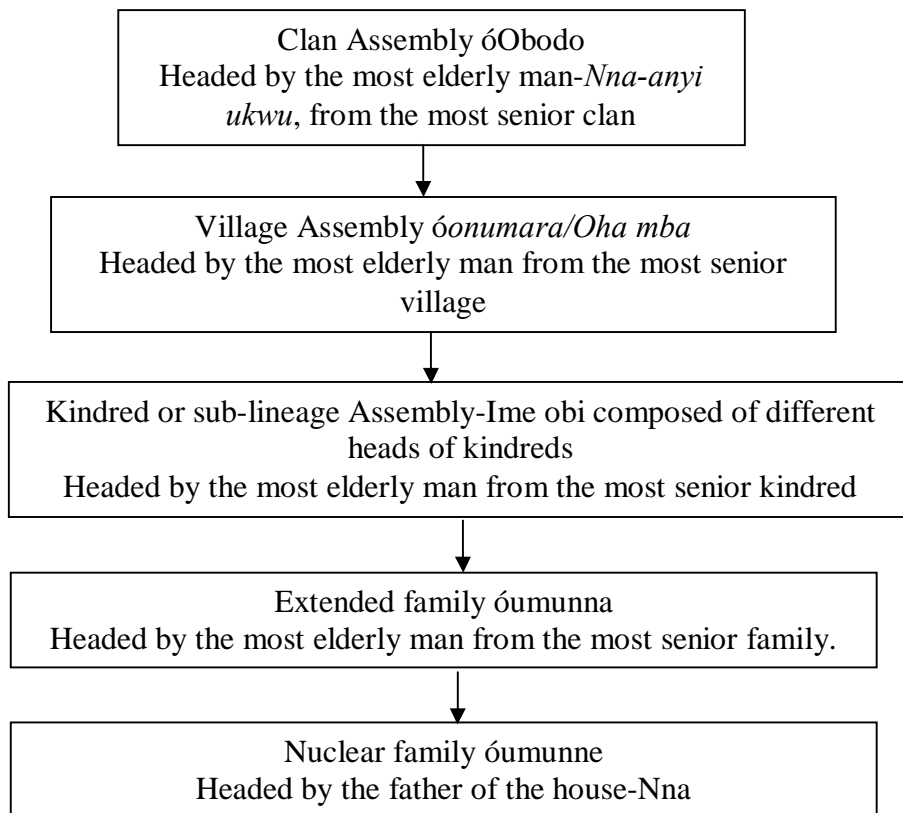
<sup>122</sup> Olisa, 'Igbo Traditional Socio-Political System', pp.218-219

<sup>123</sup> W. Anderson, 'Kinship Terminology of a Group of Southern Ibo', *Africa, Vol. 24, 1954*, pp. 87-99.

<sup>124</sup> G.I. Jones, *Trading States of the Oil Rivers*, London: O.U.P., 1963, p.17

instance, V.C. Uchendu identified two layers of political structure,<sup>125</sup> while A.E. Afigbo identified four levels.<sup>126</sup> But the fact is that the levels defer from one community to another. Within Mbano and its neighbours, different levels of political and social organization did exist. These were *umunne* -the nuclear family, *umunna* -extended family, *ime obi* -the sub-lineage or kindred assembly. Others include *onumara* -the village assembly, and the *obodo* -village-group or clan Assembly.

**Table 1: Levels of Socio-political organizational hierarchy chart**



The family is the smallest political unit in Mbano. It comprises a man, his wife or wives and children. All the members of the household lived together in a compound

<sup>125</sup> V.C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of South east Nigeria*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, p. 39.

<sup>126</sup> A.E Afigbo, *Indigenous Political Systems and Government in Pre-colonial Africa*, *Tarikh vol.4 No.2*, 1973, pp.17-18.



which is enclosed with walls made of red earth. The family household though not in itself a strong political unit, is the foundation on which a more complex institution is built.<sup>127</sup> The man is the head of the household or family. He is called *Nna* (father). He made relentless efforts to ensure he pilots the affairs of his family very well. The father, as the head of the family is assisted by his wife or the most senior wife, if he married many wives. He ensures that the health, peace and progress of his family remain intact all the time. It is in order for him to ensure the progress and long life of his family that he makes sacrifices to the ancestors. When his male children are of age, he allocates farm lands to them so they could cultivate them and make a living out of them. He also made sure that his daughters marry responsible husbands. When disagreement arises among his children, he settles it amicably. More serious cases could be referred by him to the head of the extended family.<sup>128</sup> When the *nna* or father who is the head of the family dies, he is succeeded by his eldest son, *di-okpara* or *diopara* who inherits the *obi-ama* and automatically assumes leadership. He held the *ofò* (symbol of authority) and performed the political functions of rule-making and execution among other things.<sup>129</sup> The authority of the *di-okpara* is based largely on the fact that he is the intermediary between the family and the ancestors, and as Meek observes, *òto* disobey him is an insult to the ancestors on whose goodwill the family depends.<sup>130</sup> As a result, his position is seen as sacred and the office is respected.

Besides, the family is very important in the political and social development of the individual. It is in the family that the spirit of individual achievement for which the

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<sup>127</sup> Olisa, *Ìgbo Traditional Socio-Political System*, p.219

<sup>128</sup> Onukogu Okechukwu, C.98 years, Farmer Umueze II, Ehime, interviewed, 11/09/2012

<sup>129</sup> Chidi, M. Amaechi, *Òka-Isiala Mbanò Politics and Society in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, B.A Project, Department of History, U.N.N 1992, p.18

<sup>130</sup> C.K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, London: O.U.P, 1932, p.6

Igbo is known is gradually inculcated into the children. The political importance of the family lies, first and foremost, in its being the basic membership unit within the Igbo social structure and its being the centre of political socialization of the individual. It is within the family that the individual, in the course of his/her development, learns the relationship between his/her kindred and other kindred and those between his/her village and other villages and villages at the town level.<sup>131</sup> It is from the family, as Ogbalu noted, the individual picks up the proverbs of wisdom from his/her father and other elderly relatives or neighbours. He/she is tutored in the avoidance and compliance of the land. At the usual critical events of the community such as births, marriage, funeral, title taking, festivals, he observes and learns the multitudes of the traditional laws and customs. Finally, at adult stage, he/she enters into the positions of participating directly in all these that he/she has learnt at a stage he/she usually enters by marrying.<sup>132</sup> Training in civic responsibility begins with the recognition and performance of duties for elders of the family, beginning from parents to titled men, *ndi nze* and *Ozo*, to ritual leaders and to other men/women of influence. These duties also lead to contact and interaction between the individual and his /her neighbours. As the individual attend to these duties, new friendships are made. It could also bring about marriage between people from different communities.

It is important to point out that in Mbano and its neighbours as in many Igbo communities, family and village names are usually names of founding ancestors. The term *Umu* (children) is used to refer to their off-springs and the territory they occupy. Leadership is strictly based on such organization of blood relatedness or kinship, and

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<sup>131</sup> Olisa, *ØIgbo Traditionalí* ö p. 220

<sup>132</sup> F.C. Ogbalu, *Omenala Igbo*, Onitsha: Varsity Press, 1960, p.97

their territorial influence. It is under this organizational precinct that the smallest political unit of administration and governance-*Umunne* unit exist in the area. For instance, in Ihteafoukwu, Mazi Ihte was the head -the *õNnadi dibia nwe ulo*; the *oji ofoö*. He performed the family priestly functions and rituals and led the family to *Chukwu* through the ancestors. He was the custodian of all the family ancestral lands, the keeper of family ritual objects and the spiritual head of *Umunne*.<sup>133</sup> This *Umunne* (a common ritual bond performed by families to ensure continuous unity and cordial relations between people) is observed in Ugiri, Mbama, Inyishi, Eziam, Okwelle and other communities in the area of study.

Unity within the kindred is strengthened and emphasized by the fact of descent from a common ancestor or great-grand-father, usually, by the elders of the kindred. On kindred level, Olisa writes that

Blood relationship carried with it numerous taboos which ensure that certain social or political obligations are observed. A kinsman shall never sell a kinsman, nor give false witness against him, nor abandon him in time of trouble. Violations of most of these rules constitute abominations which are believed to be instantly punishable by the ancestors and *Ani*, unless the necessary rituals of atonement or purification are performed.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ugwu, *Ihteafoukwu* pp.160-161

<sup>134</sup> Olisa, *õIgbo Traditional Socio-Political System* ,ö p. 222

At the kindred political and social level, citizens are prepared for the wider village level which is more elaborate. During this period, titles are conferred on deserving indigenes that would represent the kindred at the competitive village level. Title holders such as the *nze na ozo*, priests of deities and influential personalities were representatives in the village councils.

The village assembly, *oha*, *amala*, or *onumara*, was the next higher level of political unit of kindred heads who held the *ofo*. Meetings were usually held at a market square or at a convenient place near the house of the most senior elder from the most senior kindred. The meeting was presided over by the village head who was the *oji ofo ukwu* (the holder of the big ancestral staff) or the *nna anyi* among the Ugiri and Mbama area.<sup>135</sup> Proceedings at the meeting were largely democratic since every member in attendance was given an ample opportunity to contribute effectively to the discussions. It should be noted that within the village assembly existed a special council called *ndi ama-ala*. This council, as Onukogu stated, was composed of all the kindred heads and some selected elders. In this council were also men who occupied high social status in the community, such as *ozo* title holders.<sup>136</sup> The function of the council was to advise the youths and ensure that they were good citizens with good character.

The village assembly tried such crimes as murder and incest. According to J. Oriji, these crimes were not only regarded as a violation of the ancestral laws but as an act of abomination against the earth goddess. The offenders would be accused of upsetting the ritual equilibrium in the village which was vital to the fertility and growth

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<sup>135</sup>Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugirí* , p.222

<sup>136</sup> Onukogu interview cited

of man, animals and crops.<sup>137</sup> Any person found guilty of these crimes or offences was asked to offer certain sacrifices to appease the earth goddess. According to Zephaniah Uzoeji such offender was asked to bring items like a male goat, kola nuts, a tortoise, and a pigeon, for the sacrifice. With all these items, the elders with the *Onye-isi-ala* and chief priest made a cleansing offering to *ala*, the earth goddess, in order to appease his anger.<sup>138</sup> This level of political and social organization was indeed very important partly as a result of the claim to common ancestor. The presence of titled men strengthened this unit. Chidi Amaechi writes that it was the largest and strongest socio-political unit during the period and was under the kindred head, titled men (*nze na ozo*) and elders endowed with natural wisdom (*ndi oki* or *oke oha*). It was an exercise in democracy since decisions were by consensus. However, persuasion about the legality of a particular course of action, employed in some cases to bring the divergent views to a point, was in accordance with the tradition. This was of primary importance with the tradition as tradition was a reference point. Decisions reached by the assembly were binding because in most cases, they were concluded by the invocation of the village *ofo*, the specter of traditional authority,<sup>139</sup> *isu ofo* or *iku ofo*.

After the village was the town Assembly village-group clan- *Oha mba*. According to Olisa, the town, whether singly or in group as clans, is the highest political unit among the Igbo. Structurally, it is a collection of villages which, as have been explained, are in themselves collection of kindreds, so that the town is the largest single collection of lineages which share several things in common.<sup>140</sup> In Igbo society, the strongest bond

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<sup>137</sup> Uzoeji interview cited

<sup>138</sup> Uzoeji interview cited.

<sup>139</sup> Amaechi, *õOka Isiala-Mbanoõf* p.19-201

<sup>140</sup> Olisa, p.223

and factor of interest that keeps the town and clan together is attachment to one *ala* and common ancestral origin. But at the clan level, Olisa identified a number of factors (such as distances in chronology and the presence of substantial groups not traceable from ancestral tree) that its strength as a factor of unity is quite nominal. Other factors of common interest and unity include the habitation and possession of one territory, the possession of one central market, and in some cases, the subscription to one shrine of importance.<sup>141</sup> Like the village assembly, the clan assembly was an open system. In fact, it could be said that at this level, a representative democratic system was adopted.

According to Annals intelligence report on Ugiri clan, for instance, the village-group or town assembly was under a recognized head from the ruling quarter of the town (Ugirinna) with known powers, but whose importance varied according to his ability.<sup>142</sup> He was referred to as *Nna-anyi-ukwu* (our great father to distinguish him from the heads of the families, kindred and villages) who were referred to as *Nna-anyi*,<sup>143</sup> (our father).

In other words, in line with the leadership tradition of Mbano and the four clans of Osu, Ugiri, Ehime and Mbama, it was formal for Osu who occupy the first position to lead at the time. Osu was the first to take share and break the kola-nut when people from the four clans gathered. But when people from Ugiri gathers, for instance, Ugirinna, Obollo, Ogor, Umuneke, Oka, Umudim and (excluding Ibeme and parts of Umuozu, who were later migrants that settled in Ugiri), Ugirinna takes the first share and the kola nut. In Inyishi-Ikeduru, Amaugo is the oldest community as they were the first to settle there. It is from there that the head of the village comes. His other brothers Umuoziri, Ikembara, Amaeke and Umuoti communities that make up the village accord him to

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<sup>141</sup> Olisa. p.223

<sup>142</sup> Annals, Intelligence Report..., p.8

<sup>143</sup> Annals, p.8

respect.<sup>144</sup> In Etit, and Ihite Uboma neighbours of Mban, *Umuezegwu* in Umule is the head community.<sup>145</sup>

In the town or clan assembly, because of its representative and democratic nature, every village had an equal voice. The village representatives were not a permanent body of legislators but were selected at each session based on their ability to perform, from the point of view of their different villages. V.C. Uchendu explains that at this town level, the members were indeed delegates and not representatives and they could not commit their village to any matter not previously discussed and agreed upon by it.<sup>146</sup> Besides, matters discussed here included those that threatened the town's existence and relationship with other communities.

In fact, the typical Mbasaa (later Mban) traditional town was a small democratic society where, although the voice of the elders tended to dominate, every scope was given to individuals to participate in the discussions. This imperative for consensus in the decisions was the key to Mbasaa political unit conforms to MacFarlane's description of sovereignty which he said resided in the whole body of members of the community meeting in the public assembly for the purpose of laws and authentic acts of the general will.<sup>147</sup> They also formulated policies guiding the smooth running of the area and were helped by the age-grades in the administrative organization of the people. The age sets engaged in communal labour such as clearing bush paths leading to streams, market squares, shrines buildings, construction of bridges over streams and ensuring the proper payment of fines levied on the people. Thus, clans in the area like most other Igbo areas

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<sup>144</sup> Chidi Onwubuariri interview cited

<sup>145</sup> Chijioke Innocent Obiukwu C. 65years security man, interviewed at Umuezegwu Ihite Uboma, Etit, 25/08/2010.

<sup>146</sup> Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast* p.39

<sup>147</sup> L.J. MacFarlane, *Modern Political Theory*, London: Nelson University, 1970, p.232.

never evolved highly centralized political and administrative system, yet there existed time tested rules and procedures that governed individual and inter-group relationship before colonial rule.

Generally speaking, therefore, it could be stated that the pattern of political leadership within Mbasaa and among its neighbours before the colonial era could be linked to Murdock's "Primitive Democracy."<sup>148</sup> Here leadership and a measure of prestige but not authority were vested typically in headmen and council of elders or family heads with perhaps a few other semi-specialized functionaries. In other words, the leaders had no sole power to compel compliance, rather, they only advise or persuade.

Meek observed that "in the olden days the taking of certain titles was a costly and elaborate affair extending possibly over a number of years."<sup>149</sup> The *nze na ozo* is one of such titles. Because of the very important roles they played in the administrative, legislative, executive and adjudicative aspects in the political structure, it is only men of substance suitably qualified that take the title. Aspirants to the title pay high fees to the current *ozo* title holders and also by the performing the recommended compulsory rituals. Very often, members of the institution from time to time attended initiation ceremonies and were sumptuously entertained and also had something to take home. However, the most difficult burden of these titles usually came to light when a member died. The relations of the deceased spent a lot of money performing his burial ceremony.<sup>150</sup>

However, the point to stress is that, like in many other Igbo areas such as Awka, Nri, Onitsha, Orlu and so on, the institution of *nze na ozo* in Mbano and its neighbours

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<sup>148</sup> G.P Murdock, *Africa: The People and their Culture*, New York: Mc Gram-Hill, 1959, pp.33-36

<sup>149</sup> C.K. Meek, "Report on Social and Political Organization in the Owerri Division," CER/136. Lagos: Government Printers, 1933, p.4.N.A. E.

<sup>150</sup> Columba, "Some Aspects of Cultural and Political History" pp.14-15



was an established social, political and religious one. There hierarchy and social privileges helped to enhance the political and social organization of the people. The privileges conferred on the *nze na ozo* in Mbano meant they led an exemplary life. The titled men had enormous influence in the political and social structures of the people. Jonathan Abanobi observed that,

Titled men in the past had virtually monopolised authority in their village-groups. The making of major political decisions and the administration of criminal justice were carried out at the public meetings at which adult males of the communities had the right to express their opinions, and the decisions agreed upon were ratified and virtually imposed by the lineage heads. They made use of the age-grades, the masquerades (*nmanwu*) and chief priests- (*ndi isi nmuo or agbara*) to enforce their decisions. In fact, legislative, executive and judicial powers were concentrated in the same persons. They represent their communities during clan meetings.<sup>151</sup>

The *Umuada* remains one other important political and social institution among Mbano and its neighbours. The *Umuada* comprises all daughters born and married in their towns and villages. On the eve of colonial rule and even in the colonial and post-

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<sup>151</sup> Jonathan I. Abanobi, *The Socio-Cultural History and Tradition of Iriteafoukwu*, M. SC. Degree, Department of Library Studies, University of Ibadan, 1985, p.11-12

colonial times, they have remained relevant. The *Umuada* steps in occasionally to settle prolonged disputes, which may have defied the efforts of the male folk. They wielded strong political and social influence. They helped in ensuring that all married women comply with custom and tradition, as well remained obedient to their husbands. Issues of disobedient and other forms of misconduct by women fell under their jurisdiction. For instance, matters like, adultery, stealing, and stubbornness were handled by the *Umuada*. They also helped in clearing the market square, bush paths and the roads or *okporo-ama* weekly and also during festive periods. They also ensured that the moral life of young girls and married women were maintained.

Apart from the *Umuada* was another women group called *Ndi-omi*. This comprised all women married into one village. They were also called *Umuagbata*: women married from neighbouring towns. It was presided over by the wife of the most senior man of the unit. They settled disputes among and between members, discussed matters of common interest to them and allotted civic responsibilities. *Ndi-omi* often intervened to settle long enduring disputes within the male assembly. *Ndi-omi* acted as an umbrella pressure group through which process women pushed for their collective interest. The *Umuada*, however, were in some respects more influential than *Ndi-omi* in the area.

It suffices to say that the political and social organization of Mbano and its neighbours may not have differed much from those of many other Igbo groups. However, the issues of common historical ties and ancestry imposed some level of homogeneity on Mbano and its neighbours. Especially, different communities gathered at the clan level to deliberate on socio-political and economic matters of common interests. For instance, the

heads of communities in the then Mbasaa political unit gathered at Etiti and discussed clan issues of interest. This clan meeting held every twenty-eight days. It was an effective platform for inter-group interactions on the eve of colonial.

### **Religious Belief Systems and Practices**

Before the colonial era, Mbasaa and its neighbours were purely adherents of traditional religion. Every clan, town, village, kindred, family and individual had their own deity and *chi*. Like in other Igbo communities, Mbasaa people believe in the supreme God, *Chi-Ukwu* or *Chukwu*- the great God; *Chineke*: the God that creates. Edmund Ilogu noted that, the principal God of the Igbo is called *Chineke* or *Chukwu*. *Chi-ne-eke* literally mean the creator God while *Chukwu (Chi-Ukwu)* means the great God.<sup>152</sup> He further states that the central association therefore in the concept of the principal God is a belief in a supreme source of beneficent creation. The great God (*Chi-Ukwu*) is believed to be the author of heaven and earth who makes animal and plant life grow. As the source of human life, He gives to each human at the time of his/her birth, that individual's portion of the divine being called *chi*.<sup>153</sup>

The relationship between humans and the spirit world is believed to be through varied channels. The life of the Igbo person therefore hinges on his continued quest to maintain a cordial and positive link with the spirit world, that is the land of the ancestors as the Igbo belief explains. Compliance with the codes of behaviour and the customs (*omenala*) approved by the ancestors, and enforced by the earth-goddess through priests and titled elders and heads of various extended families. Hence, the Igbo believe in the

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<sup>152</sup> Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, Onitsha: Nok Publishers 1974, p.34

<sup>153</sup> Ilogu p. 34

existence of spirits in all aspects of nature and its various phenomena.<sup>154</sup> Mbanò and its neighbours share this traditional religious and belief system. However, the names of the deities or gods differ from one community to the other. For instance, as O.U Kalu observed, in Orlu, Oru, Nkwere, Isu, Mbanò and Etiti, *ala* ranked lower than *Njaba*, *Urashi* and *Amadioha*.<sup>155</sup> These gods were highly respected among the people.

The earth-goddess remains the doyen in the spiritualised realm in Igboland. *Ala* is generally revered but some minor deities were more prominent in some Mbanò villages due to their perceived usefulness to the people. The importance of land to agriculture makes it necessary that sacrifices must be offered to the earth-goddess. For instance, in Nsu community, before the commencement of the planting season, farmers offer sacrifices to a deity called *izoaja* with a fowl for *ala*'s guidance and protection of his crops. During harvest around the month of August, sacrifices of fowl and goat are offered to *ala* for a fruitful harvest.<sup>156</sup> In many parts of Mbaise, especially Eziana and Ihiteafoukwu communities, *Ahiajoku*, represented usually with carved images, the great yam god of the Igbo is regarded as a male agent of *Ala*. There is also the *alaogbaga* of Chokoneze, *aja-ala* in Eke Ikpa, *amainyi* in Uboma and *Nkwo Ihite*. There are also other deities like *ulashi* or *urashi/uram*, *iriukwu*, *ogwugwu*, *amadioha*, *ezealakanu*, *ezeala-anyanwu*, *iyiafo-otakwu*, and *Isiala*,<sup>157</sup> among many others.

In Mbanò, the cult of *amadioha* (god of thunder) is located at Umuakagu village of Nsu with the symbol of big trees. Some priests serve the deity. Such cases as theft, kidnapping and murder are referred to the cult. There, the accused swears by *amadioha* to

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<sup>154</sup> Ilogu p. 35

<sup>155</sup> O.U. Kalu, 'Gender Ideology in Igbo Religion: The Changing Religious Role of Women in Igbo land,' in A.E Afigbo and E.J Otagburuagu, (ed.) *New Brides, More Hopes: Igbo Women in Socio-Economic Change*. Nsukka: Institute of African Studies 2008, p.138

<sup>156</sup> Iwueke Ohanele interview cited in Duru, 'Intergroup Relations', öp.4

<sup>157</sup> Kalu, 'Gender Ideology', öpp.140

prove his/her innocence. It is a common belief among the people that any offender that swears falsely would die after a period of time, ranging from seven days to twenty-eight days.<sup>158</sup>

The belief in ancestors and ancestral powers is also strong among the people. According to Ohanele, in Nsu, and Ehime area, the worship of *urashi* as the principal god of the people served as a bond of unity between them and their neighbours of Etiti and Ihiteafoukwu. The month observed by the people as *onwa urashi* accordingly coincides with their local calendar, *onwa asato* (eight month). The priest of *urashi* announces *ihu onwa*, which marks the beginning of the festivities and all the citizens join with shouts.<sup>159</sup> Following this proclamation after sacrifices at the main *urashi* shrine, all other villages' shrines, like *durukwu* Ezeoke and *ezeala-nkwo* in Umuakagu were decorated with palm fronds. Sacrifices of fowl were offered to these deities for peace, long life and good conduct. The chief priests assembled at *Afo-Agbaghara* market square (head village) where the chief priest comes from. It is also the centre of the Nsu religious rite, from where they set off for other villages. The death of any person during this period was regarded as a calamity and his/her property was confiscated by the *urashi* priests. Quarrelling or war between two individuals or villages was forbidden, traditional marriages were also forbidden, where they were violated, the *urashi* priest would fine the person(s) or village(s) concerned.<sup>160</sup>

The Umuanunu worshiped a deity called *ebumiri* which was also worshipped by most Osu people during their *onwa isii* (sixth month). The village met to offer a common sacrifice to the deity. As C.K Meek observed, among the Igbo religion and law are

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<sup>158</sup> Duru, *Intergroup Relations*, p.4

<sup>159</sup> Ohanele interview cited

<sup>160</sup> Samuel Njoku, 85 Years, farmer, interviewed at Ezeoke Nsu, 30/09/2010

interwoven and most powerful legal sanctions are derived from the gods.<sup>161</sup> During marriage ceremonies, sickness, family re-union, and warfare, the sacrifices were often offered to them. Thus the socio-culture life of the people seemed an out-growth of their religious life and belief. This as it were, greatly influenced issues of inter-group relations among the people and their neighbours.

Nzewuba Ugwuh writes that among the Ihiteafoukwu traditional belief, one known legacy bequeathed to them by their forefathers is the *onugotu* shrine. This is the general centre of worship for Ihiteafoukwu community. The people are not sure of the exact time onugotu shrine was established. There is the indication, however, that it was established as a family centre of worship immediately Ihite, their progenitor migrated into the region with his family.<sup>162</sup> Ugwu further explained that due to the importance of the Onugotu shrine as a factor of unity, peace and protection among the people, it was moved to the Afoukwu market. During this time it was alleged that all the children of Ihite had left the general family home at Ezeariam and migrated to other regions within Ihiteafoukwu. It was during this time that the name Onugotu was given to the shrine, thus, *õumu m, okwu unu buru otu oge nileö* (my children, always speak with one voice all the time), was the age long advice our ancestors enshrined, not only as a religion, but as a code of civic conduct to all their children, and children yet unborn.<sup>163</sup> Onugotu therefore appear an important instrument in Ihiteafoukwu for social justice, reminding those who oppress the weak, and the poor, disturb the unity of the community, or fail to assist their neighbours and or the community, to be mindful of their actions.

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<sup>161</sup> Meek, *Law and Authority* í , p.20

<sup>162</sup> Ugwuh, *Ihiteafoukwuí* ,p.72

<sup>163</sup> Ugwuh, p.72

In Oka Mbanjo, shrines of deities are found in the communities which serve as part of the religious life. In the words of T. Azubuike, "Oka people worshiped *ala duruodufo*, *ala okpuala ezealaume*, *dimaku*, *iyieke mbaa*, *onuiyi achara* and so on. These spirits or deities were personifications of fortunes, destiny, wealth, strength and divination among other functions and were subject to the supreme God- *Chukwu*.<sup>164</sup> The religious belief system, like in the general Igbo traditional areas, was inextricably involved in the whole structure of the society, where God and spirits co-existed but assumed prominence in different contexts. It was also the general belief among the Mbanjo people and their neighbours that human beings were left to combat the evil spirits by manipulating the good ones. Here the ancestors were important because at death, they were said to have passed into the spirit world and were believed to have acquired spiritual powers with which they protect their families in the human world. Since death was only a mirror of the human world, the ancestors were conceived as being always present. This explains why when libations were poured, the ancestors were usually called upon to come and join in the process. It also conferred legitimacy to the authority of the elders in the communities.

Nonetheless, as in other Igbo communities, Mbanjo people alongside their neighbours also believe in a future state, in the immortality of their soul, in the existence of a place of bliss in the great hereafter for the good and which they speak of as *elu igwe* (heaven). They also believe in an abode of misery after this life for the wicked.<sup>165</sup> This as it appears, runs parallel with the Christian doctrine whose teachings invoke hell-fire for the wicked and eternity or life-everlasting for the righteous. This, relationship between

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<sup>164</sup> Ugwu, p.72.74

<sup>165</sup> F.K. Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Christian Rivalry in Igboland*, London: Cass, 1972, p.160

the cosmic view and the socio-political structure in the area of study are interwoven. This is exemplified in the sacredness of the *ofò* (symbol of justice and authority). The *di okpara* who held the *ofò*, for instance, was charged with the responsibility of maintaining peace and justice in the family. The same structure follows thus, and applies to other higher religious structures among the people.<sup>166</sup>

Despite the special qualities of the *oji ofò* (*ofò* holder), the *ofò* was venerated as a sacred instrument of political, social and religious belief that was tied to the secular view of the Igbo world. This implied the belief in re-incarnation (*ilo uwa*), that an individual lives and dies and goes to the spirit world to be cleansed and re-incarnates in his family line. In the same vein, crime and punishment was tied to this infinite process. The firm belief by the people in life after death, ensures the individual who was punished did his punishment for fear that his crime would follow him to the next world. As is it did appear, almost all the communities in Mbano and its neighbours possess central deities. Each community also has its own communal deity which they worshiped. For instance, in Ugiri, the clan deity or *agbara* was called *Mbaa* associated with the *Mbaa* River. Its central worship center was at the *Nkwo Mbaa* where the *Mbaa* River is located. Others are *ogwugwu*, *Ezeala*, *Iyiafo-otakwu*, *okwara-ogbuleke*. For *Mbama* there is *Duruemezue/Durumburu* as the central deity located at Amuzari community. Eziana community in Ekwereazu has the *Ogbaegbe* deity which was centrally worshipped at *Eke Eziana*. Umueze I and Umueze II communities in Ehime Mbano, worshipped the ancestral deity called *Igu Ehime*, represented with a black stone. Umulolo Oboh, (the ancient sacred land in Osu-ama Mbano regarded as the first settlement where Mbano and some of its neighbours settled and regarded as their place of secondary dispersal), have

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<sup>166</sup> Chidi Amaechi, *òOka Isiala Mbanoí*, p. 27-28



the *Chialu* deity. The *Chialu* shrine is located at Umuezeala Oboh and the shrine is called *Nkpacha*, where the people gathered for worship. The Inyishi in Ikeduru had a deity called *ezealagaku* also found in Amuzari from where the Inyishi claim to have migrated to their present location now in Ikeduru.<sup>167</sup> In Umuagwu Umuakagu Nsu, Nze Boniface Chukwma Alogwa told the writer about different deities. He also was critical in comparing spirits of traditional religion to Christianity angels. He has this to say,

We have many deities in Umuakagu Nsu, we have *Ezeala ofo* deity, *Oparaike*, *Mgbanudim*, *Urashi* and *Amadioha*. *Mgbanudim* is a wicked deity. *Oparaike* is a rebellious deity. *Urashi* and *Ezealaofa* are kind deities. They can be called Angels in our own culture. Why do the Europeans say they are devils or idols? Is it because we did not call them Angel Raphael, or Angel Gabriel? Or is it because we did not call our deities Roman names or English names, that they are called devils by foreign religions? The truth is we have good and bad deities; *Mgbanudim* and *Oparaike* are bad deities and could be likened to the Biblical Lucifer. But *Ezealaofa* and *Urashi* are kind deities and our Biblical Angels. Most of the deities are still in

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<sup>167</sup> The following information was gathered from the resources persons interviewed in those communities Okoro Peter Ogu, at Eziana Oparanadim Ahiazu Mbaise, Godson Ogu Onyirimba, Umunkaro Umueze II Ehime Mbano; Marcel Ibe at Okwelle Onuimo; Innocent Ikemenogo at Umulolo Oboh Osu-ama Isiala Mbano; Chidi Onwubuariri at Amakpaka Umuoti Inyishi Ikeduru.

existence, if not too physically seen, they are very deep in the heart of the elders<sup>168</sup>.

These deities were worshipped by different communities on different market days, namely, *Afo*, *Nkwo*, *Eke* and *Orie*. The different days were sacred days dedicated either to the deities or progenitors as contained in their oral traditions and beliefs.

Besides, certain beliefs generally identified among the Mbano and their neighbours all tend to be associated with these deities. These beliefs are however shrouded in many taboos within the people's socio-cultural milieu. As in many Igbo areas, stealing (*izu ohi/ori*) is a taboo, so also contracting marriage on *Afo* day in parts of Ehime Mbano because the *Afo* was dedicated to the deity-*Igu* Ehime. On taboos, Godson Ogu Onyirimba said that "the *osu* and *ume* caste system is one and the same among Mbano and the neighbouring villages. Mbaise observe the *osu* caste system, so do the Etiti, Obowo, Ikeduru, Isu and Okwelle, especially, in their marriage culture. In the early days an *osu* did not appear in the public to share things in common with a *nwadiala*- free born, in Mbano. The *osu* were treated as slaves or even worst than slaves. In those days, an *osu* could only marry a fellow *osu*. Marriage between an *osu* and *nwadiala* was forbidden in Mbano. If an *osu* married *nwadiala*, the family of the free-born would chase the couple out of the family house for such a marriage went against *umunne (igbubo umune)*. Consequently, the unwanted couples were seen and treated as strangers by their relatives. Following this situation, a common tradition known as *ido okposhi* (is traditional ritual performed as a bond by the people) was no longer observed with the

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<sup>168</sup> Nze Boniface Chukwuma Alagwa, c.86 years, Retired Civil Servant, Umuagwu, Umuakagu Nsu, Interviewed 25/08/ 2010

persons.<sup>169</sup> This belief system is common among the people, their neighbours and may be found in some other Igbo villages.

Another common belief identified among the people is the *Umune*. *Umune*, according to Onyirimba, is òa common ancestral family god in Mbano. Some Mbaise, Ikeduru, Amaimo, Inyishi, and Isu also believe in *Umune*.<sup>170</sup> Innocent Ikemenogo states that, in Mbano, the *Umune* is seen as the protector and provider of good fortunes and bond of unity among the people. Every family possesses the *Umune*, serviced by the *di okpara* as their direct link with the ancestral realm.<sup>171</sup> *Umune* ritual is a common bond instituted by their forefathers and performed by the people as a mark of their kinship. It reminds the people of their one people with common ancestry. It is an inevitable part of their relationship.

The people also believe in *ogbanje*. *Ogbanje* is the continuous coming and going of the dead to life and back again to the land of the dead. In Mbano, *ogbanje* was usually detected through traditional diviners, *dibia afa*.<sup>172</sup> Ilogu thinks that *ogbanje* is another type of òreincarnationö found among the Igbo. Some children are believed to be capable of reincarnating into various òlife journeysö which last for a very short time during each trip. They form themselves into another spirit group and are reincarnated into another groups of children, to be born sometimes by the same mothers that previously mothered them, or by their close relatives. The repeated coming and going, is meant to punish the living, by tantalizing them into believing that they have got children. These *ogbanje*

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<sup>169</sup> Godson Ogu Onyirimba, c.78 years, retired teacher, Umunkaro /Umuduru-egwele Umueze II, Ehime Mbano, interviewed 23/08/2010.

<sup>170</sup> Onyirimba interview Cited

<sup>171</sup> Innocent Ikemenogo interview cited

<sup>172</sup> Ikemenogo interview cited

children can be detected and out-manuevered by the òmedicine manò through various devices.<sup>173</sup>

Again, some communities in Mbanò and its neighbours were believed to possess strong magical powers. These powers are said to have provided security and respect of some sorts for them. Those who possessed such powers were feared. For instance, J.I.J Njoku informs that òin those days in Umunkwo, Atta, Umudim even Ogwa communities, there were a lot of magical powers and acts. In the pre-Christian era, someone could just clap his hands and snakes would come out from no where and attack an enemy. There were other magical activities the people engaged in which attracted people from other villages from far and near to Mbanò.<sup>174</sup> Umunkwo people are known for their involvement in magical powers which attracts people from far and near, especially, from neighbouring Ogwa and Isu Ofemiri communities. Through this means, contacts are made and new relationships are started. For instance, during new yam festivals (*ekweji*) which involved masquerade displays, many people came to observe the show of magical powers by these masquerades. The writer had personal experience of some of these displays in Umunkwo community. The *ekweji* was one festival through which people from different communities came in contact and built relationships.

In all Igbo societies, child birth, puberty, marriages, and burials are accompanied by various rites. Before a child was born, the mother would have offered various sacrifices to *ala*, to the *chi* symbol of her own mother and to *ndibunze* (spirit of the ancestors of her husband). What was to be offered (yam, chicken or goat) is indicated by the diviner *-dibia afa*. According to Edmund Ilogu, the reason for offering these

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<sup>173</sup> Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, p.42

<sup>174</sup> J.J. Njoku, c.78 years, retired public servant, Interviewed at Umunkwo Isiala Mbanò, 25/04/2011

sacrifices is to secure the favour of the gods so as to make the child birth easy and the child to be born blessed in advance by the gods. It is an abomination if the child is born with the feet coming out first or with any teeth or as twins. Where delivery was normal, the child was taken inside the house after he/she had cried fairly loudly as an indication that there was plenty of life in the baby.<sup>175</sup> The description offered by Ilogu applies to situations in Mbano and its neighbours before and even in colonial times. When a new child was born, women gathered, sang and danced in celebration. They were entertained with palm wine, food and powder- *nzu*, which they rubbed on their faces and necks. The oldest man in the family consulted the *dibia afa* to know who was reincarnated in the child.

Friends, relations and well wishers from far and near visited to celebrate with the mother and give presents to the baby and thank the gods. Both husband and wife ensured that anybody who came to see the baby was offered kola nut. A naming ceremony is usually organized within four days after birth. During this period, the husband would send for his mother-in-law to come and attend to her daughter while she is in confinement for about four weeks. This is referred to as *õile omugwoö* which lasted for about twelve weeks. During this period, the mother of the baby was not allowed to do any hard work for she was still too tender and delicate to do any work or even to go out of the house. The husband went out and brought food-stuffs during the *omugwo* period. The mother-in-law did every domestic chore in the house, including cooking and bathing the baby. To mark the end of the *omugwo* period by the nursing mother, a tray of prepared oil bean (*ugba agworo agwo*) was carried by her to the market. While in the market, she distributed the *ugba* to friends. Each recipient reciprocated by giving her some presents.

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<sup>175</sup> Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, pp. 43-45

After that she returned home. From that day she resumed her domestic chores and her mother was given many gifts and returned to her own home. People came from different communities to visit the new born baby and her parents. The visits provided avenues for mutual interaction and understanding among people. Child birth ensures the continuity of intra/inter-group relations.

Puberty symbolises passing from boyhood or girlhood into adult life. Various religious and social ceremonies accompany this stage of development in a child's life. Among Mbano and its neighbours, this stage takes the form of cultural celebration such as *iwa akwa*. It is also marked by elaborate rituals and sacrifices to officially initiate the boy or girl into adulthood. After these rituals and sacrifices, the initiated persons are admitted into the larger political and social structure of his community. He or she could marry, pay tax and assume leadership positions where he/she is qualified to do so. This matter will be discussed further under *iwa aka* ceremony as an official cultural practice for initiation into adulthood.

Marriage is another important aspect of the people's life. Before marriage, which is regarded as sacred institution, was contracted, it was preceded by some preliminary religious divinations. This was because of the many taboos associated with the Igbo, which must be straightened before the marriage took place. These precautions were taken because, as G.T. Basden observes, marriage is a most important event in Igbo life.<sup>176</sup> Before colonial rule, it was common for the families to consult a diviner, to pronounce the clan or village or lineage from where future wife of a man would be found. When the would-be wife is found, her parents consult with a diviner to ensure her own ancestral spirits and *chi* would permit her to marry the young man. It was after these preliminaries

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<sup>176</sup> G.T. Basden, *Among the Ibo* p.68

were conducted that the process of paying for her bride price commenced.

In this regard, Simon Ottenberg writes that marriages unite people to each other, binding families, lineages and other groups in reciprocal duties and obligations.<sup>177</sup> Marriages in Mbano and their neighbours and indeed Igboland, created an interlocking web of kinship relationships which bound families and lineages, villages, towns and clans together. It promoted trade, most especially long distance trade. In fact, many people were said to have married from distant neighbours like Obowo, Umuahia, Ngwaland, Mbaise, Nkwere, Aba, Oru and Owerri in order to ensure their safe and easy passage through those villages. By such marriages, the traders became accepted members of their in-law's clans. Ofonagoro writes that the commercial importance of the distribution of Chief Odu's marriage connections is thus clear. One of Chief Odu's daughters Eguba by name was married to an Opobo trader. Other sisters and relatives of this chief married into the families of Chief Njemanze of Owerri, Chief Okenwa of Irete, Chief Duru Oshimiri of Orogwe, and Chief Nwuwa of Izombe. Among Chief Odu's many wives were Nwannediye, a relative of Chief Onyejebu of Ejeme Ekwuru, and Nwa-amagaranya, a sister of Uzegbu, third warrant chief of Ogbaku. These interlocking marriage ties, between the leading families in the villages along the trade routes were useful in ensuring the security and convenience of trader from these villages operating along that trade route.

A. E. Afigbo rightly observed that most long distance travelers were polygamist and usually took care to choose their wives from important and strategically located towns along their normal route of business. The mere mention of an in-law's family

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<sup>177</sup> For details see A.E Afigbo in G.H.N. pp.75-76. See also S. Ottenberg *Obbo Oracles*, *Ubi Supra*, p. 298. See also W. Ofonagoro, *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria: 1881-1929*, Lagos: Nok Publishers, 1979, pp.29-34.

could constitute a safe passage.<sup>178</sup> This observation by Afigbo applies to Mbano communities where some of the trade routes passed. For instance, Ofonagoro stated that Nkwere traders operated throughout the area, trading to the south by way of Amaigbo, Amaraku, Eke-Ata, Owerri and Olakwo. Marriage is an inevitable factor in the social, cultural, political and economic relations of the people.<sup>179</sup>

One important primary objective of marriage in Mbano and its neighbours and indeed Igboland is to maintain the continuity of the family and sustain the age long ties between people. Before colonial rule, it was customary for parents to choose a wife for their son. However, before this was done, the father of the young man would ensure he taught his son to be brave and hardworking. He also equipped him with the required skills to help him earn a living, maintain a wife and build up his own family. For instance, he taught him how to farm and bought a hoe and climbing rope for him. With these implements, the young man explored his environment and became mature enough to live with a wife chosen for him.

Again, before traditional marriage rites are performed, one important aspect of tradition the people consider is whether the two families could inter-marry. The families inquire on issues of exogamy among the various units, kindred, villages and quarters. In the past, people sacrificed to the deity were called *osu*. They were totally avoided by the *nwadiala* or freeborn. Despite the influence of Christianity on Igbo culture, *osu* still exists. In fact, marriage between *nwadiala* and *osu* was forbidden. They were so despised that when an *osu* died, he/she was hung on a tree to decay. It was very serious at the time. When all these factors were duly considered, the marriage was continued or discontinued.

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<sup>178</sup> A.E Afigbo, *Ropes of Sandi* , p.136

<sup>179</sup> Ofonagoro, *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria: 1881-1929*, p.34.



Successful marriage culminated to *ihe nrisa* makes a man to be automatically qualified as a full fledged man to take part in the social activities in his family, village, and community at large. He also became qualified to contest and hold political positions in his village and town. He could be considered for title taking. Marriage was one inevitable way that fostered inter-group relations between Mbano and its neighbours.

### **Cultural Practices and Festivals**

The concept, culture, has been defined by scholars in diverse ways. For our purpose, two definitions are adopted. First, according to Beats and Hoijer, culture is ða social heritage that is all knowledge, beliefs, customs and skills that are available to members of a society.ö<sup>180</sup> The second definition of culture adopted for our purpose here is that by Linton who sees it as ðmass of behaviour that human beings in any society learn from their elders and pass on to the younger generations.ö<sup>181</sup> These definitions point to the fact that culture refers to all of what people do in a given environment to make life worth living. In Mbano and its neighbours many cultural traits exist. They are mainly made manifest through some common shared religious beliefs and other practices. However, our focus here is on the different festivals and practices that showcase the rich cultural heritage of the people. They were in themselves vents for inter-group relations between the people and their neighbours. They also show the extent to which the people are related and linked up through these cultural festivals. Among these cultural festivals are *Nmanwu*, *Ekweji* or *Awa* or *Ahiajoku* or *ji Aro*, *Nta* festival, *Iwa Akwa*, *Mbom Uzo* and *Ikpo Oku*. These festivals would be discussed consecutively.

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<sup>180</sup> R.L. Beats and Hoijer, in Pita N. Ejiolor, *Cultural Revival in Igboland*, Onitsha: University Pub. Coy, 1980, p.18.

<sup>181</sup> R. Linton, *The Tree of Culture*, New York: Alfred knof Inc., 1955, p.3

In the relationship between Mbano and its neighbours, these festivals served as instruments of peace, harmony and unity. At other times, they were sources of conflict, dispute and even war which in themselves are aspects of human interaction. These festivals were held mostly in honour of the numerous deities worshipped by the people. The general cultural festival celebrated in Mbano its neighbourhood, as in most of Igboland, is the new yam festival. However, in Mbano and neighbouring communities, the new yam serves as one of the most important factor of inter-group relations. It is called different names in the different villages, but its generic names are *nri m ji*, *iri ji* or *ekweji*. The new yam is heralded by the *nmanwu* and *Nta* feast.

### **Masquerade, (*Nmanwu*)**

Masquerade societies, *nmanwu* were another religion/cultural practices among the people. Almost all the communities had one form of masquerade or another. These masquerades have existed from the primordial times to present, though with some modifications over the years. Masquerades appear in different types, and bear different significant names. Eziana Mbaise, have the *ekpe*; Osu Isiala Mbano have *ogaranya-afotoro*, *agu ibu* and *oji onu*; Inyishi Ikeduru, have the *ekpo*. In Ugiri area there are many types of masquerades with different names. In fact, every community or village has one or two different types of masquerades. For instance, in Obollo, there is *oji-onu* brought from Arondizogu; the *Odumneshi* masquerade of Umuche; *Igbofunanyaekwe* of Umuanu village, *Iyieke* of Umuozu, *Ogburumadukwe* and *owu* of Ogbor, and *Okorosha* in parts of Ehime and many others. These masquerades featured prominently during cultural festivals such as *Ekweji*, Anara day, *iwa akwa* and on the days the communities celebrated their ancestors. The masquerades attracted people from far and near who came

to watch their beautiful displays. Masquerades were a form of contact and interaction between Mbano and its neighbours. According to S.E. Mbalisi, the *nmanwu* served recreational purposes, and came out periodically, especially, from the months of August to December, during the *Ekweji* festival and other festivals to mark the end of the year. Membership is voluntary. The process of initiation is called *ima nmanwu*. Non-initiates are called *ogbendu*, while initiates are known as *odukwu*. Female initiate members are called *umu erere nmanwu*.<sup>182</sup> See picture below:



Nmanwu Igbofunanyaekwe of Umuanu a type of nmanwu found in parts of Mbano

In Ehime area, the first type called the *oti igba*, never allowed women to come near it. This type of *nmanwu* was found at Umueleke and Umunakanu. On the other hand, the second type, the *owu*, allowed women to be its dancing members but were not initiated as members. According to Ogu Onyirimba, the nmanwu society was only open to males who paid entrance fees and fulfilled all other requirements. Such males also

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<sup>182</sup> S.E Mbalisi interview cited.

showed ability to keep secrets. Those who by any means revealed the secrets of the *nmanwu* were severely punished by the group.<sup>183</sup>

In pre-colonial times, the *nmanwu* performed some vital social and political functions. It helped to ensure discipline and social harmony in the communities. Most decisions taken by the people at the village assembly meetings were enforced with the help *nmanwu*. For instance, if a man refused to pay his levy or any fine imposed on him for any offence he committed, the *nmanwu* went to his house to confiscate his property on behalf of the community. If a man wanted to protect his fruit trees such as pears, oranges and mango, the *nmanwu* would hang a tender palm frond, *omu nkwu* on the tree. This served as a warning to people that the fruits were under the protection of the *nmanwu*, which was believed to be a spirit from the gods. Any trespass attracted heavy penalties to the culprit. If two persons were in dispute over the ownership of a piece of land, the *nmanwu* also placed *omu nkwu* on the land. This served as warning to the parties concerned not to enter the land until the dispute was settled by the *nze na ozo* titled men. These political and social functions performed by the *nmanwu* in Mbano communities and its neighbours lasted up to the third decade or so of colonial rule. The establishment of the native courts in the area influenced function/power of the functions of the *nmanwu society*. The courts took over the settlement of such issues as land disputes. Christianity helped to whittle aspects of the masquerade society.

However, the masquerade culture did not disappear with the advent of colonialism and Christianity. Their roles during some cultural festival were modified.

As P. Okigbo observes,

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<sup>183</sup> Ogu Onyirimba interview cited

in various festival and ceremonies, in Igboland, masquerades of various kinds regarded as representing the dead, usually danced to entertain people or participants in burial ceremonies.<sup>184</sup>

These masquerades brought about mass gathering of people who interacted in the process. There were massive movements from Ehime to Obollo, from Ogbor to Ibeme, Ugiri, Amaraku and Anara to watch these masquerades. Different people from communities in the area moved with their masquerades to other communities to participate in their cultural celebrations. In such celebrations, youths usually clashed for several reasons which caused fighting between peoples. Masquerade displays were done in both peaceful and conflict conditions.

#### ***NTA FESTIVAL /FEAST***

The history of *Nta* feast is interwoven with the culture history of the Mbaa group of towns (*Ihe Mbaa nwe*). C.T.C. Annals observed that,

The *Nat* feast was usually begun in August by Atta, the most junior town and that Ugiri, the head town, as well as other towns had to wait until the feast was held at Atta. This was the know pattern.<sup>185</sup>

This, according to Eze Azubuike, was as a result of how responsibilities were shared then.<sup>186</sup> *Nta* was a minor feast that signified the approach of the new yam period. The

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<sup>184</sup> P.O. Okigbo, Ahajoku Lecture, Ministry of information, Culture, Youths and Sports, Owerri: Govt., Printer, 1980, p.25

<sup>185</sup> C.T.C Annals, Intelligent report, p.6

<sup>186</sup> Eze C. Azubuike interview cited in Chidi Amaechi, òOka Isiala Mbano... 31

feast was celebrated not only in Mbaa and Mbama towns, but in all the areas served by the Mbaa River that has its source at Nkwo Mbaa in Ugiri clan of Mbano. These included some towns in present Ikeduru in Owerri zone. The commencement was signified with the cutting down of *Nkwu Nta* (small palm fruit) at Atta. The *nkwu nta* or *ikwo- Nta* began in the third week of August in two bits. The first part called *ikwo nta* began in Atta and moved towards Umudim and thence to Ugiri. *Nta* began with loud shouting and chanting. The *Nta* song went thus:

Song:            *Nta ooo, nta ooo*  
  
                    *Owo owo nta*  
  
                    *Nta abiala ooo*  
  
                    *Owo owo nta*  
  
                    *Nta nke gara aga erighim ooo*  
  
                    *Owo owo nta*  
  
                    *Nke ugbua erikwalam ooo*  
  
                    *Owo owo nta*  
  
                    *Nta owo owo*  
  
Chorus:         *Owo owo nta*

This spread to all *Nta* areas. Immediately the song started from Atta, all who heard joined in the shouting and chanted with joy.<sup>187</sup>

The second part was the celebration of *Nta* feast by the different towns and village in the area. This celebration continued till the *Ekwe ji* or *Aruro* was celebrated. In Ugiri, it was believed that the *Agu* Mbaa came out from the

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<sup>187</sup> . Mbalisi, *Change and Continuity* , p.8

Mbaa forest around the source of Mbaa River. However, the *Agu* Mbaa was harmless to people because it was symbolic of the Mbaa deity-*Dimolushi*. Its presence signified the approval of *Dimolushi* for the feast.<sup>188</sup>

In Obollo town, *Nta* was usually celebrated by married women after the *ikwo nta* ceremony on an *Orie* market day. Women bought hens which they gave to their husbands or elderly men in their families. The hens were killed at the *chi* shrine of the mother. *Ugba agworo agwo*, native salad, was prepared and distributed to male family members in their families. Different kinds of food like *foo foo*, pounded yam with palatable soup- *ofe araga*, and palm wine were used to entertain the men in anticipation that they would reciprocate the gesture during the *Ekwe ji*. This is in keeping with the saying among the people that *õo tara amu ebule, ji ibi ugwoö* (one good turn deserves another). Men supplied the native wine, *mmanya ngwo*, for the *Nta* ceremony usually done in the evening.<sup>189</sup>

In Oka Ugiri, the *nta* feast was celebrated in stages and all sacrifices connected with it were offered to *Iyieke* Mbaa deity. According to Chidi Amaechi, with the commencement of *Nta*, the entire ladies ready for marriage entered into *ikwe* or *oruru* (seclusion or fattening room) at *Ama Ejiuwa*. From there, they went around the farms at stipulated times, harvesting any crops they wished to without being questioned. This continued throughout their eight-day stay in *ikwe*. This was called *Nta Umu agboghobia*. It was followed with female wrestling between the ladies and their counterparts from neighbouring towns with their suitors in attendance. The mothers usually concluded the wrestling with a dance, at the Akpakama square. Sacrifices of cock were offered by the

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<sup>188</sup> Lazarus Nwabugo, c.92 years, trader/ farmer interviewed at Amaraku 25-4-2011

<sup>189</sup> Mbalisi, pp.8-9

*opera* of each family, and visitors were entertained. This was known as *nta ishi obi* and *Umuada* (married daughters) brought cocks to their families.<sup>190</sup>

The last stage of the *Nta* festivities was the *Nkwa Oka* dance, which lasted into the *Ekwe Ji*. Each person was expected to attend the *Nkwa* with one or two new tubers of yam (*ji ohu*) fresh from the farm. The purpose was for the individual to know how fruitful the harvest was that year, thank the gods and prepare for the coming planting season. The *Nkwa* marked the end of the *nta* feast; thereafter people were free to harvest their new yams.

From its origin, process and spread, the *Nta* feast fostered unity not only among the discordant *Mbaa*, but also between them and their neighbours, who usually came in their numbers from different communities to participate and witness the ceremonies. *Nta* is one of the festivals celebrated by the people to show their relationship from ancestry. The *Nta* provides strong evidence of the relationship between *Mbano* communities of *Ugiri*, *Mbaa* and *Mbama* with those of *Ikeduru* in *Owerri* zone, especially, in the pre-colonial period. It emphasized their common cultural affinity. *Nta* heralds the *ekweji* festival.

### **Ekweji Festival/Ji Aro/Aruru**

In *Imo* state, this is called *Ahiajoku* and is performed specifically to mark the arrival of the new yam. The importance of yam to the *Igbo* has received scholarly attention. Therefore, our focus is on how *Mbano* and their neighbours celebrate yam, as brothers in their interaction. The new yam celebration or *Isiajoku*, as it is also called is heralded by different feasts. In *Ugiri* area, it was heralded by the *-Nta* feast, while in *Ehime* area it was the *ji aro* and *awa* feasts.

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<sup>190</sup> Amaechi, Oka Isiala *Mbano* ..p.30-34



Ogu Onyirimba states that the *Isiajoku* cultural festival was performed on behalf of the Ehime by Umuihim, the most senior village in Ehime. It was associated with the new yam festival. It was held in July before the *Ji aro* and *Awa* feast. Yam was extensively cultivated in Igboland, and before yams were eaten in Mbanjo, the *Isiajoku* festival was first celebrated.<sup>191</sup> It is part of the people's belief that the earth goddess, *Ala*, was a generous giver of good yam harvest. In order for the people to thank *Ala* for the good harvest and purify the yam, the king of all crops before eating it, the *Isiajoku* festival was held. If a man ate the new yam before the celebration of this festival, such a man was punished by the *Ajoku* and the *Ala* deity. The feast was celebrated by sacrificing a cock, yam and wine to *Ala* and the ancestors. As Nze Boniface Alagwa noted, this sacrifice was very crucial to all peasant farmers in the area. It was after its performance that they entered their farms, harvested yams and fed their families. However, the people of Umuezeala did not eat the new yam at this time. They waited until they celebrated their unique *ji aro* feast before doing so.<sup>192</sup> The *Ji aro* was a form of new yam festival celebrated by some Mbanjo communities. It was usually celebrated in August which, in their tradition is called *Onwa ano*.

There was also *Awa* celebration usually done on *Eke* market day. The sounding of *Nkwukwuishi* drum signified the beginning of *Awa*. Onyirimba observed that all compounds and roads in each village were kept clean. The cleaning was done preparatory for invited guests and people visiting from neighbouring communities. During *awa* festival, new contacts and relations are made between people from

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<sup>191</sup> Onyirimba interview cited

<sup>192</sup> Boniface Alagwa interview cited

different communities.<sup>193</sup> *Awa* is perceived as a unifying factor among the people and communities. *Awa* brings peace and enhances inter-group relations between Mbano people and their neighbours. The festival is attended by people from different communities in Mbano and beyond. It is a celebration of the cultural heritage of the people. Neighbouring communities usually participated in *Awa* with their cultural dances, masquerades and participated in wrestling competitions. *Awa*, a yearly celebration, brought people in their numbers together from different communities to showcase their rich cultural implements. Interactions between people during the *awa* were usually massive.

The people of Ugiri and Mbama towns have in their tradition that the new yam festival began with the man who discovered yam called *ihe ji ndu*. Different towns in Ugiri call it different names. Ugiri, the head town in the clan, calls it *Aruru Ugiri*, while Obollo, Umuneke, Ogbor, Ibeme and Umuozu towns, call it *Ekwe ji*. It is forbidden to celebrate the festival with yams bought from the market. It is, indeed, an abomination to sell yam in the market before the festival day. E.E. Obilor explained that

The traditional new yam festival *aruru* or *ekweji* is celebrated on the third *Orie* Amaraku market day in September when Ugiri the eldest town must have finished their celebration, other communities followed. The *Orie* Ukwu market day coincides

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<sup>193</sup> Onyirimba interview cited

with the first day the *ihe ji ndu* was first eaten after  
it was discovered by our ancestors.<sup>194</sup>

A native week after the *Orie* market day, the traditional priest of other towns sound the *ekwe ji* or *ekwe Ahajoku* drum. The *ekwe Ahajoku* usually generates shouts of joy and put the people in a festive mood. From that day, clearing and cleaning of streets and pathways began. In Obollo town, for instance, on the *Eke* day that proceeded the *Orie* day, there was a wrestling contest between villages and this attracted large crowd of people from different places. Most of the villages or neighbours from Ata, Umudim, Eziama, Inyishi, IHITEAFOUKWU, Okwelle, and one of the closest neighbours, Agbaja Isu, witnessed the event. At the end of the event, the victorious community was usually joined by the rest of the communities to celebrate until they reached their boundaries. This showed the wrestling contest was as a cultural celebration that helped people from different communities to interact and maintain relations.<sup>195</sup> The festival thus provides an avenue for contact and interaction between people. New friendships that result to marriages between people are made during the festival. Traditional wrestling features during *iwa akwa* and new yam festivals.

Before the ceremony began, the chief priest, in the company of other priests, placed the *õEgwuö* across the roads through which visitors and neighbours entered the town. The *Egwu* was believed to have powers to stop or avert trouble during the festival. Fowls were killed by the chief priest and their blood and feathers spread in front of the

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<sup>194</sup> Ven. Dr E.E. Obilor, c.79 Years, retired Lecturer/Anglican Priest, interviewed at Alaiyi-ama Obollo, 20-4-2011

<sup>195</sup> Samuel E. Mbalisi, 71 years, retired teacher/community leader interviewed at Umuche-Amakwu Obollo 20-04-2011

shrines.<sup>196</sup> After these sacrifices, the heads of the various villages, on hearing the sound of the cannon shots, collected their *ofò* and fowls and *omu nkwu* and moved to the central shrine.

The main celebration of the new yam festival was accompanied by wrestling at the village square, masquerade displays and cultural dances of various types by different groups. Such cultural dances included *egwu alija*, *egwu inwakiriinwa* from Eziamma Mbaise, *nkwa otele* from Umuri Ikeduru, *atiero* and *Ubo-ogazi* dances which attracted many people due to their uniqueness. People moved from one dance group to the other to feed their eyes. Some children often missed their ways as they followed the thrill of the masquerades and cultural dance groups to their homes.<sup>197</sup> Visitors retired to their friends and relations' homes where eating and drinking continued. The festival lasted one week and four days. This was because different villages celebrated on their ancestral market days. The festival ended with a minor feast called *ima iyoro*. The purpose was to thank the gods and deities for protecting the people and their visitors before, during and after the festival.

The *iri ji* or *ekwe ji* serves as a factor of cultural relations between Mbano people and their Ikeduru neighbours, and emphasise their common ancestry. For instance, as Chidi Onwubuariri stated,

In Inyishi Ikeduru, the new yam festival (*ahajioku*) as we call the festival is one way we show our relations with Amuzari in Mbano. It has been baptized as *õiri jiö*. During the month of June and

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<sup>196</sup> Obilor interview cited.

<sup>197</sup> Mbalisi, pp. 13-14

July of every year, our people harvested their first yams and offered it to the *Ezealaogaku* deity. It was done on *Afo* market day. The elders, Nze and Ozo titled holders performed the rituals at the shrine. People feared to come out for fear they would be killed by the deity. Elders from Amuzari were usually, fully represented in their numbers. The attendance to the festival was inter-changed between Amuzari and Inyishi communities every other year. It was usually marked with the exchange of gifts and introductions between families from different villages. It showed how our people are related with Amuzari. It helps us reaffirm our brotherhood from the ancient times. It served as our cultural bond as *umunne*.<sup>198</sup>

The New yam festival though a cultural celebration, served as a veritable tool for inter-group relations between the people going far back into pre-colonial times. However, a lot has changed in the process and mode of celebration since the colonial era till date.

### **Mbom Uzo and Ikpo Oku**

*Mbom Uzo* or *Ibo Ama* is another important rich cultural practice of Mbanjo and their neighbours. The practice was /is observed in many other parts of Igboland. They were avenues through which the several roads and path-ways in the communities were cleared. These include the roads that connected one community or town and the other. As

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<sup>198</sup> Chidi Onwubuariri interview cited

Herbert Oguine stated, it was usually done before any important annual or seasonal celebrations. The *Mbom uzo* or *Ibo Ama* preceded *ikpo oku*- which was the entertainment that usually accompanied *Mbom uzo*. *Mbom Uzo* is practiced by, Mbano, Ihiteafoukwu, Umuri in Ikeduru, Etiti, and Ihite Uboma, among other communities. In Oka Ugiri it was called *isu achara*.<sup>199</sup>

Jonathan Abanobi said *Mbom uzo* is one of the numerous cultural practices of the Ihiteafoukwu people. The festival features between the months of August and September. The dates differ from one village to the other, but the dates were fixed in the order of seniority of villages. Accordingly, the most senior celebrates first. On an agreed date, all males gathered at the village square where they received instructions. As soon as instructions were given, each family cleared its own road from its compound to the main road leading to the market square. This was followed by a festival called *ihio-ahia*. Friends and visitors from different communities joined the celebration. In the evening, villagers and their invitees gathered at the market square where various dances were displayed by members of male and female age grades. The ceremony was characterised by many comic and acrobatic displays. Men brandished their guns and decorated cutlasses in such dexterous but dangerous demonstrations as though the weapon no longer hurt or kill. At night fall, people retired to their homes. However, children moved round the village with songs and were given gifts. In the morning after the celebration, elders gathered at the *ogboto*-village square and drank the remains of the wine called *-mmanya ora*. *Mbom uzo* serves the purpose of keeping the town tidy to usher in the forthcoming festival- *Ekwe ji*. It provides entertainment for the entire people of Ihiteafoukwu

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<sup>199</sup> J. Abanobi, *The Socio-Cultural History and Tradition of Ihiteafoukwu* p. 30-32.

and their neighbours. It is a common cultural ceremony of our people.<sup>200</sup>

The *mbom uzo* and *ikpo oku* are significantly observed by Mbano its neighbours. As the roads that linked one town or clan were cleared, relationships were built and maintained. Ogu Onyirimba informed that *mbom uzo* emphasis good inter/intra relations. As the roads that connect villages with others were cleared, such occasions were marked with entertainment usually from both communities for festival. This naturally helped to build relations between the members of the participating communities.<sup>201</sup>

Chijioke Obiukwu states that in Etiti and Ihite Uboma, *õmbom uzo* is one the cultural practices of the people. It is a medium through which we maintain good neighbourliness with other communities. It is usually rounded off with entertainment between the Etiti, Mbano and Mbaise communities. It promotes interaction between our people. In fact, *mbom uzo* united the communities, especially, in the old Mbasaa before colonial rule. Through this means, we leaned our roads and path-ways to the stream, market, shrine and inter-community linking roadsö.<sup>202</sup> Obviously, *mbom uzo* provides the needed plat form for group interactions. It is also a period for merry-making as cultural dances brought by the communities displayed. Such masquerades in Etiti include, *agba-agwuru*, *ese*, *utubere* and *agbachaa ekurunwa* entertained people.<sup>203</sup> Boniface Alagwa added that *mbom uzo* is a period that highlights the highly hygienic attitude of the people. They love luxury, wellness of work place and household. It suggests that the people and indeed the Igbo are very hygienic people.<sup>204</sup>

In Ugiri area, *ibo ama* and *ikpo oku* are also practiced. They also involve the same

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<sup>200</sup> Ogu Onyirimba interview cited

<sup>201</sup> Chijioke Obiukwu cited

<sup>202</sup> Chijioke Obiukwu interview cited

<sup>203</sup> Boniface, Alagwa interview cited

<sup>204</sup> Abanobi öThe Socio-Cultural Historyí ,ö pp.32-34

process of clearing the path way to the Mbaa River and the very many streams and markets in Obollo, Ibeme, Oka, Umuozu and Umuneke and other communities in the area. As in other villages, it usually ended with an entertainment called *ikpo oku*. Mbalisi said *õibo ama* and *ikpo oku* were significant because both helped in cementing inter and intra community relations. The festivals were regular means of keeping the communities clean. The events were usually brought to a close with the display of different cultural dances. Villages and communities usually led the visiting community to their boundary.<sup>205</sup>

In Oka community of Ugiri clan, *mbom uzo* is called *isu achara* or *ibo achara* festival, which involves the clearing of the *Onuiyi achara* stream and *ishi achara* (field) by Umuwoha. This was done in the month of July every year. According to R. Eziefule, during the festival, the first thing was the clearing and dredging of Onuiyi achara stream by able-bodied men after which they rubbed the mud collected all over their body for a show. The main celebration was the setting of ishi achara field on fire.<sup>206</sup> The festival involves dancing and all forms of entertainment for strangers, during which drum beats were sounded inviting all animals that belonged to the deity to leave the field.<sup>207</sup> Usually, it was believed that the animals that belonged to the deity left peacefully while the others were trapped in the fire. The people and their invited guests, in-laws and neighbours from Ikeduru participated in the catch out of which they received some bush meat. The animals included lions, antelopes, rabbits, grass cutters (*nchi*) and so on. The festival mainly served as a factor of intra- and inter-group relations. First, it helped to integrate of the people in the immediate and surrounding villages. Second, it provided the

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<sup>205</sup> R. Eziefule Interview cited in Chidi Amaechi, *õOka Isiala Mbanof* öp.33.

<sup>206</sup> Amaechi, p.34

<sup>207</sup> N. Ugwu, *Ihiteafoukwu*.p.94



necessary and favourable platform for relations between the people and their neighbours.

### **Iwa-Akwa or Nwam Akwa**

The *iwa akwa* (initiation ceremony) was/is one of most important cultural ceremonies celebrated by Mbano and their neighbours. It is prominent among the Ehime Mbano, Etit, Ihite Uboma, Ihiteafoukwu and Eziana Mbaise neighbours. The Obowo people also celebrate it. There are controversies concerning the origin of the *iwa akwa*. Opinions differed on whether it originated in Ehime or Ihiteafoukwu in Mbaise or even Obowo from where it spread to other communities. What is certain is that *iwa akwa* is a cultural and initiation ceremony practiced by Mbano and its neighbours. It is a symbol of their cultural link as brothers from ancestry. The issue of its origin among the communities is not so important in our present discourse. Cultural borrowing is an intrinsic part of human relations. The communities within the area practice it as a rite-of-passage into adulthood.

On the cultural significance of *Iwa akwa*, Nzewuba Ugwu writes that

*Iwa-Akwa* is for the youths -male between the ages of 21 and 25years. *Iwa-akwa* symbolises our youths march to social growth, independence, with family and community commitments and responsibility. *Iwa-akwa* takes place every three years. During this time, all the male children in each village, meet and prepare themselves for the initiation. These youths had played major roles during the last *iwa-akwa* ceremony of their senior age-groups. Each *iwa-*

*akwa* unifies the allegiance between the age-groups and their seniors, strengthens the bond between them and their juniors, all with a purpose, and in solidarity with the family and village past, present, and future.<sup>208</sup>

The above extract sees *iwa akwa* as not just an initiation ceremony, but also a period of inculcating in the youths, the values and virtues of their society. It is a period during which they are tutored on life attributes that ensure good relations. The entire process of *iwa-akwa* is very vital to the growth and maturity of the male child and his ability to assume roles and make meaningful contributions to his societies.

*Iwa akwa* follows different processes. According to Chijioke Obiukwu, in Ihite Ubom and Etit, *iwa-akwu* is done in three stages. The first stage is called *okoro apipia*. It is followed by the second stage known as *okoro egbeö*. The third stage is called *okoro nma akpara*. It is after the last stage that a male youth is initiated into adulthood. After that, the new men are qualified to take titles and pay taxes. They also qualify to attend village and clan meetings. The ceremony is performed every three years. Every stage of *iwa akwa* takes a year. It was at the completion of the process in the third year, that the final ceremony-*iwa-akwa* was done. The communities that participate in *iwa akwa* include, Umunomo, Umualumaku, Umuezeala, Odonkwume, Nkumeato, Umuakaagu Nsu and Agbaghara Nsu and so on. *Iwa-akwa* was more of a cultural unifying factor than just a ceremony. It helped to unify the male folk at an early age and

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<sup>208</sup> Chijioke Obiukwu interview cited.

also make them responsible early in life.<sup>209</sup>

However, Ogu Onyirimba observed that *iwa-akwa* was not celebrated by all communities in Mbano, but mainly by Ehime and its adjoining villages. The Osu, Ugiri and Mbama towns do not celebrate *iwa akwa*. Even their brothers/neighbours in Ikeduru do not celebrate *iwa akwa*. They only celebrate the *Nta* feast and *mbom uzo* or *ibo uzo* and *ikpo oku*.<sup>210</sup> Merry making pervades the town, making people feel the importance and joy of the initiation through drumming, dancing and cannon fires from individuals and groups. Invited guests, friends, relatives and neighbours jubilate with their folks. Parents and families become extremely excited that their son or member of their family has come of age, and his name recorded in the community family tree. Each participant carries a cutlass, tied to the left side of the waist- a sign of courage. C.Y. Iwuh highlights the general importance of *iwa akwa* thus,

The ritual is an empowerment by the ancestors of the land through the spiritual and priestly leader of the village-*oji ofo*. With his empowerment and blessing, the young male comes of age, he becomes not just a man, but a grown up man- *Dimkpa* (a doctor of responsibilities and master of difficult situations). He marries, gets children, receives his own *ofo* and enthrones *agwu* (shrine), he starts to pay tax, vote and could be voted for. He could represents the village and has become a free, independent citizen within the

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<sup>209</sup> Boniface Alagwa interview cited

<sup>210</sup> Ugwu, *Ihiteafoukwu: The Eco of Igbo Culture* p.95

perimeters of the community, culture and tradition. Nothing else bestows these rights, these powers, on a man than the *iwa akwa* ritual and ceremony. With time, well behaved and hard-working ones, could rise to become *Nze* or *Ozo* or be decorated with facial mark of honour and bravery *igbu ichi*.<sup>211</sup>

The culture of *iwa-akwa* is highly significant not only to Mbanjo and its neighbours, but in some parts of Igboland. This claim stems from the unavoidable roles the initiated members play in the society when they attain the status and the age of manhood. These roles apparently, are denied the community if the boys fail to perform the *iwa-akwa* ritual and ceremony. In this regard, Iwu noted that, in the pre-colonial times, *iwa-akwa* was seen as a means of adding to the work and military forces of the society. From the moment a boy performs the ritual and ceremony, he is counted as a citizen in the community, fit to contribute ideas, fit to make contributions, and fit to be punished if he committed any crime. He is also fit to go to war, represent his parents in any occasion and carry corpses for burial.<sup>212</sup>

L.U. Ugwunneke (quoted in Iwu) states that *ōiwa-akwa* establishes a link between the past and the present. Since the past is very important in grasping the present and proffering solution for the future, *iwa-akwa* puts us- the men in the right track of understanding what our forefathers' world was like and how the future would look like. In fact, it makes the people feel that their forefathers left a legacy for their children to

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<sup>211</sup> C.Y. Iwu, *ōIwa-Akwa Ceremony in Ehime Mbanjo*. B.A. Project, Department of History and International Studies, U.N.N, 2002, pp.30-32.

<sup>212</sup> L.C. Ugwunneke interview cited in C.Y. Iwu, p. 32.

followö.<sup>213</sup> *Iwa-akwa* is financially profitable to the community and its neighbours. Ugwuneke informs that ð *iwa-akwa*, is usually a period of market boom and availability of hitherto scarce commoditiesö.<sup>214</sup>

Another significance of *iwa-akwa* in Mbanö and its neighbours is the promotion of equality. On this view, Ebem Njoku posits ð*iwa-akwa* symbolizes the equality of men in the community, the rich and the poor, and the high and low. The ceremony does not discriminate. All the members of age grades, no mater the caste and family background are counted as equals.ö<sup>215</sup> This is because, as noted earlier, the ritual and ceremony is not compulsory and forced on the individual. It is only culturally necessary for a male to perform the *iwa-akwa* if he wanted to assume responsibility and recognition as a full citizen. Hence, he was seen as an *efulefu* -irresponsible or unimportant person in the community.

In fact, within Mbanö and its neighbours, *iwa-akwa* signifies cultural relations and affinity between the people. It shows the extent to which the political, economic and social aspects of their relationship point to their common historical origin. The beliefs and religious practices linking the people are also showcased through *iwa-akwa*. Hence, on the spiritual significance of *iwa-akwa*, Nzewuba Ugwu asserts thus,

Let it be emphasized that *iwa-akwa* simply means the dedication, the handing over of a young son to the ancestors (by the *oji ofo*), for protection and guidance, for good health and prosperity, for useful and abundant

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<sup>213</sup> Ugwuneke cited in Iwu, p. 33.

<sup>214</sup> Ugwuneke interview cited.

<sup>215</sup> Ebem Njoku interview cited in C.Y. Iwu. p. 33

children, and above all, for their mediation through all his encounters with the society and the world. This is *iwa-akwa*. All other ceremonies, including eating and drinking, buying and wearing of expensive clothes and apparels, are all designed to showcase the ceremony- that a young son has been trusted unto the comfort zone of the ancestors and Chukwu.<sup>216</sup>

The brief *expose* on *iwa-akwa* explains its cultural significance in relations between Mbano and its Mbase-Ihiteafoukwu, Etiti and far flung Obowo neighbours. *Iwa-akwa* evokes a feeling of common origin and good cultural interaction within the neighbourhood.

#### **d. Conflictual Aspects of Their Relations**

As stressed earlier, Mbano and its neighbours on the eve of colonial rule enjoyed relatively peaceful relations, though not without occasional disagreements. However, the people at times engaged in some inter-community skirmishes or feuds and even wars in extreme cases. The situation appears in tandem with the theoretical framework adopted for this work. It accords with the fact that different communities in their actual day to day experiences have had to co-exist and interact in peace and in war. Therefore, the conduct of inter-group relations is neither dependent on peace nor war situations. This is because, as the theory of Mutual Aid provides, people have needs to relate with one another to bridge the gap created by disparity in the distribution of natural resources.

Among Mbano their neighbours, like in other Igbo areas, the spilling of human blood is regarded as an abomination- *aru-*, against the earth, *ala*. And when such a crime

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<sup>216</sup> Ugwu, *Ihiteafoukwu* p.99

as man slaughter or murder occurred without any justifiable reason, such as war or accident, it often rallied the concerned group. Iwueke Ohanele informed that òland and boundary disputes as evidenced in the traditions resulted from the desire for more land to meet the demands of the growing population. This formed important source of quarrels or conflict situation between the different groups in Mbanò.<sup>217</sup> However, there were other sources of disputes not connected with land, like assault on women in public, stealing, molestation of traders, abuse of custom and tradition, careless use of abusive words and dispute over marriages, burials and so on. These issues caused conflict and disagreements but not full blown intra-or inter community wars, as Isichei would have us believed. Writing on the Igbo, Elizabeth Isichei generalized to a great extent that the nineteenth century was a period of continuous wars.<sup>218</sup> This assertion is an overstatement because it tends to include all the minor skirmishes as wars.

M.D. Jeffreys expressed the view that òin fact, war was a friendly but exciting display of human force employed to break the monotony of the dry season.<sup>219</sup> However, Basden stated that òit was a rare thing for towns to remain at peace for very long and that when peace prevailed, it was broken on slightest pretext.<sup>220</sup> Obviously, these writers had made some good study on Igbo life and society. But they appear not to have distinguished what really should be called wars, misunderstanding and skirmishes among the Igbo. There were occasional disputes and skirmishes which resulted in violence between communities.

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<sup>217</sup> Iwueke Ohanele interview cited.

<sup>218</sup> E. Isichei, *A History of Igboland* p.75

<sup>219</sup> M.D Jeffery, *òlbo Warfare in Man: A Monthly Record of Anthropological Science, Vol.56, 1956, p.79.*

<sup>220</sup> G.T. Basden, *Among the Ibo* p. 202.

Traditions in Mbanjo and its neighbours tend to agree on three kinds of wars or fighting. According to Iwueke,

First was *Ogu Ibe Ama* (extended family fight), which in most cases resulted from spontaneous reaction to injury or insult meted out to an individual. Second was *ogu nne na nne* (inter-kindred fighting), which often involved natal related groups and usually never, lasted for long period. Third, was *Ogu-Mba na Mba,ö* (inter-village, community or clan fighting), usually fought between two villages or clans.<sup>221</sup>

The weapons used varied from *okpo-mkpo* (clubs) used in family and kindred, to avoid spilling of blood. In inter-village group or clan wars, *egbe na mma* (guns and knives) were used. The decision to attack an enemy camp was usually taken by elders, titled men, priests of deities and diviners when measures to bring peace failed. Ogu Onyirimba informed that soldiers had to be mobilized since there were no standing armies. They made use of able bodied men especially, those that belonged to the various age sets and they formed the core of the army.<sup>222</sup>

Besides, during wars, all women and children were free from molestation and attack. Thus women were employed and used as spies through their interactions at neighbouring markets with fellow women. To avoid such spying and sabotage, the

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<sup>221</sup> Iwueke interview cited

<sup>222</sup> Ogu Onyirimba interview cited



movements of women were restricted. Certain measures and preparations were made to fortify the warriors for the task ahead. These involved both physical and spiritual preparations; the engagement of native doctors and diviners who prepared different charms for the troops. Several rituals were performed to avoid falling in the war. For instance, Iwueke informed that in the past, Ezeoke people invited a certain *dibia* called Opara from Agbaja, and Orijeji from Umuokirika Ekwereazu Mbaise to prepare charm for their soldiers when they fought against Umuakagu.<sup>223</sup>

Again, the weapons used by the warriors at the time included guns and clubs. Some of the iron or metal weapons like guns, spears and gun powder were acquired from *Nkwere* smiths through trade. Johnson Ezeji, a blacksmith said the *õNkwere* were also noted for their competence as gun makers hence the name *Nkwere opi egbeõ*.<sup>224</sup> Scholars like Mary Kingsley and M. D.W. Jeffreys in their not totally correct opinion, said Igbo spears were entirely made of wood,<sup>225</sup> and that iron seldom featured in the armoury of Igbo warriors and that there were no foundry men.<sup>226</sup> Apart from horses, most of the other weapons were used during the inter-communal skirmishes and fighting that ensued between Mbano communities on the one hand, and their neighbours on the other hand in the past, though at a minimal level.

There were a few wars and land disputes which claimed some lives in various communities before colonial rule. We must note that to understand the system of warfare during the period, there is need to avoid judging the period, with war standards in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It should be pointed out that the people had no

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<sup>223</sup>Iwueke Interview cited

<sup>224</sup>Johnson Ezeji interview cited

<sup>225</sup>Mary Kingsley *Travels in West Africa*, London, 1997, p.58.

<sup>226</sup>M.D.W. Jeffreys, *Ibo Warfare*...77.

permanent military institutions, and they were to a large extent, an agglomeration of villages that claim a common origin. Hence, M.M. Green observed that an ðattack on any member from outside was one of the things that made the heart of the village beat as one.ö<sup>227</sup> An example of such a war was that between Ugiri and Ezihe villages of Osu-Owerre. In the course of their relationship, an influential *Nze* titled man was attacked and killed by Ezihe on his way back from Osu at *Ikpa Mburu*. In response, Ugiri rallied in revenge and killed an *Ozo* titled man from Osu. War broke out and expectedly, lives were lost. This incident caused strained relations between the people for a while, but was settled over time because of their belief that they share common origin. Wars as noted earlier are also part of inter-group relations.

In Ugiri clan, land dispute had resulted in a communal war. According to Christopher Azubuike, Ibeme people in the course of their migration from Osu, arrived at Ugiri. But Ugiri towns were divided over the villages that would host or accommodate Ibeme. Part of the section given to Oka was carved out and given to Ibeme to settle. Over time, they began to increase in size until they encroached on the ð*Ala isi acharaö* (a central square for dancing and other important rites). Oka warned Ibeme to vacate the land. Following Ibeme's refusal to vacate the land, fighting broke between Ibeme and Oka. Oka formed a military alliance with Amaimo, Umudim and Atta people. As a result, Ibeme were forced to move back to their former area of abode near Ogor, while ð*ala isi acharaö* became a permanent property of Oka.<sup>228</sup>

One important and notable war fought on the eve of colonial rule in Mbanda,

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<sup>227</sup> M.M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, London: Frankcass, 1964, p.64

<sup>228</sup> Christopher Azubuike interview in Cecilia Duru, ðIntergroup Relations in Mbanda,ö pp.20-21

according to J.C. Ogu, was the seven-year Akanu-Ezeala war, 1897-1904.<sup>229</sup> The Umunakanu people and Umuezeala are believed to be brothers and descendants of Ehime, and had followed the same route during their dispersal from *Igu Ehime*. Because their boundaries were not clearly defined, it became a source of constant clashes, especially, the border area of *Uhu Ogbalikorö*. Problem began when a warrior from Umunakanu named Ebi, allegedly, instigated the selling of Ekechukwu, a man of Umuezeala birth to Obowo. Umunakanu in revenge kidnapped and killed an Umunakanu warrior called Nkume. The two villages went to war in which many lives were lost and many other people wounded. Umuezeala appealed to Ehime for a united battle against Umunakanu. However, peace settlement was initiated by the *umuada* to rebuild the relationship of *umunne*.<sup>230</sup>

Mbano on the eve of colonial rule did not only engage in internal wars, but also at times fought external ones with its neighbours. One such wars was, according to Nwaneri Nduka, the Obollo war that involved Ehime, Obollo and Ekwereazu in Mbaise. The quarrel started with a hand to hand fighting at Eke Obollo market square between two Ugiri men, and resulted in the death of an Umuozu man. After a long negotiation, Umuoruoma were asked to compensate Umuozu people. Their refusal to compensate Umuozu drove the communities weak into a war. During the war, Umuozu asked for alliance and re-enforcement from Umueze II in Ehime. Unfortunately, one of the men sent for was mistaken as Umuoruoma soldier and was killed. In retaliation for the death of their relation, Umueze II killed an Ihite Ubi market attendant who spoke Umuozu dialect. Ekwereazu Mbaise in retaliation killed two men of Umueze II extraction at

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<sup>229</sup> J.C. Ogu, *War and Society in Pre-Colonial Ehime*, B.A. Project Department of History, U.N.N. 1977, p.28

<sup>230</sup> Johnson Ezeji interview cited.

*Olulueke* stream. Actual war broke out. Mbaise had used the tactics of crowing while shooting. Other villages in Ehime allied with Umueze II against their enemies and neighbours- Ekwereazu. It was the intervention of Umunumo and Nsu that helped to restore peace.<sup>231</sup>

Cecilia Duru noted that three means of settlement were applied. These were through the intervention of *umuada* (married daughters), the intervention of *nwanwa* with the help of neutral neighbours; and the *Ogu-ato* (selected members made up of priest of deities, elders, titled men from neutral villages in Mbano).<sup>232</sup> Usually, the *umuada* appealed to the parties at war for a cease fire. This they did by carrying palm fronds, (*igu nkwu* and *omu*), and met at a neutral place arranged for the purpose. Once agreement was reached by both parties, peace was consolidated through the performance of a ritual called *isu ogwu* or *igo oriko*; a form of blood bond or covenant. Items used for *isu ogwu* included, the blood of any animal killed (goat or cock), and herbs (*ngborogwu*) collected from the parties, salt (*nnu*), dried pepper (*ose okpoo*) and palm oil from female palm tree (*nmanu nkwu osukwu*). Kolanuts were broken into lobes, dipped in the mixture and eaten by the parties at the peace process. The parties also swore not to harm or spill each other's blood again. Most times, the *oriko* mixture was preserved in form of a solid chalk (*nzu ogu*) and kept for generations.<sup>233</sup> This mixture was a mechanism put in place to ensure conflict between the people were settled as quickly as possible

Among Mbano and their neighbours, *nwanwa* (off-springs of inter-marriages) played vital roles in warfare due to the respect and neutrality conferred on them naturally by tradition and custom. They enjoyed a high level of immunity that cut across

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<sup>231</sup>Nwaneri Nduka interview cited.

<sup>232</sup> C. Duru, *Inter-Group-Relations in Mbano*... p.21

<sup>233</sup> Duru, p. 22

communities. In suing for peace between warring communities, *nwanwa* could be sent to intervene with the help of neutral neighbouring communities. The love and respect accorded *nwanwa* by their maternal or paternal relations conferred this rare privilege and right on them. The *Ogu-ato* also sat as a council of representatives of villages and settled disputes by ways similar to *oriko* used by *Umuada*. Their decisions commanded respect, authority and were obeyed.<sup>234</sup> Through these avenues, freedom of movement and interaction among the Mbano and its neighbours were restored after. Contravening of such settlement by any party or group carried serious punishment from the ancestors. Acceptance of such a settlement arose from the people's belief in the presence of the ancestors and their powers in all aspects of their lives. Through these settlements, mutual relationships between Mbano communities and their neighbours are maintained

### **Economic Activities**

The variety of economic activities that serviced the relationship between Mbano and its neighbours is our focus here. These economic activities are considered under the following sub-themes; agriculture- land tenure system, local craft; blacksmithing, weaving, pottery, palm wine tapping and trade.

### **Farming and Land Tenure**

It is an undeniable fact that agriculture was the most important economic activity in pre-colonial Igboland as it has continued to be. This explains the value and importance attached to land in a striking uniformity by the Igbo. Igbo agricultural practices appear to have influenced all other aspects of the Igbo life, and much attention was paid land. Therefore, the central foundation of economic activity in Igboland is land,

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<sup>234</sup>. Duru, p.23

through which other economic activities were regulated. We shall consider land and agricultural activities within the area of study.

As already noted, agriculture constituted the basic foundation on which the economic of Mbano and its neighbours rested on the eve of colonial rule. The importance of agriculture made land a central factor in the life of the people. M.O. Ijere noted that

The economic resources of the people of Mbano depended much on agriculture, as the main stay of their economy, while trade and industry featured as subsidiaries. It was practiced mainly on a subsistence level and their attachment to agriculture explains to a large extent their system of land tenure, individual, family or communal ownership.<sup>235</sup>

In traditional Mbano society, land was owned by the community but held on trust by their various family and lineage heads. Mbalisi explained that land belonging to the various families was inherited by their younger ones. The eldest son of the family -*di okpara or opara* -were in charge of the family land, and individuals had to seek his permission before making use of any family land either for farming purposes or building a house.<sup>236</sup> The *di okpara* allocated land to their family members for farming. At his discretion, *di okpara* often times allocated the fertile portions of the land to himself and the less fertile areas to other members of their families, according to seniority of birth. The last born at

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<sup>235</sup> M.O Ijere, *Economic Development of Nsu*, Nsukka: 1981, p.43

<sup>236</sup> S.E Mbalisi interview cited.

times received the smallest portion of the land.

V. C. Uchendu rightly noted that òin Igboland, land belongs to the lineage and cannot be alienated.<sup>237</sup> Before colonial times land was not sold. Acquisition of land was hereditary, though often, land was used as collateral for borrowing. For instance, most people who were in need of money, either for title taking or burial of their father or loved ones, pledged some portion of their land to somebody for money. This was usually done before a witness (*onye-aka-ebe*). The original owner of the land regained his land unconditionally as soon as he returned the money within the stipulated time; failure to return the money could mean loss of ownership of the said land. Availability of land determined the method of farming adopted by the people.

Different methods of farming were adopted and used by farmers. The major method was shifting cultivation. Mixed cropping was another method of farming very common in Mbano. The unit of labour for agriculture was the family. Under this system, the man, his wife or wives and children provided the required labour. Where a man could afford it, he acquired slaves to work his farms. In most cases where the farm land was very large, communal labour was solicited. According to E.E. Obilor, labour in Mbano was secured through *igba onwo oru*, a form of exchange. This simply means exchange of working days in the different farms among groups of boys and girls, or age groups or even communities. Migrant labourers called *ndi ogu-ukwu* from Okigwe area provided additional source of labour. They were so called because, they were known for carrying big hoes with wide blades. Their mounds were bigger than those made by farmers and labourers in Mbano.<sup>238</sup> Farming was labour intensive, and tools comprised simple

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<sup>237</sup> V.C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria*. New York: Holt Rhine Hart and Winston, 1965, p.22

<sup>238</sup> E.E. Obilor interview cited

implements such as machete (*mma*), hoe (*ogu*) and digger, (*mbazu*) with which, as A.E. Afigbo observed, the Igbo reduced to either grassland or palm bush vegetation which could have passed for some tropical rain forest.<sup>239</sup>

Some of the crops planted are mainly root crops of various species such as *ji ocha* (white yam), *ji okom or nkokpu* (yellow yam), *ji asere or asiri* (water yam), *una* (three leaved yam). These are planted by men. Coca yam- *escalentum (ede)* and cassava are planted mainly by women. In some communities, *una adu* (a type of crop which bear its ambers on the stem and tastes slightly bitter) are harvested and eaten.<sup>240</sup> These crops were also sources of income to the people. Hence, E.E Obilor stated *õndi ozo na aru-aru, ndi ozo na azuru-azuru, ndi ozo na eri-eri.*<sup>241</sup> This translates as, while some cultivated, others bought and the rest were eating). The need for effective farm produce increased the importance and value of land in Mbano and Igboland people in general. Afigbo noted that laws and regulations were made to guide land use. The breaking of such a law amounted to an *nso ala* and a serious punishment awaited such a culprit.<sup>242</sup> V.C Uchendu states that land tenure system was not very rigid for it was flexible enough to allow strangers (in a case where there was free, unclaimed land, as was mainly the case during the pre-colonial times) married women, free born and slaves to acquire land for farming.<sup>243</sup> Similar system existed in Mbano.

### **Local Crafts**

Local crafts, as an aspect of economy of Mbano communities and their

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<sup>239</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand* ,p.126

<sup>240</sup> Ijere, *Economic Development* , pp.24-25

<sup>241</sup> E.E. Obilor interview cited

<sup>242</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *Prolegomena to the Study of the Culture of the Igbo Speaking People of Nigeria* in F.C. Ogbalu and E.N. Emenanjo, *Igbo Language and Culture*, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1975, 44.

<sup>243</sup> Victor C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria...* 23



neighbours, supplemented farming. It played a secondary role to agricultural production. J.E. Flint noted that a large number of people regarded crafts as a part time activity normally practiced when the peak of farming was over.<sup>244</sup> Men engaged in such specialized industries as blacksmithing, weaving and carving. The women on the other hand excelled in such craft as pottery, weaving (textiles) as an addendum to their household chores. The development of specialized crafts and other industries in Mbano appear most likely to have occurred with the growth of trade.

### **Blacksmithing**

Blacksmithing in the area was prominent among the Umudiemeka in Ugiri, Agbaghara, Nsu and parts of Osu. The products of the blacksmiths especially, farm implements were exchanged for goods made outside of their immediate environment. Many Mbano people believe that blacksmithing was introduced into the area from other parts of Igboland, while a few others believe it is indigenous.

Blacksmithing in Mbano is considered to have been introduced from the neighbouring Nkwere area near Orlu. In Mbano, like in some other Igbo areas such as Awka and Nkwerre known for blacksmithing, there exists a system of apprenticeship. Although, this may not be as developed and pronounced as in the famous iron making areas of Awka, Abiriba, Udi and Nkwere, it attracted many young boys from at least within Mbano and its neighbouring towns such as Umuri, Atta, Inyishi and even Obowo. There were certain conditions through which a boy could serve as an apprentice apart from being naturally being born into the family of blacksmiths. Such a situation could be when the boy's parents obtained farm implements from the blacksmith on credit. Such a

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<sup>244</sup>J.E. Flint, 'Economic Change in West Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century', in A. F. Ajayi and Crowther, (eds.), *Economic History of West Africa*, London: 1975, p.386.

boy served out the debt working for the blacksmith. It was known as the *õpaw* system.<sup>245</sup> Again, a boy could willingly pursue a career in blacksmithing. In this case the period of time spent by the boy with the blacksmith depended on his ability to grasp the idea and the skills of smithery. Apart from the trainee learning the basic techniques, he also was tutored on how to carry himself in the society, for the blacksmith was highly respected and his status and dignity was carefully guarded to the envy of all. This quality determined the acceptance into the guild system or otherwise.

Besides, the blacksmithing communities in Mbano, through the guild system, regulated the activities of the smiths. According to Ikeneri, they usually co-ordinate and organized their annual thanksgiving offering and sacrifices to *Ugardashu*, their ancestral deity. This was done around the month of December (*Onwa Asato*). A second thanksgiving for a successful blacksmithing season was observed around January or February.<sup>246</sup>

As was the case with most Igbo traditional craft industries, blacksmithing was hedged around with a series of taboos. First, it was a taboo for a woman to abscond from her Umu-uzu husband to marry another man. Such a woman, it was believed, would be struck barren, or if she bore children. This continued until she returned to Umu-uzu for forgiveness and sacrifices to *Ugardashu*.<sup>247</sup> The extent to which this latter taboo applied could not be substantiated by the writer. But it was said to be a common belief among blacksmiths in the area. It was a taboo for a woman or a non-smith to touch the bellow, forge and other implements used by the blacksmith as they were considered sacred. The blacksmiths were indeed very important to the people because most of their local

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<sup>245</sup> R. Olufemi, Ekundare, *An Economic History of Nigeria 1860-1960.*, London: Methian and Coy, p. 44

<sup>246</sup> Titus Ikeneri interview cited.

<sup>247</sup> Ikeneri interview cited

implements were his products. The products were also sold in markets within Mbanjo area and beyond.

Besides, blacksmiths provided hunters with the tools required for hunting. The hunters were also said to have exchanged some of the animals they hunted with the blacksmiths. Hunting as an economic activity served to provide the basic protein needs and food for the people. The desire to satisfy these needs made Mbanjo smiths specialize in the production of different types of hunting weapons or tools. These include *nma nwoti* (digger), *onya igwe* (trap), and *ikpo nkita* (metal gongs hung around the neck of dogs during hunting). During *Nta* festival these tools were used. In fact, the importance of the blacksmiths in the society conferred a sacred status on them and were not molested or killed. They were particularly important in settling land disputes, and were a symbol of inter-village and inter-group peace and cordial relationship. The smiths' products were in high demand and were exchanged for agricultural and other products. Smithery attracted fame and respect to the villages that practiced craft.

### **Carving**

Carving was another prominent economic activity practiced by Mbanjo. Umuezeala, Agbaghara, Umuakagu, Ezianya, Obollo, Inyishi, Amaraku, Umuduru and Amuzari villages were prominent in this art. In fact, in almost every village, there were one or two carvers. They produced such items as door post (*eku uzo*), wooden spoon (*eku*), wooden drum (*ekwe, ikoro* and *nkukwuishi*), and walking stick (*nkpara*).<sup>248</sup> The origin of carving especially in Umuakagu Ehime is traced to two long distant traders named-Uzoebo and Osusuala. They acquired and returned with the skill from *Mba-miri* (River state). They learned carving from canoe makers and brought the skill into

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<sup>248</sup> V.N. Uzoegbo, *Local Crafts in Mbanjo from Earliest Times*, B.A. Project Dept. of History U.N.N. 1984, pp.16-17

Umuakagu.<sup>249</sup>

Carvers worked with societal symbols in mind which they reflected in their works. More importantly, sacred objects of Igbo traditional worship were produced by wood carvers. They combined both divine and other herbalist duties. They were inspired by moral religious beliefs and some of their works adorned people's homes, community squares, and shrines as symbols of religious worship. Basden described these carved objects as *õalusi* figures.<sup>250</sup> Some of the objects carved included, the *Ikenga*, *Nwanyilolo*, *Agwuishi*, *ofo*, *ihi ntukasi ofo*, *ozu agwu*, *Ikenga ajo ahia*, *nne nwa*, *ikpo ebo agwu*, *ezumezu agwu*, *umunne*, and *okposhi* and were usually carved with the *Edo* wood. Most of them denoted human figures and as such, required extra care and effort in carving them.

Some of the gods in the public shrines, for instance, *Okwara-ogbuleke* of Obollo, *Ezealaogaku* of Inyishi, *Ezealakatamu* in Osu and a host of others mentioned earlier were the handiwork of the wood carver. A special small knife called-*nma nwoti* was used to design the images' eyes, nose, hand and legs. A black paint was used to give it a peculiar look after drying the wood. Thus, the carver and the herbalists always had market for their products and were well respected and even feared in their community and those of their neighbours. In the search for answers to individual and community challenges, they crossed boundaries to consult native doctors who used these objects. People made new contacts and built new relationships in the process of acquiring these objects. Oracular consultation was one important factor of inter-group relations between Mbano, Mbaise and Ikeduru communities. The wood carver's products attracted people from far and near.

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<sup>249</sup> Uzoegbo, p.18

<sup>250</sup> G.T. Basden, *Among the Ibosí* p.322

Such meetings of different people, either in the market or carvers' houses to purchase these items constitute ways of interactions and relations between communities.

### **Pottery Making**

Pottery making was another craft in pre-colonial Mbano and some of their neighbouring village groups. It was restricted to women and is of ancient antiquity. In the words of Henry Trevor, pot making is one of the oldest crafts in the world and was practiced many thousands of years ago by Egyptians on the banks of the Nile.<sup>251</sup> But the exact date for the origin of pottery industry in the Mbano area remains unknown. There are suggestions that the knowledge probably entered Mbano from the Okigwe area. Mrs. Virginia Ihemegbulam, a known potter, suggested that pot making spread from the Ishiagu area of Okigwe, through the activities of Mbano traders.<sup>252</sup> Consequently, most men sent their wives there to acquire the skill. Another version put forward by Ihemegbulam is that the craft entered Mbano from Nkalagu area. But this claim appears unacceptable because the pots made at Nkalagu were different from the ones found in Mbano. The former mixed their fresh clay with sand, while Mbano used *ngba* (broken pieces of old pots) to mix their clay.<sup>253</sup>

Pottery was not practised by all the communities in Mbano. The craft was prominent among the communities that possessed clay valleys and these include Umunumo, Ihiteafoukwu, Umuihim, Agbaja, Mbeke and Ugiri. Some potters though acquired their clay from Ama-uro near Okigwe. Potters in Mbano and in indeed Igboland distinguished their pots by the use of different designs. Kenneth Clark writes of a potter as someone who must have natural sympathy and feeling for her materials and lively

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<sup>251</sup> Henry Trevor, *Pottery Step by Step*, New York: Watson Guptill Ballantine Books, 1966, p.7

<sup>252</sup> Mrs. Virginia Ihemegbulam, 72 years potter, interviewed at Umunumo, 16/08/2010.

<sup>253</sup> Ihemegbulam interview cited

imagination. He must aim to be an artist and a craftsman with a skilled control of all pottery techniques.<sup>254</sup> Clark's description fits Mbano porters who exhibited a great deal of imaginative power and artistic ingenuity.

The type of decoration showed the origin of a pot or its culture area. In this regard, Joy Ejikeme observes that 'decoration on a pot brings out the aesthetic and cultural endowment of an area. It is through the decoration on a pot that one can stand to say that this pot belongs to this cultural area.'<sup>255</sup> Among the potters of Mbano, Inyishi Ikeduru, Atta, parts of Okwelle and Ezianya Mbaise, 'staining' which is part of body decoration was done after firing, when the pots were still hot. The stain was obtained from a leaf called *aga*. The red bark was scrapped and squeezed in water to extract its liquid. Subsequently, the liquid was mixed with a slimy, sticky liquid from a vegetable plant known as *ulogboro*. This slime sticky liquid acts as gum which enables the stain to stick on the pot firmly.

In some Mbano and neighbouring communities like Agbaje, Umuakagu, Ehime and parts of Amaimo, it was the custom to present the young bride with a new *ite-nri* and *oku nri* as marriage gifts. The initiative was taken by the mother-in-law. The essence was for the new bride to cook and display her cooking ability. Potters in Mbano and their neighbouring communities were seen as special and creative people, who are gifted with special skill. Like blacksmiths and carvers, potters were respected because of their artistry. Afigbo's opinion that a potter must aim to be an artist and a craftsman or woman with skilled control of all pottery techniques, applies to potters in Mbano. Indeed, potters in Mbano were experts as the pots (*udu* or *oku*) made by the people showed considerable

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<sup>254</sup> Kenneth Clark, *Practical Pottery and Ceramics*, Great Britain: Studio Vista Publishers, 1964, p.33.

<sup>255</sup> Ejikeme, 93

display of skill and design on the part of the individual potter.

Pottery contributed in no small measure towards domestic income. In some families, prominent women potters made regular income and assisted their farmer husbands whose income was seasonal. For instance, according to Virginia Ihemegbulam "the greater economic power of the women potters helped them to take care of their household. This however did not make such women disobey their husbands."<sup>256</sup> Women potters in the area led other women in the society. Pottery, no doubt, brought people in the area into constant contact because pots were invaluable necessities in their homes. The potters homes and markets in the area where these pot were sold provided avenues for people to interact.

### **Weaving and Textile**

The weaving which included basketry, cotton textiles industry was another craft practised in Mbano. This craft also influenced relations between Mbano and its neighbours. Its long history shows that it played a very important role in the economic and social life of the people. Weaving was practiced by men and women, but men dominated basketry. It has been suggested that the knowledge of basketry may have reached Mbano from Okigwe area, although the time appears uncertain. It is almost certain that it may have been copied from one of its far flung neighbours of Okigwe, Oru or Ukwa-Ngwa and Igirinta areas of Igboland. The industry however, had been in existence long before colonial rule. The earliest forms of baskets made included *akpara* and *ngiga*- baskets of different shapes and sizes used in displaying goods.

According to Mike Obiechefuna, a prominent basket weaver, basket is an old craft practiced by Mbano and many other Igbo communities. It was an important craft because

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<sup>256</sup> Virginia Ihemegbulem interview cited.

of its use in almost every household. In the culture of marriage in Mbano and its neighbours, a girl presented her suitor and his kinsmen with cassava meal in this basket, i.e. the *ekete oborobo*. These baskets- *ekete*, *abo* and *ngiga* were very important in the area because of their cultural and economic uses.<sup>257</sup> Mrs. Virginia Ihemegbulam stated that *abo* was very important at a time where there was no other form of carriers, except other types of baskets which unfortunately lacked the covered base like the *abo*. It was especially used by women potters who made use of *abo* in carrying their products to the market. The people believed that if a woman whose child was unable to walk in time after birth was carried in this basket such a child would immediately start walking. Thus it was a common site in those days to see children being carried about in the *abo*.<sup>258</sup> *Ngiga* and *oki* were other forms of baskets used for drying fish and meat over the heat and smoke from fire to prevent them from decaying. It was woven in Umuri, Inyishi, Atta, Umunkwo, some Ugiri communities.<sup>259</sup> They were used in collecting palm fruits and farm produce. Markets were readily available for the basket weaver at home. Hence, rarely did the basket weaver travel far with his wares beyond markets in the neighbouring communities. There were continuous interactions between the users of baskets and the weavers. As weavers moved their baskets from one market to the other, new contacts, new friendships and new relationships were made. The baskets of the weavers were articles of trade between the people.

Textiles constituted another aspect of weaving the people engaged in, though it was not quite wide spread during the era. However, it was needed by almost every society in Igboland. This probably accounts for its longevity in Igbo cultural life. A. E.

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<sup>257</sup> Mike Obiechefuna, 77years weaver interview at Nsu, 25/08/2010.

<sup>258</sup> Virginia Ihemegbulem interview cited.

<sup>259</sup> Uzoobo p.30



Afigbo and C. S. Okeke observed that manufacture of textile for weaving is long established in Igbo culture.<sup>260</sup> The earliest forms of weaving include raffia weaving used in producing such types of materials as *mkpuru* and *abada* made of fronds. It was worn by women together with body paintings and decoration with *uri* and *uhie* (indigo and violet). According to Cherry Plummer, raffia was the only form of cloth produced before the introduction of cotton.<sup>261</sup> Besides, Thurstan Shaw's findings at Igbo Ukwu revealed clearly that bass and flat fibers were being woven in the area and this seemingly throws more light on the origin of the Igbo textile industry.<sup>262</sup>

*Mkpuru* and *gburu-wara* were also made from the raffia. The knowledge of weaving with raffia was said to be acquired and introduced into Mbano and other neighbouring communities such as Inyishi, Umudim and Atta from Calabar and Akwaete areas. The skill was most probably introduced through long distance traders. Cornelius Oku told the writer that his father had acquired the skill from Calabar and Akwaete along side others who traded with the people on the eve of colonial rule. Oku said he told me he learnt raffia weaving skills from Calabar.<sup>263</sup> From the raffia was extracted the *ijiji ngwo* which was dyed into any choice colour of *mkpuru* by the weaver.<sup>264</sup> The *mkpuru* was mostly worn by women and men as wrapper. It was commonly worn during burial ceremonies. *Mkpuru* was the traditional attire for most cultural festivals such as *mbom uzo*, *iwa-akwa* and dances. From the raffia was made the *okpu atakara* or *ayaghara* or (war cap) *nche*

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<sup>260</sup> A.E. Afigbo and C.S. Okeke (ed.) *Weaving Traditions in Igboland* Published by Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Social Development, Youths, Sports and Culture, Lagos, 1982, p. 7

<sup>261</sup> Cherry, I. Plummer, *African Textile: An Outline of African Handcrafted Sub-Saharan Fabrics*, (Michigan: Michigan State University, 1911, p. 53.

<sup>262</sup> Thurstan Shaw, *Igbo Ukwu: An Account of Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Faber and Faber, 1970, Vol.1, p. 242.

<sup>263</sup> Mr. Cornelius Oku a weaver interview cited

<sup>264</sup> Cornelius Oku interview cited.

*obi* (a type of bullet proof) made from *ana* or the *utabo* (*pandemus* candle *abrum*). There was also the *akpa ngwu* (raffia bag) used mainly by the *di ochi* (palm wine tappers), and by *dibia afa* (diviners and herbalists). Masquerade attires were also made from raffia. In fact, it was a tradition on the eve of colonial rule for a groom to present *mkpuru* to his in-law as part of the bride wealth. The traditional weaving industry was dominated by men within Mbano area, probably because of the tedious process involved in it. The men weavers were usually wealthy and prominent. It brought fame to the communities that produced them, especially, Umueze, Umuehie, and Osu area, among others.

From the foregoing, agriculture and crafts and other economic activities of the people were vent for inter-dependence due to differentials in the distribution of natural endowment and skills in the area. Thus, textile materials, its movement and sell as important articles of trade, served as great stimulus to inter-group relations. In *Igbo village Affairs*, M. M. Green rightly observed the role of trade in the economic life of the people. He stated that if agriculture is a basic occupation of these Igbo people, trade is the close second. They trade not only of necessarily but for pleasure.<sup>265</sup> This observation obviously applies to Mbano as well as its neighbours because it was through trade that agricultural products and crafts of the people were sold to those in need of the items in their local markets in the communities. Hence, we consider trade as a factor of contact and group interaction and relations between Mbano and its neighbours on the eve of colonial rule.

### **Trade and Contact**

Mbano people and their neighbours before colonial rule were basically farmers. They engaged primarily in trade to sell some of their farm produce and local crafts.

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<sup>265</sup>M.M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs* p.64

Intra/inter-village trade was an important part of the economic activity of the people. Trade became important because of differences in ecological conditions, which made some villages to produce more of certain commodities than others. Some of the people engaged in regional and local trade in order to make up for scarce commodities. Hence trade during the period was unavoidable as it provided the vent for people to buy what they could not produce. O.N. Njoku writes that in Igboland trade was in consequence a crucial component of the economy, for it was through trade that disparities in productive capacity between communities were bridged.<sup>266</sup>

Indeed, the origin of market and trade in Igboland is very ancient. Excavations from Igbo Ukwu sites, by Thurstan Shaw, show that as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD, the Igbo were already exchanging with their neighbours some of their products for what they needed.<sup>267</sup> Trade and markets in the area developed simultaneously with agriculture and specialized craftsmanship. Local trade and markets in the area had developed naturally largely due to the complementary role it played in providing for the needs of the communities. Many local markets were attended by the people. Prominent among these markets were Afor Amadioha (later Nkwo Mbaa), Orië Amaraku, Nkwo Umuezeala, Eke Ezeala, Orië Umuozu, Afo Amuzari, and Eke Obollo. Market in the neighbouring communities included, Afo Inyishi, Eke Umuri, Eke Eziamä Mbase, Afo Ukwu in Ihiteafoukwu, Eke Ukwu Okwelle, Eke Atta among others.<sup>268</sup> These markets were periodic though few were daily. As O.N. Njoku writes, periodicity varied according to culture areas; but four-day, five day and eight-day periodicities were wide spread,

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<sup>266</sup> O.N. Njoku, *Economic History of Nigeria, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Enugu: Magnet Computer Services, 2001, p. 81.

<sup>267</sup> Thurstan Shaw, "Archaeology in Eastern Nigeria". *Nigeria Magazine*, June, 1967, p.67.

<sup>268</sup> C.N. Mbalisi, "Change and Continuity in Isiala Mbano" ö, p.45

sixteen-day markets were less common while twenty-four-day ones were very rare.<sup>269</sup>

Most markets in the area held every eight days. These include; Nkwo Dioka, Orie-Agu, Nkwo Umuezeala, Afor Umueze, Afor Amadioha, Eke Mbeke, Afor Umueze, Afor Agbaghara and Orie Ikpa. Neighbours like Umuahia, Etiti and Mbaise attended these markets. Most of these markets lay along the major trade routes and were attended by neighbours from Nkwere, Orlu, Owerri, Atta, Umudim, Inyishi, Isu and Okwelle. They were easily accessible. The main currencies used were *eze-ego* (cowries), *ojoma* (manilas), and *ikpechi* (copper rod). These currencies though had some deficiencies, like weight, performed the basic functions as media of exchange and measure of value, aside the earlier trade by barter method.<sup>270</sup>

The arrangement of these markets enabled the people prepare their goods for the next eight-day market. Because of the proximity in space between one community and the other, there was a market to attend every four days. Though markets in pre-colonial Igboland were said to be dominated by women, especially, local markets, men attended markets along side women in the area. The goods sold by men *inter-alia* included baskets, yam, palm wine, goat, *okpokoro* (traditional medicine items), kernel, raffia bags, knives, and products of the blacksmiths. Women sold *foo-foo*, vegetables, pepper, cocoyam, fowl, and other food items. They also sold pottery wares and textile items.

In addition, the people engaged in some sort of long distance trade, though at a very low scale. Mbano and its neighbours traded with Uburu from where they bought *uhie* (cam wood) and salt in exchange for slave. They also travelled as far as Oguta where they sold palm oil and palm kernel, passing through Umuneoha. Apart from exchange of

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<sup>269</sup> O .N. Njoku, *Economic History of Nigeria...*, p.84.

<sup>270</sup> Johnson Ezeji, *õA Sketch History of Mbano Communal Life 1903-1923õ*. Unpublished Local Material, Ehime, 1924, p.2.

crops, they also exchanged the services of medicine men, oracle agents and occult advisers.<sup>271</sup> Trade was conducted with Uzuakoli, Arochukwu, Umuna, Nkwere, Ikwere, and Mbaise. The articles of trade included palm produce and raffia bags, in exchange for tobacco, salt, textile materials, guns and gun powder, beads, stockfish and other Western goods.<sup>272</sup> The trade was not regular because of the distance covered and other hazards encountered by the people. Trekking was the available means of transport and conveying goods was by human portage. Long distance trade seemed exclusively for the brave, strong and wealthy, especially, blacksmiths, weavers, diviners and so on. The fear of the Aro and the *Ubini Ukpabi* (the long juju) was said to have scared the people from engaging in the trade. The Aro were known in Igboland for their trade in slaves. Hence, the people feared being captured and sold into slavery. Those who traded were said to have had some agreement with the Aro and communities along the trade routes. O.N. Njoku stated that the Aro had agreements with traders thus, "blood covenant- *Igba ndu*, was one of the methods Aro long distance traders employed to affect a bond of mutual trust and protection with their hosts."<sup>273</sup>

Samuel Njoku said *igba ndu* involved an incision on the arm and the intermingling of blood of the two covenanting parties. Kola nut lobes were dipped in it and eaten by the parties. These blood pacts acted as ritual passports, used to check invasion, kidnapping and trespassing. It was a principal means of guaranteeing movement across the communities and safety among strangers. It also facilitated trade and to large extent promoted healthy inter-group relations. In fact, this explains the Aro settlements

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<sup>271</sup> Samuel Njoku interview cited

<sup>272</sup> Samuel Njoku interview cited

<sup>273</sup> O.N. Njoku, *Economic History Nigeria* p. 84.

found in Umuaro Mbandi and in Ihoiteafoukwu, among others.<sup>274</sup> Besides, marriages were said to have been contracted in the course of the trade. These marriages as they were provided easy passage of some sort for Mbandi traders with communities situated along the trade routes.

Apart from their commercial importance, markets served other vital social purposes. According to Ukwu I. Ukwu, in traditional Igboland, marketing was more or less numerous as there were village groups.<sup>275</sup> C.C. Ifemesia expresses similar view, thus "these markets were the focal points of social as well as economic activities; for people gathered there not just to exchange, though important, but in these markets arrangements for other social activities were made."<sup>276</sup> O.N Njoku was right to state "the market place was a venue for social interaction: gossips were bandied about, lovers met and dated and some people went there to enjoy the thrill of mass gathering".<sup>277</sup> Markets also served as a meeting point for couples. Markets were in fact, information centres. The large gathering provided for quick spread of information within communities and beyond. Thus markets for Mbandi and its neighbours provided a meeting place for kinsmen, and friends for discussion of common business. The market place was an avenue where suitors could meet their wives. They were advantageous for the dissemination of information regarding social events, recreation, wars, cultural ceremonies and festivals, and other concerns between communities.

From the foregoing, there are grounds to say that Mbandi people and their neighbours on the eve of the colonial rule were involved in active trade beyond the

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<sup>274</sup> Samuel Njoku interview cited

<sup>275</sup> Ukwu, I. Ukwu, "The Development of Trade and Marketing in Igboland". *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 3 No.4, 1967, p.122

<sup>276</sup> C.C. Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living among the Igbo...*66

<sup>277</sup> O.N. Njoku, *Economic History of Nigeria...*, p. 85

confines of their communities or towns. Farming was the bedrock of the people's economy, and was beyond subsistence level. Farm produce and other products from blacksmiths and crafts provided the major articles of trade between the people and their neighbours. Economic interests may have bred conflict situations, but relationships based largely on kin, common ancestry and some communal ritual practices, helped dilute raging nerves and provide for peaceful relations between the groups.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MBANO AND ITS NEIGHBOURS DURING COLONIAL RULE, 1906-1960

#### Colonial Conquest and Occupation

The British conquest and occupation of the then Mbasaa and later Mbanda was obviously not achieved in a day. It followed a gradual albeit a forceful process. The earliest attempt at British penetration into the Igbo hinterland was in 1887, with the banishment of king Jaja of Opobo; the subsequent war against Nana and the Ishekiri in 1894; the Akasa Raid by the Brass people and the punitive expedition against them in 1895; the Major Leonard journey to Bende; the Arochuku Expedition and the destruction of the òlong Jujò in 1901-02; the Onitsha expedition under Colonel Morehouse; the killing of Dr. Stewart in Ahiara in 1904-05 and subsequent Ahiara Expedition of 1905-1906,<sup>278</sup> which brought the British closer to the area that became Mbanda and its neighbours.

By the early 1900s, the British had penetrated, conquered, occupied and set up their administrative systems in Igboland. It could arguably be stated that the occupation process began in 1885, when the Oil Rivers Protectorate was proclaimed by the British. The ultimate aim of the colonizing power was to extend their political sway to the rich agricultural and palm producing region of the hinterland occupied mainly by the Igbo.<sup>279</sup> Mbanda and its neighbours are indeed an integral part of this area. Consequently, in 1891, a general instruction issued by the British Foreign Office (BFO), warned Major (later Sir) Claude Macdonald, the first British High Commissioner and Consul-General to the Oil

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<sup>278</sup> A.E. Afigbo, (ed.), *Historical Events List of Local, Regional and National Significance*, Enugu: Government Printer, 1973, p. 3.

<sup>279</sup> H.U. B. Kaghala, òLocal Government at Oratta: 1950-1960.ö M.A. Dissertation, Department of History, U. N.N. 1981, p.37.



Rivers (later Niger Coast) Protectorate, of the dangers of interference with the people's government. Macdonald was faced with acute shortage of personnel and funds with which to carry out his assignment. As a result, in February 1892, he established the High Court of Native Council of Old Calabar (HCNC), which also was projected to act as the Court of Appeal for a number of minor courts that were in operation in the coastal area of the Cross River region. The establishment of courts in parts of Igboland, no doubt formed the basis for British administration in communities in Igboland. R.I. Ozigbo writes that the military operations by which the Eastern Nigerian hinterland was opened up to British commerce began in earnest in 1895- the year Joseph Chamberlain became British Colonial Secretary with like-minded Lord Salisbury as the Foreign Secretary. They championed a forward policy with Ralph Moor, the High Commissioner at Calabar avidly pursued during his consulship, 1896-1903.<sup>280</sup>

It would be recalled that British agents had signed treaties of protection with some Igbo communities. However, it does appear the treaties failed to produce the much needed breakdown and overthrow of the local authorities. The British resorted to the use of complete military force in achieving the conquest of Igboland. Ozigbo thinks that the "treaties of protection" through which British consular agents sought to overthrow the authority and independence of some Igbo communities were largely farcical.<sup>281</sup> Therefore, for the British, a territory was regarded as a "protectorate" with the assumption that its inhabitants placed their sovereignty in their hands. This had formed largely the legal thrust of the treaties. The exposure of the hypocritical nature of the so called treaties of protection, and following refusal by the Igbo to be so protected, Britain

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<sup>280</sup> Ikenga, R.I. Ozigboh, *A History of Igboland in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Enugu: Snap Press Ltd., 1999, pp.34-35

<sup>281</sup> Ozigboh, p. 33

adopted the paradoxical policy of according protection by force of arms. As the prevailing tendencies appeared, the easiest and most economic way of doing so became their only concern. In the end, the British settled for war as the quickest and surest way of subduing the Igbo.<sup>282</sup> The prime targets of the British were the Aro.

The British believed the Aro ruled the Igbo interior and had been the master-minds of every opposition to British efforts into the interior. Hence, they planned the expedition which they thought would be òa war to end all warsö in Igbo and Ibibioland.<sup>283</sup> The Aro Expedition arguably was aimed at disarming the natives. Consequently, by 1900, as S.N. Nwabara contended, òthe logistics of the war against the Aro have been worked out. The Aro Expedition was the handwork of Sir Ralph Moor, who had a firm belief in the efficacy of military expeditionsö.<sup>284</sup> The Expedition took off in November 1901 and lasted till March 1902. The Expedition as it were, secured most of Igboland for the British.<sup>285</sup> However, all parts of Igboland, especially our area of study, did not fall to the British in 1902. It took the Ahiara Expedition of 1904-05 to bring Mbano and its neighbours under British colonial rule. In fact, it seems that year -1900-191- or even 1914 marked the pinnacle of British conquest and occupation of almost all parts of Igboland. Available evidence shows that, to their chagrin, the British,

í discovered that one round of conquest was not enough to keep most Igbo communities submissive to the new colonial order. Many punitive campaigns

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<sup>282</sup> Ozigboh, p.33.

<sup>283</sup> S.N. Nwabara, *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain, 1860-1960*, London: 1977, p. 144

<sup>284</sup> For these see, S.N. Nwabara, *Iboland; A Century of Contact with Britain, 1860-1960*, London: 1977, J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition, 1885-1906*, London: 1966, T.N. Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigeria State, 1898-1914*, London: 1972, A.E Afigbo, òThe Aro Expedition: An Episode in the British Occupation of Igbolandö . *Odu New Series No. 7*, 1972.

<sup>285</sup> I.R. Ozigboh, *A History of Igboland...*, pp.35-36

had to be continued right till the end of the First World War. There were the military operation against Uli and Umuneoha (July 1903); the Bende-Onitsha Expedition (1905-1906), the Udi District Patrol (November 1909); the Owerri-Bend-Okigwe Operation (August 1911) and the Orlu Patrol which eventually touched on Okigwe, Owerri and Onitsha districts.<sup>286</sup>

The British visited Mbano in 1905, during a punitive expedition against Ahiara in present day Mbaise. The expedition was adjudged to be necessary as a result of the killing at Obizi in 1905 of Dr. Stewart, who was posted to the protectorate of southern Nigeria. In their search for Ahiara, the British Commander, Captain Fox, and four sections of the Bende-Onicha Hinterland Expedition, visited Umunumo on December 8, 1905.<sup>287</sup> In 1906, the British set up a station at Onu Oyibo, near Umuduru where the first political official, the then commissioner of Umuduru, A.E. Healthcole, resided.<sup>288</sup> The presence of the District Officer (DO) symbolised the British occupation of the area, though not without pockets of opposition and resistance. Following rumours that the British had entered the area in search of Dr. Stewart, the people of Mbano were afraid and villages organised themselves and took up arms to resist the invaders. According to Johnson Ezeji, in Nsu area, the people lined up the roads in companies and marched against the British. In Ugiri area, the people for the most part reportedly ran into the bush

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<sup>286</sup> . PRO, CO520/31 òOnitsha Hinterland Patrolò June, 190 Co 520/03, òOrlu Patrolò May, 1911, in Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland...*, pp.36-37

<sup>287</sup> Nwabara, *Ibolandí* p.145

<sup>288</sup> S.N. Egerue, Mbano Under Warrant Chiefsò, B.A Project, Department of History and International Studies, U.N.N 1984, p.9

without giving any strong resistance. However, Chief Ihemeje of Agbaja was said to have organised his people and fought the British at Ikpa Agbaja later Umuduru.<sup>289</sup>

**Table 2: British expeditions that led to the conquest and occupation of Mbano and its neighbours**

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

The subjugation of Ehime near Mbaise, according to Christopher Ajaegbu, took two phases. The first phase was in 1906, when British troops came to Agbaja and declared war on the people. But in the face of sophisticated modern weapons, the people of Agbaja gave up the struggle. As P.A Talbot wrote, òin April a military post was stationed at Umuduru and the pacification of the surrounding territory began.ó<sup>290</sup> This view was corroborated by Ajaegbu thus, a military post was consequently set up at Ikpa-Agbaja-Umuduru in order to consolidate British control of the area.<sup>291</sup>

The second phase of the subjugation came later when as John Ezeji put it, the Royal Artillery under the command of Douglas arrived Dikenafai from Orlu, and moved

<sup>289</sup> Johnson Ezeji, *Sketch History of Mbano Communal Life*, Ehime: 1924, p.2

<sup>290</sup> P.A. Talbot, *The People of Southern Nigeria Vol. I*, London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1967, p.274

<sup>291</sup> Christopher Ajaegbu, interview cited in J. Ogu, òWar and Society in pre-Colonial Ehime Mbanoó B.A Project, Department of History, U.N.N, 1977, p.5

to Nwalolo in Umueze I. From here the troops linked up with those already stationed at Ikpa-Agbaja and declared war on Umueze people.<sup>292</sup> Umueze courageously resisted them, and according to Ogu Onyirimba, pursued them towards Eziama-Mbaise and Ihiteafoukwu. Following the initial success, the Okwenaduru composed and sang a popular song thus *õEkwereazu melaanu nwa bekee, anyi emelala nke anyiõ* (Ekwereazu chase away the Whiteman, we have chased away those in our place). But on their second visit, the British defeated Umueze II and erected their symbol of authority, the British flag, to declare the place a British territory. The iron rod used to hoist the British flag was removed in 2004 when the Afor Oru road which passed through Orië Owerre was tarred.<sup>293</sup> However, with the introduction of the maxim guns, one would expect Umueze II like Agbaja to be utterly humiliated. From Umueze II, British troops moved inland to Umunakanu, Umuezeala and other villages. Aware of the fate of their brothers and neighbours, these villages surrendered to the British without a fight. The news of the British humiliation of Ehime, Etitì, and Agbaja close to their Mbaise neighbours spread into other areas. The British marched without restriction into Ugiri area. The Ugiri group of towns and their Inyishi, Amaimo-Ikeduru, Umudim and Atta faced similar subjugation. For instance, C.T.C Annalsøintelligence Report on Ugiri clan noted that

Oka people, like most Ugiri towns, drawing from their experience of what happened to other resisters like Ibeme, became afraid and simply surrendered their cap guns to the new government. The (British)

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<sup>292</sup> John, Columba, *õSome Aspects of Cultural and political History of Ehime up to the Colonial Periodõ*, B A. Project Department of History, 1986, p.35.

<sup>293</sup> Ogu Onyirimba, 76 years, retired teacher, interviewed at Umunkaro Umuduruegwelë Umueze II, Ehime Mbano, 23/8/ 2010

camped at Ochasi, going down the slope of Nkwoda (Nkwo Mbaa) stream, around 1906 and Oka was used as a spring-board from where other recalcitrant towns like Inyishi were brought to submission.<sup>294</sup>

Despite pockets of resistance, Mbanda and its neighbours were defeated by the British and brought under effective control.

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

### **Administrative Re-organisation and Infrastructure**

Before colonial rule, Mbanda and its neighbours conducted their political affairs in their various clans that constituted the then Mbanda clan groups. It was during colonial rule that these groups were balkanized into different political units. The British

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<sup>294</sup> C.T.C Annals, Intelligence Report on Ugiri Clan, Okigwe Division, 1932, Ep. 9394 CSE 1/85/4850, p.7, N. A. E

superimposed their administrative system on the people through the native court system. A.E Afigbo observed that the British saw the establishment of Native Courts as the logical follow-up to the annexation of any group whether by treaty or by conquest.<sup>295</sup> Consequently, a Native Court system was imposed on Igboland. However, British administrative officers and personnel were too few on the ground to administer the vast territories. It became necessary to utilize the services of indigenes in the new administration. The Supreme Court Proclamation Ordinance of 1900 (SCPO) and the Native Court and Native Councils Proclamation of 1903 (NCNCP) made provisions for Native Councils and Native Courts. Local agents were selected (often arbitrarily) to serve as members of Native Councils and Native Courts. Such members obtained official letters (warrants) from the High Commissioner or the Provincial Commissioner (after 1906), appointing them to their respective Native Councils and Native Courts. The recipients came to be known as Warrant Chiefs.<sup>296</sup>

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

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<sup>295</sup> A.E Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*, Nsukka: University Press Ltd, 1981, p. 315.

<sup>296</sup> See M.C Okanyi, *The Role of Customary Courts in Nigeria*, Enugu: Snaap Publishers Ltd., 1984, G.C. Eze, òA Political History of Nsukka, 1900-1960, ò B.A. Project, Department of History, U. N.N., 1995, I.R.A Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland...*, p.43

was also a multi-purpose governmental institution in the sense that it exercised judicial, legislative and executive powers.<sup>297</sup>

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

This new political unit differed significantly from the village-group which hitherto had been the highest administrative unit known to the people. Moreover, the traditional political institutions, as Elizabeth Isichei opined, were designed to obtain maximum participation by all the people in decision making with due right to wisdom and experience.<sup>298</sup> However, F. Obi has suggested that it was the imposing physical appearance of the so-called warrant chiefs that qualified and influenced choice of them over the natural rulers by the colonial rulers.<sup>299</sup> In fact, only few recognized traditional heads received warrants during the period, 1900-1929.

According to Afigbo, under the warrant chief system, men saw people who were neither title holders, nor heads of the secret societies, nor of age grades, nor heads of distinguished professional groups of hunters, traders or smiths attain power simply

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<sup>297</sup> Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand* . . . , 314

<sup>298</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1975, p.120

<sup>299</sup> Fabian, Obi interview cited in Ugo Columba, *Some Aspects of Cultural and Political History* p.37



because they enjoyed the confidence of the central government.<sup>300</sup> This arbitrary appointment without consultation with the people ōhook the old idea of political leadership based on gerontocracy, with most of the leaders being lineage heads.<sup>301</sup> Following the insensitivity of the British colonial officers to the prevailing political structure in the area, they created their new administrative system in Igboland. Mbano and its neighbours were victims of this ineptitude of British political construct.

As noted earlier, the British set up a station at Ikpa-Agbaja-Umuduru in 1906. Consequently, the first Native Court, designated as Umuduru Native Court (UNC), was established in 1906.<sup>302</sup> It was located at Umuduru, which they considered central for Osu, Mbama, Ugiri and Ehime and other constituent communities which the court was intended to serve. The court was established and it operated in consonance with the amended Native Court Proclamation of 1903, which later became known as the Native Court Ordinance of 1906.<sup>303</sup> The Native Court at Umuduru was the headquarters of the then Okigwe District. The court was attended by all the Warrant Chiefs of the integral towns. These, *inter-alia*, include Ehime, Ugiri, Osu, Mbama, Onicha Uboma, Isu, Obowo, Otanchara, Otanzu and Isukwuato.<sup>304</sup> However, in 1909, the headquarters of Okigwe Division was moved to Okigwe North from Umuduru,<sup>305</sup> apparently because of the prevalence of mosquitoes in Umuduru. Another factor could be the closeness of Okigwe to the major road that connected the area to Calabar route.

Afigbo discerned two methods adopted in the appointment of warrant chiefs in the

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<sup>300</sup> A. E. Afigbo, ōIndirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria: The Era of Warrant Chiefs 1871-1929ö, *Tarikh, Vol. 4 No. 4*, London: Longman, 1974, p.23.

<sup>301</sup> Afigbo, p.23

<sup>302</sup> C.T.C Annals, ōIntelligence Report on Ugiri Claní ,ö p.8

<sup>303</sup> H.U.B. Kagbaha, ōLocal Government at Orattaöí p.53

<sup>304</sup> C.T. Nwoko, ōThe Impact of Colonial Administration on the Traditional system of Governance in Igbo land: A case study of Isiala Mbanoö B.A. project, Department of History and International Studies Imo State University, 1994, pp.3032

<sup>305</sup> Talbot, *The People of Southern Nigeriaí* p.275

interior of Southern Nigeria. One was arbitrary appointment. Those so appointed had no backing of the people they represented. Such persons most probably had obtained their warrant to sit in the native courts from British political officers either because they assisted the British during the various expeditions, or because they were pushed forward by the traditional rulers who wanted to avoid the invaders. The second method was appointment of warrant holders after consultation with the people they were intended to represent in the courts. This category of warrant chiefs enjoyed the traditional right to rule their people.<sup>306</sup>

British appointments of warrant chiefs were by two processes between 1907 and 1930. The British Officer, A.E Heathcoat, who resided at Umuduru, appointed all his guards as headmen for their various communities to assist him with initial administration of the area. Njoku Nwokeiwu, who guided the British Officials in Ehime, became the warrant chief of Ehime clan. Likewise, Ihemeje of Umuebie became the warrant chief of Agbaja. Elsewhere, Agbugba Okereke became the warrant chief for Osu-ama because he prevented Anara people from engaging the invaders in battle during their expedition. Ukachu, who was part of the search team that led the punitive patrol to Ahiara to avenge the murder of Dr. Stewart, was appointed warrant chief for Osu Owerre. Duruagbazie was picked for Umunumu, while Onwudiwe Onumaku introduced by Njoku Nwokeiwu of Umuakagu became the warrant chief for Nsu group of villages.<sup>307</sup> At the time, the British Officials were still settled at Onu Oyibo.

C.T.C. Annalsø Intelligence Report stated that, õupon the establishment of Umuduru Native Court in 1906, there was need to constitute its membership with

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<sup>306</sup> Afigbo, õIndirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeriaí ,õpp.23-25

<sup>307</sup> S.N. Egerue, õMbano Under the Warrant Chiefs,õ B.A Project, Department of History and International Studies, U.N.N, 1984, p.9

dispatch in order to ensure a prompt take off. Without hesitation therefore, all the headman were designated warrant Chiefs.<sup>308</sup> Chief Agbugba Okereke of Anara was issued with a warrant certificate by Captain H.S. Burrough in 1911.<sup>309</sup> Between 1916 and 1917, many people including new headmen, were raised to the status of warrant chiefs. They include, among others, Chief Ekejiuba of Umuduru, Chief Ofoaro for Obiohuru, Chief Ibegbulam for Umuelemai, Chief Osunwa for Ezihe and Chief Njokuduruozo for Umualumaku. In 1919, at the end of the World War I, Chief Ohanyerem of Umueze, Chief Nwaeme of Okohia, and Chief Obiechefu of Mbeke received warrants as members of Native Court at Umuduru.<sup>310</sup> Other warrant chiefs include Chief Nwachukwu of Ezeoke Nsu, Chief Ike of Ugiri, and Chief Mbamara of Amaraku. Court clerks included, Mazi Unnoka, Thomas Ugoji from Umuelemai, and Adolphus Ebizie from Umuanunu Nsu (See table 3).<sup>311</sup>

**Table 3: Warrant chiefs in Mbano and their areas jurisdiction**

S/N	Villages	Warrants chiefs	Year	Areas of Jurisdiction
1.	Anara	Chief Agbugba Okere	1911	Umuduru Native Court
2.	Umuduru	Chief Ekejiuba	1916	Umuduru Native Court
3.	Obiohuru	Chief Ofoaro	1915	Umuduru Native Court
4.	Umuelemai	Chief Ibegbulam	1916	Umuduru Native Court
5.	Ezihie	Chief Osunwa	1916	Umuduru Native Court
6.	Umualumaku	Chief Njokuduruozo	1916	Ehime court

<sup>308</sup> C. T.C Annals, District officer, Okigwe Division, Annual Report. N.A.E. Ok/DIST. 3/1/189, p.17

<sup>309</sup> Mr. Fox-Strangeways, Intelligence report on Mbama Clan, Okigwe. Dist. Ep. 116 A 5/7/5803,p.27.

<sup>310</sup> S.N. Egerue, òMbano Under the Warrant Chiefs..ò 10-12.

<sup>311</sup> Gabriel Abanaonu interview cited in Cecilia Ugochi, Duru, òIntergroup Relations in Mbano from Earliest Times,ò B.A. Project, Department of History and International Studies, UNN, 1984, p.32.

7.	Umueze	Chief Ohanyerem	1919	Ehime court
8.	Okohia	Chief Nwaeme	1918	Ehime court
9.	Mbeke	Chief Obiechefu	1919	Umuduru Native Court
10.	Ezeoke/ Nsu	Chief Nwachukwu	1918	Ehime court
11.	Ugiri	Chief Ike	1919	Umuduru Native Court
12.	Amaraku	Chief Mbamara	1912	Umuduru Native Court

Warrant chiefs from Ugiri clan and Mbama attended court at Umuduru until 1932. Following Mr. Annals Intelligence Report on Ugiri clan, there was a meeting with the Ag. Resident of Owerri Province, Mr. K.A.B Cochrane, for discussions. Consequently, on September 19, 1932, the Native Court Warrant establishing Ugiri Native Court at Nkwo Mbaa was signed by the same Ag. Resident of Old Owerri Province, Mr. Kenneth Alexander Basil Cochrane.<sup>312</sup> It would be recalled that in 1912, Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard became the Governor-General of Nigeria. He was said to have viewed with contempt Macdonald, Moor and Egerton's political practices, whereby political officers sat as presidents of Native Courts. After a careful observation of the Native Court proceedings, Dr. J. Crawford Maxwell expressed the view that the District Commissioner was the court and the Native members were merely figure heads. He took evidence when he was present. He gave judgment without consulting the native members.<sup>313</sup>

He introduced a reform which removed the CDO from presiding over the proceedings in the native courts. Lugard recommended for the establishment of Native

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<sup>312</sup> C.O.B. Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan, 1900-1950*, Owerri; Luton Press Ltd., 1992, pp.9-10

<sup>313</sup> J. Crawford Maxwell, cited in F. Lugard, *Political Memoranda, Revision of Instruction to Political Officers on Subject Chiefly on Politics and Administration*, London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1970, p. 266.

Authorities and the imposition of direct taxation to boost the Native Authority Treasury. Lugard's desire was to apply to the Southern Provinces, the indirect rule system of administration already existent in the North. To implement this, the Native Court Ordinance of 1914, Native Revenue Ordinance 1914 and Native Authority Ordinance 1916 were introduced.<sup>314</sup> But the system was less successful than Lugard had envisaged. The Native Authority Ordinance (NAO) was designed to establish Native Authorities by appointing "traditional rulers" for communities as Native Authority.<sup>315</sup> Political participation at the time was to be limited to such rulers who wielded executive, legislative and judicial powers over all communities within their area of jurisdiction.<sup>316</sup>

Afigbo observed that as time went on, the warrant chiefs and the native court staff proved to be corrupt and oppressive.<sup>317</sup> By 1922, the administration had realized that all had not been well with the system under which they governed the people. In 1925, it was decided that direct taxation was to be imposed on all male adults. The colonial authorities had hoped that the process of assessing and collecting the tax would encourage the traditional leaders of the people to come forward and assert their authority.<sup>318</sup>

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

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<sup>314</sup>A.E. Afigbo, "Warrant Chief System in Eastern Nigeria". Ph.D thesis, Department of History, University of Ibadan, 1964, p.418

<sup>315</sup>S.O. Okafor, *Indirect Rule*, Lagos; Thomas Nelson, 1981, p. 61

<sup>316</sup> Okafor, p.62

<sup>317</sup> Afigbo, "Warrant Chiefs" p.320

<sup>318</sup> Afigbo, 321

same to the government.

The Native Authority Ordinance gave the chiefs the power to arrest without warrant any person who committed, or was charged with committing a breach of traditional or protectorate law.<sup>319</sup> Also, by the Roads and Creeks Proclamation of 1903 and 1925, the Chiefs were empowered to recruit able bodied men and women to clear roads, rivers and creeks.<sup>320</sup>

However, with time, the high handedness of the chiefs irritated the people, who felt the chiefs were exploiting them. The chiefs were said to have used their powers to encroach into people's farmlands. There were disturbances between some villages in Mbano and their neighbours. For instance, the Obollo Town Disturbances of 1926 between Umuoruoma and Umuozu villages, led to the deposition of Chief Ogoke. The matter was investigated and the culpable villages were fined. According to Bones Ojiah, from the findings of the investigation, Umuoruoma and Umuozu paid two different fines as contained in paragraph 5 vide Okigwe Treasury Receipt No. 35 (A240804) 90 1 of 30<sup>th</sup> October, 1926.<sup>321</sup>

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

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<sup>319</sup> Laws of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, Vol. II, 1908, p. 1277

<sup>320</sup> T.N. Tamunno, *The Evolution of Modern Nigeria State*, Essex: Longman Group Ltd., 1982, p.319.

<sup>321</sup> C.O. B. Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan*, ..p.51

amicably between Umunachi and Okwelle.<sup>322</sup> That singular action was said to have attracted the attention of the British officials who commended the wisdom of Chief Agbugba.

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

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

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<sup>322</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *Historical Events Lists of Local, Regional ad National Significance* , p.51

whether to join the rest of Oka their brothers in Ugiri. Igboejeshi had possibly thought that he would strengthen his position by going over to Okigwe. As an influential man, he was already in terms with most of *Ndi isi ala* in Ugiri, who had promised him their support. Igboejeshi attended most of the meetings held in Okigwe Division. Though Igboejeshi and the majority favoured Oka, the colonial officials grouped them under Ikeduru courts in Owerri Division.<sup>323</sup>

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

Following Okereke's answer, the DO of Owerri Division, Mr. K.A. B Cochrane, suggested that since Amaechi takes the first share in Okereke's quarter, Amaechi, not

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<sup>323</sup> Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan*, pp.35.36



Okereke, was the head of Atta town. Perhaps, Okereke realized that in Okigwe, the *Onye Isi Ala* always takes the first share and that Amaechi by Okigwe standards stood a better chance than him. But it did appear Amaechi was deficient because he had no significant influence at the time. Amaechi failed to express any strong opinion in the meeting held at Atta. Although he takes the first share in the town, Amaechi made no strong claim to the headship and had rather admitted that the man who was the senior *ozo* member was regarded as the senior man in the town. Besides, at the time, Atta's popularity with the Okigwe-Ugiri towns was shaky. Nevertheless, Ugiri still wanted Atta to join them as their brothers. But since the creation of Owerri-Okigwe boundary, Atta had been drawn into Owerri and Atta had put forward a counter-proposal for a separate native court comprising Atta, Umudim, Inyishi and Mbieri in Owerri Division.<sup>324</sup> Consequently, the Okigwe-Ugiri towns attended the Umuduru Native Court with the Osu, Isu, Mbama and Ehime clans. Umudim and Atta attended the Owerri Native Court at Ikeduru.<sup>325</sup> It was at this point that Atta and Umudim, who had hitherto been part of Ugiri town in Mbano, became neighbours having been grouped under Ikeduru in Owerri District since the colonial period.

This singular action exemplified the extent to which colonial administrative reorganization distorted the existing aspects of political and cultural grouping in the area. The new boundaries created by colonial administrators caused increased land disputes between communities. Atta and Umudim were said to have had disagreements with Umunkwo over boundaries because they were transferred to Ikeduru while Umunkwo remained in Mbama in Mbano. The activities of the warrant chiefs, who used their new

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<sup>324</sup> For this see C.T.C Annals, Intelligence Report on Ugiri Claní , pp.8-20, Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Claní* , pp.35-37.

<sup>325</sup>Ojiah, p.40

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

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

Court. Consequently, Uboma Native Court was built for Uboma people at Isinweke (See table 4).<sup>326</sup>

**Table 4: Towns grouped according to Native Court jurisdiction**

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

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

Just as the provinces did not correspond with  
linguistic or ethnic groups, the smaller sub-divisions  
did not correspond with clans. Each Division

<sup>326</sup> Geoffrey Ugwoegbu interview cited in Ugo, Columba, óSome Aspects of Cultural and Political History of Ehime up to the Colonial Periodöf , pp.39-40

comprised a large number of clans and most Native Courts served more than one clan. Thus Okigwe Native Court served the Otanchara, Otanzu, Isuochi, Nneato and Umuchieze clans.<sup>327</sup>

Audrey C.S Smoke also stated that Mbaise in Owerri Division was an artificial creation, going by the Native Authority formed in 1941.<sup>328</sup> The system saw the imposition of direct tax which only served the economic interest of the British and their hand-picked, corrupt and exploitative warrant chiefs who grew rich as they fed fat on their people. Afigbo observed that nearly every warrant chief of the time was guilty of corruption, extortion and oppression.<sup>329</sup> Isichei in the same vein writes that;

The chiefsí made much money by sending their subjects in great numbers to work for the whitemen on the roads and bridge constructionsí The chiefs were the worst set of people who defrauded the labourers from their wages and got supreme control over them. In this way and by slavery too X accumulated much wealth and became the greatest man who lived in those days. He had the most famous zinc house by then and could entertain all classes of big men with food, palm wine and some imported drinks. He married over forty wivesí <sup>330</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891-1929*, London: 1972, p. 202.

<sup>328</sup> Audrey C. Smock, *Ibo Politics: The Role of Ethnic Unions in Eastern Nigeria*, Cambridge: Mash, 1971, pp71-72

<sup>329</sup> A.E. Afigbo, òChief Igwegbe Odum: The Omenuko of Historyö, *Nigeria Magazine*, 90, 1960, p.228.

<sup>330</sup> òAba Commission of Inquiry Notes of Evidenceö, cited in Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977, 145-146.

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

The movement in the Division started about 9<sup>th</sup> December, but prior to that date, the women from Obowo and Umuduru Court areas appear to have been attending meetings in the Bende Division. They were, I think, first called in there when it was alleged that Chief Okugo (Bende Division) has stated that women were to be taxed.<sup>331</sup>

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

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

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<sup>331</sup> Memoranda from District Officer, Okigwe to the Resident, Owerri Province, N.A.E. OKDIST., 1/12, No. C. 122 /1929

had been before he obtained a warrant. I was, he replied, an ordinary young man.<sup>332</sup>

However, at the end of the women's rising, the effectiveness and activities of the warrant chief system was undermined. No new warrant chiefs were created after that, but the surviving ones were to remain and be absorbed into the new Native Administrative system.<sup>333</sup> The people selected their traditional rulers in the new system. In Mbano, some of the warrant chiefs became traditional rulers after the reorganization, while some lost their position. Some of the traditional rulers, who were selected by the people, were former warrant chiefs. For instance, Chief Agbugba Okereke became the traditional ruler of Anara in Osu-ama. I Obollo community, Edwin Mbeyi became the traditional ruler while Chief Ogoke was dropped. I.R.A Ozigbo correctly summarized the events of 1930-1950 on Native Authorities in Igboland thus, in effect, the 'traditional rulers' replaced the former warrant chiefs only in some localities where they were weak or totally unwanted by their people. In many places, the former warrant chiefs manipulated themselves back to power as traditional rulers. Many of the warrant chiefs lost their position. They resented the re-organisation which resulted in the diminution of the power.<sup>334</sup>

The system of choosing elders as councilors or court members was abandoned when youths were chosen to represent their people at the courts. Afigbo noted that this system was called the 'Best Man Policy', *Eze Oka-cha-nma* instituted in 1948. But in the late forties, the educated elite in Mbano and indeed Igboland saw the indirect rule

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<sup>332</sup> 'Aba Commission of Inquiry, Notes of Evidence', p.32, Para. 500, in E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* p.145.

<sup>333</sup> I.R.I Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland in the 20<sup>th</sup> century...*, p.56-57.

<sup>334</sup> Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland* p. 57.

system as òa special device for slowing down the political evolution of the African colonies.ö<sup>335</sup> In response to their demand, a simplified form of the British system of government through county and local councils was introduced throughout Igboland. The DO at Okigwe created the Mbano County council. In the new county council, members were elected and as a result of the innovation, in the political system, the Native Administrative System was abolished in Igboland. The Native Authority lasted till 1951, when the District Council, which succeeded it, took effect in Old Owerri Province including Mbano and its neighbours.

Besides the overbearing excesses of the warrant chiefs, the court clerks constituted another thorn in the people's flesh. The court clerks lived in the same vicinity with the DO at Umuduru. This gave the feeling among the chiefs that they were very important. They determined whether a case was criminal or civil and whether the accused was to be arrested and detained or not.<sup>336</sup> According to Afigbo in the period after 1914, there was hardly any Annual Report was complete without a reference to the menace of court clerks. In fact, the years from 1914 to about 1930 could be properly designated as the 'golden age' of court clerks in Eastern Nigeria, the era during which the clerk sitting at his table commanded and he was obeyed.<sup>337</sup> According to Emmanuel Onyenze, in the late 1920s one Daniel Okorie, a court clerk in Ugiri Native Court, was dismissed for malpractices. He was replaced by Jupurueze.<sup>338</sup> Similarly, one Mr. Ukanwa, a court clerk at Umuduru Native Court, was on several occasions warned and even punished for exercising powers considered extraneous to his office. Chief Ehirim, a

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<sup>335</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture...*, p.323.

<sup>336</sup> Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs...*, p.241.

<sup>337</sup> Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs*, p.225.

<sup>338</sup> Emmanuel Onyenze, c.79 years Judicial Secretary, interview at Umukam Obollo-Ugiri, 20/01/2011.

former court clerk confirmed that there was widespread evidence of corruption against court clerks, in Mbano after 1914. In his words, "the situation became worse because even where one wanted to steer clear of the trend, litigants lured one into it by their material gifts and persuasion."<sup>339</sup> From the foregoing, it seems that most of the court clerks at the time lacked integrity. Due to their greed, they easily gave in to corruption.

It is instructive that though the Umuduru Native Court was fully operational, in parts of Ugiri, Osu, Mbama and Ehime, the traditional patriarchal system was still practiced, especially in places where the appointments of Warrant Chiefs were controversial or not made in consultation with the indigenes. Afigbo also alluded to this when he stated, "these institutions continued to operate in some form in those areas of the people's life outside the gaze of the colonial authority."<sup>340</sup> But with the local council reforms of the 1930s the British Officials had consolidated their administration of Mbano local affairs as in other Igbo areas till 1951 when the idea of Native Administration was abandoned.

Apart from Chieftaincy Reform of 1932, there was another reform in 1946 which embraced all the clans in the then Otanzu-Otanchara in Okigwe Division of Owerri Province. In some parts of Mbano, for instance in Ugiri and Ehime clans, the reform affected most Warrant Chiefs. It was said that the colonial government put up some sort of advertisement, inviting applications from eligible candidates. Many people applied, including the traditional rulers and town heads. Out of the 84 applicants, only 23 of them were selected (see table 5).<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>339</sup>A.O. Ebirim, 81years, former council treasurer, interviewed at Umuelemai, 03/08/2011

<sup>340</sup>Afigbo, *Ropes of Sandí* p.349

<sup>341</sup> Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Claní* p.117



**Table 5: Selected Members of Ugiri Native Court in 1946**

		Name of Candidate Selected
SN	Villages	1946
1	Umuneke	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Daniel Egwim</li><li>2. Obialor Ike</li><li>3. Stephen Ike</li><li>4. Duru Anyanwu</li><li>5. Peter Ejionwu</li></ol>
2	Ogbor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. John Onweni (later traditional ruler)</li><li>2. Thomas Agunanne</li><li>3. Joseph Egbuziem</li><li>4. Njoku Duruoha</li><li>5. Mr. Enwerem</li></ol>
3	Ugiri	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Dennis Ekeanyanwu</li><li>2. Mr. Durumbaa</li></ol>
4	Obollo	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Timothy Onyelike</li><li>2. Julius Ogoke</li><li>3. Mbeyi Ndukwe (later the traditional rulers)</li><li>4. Michael Mbalisi</li><li>5. Josiah Ejiogu.</li><li>6. Samuel Adim</li><li>7. Christopher Nwachukwu.</li></ol>
5	Oka	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Azubuike Akudorobi</li></ol>

6	Ibeme	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. James Ijezie</li> <li>2. Stephen Igwe</li> <li>3. Christopher Ohiaeriaku.<sup>342</sup></li> </ol>
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**Source:** Bones Ojiah, Early History of Ugiri Clan 1900-1950, 117-118

Representatives from Osu, Ugiri, Mbama and Ehime were elected to constitute the new Mbano County Council. The Native Authority was one bold attempt to revive the people's traditional system of government and administration by a council whose members, mostly elders and titled men, were the true delegates of the different lineage segments. It has to be added however, that although oppressive corrupt practices and abuse of power characterized the warrant chief system, the warrant chiefs were not altogether a total failure. Among Mbano and its neighbours, they made modernization efforts which have not always been appreciated. They were at least instrumental to laying the foundation of modern infrastructure in the area and Igboland in general. By so doing as Afigbo pointed out, they engaged in petty blackmail, which tended to clash with the traditional customs and laws,<sup>343</sup> a situation that affected relations between people and communities.

Expectedly, the new political development had some implications for inter-group relations between Mbano and its neighbours. First, the known Mbasaa traditional political unit, which formed the nucleus of communal interactions, was disintegrated. The usual converging and interactions of people from different clans to discuss issues of common interest disappeared. The new native court and warrant chief system, usurped the processes of administration known to the people. New administrative headquarters were

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<sup>342</sup> Ojiah, pp.117-118

<sup>343</sup> Afigbo, Warrant Chiefsí p.373

created to administer the area without the consent of the people, a situation that caused disturbances between people and communities. The boundaries brought by the reorganisations, created conflict in the form of relationships between Mbanjo communities and their neighbours. This stemmed from the fact that in the pre-colonial days, positions of responsibility were followed by duties and expectations which commanded popular support and respect. When these duties and obligations were not met, they attracted popular disapproval and sanctions. These warrant chiefs called out villagers for purposes of building and maintaining roads through forced labour. The new situation was against the culture of communalism and village democracy known to the people.

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

In the new administration, land disputes were settled at the native courts and the litigants often sent gifts of yam and goats as a form of inducement to influence their cases. At their homes, some of these chiefs held private courts where they settled civil cases, land disputes, kidnapping and even murder cases. Their powers were more than ever feared. As Afigbo observed, the duties of these warrant chiefs were incompatible

with their traditional status.<sup>344</sup> The very fact that they had British authority with the police and the army behind them, made them to coerce their fellow men without traditional reprisals. This harsh method of governance was new to the people, and led to violent resistance against oppressive warrant chiefs.

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

### **Road Transportation**

One important aspect of infrastructure that helped quicken socio- cultural, and economic relations was the revolution in road transportation and communication. This had direct impact on trade and the movement of people. Prior to the colonial times, the major means of transportation was on foot. People had to trek to very distant places to carry out their socio-political and economic activities. There was no motor transport in Mbano until about the 1930s. Movement of goods and services was by human portage.

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<sup>344</sup> Afigbo, 70

Human portage was, as O.N. Njoku posited, òthe least efficient and most expensive mode of transportation. It was also hazardous.ö<sup>345</sup> The introduction of motor transport system during the colonial era reduced trekking and human portage considerably. The use of trucks to convey goods started and increased significantly over time.

Before the introduction of motor transport system in Mbanò and its neighbouring towns, bicycles were largely used to transport goods from one destination to another. Mbanò people and those from Inyishi, Mbaìse, Ogwa and Okwelle used bicycles to travel to Umuahia, Obowo, Okigwe, Uburu, Uzuakoli, and Ikwere to buy and sell goods. There were no motor roads at the time. The roads were opened later by the colonial officials and the native administrators. They brought lorries that came through Umuahia, Owerri, Port-Harcourt and Okigwe into Mbanò to carry palm oil and kernel to the railway station at Umuahia. The use of these roads helped reduce the burden of trekking long distances with heavy loads.<sup>346</sup>

It is instructive that the early British administrators in Mbanò encouraged the construction of motorable roads. Arguably, the roads provided for easy access to agricultural produce from the area, and to move them to the coast for export to Europe. Ukwu I. Ukwu noted that from the 1930s roads and bridges were constructed which cut across Igboland, linking the different communities and clans together.<sup>347</sup>

The first major road that ran through Mbanò was the Umuahia-Etiti to Nsu-Umuezeala-Umuelemai -Mbanò headquarters. From the headquarters the road moved to Umuduru through Mbeke to Anara in Osu connecting the Oriè Amaraku market and from

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<sup>345</sup>O.N. Njoku, *Economic History of Nigeria, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Enugu: Magnet Business Enterprises, 2001, p.104.

<sup>346</sup>Chief L.E Opara, c.80 years, retired civil servant, interviewed Umueze I, Ehime Mbanò, 21/02/2011.

<sup>347</sup>Ukwu .I. Ukwu, òThe Development of Trade and Marketing in Igboland,ö J.H.S.N. Vol. 3 No. 4, 1967, p.660.

there through Eke Atta in Ikeduru to Owerri. Another road ran from Anara, Eke Ego market in Okwelle to Okigwe. There was also the Amaraku-Agbaja-Nkwerre-Orlu road.<sup>348</sup> Apart from these major trunk roads, there were other minor roads connected to different bush paths and village markets that were widened. These include the Umunumo-Nzerem, Nsu and Onicha Uboma in Etit. Others moved from Umuelemai through Umueze to Obollo, connecting Ogbor-Ibeme-Oka Amaimo and Inyishi into Ikeduru. There was the Obollo-Ugiri-Amaraku road which extended to Amuzari. Another road also connected Obollo to Umueze II-to Eziana and IHITEAFOUKWU in Ekwereazu Mbaise. These roads served as links connecting Mbano communities with their neighbours.<sup>349</sup> Many of these roads were expanded later in the 1940s and 1950s. The use of bicycles for transporting goods by many Mbano traders lasted beyond 1960. But with the construction of more roads, a number of vehicles moved into the interior parts of Mbano. Two lorries nick named *õUgbo Nkwerreõ* and *õMbano Go Townõ*, respectively, were among the first that came into the area to evacuate palm oil and kernel. These lorries visited twice in a fortnight or even in a month to carry produce.<sup>350</sup>

The new transportation system became *desideratum* for the improvement in movement, communication and the development of trade and markets. It enhanced mobility among the people and quickened their movement beyond Igboland. A.G. Hopkins argues that transport development enables man to harness existing and new resources and to release labour and capital previously tied up in less productive enterprise or isolated by distance.<sup>351</sup> This perspective supports Lord Lugard's view that the

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<sup>348</sup> Lazarus Nwabugo. C. 95 years, farmer/trader, interview at Amaraku, 11/02/2011.

<sup>349</sup> C.N. Mbalisi, *õChange and Continuity in Isiala Mbano, An Igbo Society, 1906-2007õ* M.A. Dissertation, Department of History and International Studies, U.N.N 2008, pp.71-72.

<sup>350</sup> Lazarus Nwabugo interview cited

<sup>351</sup> See. A.G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, London: Macmillan, 1975, pp.192-193.

material development of Africa may be summed up in one word-transport.<sup>352</sup> More roads were built and expanded in Mbano communities, linking them with their neighbours. Interaction and movement between people from different communities became faster. Trade and other economic and social activities improved. There was some sort of transformation in the movement of goods and services in and out of the area. The people's ways of life began tilting towards the Western innovations introduced by the colonial people. New articles of trade and materials reached the interior through the new roads. The network of roads and trade routes allowed for easy movement of people. The distances between various towns and villages which they linked were easily bridged. For instance, trade and movement from Mbano to Owerri, Okigwe, Oru, Umuahia and Ikwere or Igirinta speeded up.

Furthermore, the use of lorries increased the safety of travelers and traders for these roads were said to be frequently patrolled by the police and army. Afigbo pointed out that the margin of safety increased as the colonial regime got more deeply entrenched.<sup>353</sup> The improvement in safety had massive consequences on trade; it increased the flow of trade from the interior areas of surplus production to areas of want. The articles newly introduced by the British included cosmetics, clothes, stock-fish, soap, enamel wares, drinks, and knives. However, the new development undermined the activities of traditional long distance specialist traders such as blacksmiths, potters, and weavers that used to trek together with their products. The long distances covered by traders reduced because more local markets were improved upon, for instance, Eke Atta, Orié Agu, Nkwo Umuezeala, Eke Mbeke, Nkwo Imo in Amaimo, Eke Ego in Okwelle,

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<sup>352</sup>F.D. Lugard, 'The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa'. In G.O. Ogunremi and E.K. Faluyi (eds.), *An Economic History of West Africa Since 1750*, Lagos: First Academic Publishers, 2005, p.151.

<sup>353</sup> Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand...*

and Orié Amaraku markets among others. Most of these markets are located along the new motor ways. The foreign or imported goods challenged the locally made ones in these markets. The impact of the new roads on inter-group relations was quite palpable.

These new roads brought about faster movements and greater interactions. People were able to get in contact with friends and relations, which was difficult because of the distance to be trekked. Traders from different communities were able to bring their goods to markets in Mbano and in return bought from the people. New contacts were made and new relationships established. These new contacts helped to expand and enhance relations between Mbano people, their neighbours and people from other Igbo communities. These markets served as a melting pot for all forms of socio-cultural interactions. Besides, the development and enlargement of markets brought people from far and near to live closely together. People from different cultural background came to trade with Mbano. Some settled in communities in the area and became integrated into the society. For instance, Lazarus Nwabugo said people from neighbouring Mbaise built abattoir houses and settled in the communities to do their businesses in the Orié Amaraku, Afor Ibeme, Nkwo Obollo, Afor Ibeme and Eke Atta markets. The many agricultural products like yam, palm oil and kernel and crafts like brooms, baskets, and pottery products by farmers and craftsmen were easily moved from one market to the other. The farmers and craftsmen had customers who were in constant contact to buy their produce and wares from them. Such trade activities brought people from different communities together. Movement of people from parts of Mbano, like Ugiri, Osu and Mbama to Mbaise and/or Okwelle, helped enhance relations because those that could not have done so previously, were able to do so. People interacted as they bargained over the



prices of goods<sup>354</sup>. However, the usual mutual relations that existed between long distance traders as they trekked along trade routes with their neighbours disappeared. In their place, were found new individual business peoples driven by capitalist tendencies of profit maximization.

In spite of the type relations between the people under the new system brought by colonial systems, the people's claim to common ancestry and numerous cultural festivals, helped ensure mutual relations. Improved transportation helped more people to attend cultural celebrations like new yam festival, *okoroha*, *iwa akwa* ceremonies in distant communities. These cultural ceremonies were avenues of contact and interaction between people from different communities and those of their neighbours. The establishment of colonial infrastructure affected positively, inter-group relations between Mbano and its neighbours. People came into constant contact as their movements in and out of the markets located in different communities were made easier. As these movements became easier, meeting people, making new friends and building relationships improved. The impact resulting from the new systems notwithstanding, interactions remained mutual and improved continuously.

### **Christianity and Western Education**

Freed slaves were instrumental to bringing Christianity and its spread in West Africa and Igboland in particular. Edmund Ilogu provided in some details, the arrival of Christianity in Igboland and its subsequent spread to the interior thus

The definitive date was 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1857, when an agreement was finally executed between a missionary group led by Samuel Crowther, and Obi

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<sup>354</sup>Lazarus Nwabugo interview cited.

Akenzua of Onitsha and his councilors to establish a Christian mission at Onitsha, an Igbo town on the eastern bank of the river Niger.<sup>355</sup>

From Onitsha, Christianity spread further into the Igbo hinterland. Hence, Onitsha has the pride of place in becoming the place of active beginning of the evangelization of Igboland. Before the arrival of Christianity, the Igbo interior was said to be under the grip of Aro and Nri religious and commercial influence. However, Christianity found its route to Owerri and closer to Mbano, Ikeduru and other towns around the area. The way to Owerri was opened during the Aro expedition of 1901-1902, when Owerri was used as the garrison of the colonial army. It was from Owerri that the first column of the Nigerian regiment proceeded to Bende from where Arochukwu was attacked and the *Long Juju* destroyed. Between 1902 and 1905, most towns in Owerri District (Old Owerri Province) were conquered and the rulers, the slave chiefs, subdued and brought under colonial rule.<sup>356</sup> The colonial government had ordered that slaves held at Arochukwu be released. It was most probably at that point, the ex-slave woman, Nwanmgorie, who first brought Christianity into Mbano at Ezeoke was freed.

But before Christianity came to Mbano early in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, between about 1912 and 1913, the pioneer missionaries, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) at Onitsha, had been in search of a more possible center for mission work in Owerri District. According to A. O. Iwuagwu, the Archbishop of Owerri ecclesiastical Province, in 1904, Leslie Probyn, suggested to Tugwel, the Bishop of Western

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<sup>355</sup>For details, see Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture: A Study of the Interaction of Christianity and Igbo Culture*. Onitsha: University Publishing Company, 1974, pp.148-149

<sup>356</sup> A.O. Iwuagwu, *The foundation of the Anglican Church in Imo State, Nigeria, 1905-2000*, Aba: Nwamara Publishers Ltd. 2002, pp.8-9.

Equatorial Africa, in charge of Yoruba Mission and Niger Mission, that Owerri might prove a possible center for mission work in the District. Leslie informed the Bishop that the purest Igbo language was probably spoken in Owerri Isuama area. After the initial hesitation, Archdeacon Dennis and an Igbo catechist, A.C. Onyeabo, visited Owerri in April 1905 through Oguta. On arrival, the missionaries were received by Harold M. Douglas, the District Commissioner at Owerri. The arrival of the C.M.S in Owerri marked a change in the general pattern of missionary enterprise in Igboland. After a long period of search for a suitable town in Owerri, Archdeacon Dennis preferred Egbu close to Owerri. The movement of the C.M.S to Egbu was facilitated by the decision of Eze Njemanze and his cabinet.<sup>357</sup> It was from Egbu that the missionaries spread to other towns within Owerri Province including some parts of Okigwe District.

Christian missionaries first visited Mbano area early in 1910, but they were unable to establish a church. A. O. Iwuagwu states that òat Anara, the gospel came to Umuokpukpara, now Ezihe as early as 1910 when Rev. Payne and Jeremiah Nkparu of Nnewi visited the town. The church was not allowed to stay because the visit was not initiated by Chief Osunwa. For this reason quarrel ensued between Osunwa and Ekpemandu who brought the earlier church.<sup>358</sup> A second attempt at establishing Christianity in Mbano through Anara also failed. Bishop Iwuagwu writes that, the African Church was brought from Kalabari to Anara in 1912 by Anara indigenes. But that church was not allowed to survive because Chief Agbugba and his people (Chiefs) did not welcome it. The early converts were imprisoned by Agbugba because they were alleged not to have respected the traditions of the land. They were accused of breach of

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<sup>357</sup> Iwuagwu, *The Foundation of the Anglican Church*, 1 pp.9-10

<sup>358</sup> Iwuagwu, *The Foundation of the Anglican Church*, ... p.104

peace because they preached about a new God. But the warning from the British Resident at Calabar and the fear of losing the church and his Warrant compelled Chief Agbugba to restore the church.<sup>359</sup> It seemed that the warning by the British Resident at Calabar influenced the establishment of the C.M.S at Ezeoke and from where Christianity began its spread in the area.

The formal establishment of Christianity in Mbano began with the story of an ex-slave woman by name Nwanmgborie Iwundu of Ezeoke. She returned from Arochukwu in 1912, and lived with her sister Munonye, the wife of Chief Nwachukwu Nwadigo. She had been sold to Obinkita in Arochukwu; was liberated by the Church of Scottish Mission and was converted a Christian. Enchanted by the Christian message and promises of eternal life, peace and education and fame, she was inclined to bring the same good news to her own people back home at Ezeoke.<sup>360</sup> Nwanmgborie was said to have converted her family and sister Munonye. Munonye had informed her husband that his throne could be better boosted by his embracing the new religion called Christianity with its blessings and promises.<sup>361</sup> Chief Nwachukwu showed keen interest. He agreed and arranged with his people to send his first son, Daniel Nwachukwu and some young men to Arochukwu to ask for a church. He was encouraged by Ambrose, the District Officer at Okigwe. Bishop Iwuagwu stated that

After collecting £12 (twelve pounds), the young Daniel Nwachukwu and Nwanmgborie, led a delegation to Arochukwu, for his mission. There,

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<sup>359</sup>Iwuagwu, *The Foundation of the Anglican Church*,... p.103

<sup>360</sup>I.D.E Anyadike, *The Advent of Christianity in Igbo Heartland* in church of Nigeria Silver Jubilee Commemorative Album 2004 Edition, Owerri Ecclesiastical Province, pp.13

<sup>361</sup>Anyadike, p.87

they met a Presbyterian minister, Rev. Richardson, who re-directed them to Rev. A.C. Onyeabo at Egbu near Owerri with a letter. Daniel Nwachukwu and his group returned and planned to go to Egbu, but were duped by a man who claimed to be a church teacher. The man promised to lead them to Egbu, but after he received the money, he was not seen again.<sup>362</sup>

As a result of the burning desire of the Chief and his people, a fresh collection was made and a delegation was sent to Egbu. While at Egbu, Rev. A. C. Onyeabo directed them to Ozala C.M.S. headquarters in Onitsha for a teacher. The journey was made and on August 13, 1913, they returned with Joseph Chiejina as their first church teacher.<sup>363</sup> The church was St. Paul's Ezeoke.

St. Paul's Ezeoke developed rapidly and became the mother church of converts for many churches in Mbano, Etiti and Ekwereazu. From Ezeoke, the C.M.S. spread to Ikperejere, Lowa, Onicha Uboma, Umuowa and Umunakanu in 1916; Agbaja, 1916; Umuezeala Nsu, 1917; Nzerem, 1918; Umunachi-Onicha, 1921; Umunumo, 1924; Umueze II, 1918; Umualumaku; 1937, Umuopara-Owerre 1942, and Umuopara Nsu, 1970.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Iwuagwu, *The Foundation of the Anglican Church, ...* p.87

<sup>363</sup> Iwuagwu, p.87

<sup>364</sup> Iwuagwu, p.87



Picture 1. Old building of St. Paul's Church Ezeoke, Ezeoke, now the first Anglican church built in Mbano in 1914  
 Picture 2. The new St. Paul's Cathedral Church the Headquarters of Okigwe South Diocese

However, the Ezeoke experience did encourage chiefs from other Mbano towns, to bring Christianity into their communities. The situation was such that the conversion of a chief in some cases ensured the chief would retain his warrant. Hence, chiefs began inviting the missionaries into their communities. For instance, in 1912, Chief Agbugba of Anara in Osu-ama clan applied for the C.M.S via Rev. A.C. Onyeabo of Egbu. It was granted with Emanuel Chikwendu as the first church teacher. In 1915, with the visit of Rev. Payne to Oka Ugiri, a young *juju* priest ó Mazi Onuegbu Onwuka, became converted to Christianity, and was named Samuel Onwuka. Rev. Payne, Spencer and other mission teachers had visited Oka in 1911.

In Oka, initial efforts made to bring Christianity was said to have failed because, the people opposed the missionaries. Mazi Azubuike, the community leader of Oka, was

compelled to ask for a church teacher. It was the second visit by Rev. Payne in 1915 to Oka, that the St. Stephen's Church was established with a school. The colonial government disarmed Oka as they did to Atta and other places.

During the initial persecution of the early converts, the church teacher's property was destroyed and some converts were imprisoned for taking the chief's subjects to church. One of the converts named Edenji died in prison at Okigwe. For that reason, Chief Azubuike's warrant was suspended for three years. From Oka the C.M.S evangelization was extended to Umuoziri Inyishi, Obollo, Ugiri, Ogbor, Umuneke, Ibeme and other surrounding towns (See table 6).<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>365</sup>Iwuagwu, pp.96-97

**Table 6: Churches established in Mbano and neighbouring towns, 1915-1926**

S/N	Villages	Name of church and year
1	Oka	St. Stephenø 1915
2	Anara	St. Andrewø, 1915
3	Umunkwo	St. Stephenø, 1915
4	Okwelle	St. Andrewø, 1915
5	Ezihe	Christ Church, 1916
6	Obollo	St. Paulø (later Holy Trinity Church), 1916
7	Umuneke	Emmanuel Anglican Church, 1916
8	Umuihim-Etiti	St. Cyprianø, 1916/1920
9	Umuawuchi	St. Paulø, 1916
10	Amaraku	St. Peterø, 1917
11	Amuzari	St. Johnø, 1917
12	Okohia-osu	St. Michaelø, 1917
13	Umueze	St. Jamesø 1917
14	Umuduru	St Johnø, 1918
15	Ihiteafoukwu	St. Jamesø, 1918
16	Ezumoha	C.M.S, 1918
17	Eziama	St Michaelø, 1919
18	Umukabia	St, Philipø, 1919
19	Ibeme	St. Maryø, 1926



These churches were located within Mbano, Ekwereazu, Ihite Uboma Okwelle and Etit.

Within the Ikeduru axis, a number of churches were established through Egbu. A similar scenario in terms of resistance and conflict situations played out. Christianity reached Amawo-Atta in Ikeduru in 1911. At the time also, two Ikeduru chiefs namely Chief Nwigwe of Umuhu Atta and Chief Njoku Nwanshi of Akabo had been oppressing their people. As the news about happenings in neighbouring communities reached the Amawo youths (age-grade), they invited the C.M.S church to Atta. The C.M.S was at the time described as òEgbe Adaö (or the church that stops shooting war). Some persons from Amawo-Atta had visited Abazu where they met with the foreign missionary, Mrs. Hensley, sister of Archdeacon Dennis. Atta people were impressed by the preaching of the mission, the education which Abazu converts received at the time, and the peace the presence of the C.M.S brought to neighbouring Ogwa community. The Amawo elders therefore approached Chief Esiemeje of Abazu, who connected them with Chief Oparaeke of Abazu Mbieri. Oparaeke willingly accompanied Amawo elders to Egbu where they met with Rev. Brown. Following the request by Amawo people, Jacob Opara was posted to St. Mathews Amawo Atta, in 1911 as their first church teacher. Christianity at Atta at its early stage faced some difficult times because Chief Nwigwe Mbachu, of Umuhu Atta made life miserable for the new converts. He opposed the Christian religion because of its attack on traditional religion. He punished early converts such as Mr. Azubuike, Mr. Nwoleke, Mr. Iwuchukwu, Mr. Abunachu and Mr. Ezete. Chief Nwigwe also subjected others to all sorts of hard tasks. Mr. Nwoleke and Iwuchukwu had died in the prison. In spite of persecutions, converts at Atta and its environs continued to practice their newly introduced Christian religion. From Amawo, the church spread to Umuhu,

Umuafa, Ikembara, Inyishi, Iho, Amaimo, Umuri Umunkwo and other towns. However, with time Atta produced the first indigenous Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of Owerri- His Lordship Bishop Nwankiti.<sup>366</sup>

The following churches were established in the Ikeduru during the period 1911-1921, (see table 7)

**Table 7**

S/N	Villages	Name of Churches and Years of establishment
1.	Amawo óAtta	St. Matthewø 1911
2.	Owu-Amakohia	St Johnø, 1912
3.	Umuoti Inyishi	St. Andrewø, 1914
4.	Uzoagba	St. Andrewø, 1914
5.	Iho Dimeze	Holy Trinity 1916
6.	Umuoziri	St. Peterø, 1916
7.	Ugirike	St. Simonø, 1916
8.	Akabo	St. Andrewø, 1916
9.	Amacke Inyishi	St. Stephenø, 1917
10.	Ikembara	St. Philipø 1917
11.	Amaimo	St. James and Emmanuel Church, 1917
12.	Umuafa-Atta	St. Paulø, 1918
13.	Umuhu- Atta	St. Jude, 1918
14.	Umuri	St. Johnø 1921

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<sup>366</sup>Iwuagwu, pp.59-60

The fast spread of churches in Mbanjo and its neighbours, especially between 1914 and 1919, during the World War 1 years, was, as Nwadike contends, attributed to an overzealous court clerk, Stephen Oranye. He worked with Mr. C.A.B. Cochrane, the District Officer in Okigwe Division. Oranye arbitrarily announced to the Chiefs of Okigwe that any of them who failed to establish a church in his area of jurisdiction ran the risk of losing his warrant. This triggered an unprecedented enthusiasm as the chiefs went all out and brought Christianity into all communities within Mbanjo territories, Ikeduru, Etiti and Ekwereazu.<sup>367</sup>

These early churches were mainly built with red mud and thatch. Some chiefs' houses were used as churches until their community was able to erect one. For instance, in Ugiri clan of Mbanjo, in 1917, the Roman Catholic Mission (R.C.M) on its arrival was the first to establish in Umuebie Quarter of Ugiri town within the compound of Chief Duruokwara. The church was attended by all and sundry who professed the Roman Catholic doctrine within and around Ugiri clan.<sup>368</sup>

The establishment of Christianity, as noted earlier, was not without resistance. Resistance in Mbanjo came mainly in respect to the provision of land for the citing of church buildings. It also took the form of individual communities resisting attending churches in the houses of chiefs. The R.C.M. at Umuopara Ugiri was one such example. Bones Ojiah writes that:

Early in 1926, the young Catholics of Umuopara Ugiri described as the 'The Boys' felt that the distance they were covering to attend church

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<sup>367</sup>Anyadike in 'The Advent of Christianity in Igbo Heartland', p.13.

<sup>368</sup>C.O. Bones, Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan...*, p.59.

services, masses and other committed activities was not conducive to their health, especially, during rainy season. Of course this situation coupled with non-availability of enough space to accommodate them in the church hall triggered off crisis between The Boys and Chief Duruokwara. Eventually, the church building was demolished and later, another new church building was set up at Nkwo Mbaa.<sup>369</sup>

The coming of the church in some communities created conflict situations which impacted on inter-group relations. There was a clash between the new religion and traditional religion, custom and cultural festivals, values and societal norms.

The years 1920-1960 witnessed the establishment of mainly the C.M.S. and R.C.M and other denominations in almost all communities in Mbandaka and those of the neighbouring communities. Each community had its own church, but was grouped under different parishes and dioceses. The impact of Christianity on inter-group relations was largely felt through various church activities such as youth programmes, conferences, and anniversary celebrations, among many others. Through these activities, people from different communities, who attended such programmes, came into contact. It was indeed, an avenue for interaction between people. Such interactions helped build relations among individuals and communities over time. It is also instructive, that, the missionaries, alongside the churches, introduced Western education. One of the most revolutionary

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<sup>369</sup> Ojiah. p.59

influences operative in Nigeria since the beginning of the European intrusion has been Western education.<sup>370</sup>

From the very beginning, Western education was a virtual monopoly of the Christian missions. A.V. Murray, observes that,

To all intents and purposes, the school is the church.

Right away in the bush or in the forest, the two are

one, and the village teacher is also the village

evangelist. An appreciation of this fact is cardinal in

all considerations of African education.<sup>371</sup>

Ozigbo correctly stated that Europe or the Christian missions did not bring the concept and practice of education to Igboland. The Igbo had their traditional system of education. What the Europeans brought was the Western type of education.<sup>372</sup>

He further explained that, long before 1858 in Igboland, traditional system of education was largely informal, in that it had neither fixed venues (schools) for its practice nor professional teachers or graded durations (classes 1,2,3,etc; years 1,2,3 or intervals of rest/ holiday). It was also non-literate in that, it did not utilize reading of books or writing. It transmitted knowledge and skills orally through parents and adults, relations and acquaintances to the young, adolescents and adults. The teaching profession in Igboland, he stated, was an adjunct of school education which had spread from Onitsha to other Igbo areas through the agencies of the CMS and the RCM especially. Schools

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<sup>370</sup>The concept 'Western Education' (as distinguished from Traditional African Education) is employed herein to refer to formal and systematic instruction in subjects characteristics of the curricula used in western countries (reading, writing and arithmetic as core subjects, to which are added courses in the Humanities, Arts and Science). This system of instruction was designed to standardize the training of young people not only in the values of modern industrialized and necessary skills for meaningful participation in that society.

<sup>371</sup> A. Victor Murray, *The School in the Bush*, London: Penguin Books, 1929, p.65

<sup>372</sup> R.I. Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland*, p.119

spread to Igbo areas like Awka, Udi, Nsukka, Abakaliki, Owerri, Orlu, Aba and Okigwe, etc<sup>373</sup>. Education was under the direct control of missionaries. As late as 1942 they controlled 99 percent of the schools and more than 97 percent of the students in Nigeria were enrolled in mission schools. By 1945, there were comparatively few literate Nigerians who had not received all or part of their education in mission schools.<sup>374</sup>

The first school built in Mbandaka was St. Paul's Mission Schools, Osu (later Osu Central School), built by the C.M.S about 1914/15. Pupils attended the school from different communities in Mbandaka, such as Obollo, Ogbor, Amaraku, Mbeke, Umunkwo, Oka, Amuzari and Okwelle in Onuimo etc. Many people trekked to St. Paul's Osu due to the perceived dividends of being educated as in colonial Nigeria. The expected dividends encouraged other communities to establish schools. The communities contributed both in human and material resources for the purpose. By 1930, for instance, the six towns in Ugiri clan -Ugirinna, Obollo, Umuneke, Ogbor, Oka, and Ibeme- had an elementary school each under the management of the Nsu parish priest, Rev. Father Howell.<sup>375</sup> The schools were built by the communities. In 1933 and 1942, Rev Fr. Howell who managed the six R.C.M. schools transferred the Central School at Ibeme to what was considered a more central place, that is, at Umuebie Ugiri (a village in Ugiri town) where they got a communal virgin land. The land was regarded as *ajo ohia*, evil forest. The Catholic Christians of Ugiri cleared the area for the transfer of the Central school at Ibeme. The school was established at its present location as St. Michael's Central School Ugiri at Umuebie.

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<sup>373</sup> Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland*, 1 pp. 119-120

<sup>374</sup> For details see, *Ten Year Educational Plan*, Nigerian Session Paper No. 6./1944, p.13

<sup>375</sup> Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan* p.119

The relocation of the school to Umuebie was strongly opposed by Ibeme people. However, the efforts to retain the school at its earlier site proved abortive. In a swift reaction to the re-location, Ibeme people approached one Mr. Port-Johnson at Port-Harcourt, who promised to establish a branch of his Enitonia School at Ibeme. Consequently, on February 28, 1944, it had the traditional ruler of Ibeme, Chief/Eze Christopher Ohiaeriaku Okorie, Isiala<sup>11</sup> of Ibeme as its manager; Chief Stephen Ihekaire, as its proprietor and Mr. Jonah Ngigia, a native of Tombia in River State, as its first headmaster. In 1947, the government took over the administration of the school. In 1949, the school produced its pioneer standard six certificate holders who included some people from Ibeme who later became prominent. These were His Lordship, Rev. Dr. Gregory Ochiagha, former Bishop of Orlu Catholic Diocese, Justice J. Ihekaire, former Chief Judge of Imo State and Mr. Louis Nwanguma, to mention these few.<sup>376</sup>

By 1932, the C.S.M. had built the Central School, Obollo and the R.C.M built St. Theresa's School (later Community Primary School, Obollo) in 1935. The District Officers conducted regular inspection to ensure the hygienic condition of the schools. In 1948, the year the eclipse of the sun occurred, tragedy struck at Central School Obollo. According to C.C. Opara, who was a pupil and an eye witness, it was announced that government inspectors were coming to inspect the school facilities. The pupils were asked to dig a pit toilet for the school. In the process, the toilet caved in and a number of pupils were buried alive. However, some people were rescued including Mr. Joseph Onyekebi.<sup>377</sup> Mr. Onyekebi who confirmed the incident, died a few months after the writers field work in 2011.

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<sup>376</sup> Ojiah, p.119

<sup>377</sup> C.C. Opera interview cited in C.N. Mbalisi, *Change and Continuity in Isiala Mbanof* p.79

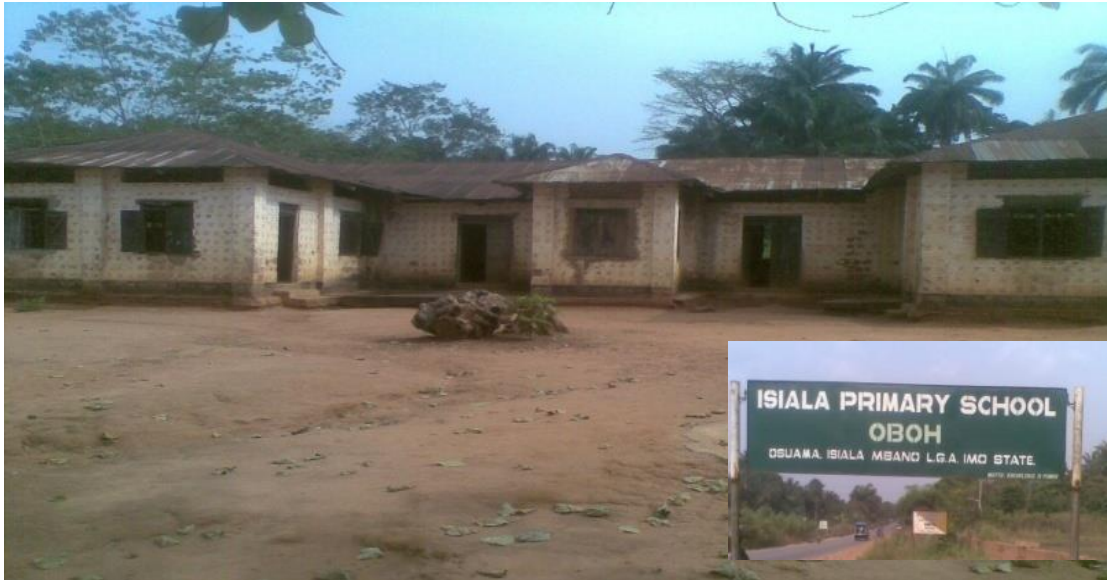
Many other primary schools were established by the missionaries within Mbanu and its neighbours. Some of these schools include Central School Umueze 11, built by the C.M.S. (popularly called 'School Nwobiji'). Nwobiji was the Chief who attracted St. Stephen's Church at Duruegwale community) in 1920; St. Andrew's Mission School, Okwelle in 1920 built by the C.S.M. and St. Charles in 1921, built by the R.C.M., under Rev. Fr. Folly. In 1920, Central School Eziana was built, and later in 1922, Isiala Primary School Oboh, was built by the R.C.M. while Group School Eziana was built in 1944.<sup>378</sup>

**See table 8: Schools in Mbanu and neighbouring communities, 1920-1944.**

S/N	Villages	Schools and date established
	Okwelle	St. Andrew's Mission School, 1920
	Umueze 11	St. Central School, 1921
	Okwelle	St. Charles, 1921
	Eziana	Central school, 1922
	Oboh	Isiala primary school, 1930
	Isiala Oboh, Eziana	Group school, 1944

<sup>378</sup>The details see, Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan*, pp.101-125., A.O Iwuagwu, *The Foundation of Anglican Church in Imo State, Nigeria, 1905-2000*, pp.156-166.





**Isiala Primary School Oboh, one of the first primary Schools built in Osu-ama Mbano in 1930s.**

It is instructive that most of these primary schools occupied the same compound with the churches. Some of the schools developed with time and came to their peak in the 1940s and 1950s.

However, by 1960, there were many elementary schools located in Mbano communities. Most communities had one, while others had two or more. There was no secondary school in Mbano before 1960. But from the 1960s to 1990, almost all communities in the area had a secondary school. The first secondary school in Mbano was the St. Thomas Aquinas Model Secondary School located in Anara. The school was built in 1962.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>379</sup>Chief Innocent Ikemenogo, c. 68 years, retired teacher, interviewed at Umulolo Oboh Osu-ama, 24/08/2010.



Picture 4: One of the new buildings at St. Thomas Aquinas Model Secondary School located along Anara-Okwelle Road.

The introduction of Christianity and Western education brought remarkable changes in the socio-political, economic and cultural relations.

Ozigbo rightly pointed out

Since man is mortal, every society must perpetuate itself physically by procreation and socially by process of education. Through education, the customs, values, beliefs, skills and so on, are passed on from generation to generation. Without this, the society would disintegrate. The new generation must be taught the way of thinking and behaving which preserved the society in the past and are believed to keep it in the future. The function of

education is to mould individuals to the social norm.<sup>380</sup>

This situation applies to the area of this study. But it was not everyone who desired to be educated had the privilege. The few who did had mainly elementary and secondary education. The reason was that the colonial administration had no interest in tertiary education. Those who acquired secondary education went to Owerri, Umuahia or Ife Grammar School. Among such people were people like Chief John Onyenze of Obollo, Samuel Mbalisi, Chief Egbuziem, Peter Ekezie, and Senator B.C. Agunanne. Ozigbo observed that, the Christian missionaries, who were the main providers of Western education in Igboland, were generally not interested in tertiary education. It was not until the 1960s that the first tertiary institution was opened in Igboland, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.<sup>381</sup> Mbano and its neighbours like most other Igbo rural communities began to have secondary schools in the post-colonial era.

### **Health and Pipe-Borne Water**

Provision of health facilities and pipe-borne water were part of colonial infrastructure. According to Ozigbo, ãa veritable revolution occurred in medicare services in 20<sup>th</sup> century Igboland. Its history, in fact, dates back to the 1890s. It was the Christian missionaries who pioneered the introduction of Western medical practice in Igboland.<sup>382</sup> Before the arrival of British administrators in Mbano in 1906, the people depended on herbs, native doctors (*dibia ngborogwu*) and diviners (*dibia afa*) for their health related concerns. Women gave birth in their homes, under the supervision of older and experienced women. The medical needs of the people were settled through the use of

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<sup>380</sup> Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland*, í p.119

<sup>381</sup> Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland*, í p.123

<sup>382</sup> Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland*, í p.128

herbs gathered from the bush and forest. Different types of roots were used to cure diseases and other sicknesses. It is a truism that the Christian missionaries brought Western medical practice into Igboland. However, it took quite a significant long period of time, before it spread to all parts of Igboland and indeed Mbano area. Ozigbo writes that the missionaries built health facilities in some cities around Igboland. For instance, the Roman Catholic Mission built a dispensary at Onitsha in 1886 and began attending to sick people in 1890: the Mary Slessor Hospital was built at Itu in 1906, by the Presbyterian Church. The Queen Elizabeth Hospital was built at Umuahia by the Methodist and Anglican Churches,<sup>383</sup> in the 1950s.

Before 1906, there were neither hospitals nor dispensaries in the area. Herbert Oguine noted that the thing we call health centers and hospitals today were not known here. It was when the ñwhite manø came, in fact, when churches were built in the 1920s, that maternity homes were sited in some places. The first was at Umuduru where the ñwhite manø lived. It was that early maternity that later became Mbano Joint Hospital in the 1960s. Communities in Mbano with the help of the colonial administrators and missionaries<sup>384</sup> jointly built the hospital. People who had one minor health need or the other had a missionary maternity within Mbano to attend. Many with severe health problems were referred to Queen Elizabeth Hospital at Umuahia. The C.M.S was largely instrumental in establishing maternity homes in Mbano communities from the 1920s. These maternities were supervised by British doctors and trained nurses from Iyi-Enu, Ogidi where the Medical Mission, Onitsha was relocated in 1907. Bishop Iwuagwu noted that, such doctors extended their services to maternities in Owerri Province. For instance,

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<sup>383</sup> Ozigbo, pp. 128-129

<sup>384</sup> Herbert Oguine Interview cited.

in 1942, Dr. Rosevera worked at Egbu from where he also inspected the maternities in parts of Owerri District. In the 1950s, Dr. Dorothy Dykes also worked faithfully at Iyi-Enu. The nursing school at that mission hospital has also played a major role in the training of nurses and other para-medical staff sent to the maternities. It was only in the 1950s and 1960s that other hospitals were set up to support the health care delivery provided by Iyi-Enu and the Queen Elizabeth Hospitals.<sup>385</sup>

The C.M.S established some maternity homes in some Mbanu communities and those of its neighbours with limited number of beds. These include Atta Maternity (Atta Parish) with 8 beds; Amainyi Maternity (Etiti Parish) with 8 beds; Ekwe maternity with 4 beds<sup>386</sup> *et cetera*. A few of other maternity homes were said to have been closed down because of lack of patronage, scarcity of patients and unhealthy rivalry. Besides, each of the maternity homes got trained midwives who helped the mothers from neighbourhood in child delivery and baby care. From the beginning, there had always been Medical Officers or supervising midwives that supervised the health centres. They inspected the cleanliness of maternities, the performance of the midwives, and of the maternity, and made their reports to the missions.

The establishment of these maternity homes marked a paradigm shift from the nature of health care in the area. It was yet another addition to colonial infrastructure. Its impact on inter-group relations was quite enormous. For instance, people from Ogbor, Obollo, Amaraku, Isu, and Anara etc went to Umuelemai to receive medical attention. Some times people from Ogbor trekked to Obollo to board cars to Umuelemai. As people went to the health centres, they met and interacted with others from different

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<sup>385</sup> A.O Iwuagwu, *The Foundations of Anglican Churchí* , p. 169

<sup>386</sup> Iwuagwu, p.170

communities. The meeting of the people contributed in building new friendly relations between peoples. In fact, the movements of people to and from the health centres constituted forms of interactions among the people. The maternities attended to the converts, who were in need of health challenges. Mbano was not as lucky as some Igbo areas that enjoyed large presence of colonial infrastructure in terms of secondary schools and hospitals. For instance, the only maternity home at Obollo Ugiri served Ugiri, parts of Mbama, Osu and Ehime clans in 1942. According to Bones Ojiah,

The idea of establishing the Maternity Home at Obollo in the year 1942 was propounded by Ugiri, Osu, Ehime and Mbama chiefs, councilors and the tax payers themselves after holding several meetings. The District Officer in-charge of Okigwe Division at the time was Mr. D.A.F. Shute who after consulting the appropriate medical authorities and got the establishment approved.<sup>387</sup>

Following the completion of the maternity block, it was agreed among all the groups of towns and parties concerned (the Native Authority) that the R.C.M Emekuku be invited to take over the management since they had the man power and other resources to sustain the Maternity Home in the face of the World War II . Eventually, the Catholic Mission Authorities Emekuku took up the supervision till the end of the war. Controversy over the management of the Maternity Home arose between Ugiri Progressive Union (U.P.U) and the administrative set up of the maternity. It was the

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<sup>387</sup> Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan...*, pp. 135-137

religious politics over the control of the Maternity Home between the R.C.M. on the one hand and the C.M.S on the other that caused the relocation of the Maternity Home to Umuelemai in 1949 under Mr. L.T. Chubb, the Ag. Resident.<sup>388</sup> More health centres and hospitals were built in the post-colonial era in the area by government and individuals.

Another colonial infrastructure introduced into Mbanjo was pipe borne water, though not widespread until the post-colonial era. E.E. Obilor observed that,

Pipe-borne water in the length and breadth of Mbanjo during the colonial era was a rarity. It was the '*Nwa DC*' (the name given to the colonial officers in many Igbo communities) that established the first type of pipe-borne water at Umuduru in the late 1940s. The establishment was for the colonial officers and his administrators.<sup>389</sup>

The main source of water supply to the local people remained the streams and springs found in many Mbanjo communities. Examples of such springs are Oramiriokwa in Ugiri, Agbaja and Umuelemai in the 1920s. There are many streams in almost all the communities in Mbanjo and its neighbours. These streams served the water needs of the people.

However, Bones Ojiah noted that, the colonial officer erected a water reservoir at Umuelemai. Pipes were installed to carry the water into the DO's residence. The youths provided the labour.<sup>390</sup> Modern pipe-borne water was indeed a post-colonial development

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<sup>388</sup> Ojiah, pp. 137-139

<sup>389</sup> E. E. Obilor interview cited

<sup>390</sup> Ojiah, p. 78

in Mbano. It was the Sam Mbakwe administration in Imo state in the 1980s, which established modern pipe-borne water and boreholes in parts of Mbano.

## **Aspects of Changes in the Inter-group Relations**

### **Political Changes**

The establishment of colonial rule in Igboland and indeed Mbano had important implications for inter-group relations. It brought with it changes among the Mbano group of towns and its near by neighbours and far-flung neighbours. First, colonial rule reorganized Mbasaa political unit by creating of different native courts for different clans and communities and regrouped them according to the new creations. It was under the new native court system that Mbano emerged. Atta and Umudim communities in Okigwe Division were transferred to Ikeduru in Owerri Division. These new communities were forced to join Owerri administrative Division. These political association and allegiance with Mbano was severed and transferred to Ikeduru as the people attended court at Ikeduru. Hence, Atta and Umudim became neighbours of Ugiri, and ceased to share political interests because their interests turned towards Ikeduru. The usual interaction enjoyed by the people of Atta and Umudim with other Ugiri communities became skewed.

Ugiri would have probably gone to war with Ikeduru to reclaim their lost territories, but for the colonial forces stationed in the area to avoid any break down of law, order and peace. What is more, the courts being colonial creations would probably have stood their ground with the new arrangements to suit their purpose. In the main, the people had to contend with new creations, ideals, interests and institutions arising not only from their indigenous experience sanctioned by their traditions and usages, but also



those introduced and imposed by new British colonialists. As Afigbo reasoned, while many of the implications of this changed situation took time to become manifest, some were felt almost immediately. For instance, war and oracles as instruments of inter-group relations in this whole area were banned.<sup>391</sup>

The colonialists in their creations did not consider existing political and cultural differences. Their indifference affected the delimitation of administrative boundaries. Thus, the boundaries of the Districts, Divisions and Provinces into which most parts of Mbano were divided did not seriously, or at any rate, aim at respecting the existing socio-political and historical groupings in the area. Colonial rule broke the existing political structure hitherto in existence in the area called ÆMbasaaø political unit, which was also the largest level. Consequently, during the colonial administrative re-organisation, Mbano was created. The different federating units were grouped under different Native Courts and Native Authorities. Also, Abajah community which had been part of Ugiri was transferred to Orlu Division. By implication the two towns became neighbours of Mbano.

In addition, the revered traditional *Ozo* and *Nze*, *onye-ishi-ala*, *oji ofo*, *ichi*, age-grade groups and *Nna-Anyi-Ukwu* title institutions and positions became almost insignificant under the colonial political and administrative circle. The secret societies and masquerade groups, as means of social control and interaction, were gradually challenged by Christian groups. The native courts and warrant chiefs became new agents of local administration and dispensation of justice. The position of the *Okarue*, the kingø's messenger, was usurped by the *kotman* -court messengers; the *oso eze achi eze* in council became native administrators under the

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<sup>391</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *The Igbo and their Neighbours: Intergroup Relations in Southeastern Nigeria to 1953*, Ibadan: University Press Ltd., p.79

Native Authority system. Most institutions that shared social and political authorities with council of elders were side-tracked. The young men that served as village warriors during the pre-colonial times in Mbanjo went into hiding due to the presence of more sophisticated weapons used by the British police and soldiers stationed in the area. In fact, the original political units disintegrated and were replaced by the British political system, structure and administrative institutions. Though mutual relations persisted, political, cultural and social interests were realigned along the new creations and regroupings.

### **Social and Cultural Change**

Apart from the political restructuring of Mbanjo communities and their neighbours, the introduction of Christianity, Western education and other forms of colonial infrastructure, had enormous impact on the socio-cultural and economic life of the people. There was the introduction of new cultures and ideas alien to the extant values, custom, beliefs and religious inclination of people. These new cultures were to contribute immensely to major changes and influences witnessed in the area. Most Mbanjo people accepted the new Christian religion. P.C. Lloyd, rightly noted that "in the first place, the missionaries preached against polygamy and worship of images, which was part and parcel of African Traditional Religion (A. T.R). In fact, the missionaries had disdain for the people's art, music, dancing, names and the like. Almost all the traditional beliefs and customs were at logger heads with Christianity."<sup>392</sup> There was a period of intense conflict and rivalry between indigenous culture and western culture implements. There was also inter-denominational rivalry between C.M.S and

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<sup>392</sup> P.C. Lloyd, *Africa in Social Change: Changing Traditional Societies in the Modern World*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1967), 171

R.C.M. Michael Crowther added that the missionaries required of an African conversion not only to a new religion but to a completely new way of life.<sup>393</sup>

There were concerted efforts to convert the priests of deities, burn their shrines and destroy the cultus symbols of authority and worship. According to Josiah Eke, this new religion (Christianity) caused people to burn such traditional symbols like *ofo*- staff of office, held by the *Nze* an *Ozo*. The missionaries organized classes for their new converts, while *Ala* and other deities and religious/cultural festivals in Mbano were condemned. These churches went as far as converting the traditional religious priests, ritual priests, medicine men and diviners into the new Christian faith. Their functions, value and importance to the people were discredited. *Otutu ndi dibia wucha azu eru ala, cheghariri*, (many great and known dibia converted to Christianity) Such prominent *dibia* like Mazi Nwanyanwu Agwu-oke *dibia* (great priest), Chukwuocha of Umuduraro, Anyahuijiji, Ochashi and many other great *dibia* converted to Christianity.<sup>394</sup>

On the religious and ritual priests, G.I. Jones states thus "they lost their power and most people stopped believing in them" but these indigenous religious priests and ritual specialists performed important specialist functions, some of them negative, but the Christian missions did none of these things.<sup>395</sup> Christianity influenced the activities of traditionalists and the earlier respect people had for them. The traditional functions performed during cultural ceremonies and festivals before colonial incursion were challenged by Christianity. Consequently, missionary activities and influences weakened mutual respect people had for them and their authority waned.

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<sup>393</sup> M. Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*, London: Faber and Faber, 1962, p.132

<sup>394</sup> Josiah Eke interview cited

<sup>395</sup> G.I. Jones, *Trading States of the Oil Rivers*, London. O.U.P, p.84

The impact of Christianity on Igbo society is exemplified in aspects of Igbo culture. Scholars had written on Christianity and changes in aspects Igbo culture. Simon Ottenberg opined that a people of that frame of cultural adaptability do not close their minds to a new teaching like that brought about by Christian missionaries.<sup>396</sup> F.K Ekechi observed that later at the turn of the twentieth century, the British colonial authority's effort to open up the country together with the cordial relationship that seemed to prevail among the missionaries, especially of the C.M.S and the British officials, provided their own historical facilities that must have led to the increased number of persons that accepted Christianity.<sup>397</sup> E.O. Egbo also thinks that the seductive approach of the missionaries in offering to the people, facilities for the education of their children and the manifest evidence of the benefit of education to such children in their ability to read and write, were attractive.<sup>398</sup>

In spite of the various romantic approaches adopted by Christian missionaries in spreading the Christian faith in Mbandaka, clashes and conflict were rife. For instance, in the late 1930s, a fight broke out between the Ezeoke Nsu and Umuezeala Nsu.<sup>399</sup> This was a direct reaction to the missionary activities in two Mbandaka communities. The Ezeoke, having been converted by the C.M.S, built a church on the path leading to the Umuezeala ancestral shrine at Afo-Agbaghara. Thus, the situation made it difficult for the Umuezeala to freely clean the path during *mbom uzo* cultural festival. Conflict arose between the Christian converts of both C.M.S and R.C.M against the adherents of ATR. The Christians prevented the traditionalists from cleaning the path and performing the

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<sup>396</sup> G.I. Jones, *Trading States of the Oil Rivers*, London. O.U.P, p.84

<sup>397</sup> See F.K. Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, London: Frank Cass, 1972, pp.147-150

<sup>398</sup> See E.O. Egboh in 'Conflict between Traditional Religion and Christianity in Igboland, South-Eastern Nigeria', *West African Religion*, Nsukka, No. 10 July 1971, p.13

<sup>399</sup> *Nsu Affray*, file No OW589/1930 Okidist 3-4, -76 N.A.E

rituals and sacrifices at the shrine. Fighting broke out and many people were injured. It took the intervention of the police to bring the situation under control. The ensuing rivalry notwithstanding, Umuezeala people invited a Rev. Father to live at short distance away from the Ezeoke mission. In December 18, 1930 the rivalry reached its climax when the Ezeoke refused Umuezeala pilgrims passage through the path, on the pretext they would disturb Miss Ross, the British missionary who lived there at the time. The action resulted in a fight between the two brother communities in which about thirty people were said to have been injured before the police intervened. This episode in the relations between the people reflects greatly the extent to which the Nsu were divided largely along religious lines in the new era. But it is instructive that before colonial rule and the subsequent introduction of Christianity into the area, the Nsu worshipped one central deity- the *Urashi* Nsu- which bound them together religiously.

The new faith-based rivalry manifested in Agbaja town at the early stages of the missionary activities. The rivalry was caused when Chief Ihemeje visited the site of a C.M.S school in the area considered a strong-hold of the Catholic mission.<sup>400</sup> It was seen as an act of provocation and fighting broke out between members of the two denominations, C.M.S and R.C.M. A similar incident showcasing rivalry resulted to an unprecedented upheaval in 1950, when Mrs. Mgborie Nwokelum died and was to be buried in the C.M.S cemetery. There was disagreement between C.M.S and R.C.M as both denominations laid claim to her corpse. It resulted in a heightened state of cold war between the C.M.S and R.C.M. The matter led to a protracted litigation in the Native

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<sup>400</sup> See J. Ashby to Rev. Fr. Walsh., March 18, 1921, File No. 429/8/1921 Okidist -4-3-76 N.A.E.

Court at Ehime.<sup>401</sup> It was settled in favour of the C.M.S that had converted Mgborie to the Christianity. Indeed, the situation soured relations between the people

The inter-denominational rivalry arising from competition for dominance between the C.M.S and R.C.M converts adversely affected intermarriage in the area. For instance, M.O. Ijere noted that families of R.C.M faith in Nsu and its environs and Ihteafoukwu in Ekwereazu Mbaise would not allow intermarriages between their sons and daughters and those of another denomination.<sup>402</sup> In effect, religion and denominational considerations became rife in the conduct of inter-marriages between Christians on one hand, and traditionalists on the other hand. For analytical symmetry, one can see from the foregoing two perspectives of emerging inter-group relations: a) conflictual not just between Christians and traditional worshipers but also between different denominations within the Christian fold, b) peaceful/reciprocal: beyond this, even between Christians of differing denominations. This development was of a great concern to inter-group relations at the time because religion became a dividing factor of a sort.

Nonetheless, Christianity promoted group relations in some ways. The steady manner in which churches were built in different communities at different times in Mbano caused new converts to cross borders into neighbouring communities to attend church services and or mass. For instance, people from Umueze II in Ehime attended church services at Ihteafoukwu in Mbaise before St. Stephen's Church (C.M.S) was built in Duruegwale in 1914 and Emmanuel Church Umueze II in 1920. The organizational structure of churches into different parishes brought together, people from different communities during such celebrations like the C.M.S anniversary on July 27 of every

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<sup>401</sup>Bernard Nwosu, *Christian Mission in Mbano 1913-1950*, B.A. Project Department of History, U. N.N, 1977, pp.20-25

<sup>402</sup> M.O.Ijere, *Nsu Past and Present*, p.36

year.<sup>403</sup> The grouping of churches into parishes and Archdeaconries enhanced interactions between people. It was positive for group relations as people from different communities were brought together. Mutual relations were built by church members through such gatherings. Inter-marriages were consummated between members from different places.

Chidi Onwubuariri thinks that Christianity helped build relations between Mbano and Ikeduru communities. He said some Christian converts from Oka in Mbano attended church services at Inyishi in Ikeduru. People like Ogafonanim Nwachukwu, Nnadiekwe Nwachukwu, Philip Ezeji, Abraham and a lot many of others came from Oka to Inyishi to worship. The church provided a great source of interaction between Inyishi-Ikeduru and Mbano communities, especially, Oka, Ibeme, Obollo, Ogbor, Umudim, Atta and other towns, even though Inyishi churches were grouped under Owerri Diocese.<sup>404</sup> In addition, the creation of Diocese at Orlu and at Okigwe meant that Mbano people attended Diocesan activities at their Diocesan headquarters at Orlu and later Okigwe. These church activities enhanced inter-group relations, especially, through marriages among the Christian faithfuls.

Though a large number of people embraced Christianity, many remained traditional worshippers. Many others engaged in syncretism by combining the two religions. They would attend church on Sunday, Monday class and Bible studies but went back home to offer sacrifices to deities. The preaching against the deities as idol worship, polygamy and other age long traditions and cultural festivals irked the elders. This was evidenced in the indifference most of the traditional worshipers showed to Christianity.

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<sup>403</sup> Ogu Onyirimba interview cited.

<sup>404</sup> Chidi Onwubuariri interview cited

Most people continued to frequent such oracles as the Igwekala at Umuneoha, Ezealakatamu in Osu, the Urashi Nsu, Ezealanyanwu, Alaogbaga and Onugotu, among others, though mainly in secret. The ban on oracular consultation notwithstanding, most medicine-men (*dibia ogwu*) and *dibia afa* continued their traditional practices. In the words of Nze Herbert Onwuegbu,

*Ufodu ndi dibia ogwu ka-no na-agwo ogwu ha, ma  
nke ome, ma nke ojo. Udi ogwu obula ichoro, I ga-  
enweta ya. Ufodu ndi Uka si na ha cheaghariri  
echeghari so aga na nke dibia ma-na- agakwa  
Uka.*<sup>405</sup>

My translation:

Our medicine men or diviners are still in existence. Some still practice their medicine and craft, both the positive and negative medicine. One can still obtain all forms of service from them. Some Christian converts or who say they are ðborn againø also patronize these medicine men.

From the views of Nze Onwuegbu, it could be stated that the *dibia afa* remained relevant among the people of Mbano and their neighbours during the colonial era. It was indeed difficult for Christianity to obliterate their services because of they served a felt need.

On socio-cultural changes in Inyishi occasioned by Christianity, Chidi Onwubuariri stated that, Christianity stopped the act throwing dead people into the evil forest in Afo Inyishi. The present location of St Andrew's church was previously an evil

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<sup>405</sup> Nze Herbert N. Onwuegbu, c.86 years, Farmer interviewed at Umuhu Atta Ikeduru, 26-4-2011



forest. Babies whose upper teeth came out first were thrown into òAjo Ohia Inyishi. People who were sick with swollen stomach were thrown into the evil bush. Those who committed sacrilegious crimes, òndi gburu ochuò were tied up and thrown into the bush. Recently during the digging of foundation for classroom blocks at Central School Inyishi, 24 human skulls were re-buried at the church cemetery. It was Christianity that stopped these acts. The churches and schools condemned the use of cam wood for body adornment, and other things our people did that Christianity preached against and were not considered acceptable.<sup>406</sup>

The above description shows that Christianity and Western education had significant influence on the culture and religious practices of the people. There were changes in the dress style of the Mbano people as in other Igbo communities. Nudity for one became a thing of the past. The traditional/cultural dress style known as *iwa ogo*, *iwa nja* or *mkpuru* in Mbano were jettisoned, in favour of Western dress style.

These changes affected the people's indigenous culture and identity. The conflict and crisis arising there-from disrupted the form of mutual relations exemplified in the numerous cultural festivals celebrated by the people. The festivals served as culture links to the people's claim to a common ancestral origin. Christianity preached against these cultural bonds which were described as fetish and idol worship. Thus, the usual gathering and interactions of people from different communities during these celebrations gave way to church activities. In spite of the changes, the people remained resilient in their relations through these cultural festivals and traditional practices. It is instructive to recall the view of Simon Ottenberg that, of all the groups in Nigeria, the Igbo appear to be the most receptive to Western culture and ideas. However, emphasis here should be on the rider to

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<sup>406</sup> Onwubuariri interview cited

his assertion that, 'the Ibo have changed the least while changing the most'.<sup>407</sup> Although there were marked changes in aspects of the people's cultural and social lives, geography was an advantage to the people. This is because the geographical location of the area in the interior part of Isuama Igbo, allowed for a gradual assimilation and integration of Christianity and Western influences.

Most cultural values that helped shape the society and promote relations between the communities were not speedily eroded. The people have continued to preserve to a reasonable extent, their 'ethnic essence', especially, aspects of their custom, traditional festivals evidenced in their relations. Such festivals like *Mbom uzo*, *ekweji*, *iwa akwa* and *nmanwu* among many others have continued to serve as avenues for social interactions and are very much observed by the people till date. Though, one would say that there have been some modifications in their modes of operation. The changes since the colonial era have been continuous and contribute to the dynamic nature of inter-group relations in the area.

### **Economic Changes**

The rudimentary education introduced by the missionaries produced young men who admired the Western system of life. The people's attitude to farming which had been their main-stay waned over time. People went after white collar jobs which were relatively scarce. Collective participation in meaningful labour and the exercise of skills in traditional craftsmanship were almost abandoned. People preferred wage labour to agriculture.

The prestige attached to households for their flair in one aspect of local craft waned. According to Erastus Ezeala, no one wanted to be seen or addressed as a palm

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<sup>407</sup> Ottenberg, 'Ibo Receptivity to Change', p. 30

wine tapper- *diochi*. The local industries began dying out. But that seemed not to border the people; for it was perceived that only the backward ones still participated in them. The 'modern ones' would rather be excelling in the palm oil trade or as interpreters, court messengers or clerks to the white man for the meager salaries they were paid. These were the *õndi oru bekeeö* (whiteman's workers). They formed and constituted a special group and were seen to wear the smartest of clothes, shirts and ties around. Thus, their new style of dressing became an indication of their new social and economic prestige. Many people especially, elders stuck to the old ways which they felt were good. These adherents were given the name *õndi nkitiö*-ordinary people. But who cared to patronize their goods?<sup>408</sup> These changes continued over time.

However, the Europeans on the other hand, according available records, especially, the missionaries and the Residents tried to 'discourage' the continuation of some of the crafts. These efforts were made in the 1943-1950s through the organisation of local craft exhibitions in which Mbano weavers, blacksmiths and pottery makers were invited to participate in. In an invitation letter to the Resident at Owerri in 1944 from the Assistant District Office at Orlu with the title 'Arts and Crafts', part of the letter reads:

I am however concerned to note how little concern the Ibo people seem to have for their almost limited cultural background. There is plenty of money about and new houses are being built, but no one seems to want the services of the craftsman. The cost of work of real c

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<sup>408</sup> N.A. E Or/C 176 Local Crafts and industries Exhibition of 1943 Or/dist. 3/1/250, np

raftsmanship is high. They compete favourably with  
the imported articles in workmanship<sup>409</sup>

There was no response of any kind to this letter for participation at the exhibition from the Mbande people. One may wonder the aim of such exhibition organized by the British, whose major motive was economic exploitation. Obviously, competition from imported goods was the greatest deciding factor, a competition in which the local and crude products of Mbande craftsmen may not be favourably disposed. In the textile industry, for instance, there was increased desire to imitate the white man's attire which had great impact in determining the taste and choice of fabrics. Cotton materials from Europe were preferred over traditional fabrics. A. E. Afigbo rightly observed that 'with the influence of European made materials and with the spread of Christianity, these locally made ones came to be associated more and more with traditional religion.'<sup>410</sup> A new elite, who so idolized the Europeans that the mere wearing of their cloth was seen as an indication of their new social status and prestige. The new economic situation adversely affected most of the weavers who could not adapt and had to fold up. In fact, as one weaver, Lazarus O. Ukaeje noted, weaving has since the colonial period degenerated from a full time occupation into a mere hobby for most weavers.<sup>411</sup> Besides, there has been increasing lack of desire to acquire these skills as was the case in the pre-colonial and colonial times. However, the carving of such household utensils like mortar was not affected by imported products. It was used in pounding yam, *foo foo*, pepper and garri as the Europeans could not provide immediate replacement.

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<sup>409</sup> N.A.E. or / C 176 Local Crafts and Industries Exhibition of 1943 or/Dist. 3/11/250, np

<sup>410</sup> A.E. Afigbo and C. S Okeke, 'Wearing Traditions in Igbo Land,' in *Nigeria Magazine*, Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Social Development, Youths, Sports and Culture, Lagos, 1982, p.7

<sup>411</sup> Lazarus O. Ukaeje interview cited

The establishment of industries led to the rise of big markets in Enugu, Umuahia, Lagos, Aba, Port-Harcourt, Owerri and Onitsha. Many Mbano people moved to these cities in search of greener pastures. The traditional customs and prohibitions did not apply in the cities. Hence, it was more convenient for some people to live in the city than in the village. There were moral problems associated with the new rural-to urban life. According to Edmund Ilogu, the moral problems of town life in Igboland, originated mainly from the fact that the change from village to town life, was a sudden transition. It was a transition from a fairly neat pattern of community-oriented life to another style of life where individualism thrived. This requires inner-controlled and conscience-directed actions, as well as freedom of choice that make up the style of life.<sup>412</sup> He further states that the governing moral principle as well as acceptable social philosophy of town life could have derived from schools and churches, which were the main agents of social change at the initial stage.<sup>413</sup>

In addition, the Europeans employed different strategies to fast-track economic exploitation. In another sense, the imposition of new economic regime and ideology of capitalism and the introduction of paper money was by itself, a method the British employed to extend and consolidate their rule in Igboland. The introduction of paper money took over the place of local cowries, iron bars, salt and other items used as medium of exchange. This is what, A.A. Lawal described as the demonetization and monetization of African economies under colonial rule.<sup>414</sup> The improvement in transportation aided the implementation and enforcement of the monetization policy.

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<sup>412</sup>Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, pp.95-96

<sup>413</sup> Ilogu, p.96.

<sup>414</sup> . See A.A Lawal, "Transition from the Transitional of Modern Currency System in West Africa." In G.O.Ogunremi and E.K. Faluyi (eds.), *An Economic History of West Africa Since 1870*, Lagos: First Academic Publishers, 2005, pp.164-172.

T.N. Tamunno asserted that it was hoped that through the new motor roads, European trade, ideas and way of life would reach even the remotest village and that those who benefited from the trade and contact with Europe would have a stake in the security and continuation of the new economic regime.<sup>415</sup>

E.E. Obilor agrees that improved road transportation was for the purpose of exploiting the natural resources found within Mbandaka area. Obilor states that

Our roads were widened and made motorable by the Europeans through using communal labour provided by Mbandaka youths and neighbouring communities linked by the roads to the markets. That was just to enable their trucks and lorries carry some of goods locally produced like palm oil, cocoa and kernel to the tarred roads and railway at Umuahia, Okigwe and to port-Harcourt seaport for export to Europe. Though these roads made communication and inter-group interaction and movement easier and faster, they encourage exploitation.<sup>416</sup>

In addition, the trade routes expanded by the Europeans, as noted in chapter two, traversed communities, connecting people and leading to markets in the different communities. In addition, as Chidi Onwubuariri observed, the trade routes we had in the earliest times only allowed for trekking. I would in fact, not just call them trade routes,

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<sup>415</sup> T.N. Tamunno, *The Development of British Administrative Control of Southern Nigeria*. Ph.D Thesis, London, 1963, pp. 69-70

<sup>416</sup>E.E Obilor Interview cited

they were also cultural pathways. People moved through these pathways to marry as well as attend cultural celebrations in the area. They were well organized routes, which was why the colonial officials merely expanded them. From Inyishi Ikeduru the routes ran to Orié Oka market, through Umudim to Orié Amaraku and Eke Atta markets. From Inyishi another route ran through Oka, Afor Ibeme, Nkwo Ogor, and Nkwo Obollo to Nkwo Umuezeala. There was another route from Etiti to Ezeoke, Nkwo Umuezeala, through Umuelemai, Mbeke to Anara through Amaraku to Okwelle and to Okigwe. Another route ran from Anara to Amaraku to Eke Ata down to Owerri. There was a route from Amaraku through Abajah Isu to Amaigbo-Nkwere to Orlu. Another ran from Amaraku to Afo Amuzari and connecting Ogwa. These trade route networks were arteries of communication and cross cultural interaction within the area. Hence people would say, *õo wuru i maghi uzo Orié Amaraku, gi soro nshi nkita, I ga-ama uzo Orié Amaraku.*<sup>417</sup> (If you do not know the way to Orié Amaraku market, you follow the dog's waste you will find Orié Amaraku). These routes served political, economic and religious purposes. The British simply found it convenient to expand them to suit their own exploitative economic and political purposes.

It could be stated that the expansion of these routes into motorable roads, did not arise out of any conscious plan of development by the British. It was in a bid for the British to effectively assert their authority and to achieve rewarding exploitation that some infrastructural improvements occurred. However, these expanded roads and the use of motor transport in the area, made movement of people faster and interactions between distant communities easier. These roads directly or indirectly impact on inter-group relations between Mbano people and their neighbours as people connected through them.

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<sup>417</sup> Chidi Onwubuariri interview cited

Some people who were unable to trek long distances use available vehicles to reach their destination. There was mass movement of people to attend cultural events of interest in different communities.

### **Security and Crime control**

Aspects of traditional security and crime control were distorted by the colonial administration. Especially, the security and crime control mechanisms among the Mbano, Ekwereazu Mbaise and Ikeduru, known as *Ebi* and *iri Mbube* were abolished. *Ebi* was a solution prepared by the medicine-men, tied and hung in a sacred place and used to search for missing items in pre-colonial times.

Iwunze, an eye witness and a participant in *Ebi* described it as a device used in detecting crime mainly in the pre-colonial times. It could detect crimes such as stealing, *mba-muo* (evil attack) in Mbano. It was a consolidation of different herbs, roots and other materials, combined and mixed with *ogba-aka-ari-orji'* óa kind of liquid solution to function in a particular way. It involved the belief in magic powers with the *dibia* invoking the ancestors and the gods. *Ebi* is not mindful of the nature of crime committed, either in the open or in secret. It has ability to detect the offenders, through supernatural powers and forces.<sup>418</sup> It has strong spiritual and ritual undertone. The *ebi* practice was common in Mbano, Mbaise and some Ikeduru communities. The missionaries branded the system paganism, fetish, idol and barbaric. People used to come from far and near to inquire about effectiveness of *ebi* and also adopt same in detecting crime in their community. It was common in the past for Ehime people to witness this traditional method performed at the Eke Eziana market in Mbaise. It provided the people with the opportunity to interact and share ideas on how to curb crime in their communities.

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<sup>418</sup> Iwunze interview cited.



Christianity condemned the practice of *ebi* and emphasised the use of the courts in the trial of criminal offenders. The practice of Ebi could not survive the influence of Christianity and other Western court system.

### **Mbano on the Eve of Independence**

In most Igbo communities, colonialism brought several changes in almost every sphere of Igbo life. In fact, the British colonial administrators, missionaries and educators and merchants invaded the socio-cultural, political and economic sectors of the Igbo and indeed Mbano. However, all the constitutional and political developments highlighted above occurred under the British colonial rule in Nigeria. Hence, the social, political and economic life of the people was in the hands of the British, though Nigerians had pressured for inclusion and independence. It was the British that dictated the way and manner Nigeria was governed. By implication, the administration of the area, the economic, social and political interactions between the people were distorted by the colonial rulers and their administrative cohorts.

In spite of the political reorganisations, introduction of Christianity and Western education, and colonial infrastructure that brought changes in the area, the people continued to relate mutually in both peaceful and antagonistic situations. Some of the surviving cultural festivals have continued to serve as point of contact and interaction between peoples, as well as exemplify their claim to common ancestral origin. In 1960, along-side all Igbo communities in Nigeria, Mbano and its neighbours regained her independence from British colonial rule. Inter-group relations continued to be dynamic in post colonial Nigeria as would be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### POST-COLONIAL DEVELOPMENT AND RELATIONS TO 1970

#### Road to the Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967

Post-independence Nigeria was trailed by political developments that occurred on the eve of 1960. Before independence, there had been constitutional developments and the formation of political parties along ethnic lines. The constitutions, especially the 1946 and 1951 constitutions, introduced regionalism and ethnic politics in Nigeria. By implication, the foundation for Nigeria's independence appeared to have been laid on the principles of division and ethnic politics. It was not surprising that, Nigeria went berserk shortly after her independence. Isichei has noted that "Nigeria attained her independence in what has been called a conspiracy of optimism."<sup>419</sup> Consequently, the struggle for dominance amongst the different regions, West, North and East continued. Isichei stated that "Azikiwe, doubtless reluctantly, accepted the gilded cage of Governor-General in 1963. Dr. Michael Okpara, a doctor from Umuahia, who had entered politics in 1949 at the time of the colliery shootings, became the Eastern Region Premier. In 1964 the Mid-West with NCNC backing, became a separate region, under a western Igbo premier, Dennis Osadebey. The region, in its ethnic diversity, was a microcosm of Nigeria itself, a diversity which could enrich the society, or divide it."<sup>420</sup> The East and the colossal North were left intact. The Northern Region held absolute control over the federation. The result was an uneasy and unequal struggle for power between the regions. According to

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<sup>419</sup>Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976, p.241

<sup>420</sup> Isichei, p. 241

I.R.A. Ozigbo, òa number of crises constituted the immediate causes of the 1966 coup which inexorably drew the country into the civil war.<sup>421</sup>

At this point, as Obaro Ikime stated, it became obvious that the politics of decolonization and of the First Republic (1960-1966) involved essentially, a struggle between the elite of the three large nationalities for the plums of political office for their respective nationalities and for themselves.<sup>422</sup> The struggle for power did not portend any good for the young independence of Nigeria. The power mongers from the ethnic nationalities needed to ultimately control the centre. This created mutual suspicion among the political elite.

These developments fanned the embers of political controversies, regional and sectional disagreements on a number of issues, and the struggle for political power and control. Political violence and corruption, political assassinations and arson, especially, in the Western region culminated in the first failed military coup in Nigeria on January 15, 1966, led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Major Adewale Ademoyega, Major Don Okafor and Major Chris Anuforo,<sup>423</sup> as the five most prominent leaders in the coup. In the coup, the Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the premier of the Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Federal Minister of Finance, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh and the premier Western Nigeria, Chief S.L. Akintola, were killed.<sup>424</sup> The planners of the coup had, as Ozigbo contends, wanted to remove militarily the chief political leaders of the First Republic in order to impose discipline, socialist ideology and nationalism in place of the prevailing tribal-ethnic

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<sup>421</sup> Ikenga. R.A Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Enugu: Snap Press Ltd., 1999, pp.144-145

<sup>422</sup> Obaro Ikime, History, *The Historian and the Nation: The Voice of a Nigerian Historian*, Ibadan: HEBN Publishers Plc., 2006, p.296

<sup>423</sup> Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland*, 1 p.146

<sup>424</sup> Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland*, 1 p.146

chauvinism, drift and political incoherence. The problem was that the coup was badly and partially executed. Nzeogwu had wanted to march on the South to complete the coup, but was prevailed upon by Lt. Col. Madiebo (another Igbo officer) not to do so.<sup>425</sup> This was why the coup was branded an Igbo coup. This first coup, however, failed.

The failure of the Nzeogwu led coup brought Major Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi to power as the Head of State of the Federal Government. The Ironsi led regime was resented by the Northerners. As a result of the discontent, mutual suspicion and hatred that pervaded the polity, Nigeria was agog with tension. The situation led to the counter-coup on 29 July 1966, in which Ironsi and a number of other senior officers were killed, many of them were of Igbo extraction. Lt. Col. Fajuyi, the military governor of the Western Region, was killed as well. The counter-coup opened a wound between the Igbo and the Hausa-Fulani (Northern) Nigeria. According to Ikime, öten other military officers, nine of them Igbo or Easterners were killed in the counter-coup. The counter-coup was code-named öOperation Arabaö (-Arabaø meaning secession).ö<sup>426</sup> The counter coup appeared to be a revenge for the first coup in January. The killings were subsequently followed by another round of massacres which began in the North on 28/29 September, 1966. The Igbo were again the target. It was alleged that the northerners reacted, to retaliate the attacks on northern element in Enugu, Onitsha, Port-Harcourt and Abakaliki. Killing of Easterners in Western Nigeria also occurred in October, 1966.<sup>427</sup>

The pogrom, mutual suspicion, insecurity and disturbances the Igbo were faced with, especially, in the northern and western Nigeria, led to the declaration of the Independent Republic of Biafra by Col. Ojukwu, on May 30, 1967, following the failure

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<sup>425</sup> Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland*, í pp. 146-147

<sup>426</sup> Ikime, *History, the Historian and the Nation* p.306

<sup>427</sup> Ozigbo, P. 150

of the Aburi Accord. The Aburi Accord was a meeting of the Nigeria military leaders in Aburi, Ghana in January, 1967, under the chairmanship of Gen. Ankra (the Ghana Head of State) to work out important challenges in the Nigerian constitution. The agreement reached came to be called the Aburi Accord.<sup>428</sup> The ensuing squabbles, disagreements and verbal threats between Ojukwu and Gowon over the non-implementation of the Aburi Accord, prepared the stage for the imminent Nigeria-Biafra Civil War 1967-1970. The mass return of the Igbo in the North was a fore-runner to the disquiet and chaos felt all around Igboland. In fact, it was the return of the sons and daughters of Mbano and its neighbours that disturbed the peace in the area.

Before the crisis of 1966, Mbano and its neighbours like most other rural communities in Igboland were still recovering from the impact of colonial disruptions and disturbances. People were their brother's keeper despite colonial divisions and conflicts of interest. The level of cooperation and group relations was improving. S.B.C. Onwuka, told the writer that,

Before the civil war started, Mbano and in fact, Igboland was quite peaceful, the people were mainly farmers and traders. They went on doing their things and living their lives without much complaint. In fact, relations between one another, communities and towns were quite cordial. People helped one another and lived in peace until the crisis began in 1966 and later led to the destructive

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<sup>428</sup> Jude Uwalaka, *The Struggle for an Inclusive Nigeria: Igbo to be or Not to Be? A Treatise on Igbo Political Personality and Survival in Nigeria-To Nwaigbo*, Enugu: Snap Press, 2003, p.9.

and devastating war between Nigeria and the defunct Biafra, òour Biafraö. That war came to disturb the peace and love of the people of this area, who were resting from colonial rule.<sup>429</sup>

Mbano and its neighbours as integral part of the Isuama sub-cultural group, who as N.T. Nwaezeigwe observes òapart from being the most widely dispersed single Igbo sub-group, were well known long distance traders<sup>430</sup> and travelers, became apprehensive. The safety of their kiths and kin was of utmost importance to those at home. The situation was one of perplexity.

In his view on the situation in Mbano at the time, S.B.C. Onwuka stated,

Like in most Igbo communities, Mbano towns were very anxious because they heard what was happening in Nigeria, the killing of their brothers and sisters in the North and the torture they were giving to our sons also in the West. So our people became apprehensive to know how to save their brothers then in the North. That was how we saw the war that followed these killings to Igboland and reached Mbano.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> S.B.C Onwuka, c.72 years, civil servant interviewed at Umuelemai, 20/27/011.

<sup>430</sup> N.T Nwaezeigwe, *The Igbo and their Nri Neighbours: A Study in the Politics of Igbo Culture and Origins*, Enugu: Snap Press, Ltd, 2007, p.35.

<sup>431</sup> S.B.C. Onwuka Interview cited.

Mbano as part of the defunct Biafra no doubt, was to feel the pains, hardship, disorganisations and the hues and cries that accompanied the Nigeria-Biafra War-1967-1970. Many literatures exist among historians and the like on the Nigeria-Biafra War. However, an attempt is made here to examine the war in Mbano and its neighbours, its impact on group relations through individual and common experiences of the people during the period.

### **The War in Mbano and its Neighbouring Communities**

Following the declaration by Lieutenant Colonel Emeka Ojukwu, the then Military Governor of Eastern Region, on May 30, 1967, the Republic of Biafra was created. Ojukwu stated

Fellow countrymen and women, you, the people of Eastern Nigeria: conscious of the supreme authority of Almighty God over all mankind; of your duty to yourselves and posterity; Aware that you can no longer be protected in your lives and in your property by any government based outside Eastern Nigeria; Believing that you are born free and have certain inalienable rights which can best be preserved by yourselves

I í do hereby solemnly proclaim that the territory and region known an and called Eastern Nigeria, together with her continental shelf and territorial waters shall henceforth be an independent sovereign

state of the name and title of the Republic of  
Biafra.<sup>432</sup>

Consequent upon this declaration of the Republic of Biafra, Nigeria's Head of State, Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon, in response, declared war on Biafra. The shooting started on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1967. It was allegedly a war to keep Nigeria one.<sup>433</sup> It started as a police action to arrest a rebellion with a short, sharp surgical operation,<sup>434</sup> Ozigbo asserted.

However, with the attack on Ogoja and Nsukka, the Biafra side of Nigeria, the war took a more serious dimension. The various ethno-political, economic and social considerations, which brought about the declaration of the Republic of Biafra and later the war, and its prosecution, have been discussed in many literatures. For Mbano, many returnees appeared not to have received the news of out-break of the war with much shock and surprise. This was partly due to their experience of the 1966 pogrom that forced the Igbo to return to the east. With the exception of those who enrolled in the army and the enlightened, the rural populace never knew first hand what the war meant until they began to feel its pangs and throes. The effects were in the forms of refugee influx, forced conscription, air raids, hunger, starvation, diseases and deaths among other negative impacts that attended the war. It was not long before their meaning and implications were felt by the people of Mbano and its neighbours.

At the early stages of the war, recruitment into the Biafra army was on voluntary terms. Many people rushed to join the Biafra army. Initially, as Herneit-Sievers, Ahazuem and Emezue contended, enlistment was attractive to younger men, especially

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<sup>432</sup> A. H. W Kirk-Green, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria 2Vols*, in E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, p.246-247.

<sup>433</sup> Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland* p.155

<sup>434</sup> Ozigbo, p.155



those who had returned from other parts of Nigeria after the killings of 1966.<sup>435</sup> However, young ladies later volunteered to join the army. Many people also enrolled into different militias to contribute in their small ways to the war efforts. Core rationale behind this was mainly to defend their fatherland, Biafra from perceived injustice. There were other rationales. For instance, Mbalisi said the decision to join the Biafra army was because "at the onset of the war, many schools closed, the young boys joined the Biafra army as that appeared to be the only employment available."<sup>436</sup> He, alongside his friends joined the Biafra army because the closure of schools affected him as a teacher. People enrolled in the army to eke out a living and take care of their families.

The war caused the closure of many local trade routes, and prevented people from having access to food stuffs, such as salt, fish, rice and other food items. In this regard, S.E. Mbalisi revealed that; "when the war came closer to Mbano, specially, to Owerri, Umuahia, Okigwe and Mbaize, trade routes became closed. The route to Aboa in Rivers State where we bought fish was cut off. Abakaliki fell and the production of salt and rice stopped. I did not know what next to do for a living, salaries for teachers and civil servants and other workers was not mentioned any more. The only alternative job open was to join the Red Cross. Principally, I joined the Red Cross to save my head as the only son of my parents because members of the Red Cross were not taken to war front to fight. I felt secure to join at the time."<sup>437</sup>

As the war raged on, it came much closer to Mbano area. In fact, when Owerri fell to the Nigerian army, the Biafran army was moved to Atta-Ikeduru, (one of the Ugiri

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<sup>435</sup> Axel Herneit- Sievers, "The people, the Solders and the State," in Herneit- Sievers, J.O. Ahazuem and Emezue, *A Social History of the Nigeria Civil Wars; Perspective from Below*, Enugu: Jemezie Associates, 1997, p.76

<sup>436</sup> Samuel. E. Mbalisi, 72 years, civil servant and community leader, interviewed at Amaukwu Obollo, 20/08/2012

<sup>437</sup> S.E Mbalisi interview cited

Mbano groups of towns transferred to Ikeduru during the British colonial administrative reorganization). This action meant the war had reached Mbano and its neighbours. This assertion was confirmed by Alexander A. Madiebo thus, "there was not much anyone could do immediately to strengthen our resistance, as we had practically exhausted our human and material resources in pushing the enemy out of Oguta the previous day. Before long, the enemy was in Ahoada town and was still advancing from there towards Avu and Obinze on the outskirts of Owerri. With resources available to it, which were mainly local science products, the 14 Division managed to delay the entry into Owerri of the enemy until the 18<sup>th</sup> of September. Colonel Nwajei moved his headquarters to Atta and there a delegation came to see him to find out why he had lost Owerri."<sup>438</sup>

The capture of Owerri by the Nigerian army cost Col. Nwajei his job. He was replaced by Col. Kalu. During this period the enemy's brigade advanced to Mbaise, another neighbour of Mbano. Mbano appeared to have been drawn into a very dangerous situation. As already noted, Atta had become the new headquarters of the Owerri Division. Then the Mbaise area was under the enemy's siege and Okigwe axis was not free either. Madiebo further explained that "shortly after Kalu took over, Okpuala junction fell into the hands of the enemy, thus exposing the whole of Mbaise to the enemy. í soon the enemy linked up Aba and Owerri and began a two-pronged advance into Mbaise."<sup>439</sup>

The advance of the enemy brigade posed a big threat to the entire area. In fact, the fall of Owerri was attributed to the exhaustion of human and material resources. There were little or no ammunition and reinforcement to sustain the resistance against the

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<sup>438</sup> Alexander A Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafra War*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980, p.280

<sup>439</sup> Madiebo, p. 281

advancing and well armed Nigerian army. There was fear that Umuahia, the then capital of Biafra, may even be captured.

Madiebo expresses his concern in the absence of ammunition and reinforcements and with little or no prospects of getting them in the immediate future. The situation was very grave and almost too hopeless to be described properly. If the enemy got to Inyiwugwu, not only would the bulk of 14 Division around Owerri town be rendered useless and disorganized, there would not have been a single soldier available to stop him from moving from Inyiwugwu to Umuahia, the then capital of Biafra.<sup>440</sup>

Alarmed at the situation, Col. Ojukwu sent the following signal message to Kalu,

Your role in Port Harcourt disaster is still fresh in the minds of the people. You cannot, repeat cannot therefore afford to disappoint the nation a second time. You will clear the enemy completely from Mbaise within 24 hours or submit to me your resignation from the Biafra Army.<sup>441</sup>

This preemptive distress call from Col. Ojukwu to Kalu suggests the Biafra Army was in danger. The fear of the advancing enemy army, sent jitters into the spine of Mbano people who expected the worst as the area was surrounded by Nigerian soldiers on all sides. At this time too, recruitment into the Biafra Army was no longer voluntary. The need to strengthen the human and material resources of the Biafra Army caused voluntary recruitment to be replaced by conscription. Mbano apparently become not just a

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<sup>440</sup> Madiebo, 281

<sup>441</sup> Madiebo, 281

recruitment centre, but also saw the establishment of military training posts in the schools in the area.

According to C.E. Okoroike, a former Air Force Officer with the Biafra Army

Because of the harsh conditions at the time, people were forced into the Biafra Army. A random picking was made despite age and they were given two days training before they were sent to the war front. A time arose when there was no need to train any person. It was a situation of a person being caught, armed with a gun and taken to the war front. There were some army camps in and around Mbano. One was at Umuneke Primary School, and another was at St. Dominic's Secondary School. The training camp at Umuneke was known as 'Battalion-Four', the one at Nkwo Mbaa was 'Battalion-Ten' and the one at Ibeme, was 'Battalion-Six'. A good number of soldiers were trained and sent to the war front. A lot of them died due to improper training, hunger and stamina related problems.<sup>442</sup>

The war situation had its implications following the establishment of military camps in Mbano and other neighbouring communities. First, the war reached communities in the interior and closer to the people. Forceful recruitment into the Biafra army compelled many young men to go into hiding. There was also more disquiet on the

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<sup>442</sup>H.R.H Eze, C.E Okoroike c.72 years, retired teacher/ traditional ruler and ex-Biafra Air-Force Officer, interviewed at Ibeme Ugiri, 17/07/ 2011.

part of refugees that moved into Mbano from the captured parts of Igboland. In fact, the issue of refugees in Mbano during the war took the centre stage and brought changes in some aspects of inter-group relations in the area. The loss of jobs and closure of trade routes and military blockade to the importation of food and materials into Biafra, by Nigerian army, worsened the situation. This brought hunger and starvation amid other sufferings. Chinua Achebe noted that with the economic blockade and starvation, the Biafrans paid a great humanitarian price by ceding a great deal of territory to the Nigerians. The famine worsened as the war raged, as the traditional Igbo society of farmers could not plant their crops. Gowon has succeeded in cutting Biafra off from the sea, robbing its inhabitants of shipping parts to receive military and humanitarian supplies. The afflictions of marasmus and kwashiorkor began to spread further<sup>443</sup> However, with time, the international agencies came in to remedy this situation the much they could. Notable among these agencies that came to Mbano were the Red Cross, the Caritas Organisation and World Council of Churches (W.C.C.). The war time relations, especially, the refugee problem was quite disheartening as the discussion below will demonstrate.

### **War Time Relations: The Refugee Problem**

The war actually began with shooting, forcing several Biafra cities one after the other to surrender to the military might of the well equipped Nigerian troops. Biafra conceded Ogoja, Nsukka, Enugu and Bonny to Nigeria by the end of 1967.<sup>444</sup> And by the close of 1968, all minority areas of Biafra and one-third of Igboland were in Nigeria

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<sup>443</sup> Chinua Achebe, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, New York: Penguin Books, 2012, pp.209-210

<sup>444</sup> . Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland* , p.157

hands.<sup>445</sup> Soon, Owerri, Mbaise, Okigwe and Orlu also fell, pushing refugees into Mbano especially, Ehime, Ugiri, and Inyishi the areas. The fall of the major cities triggered mass migration and flight from the war affected areas to calm and quiet rural communities for safety. C. E. Okoroike observed

The war made us to understand Mbano and these neighbouring towns are at the heart of the then Biafra or Igboland. This was because Mbano as an integral part of Biafra, though witnessed the war, were not heavily affected as it did to Enugu. It mainly affected Owerri urban area, Umuahia, Mbaise and Okigwe and other sub-urban of Owerri like Ngor-Okpuala, Ikeduru, Nkwere, Mbieri, and Igirinta and so on. All these places were badly affected, the war ravished them. People from these areas came into Mbano and were quartered in schools, churches and private homes. They were all accommodated amidst fear of the unknown.<sup>446</sup>

The fall of these cities, was to a large extent responsible for the identical pattern of inward movements, a situation where a whole population fled into smaller sub-urban villages as the bigger ones crumbled. Migrations continued into the rural and safer communities as the war drew closer and air raids increasingly caused fear and terror. Most refugees moved alongside their live stocks. Okoroike observed that 'most people

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<sup>445</sup> Ozigbo, p.159

<sup>446</sup> C.E. Okoroike interview cited.

who came from Mbaise, Ikeduru, Igirinta, Obowo and Okigwe area came with their goats and fowl. Some came with ram and other movable property. These livestock were eaten when hunger increased.<sup>447</sup>

Though some parts of Mbano witnessed sporadic shootings, it remained one Igbo area whose communities were disposed to housing many refugees from all around Igboland during the war. The number of refugees which could run into thousands that were housed in people's houses, schools and churches is not known. Mbano and its neighbouring communities constituted a safe heaven for refugees from all places. Emmanuel Onyenze, who served with the Red Cross Society, said, "many of the refugees came from Port Harcourt, Cross River and Akwa-Ibom. They came to Obowo and through Etiti and Ehime-Umueze II many came into Obollo, Ibeme, Ogbor and other communities here. Many people especially, women contributed cassava at the initial stage to feed them. Most of our leaders like Chief Christian Nwachukwu, Chief Michael Mbalisi, and Ven. Dr. E.E Obilor among many others, accommodated refugees in their private homes."<sup>448</sup> Those who were not accommodated found refuge in churches and schools. Most prominent personalities from the government ministries were housed in the schools. Some of the refugees came with bullet wounds from air raids; others sustained different degrees of injury while escaping for their dear lives. Those who managed to return from the North and West were devastated. It was a disheartening experience for most returnees and refugees in Igboland. Describing the refugee situation, Colin Legume (cited by) Isichei stated,

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<sup>447</sup> C.E. Okoroike interview cited

<sup>448</sup> Emmanuel Onyenze, c.81 years, retired School Principle/ Ex-Biafra Soldiers, interviewed at Umukam Obollo, on 07/19/2010.

Only the Igbo know the whole terrible story from the 600, 000 or so refugees who have fled to the safety of Eastern region-hacked, slashed, mangled, stripped naked and robbed of all their possession; the orphans, the widows, the traumatized. A woman, mute and dazed, arrived back in her village after travelling for five days with only a bowl in her lap. She held her child's head, which was severed before her eyes. Men, women and children arrived with arms and legs broken hands hacked off, mouths split open. Pregnant women were cut open and the unborn children killed, the total casualties unknown.<sup>449</sup>

Many returnees to Mbanjo were said to have lost their lives on their way to safety.

Mbanjo and its neighbours were warmly disposed to refugees. They lived and co-existed with each other as one people to the end of the war, when they retired back to their homes.

The refugee situation was not without implications. The population flight from the areas under federal control created ever increasing refugee problems.<sup>450</sup> Communities were inconvenienced in accommodating the strangers. Issues of accommodation space, hunger, and outbreak of war-related diseases was rampant. The refugees were not all Igbo speaking people. There were people from Calabar area, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers and a lot more. People were overstretched in accommodating and feeding the refugees. Most

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<sup>449</sup> Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, pp.245-246

<sup>450</sup> Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland* , p.158



houses were at the time made of thatch and red mud and most families were rendered homeless in sheltering refugees from afar. This refugee situation also brought with it, persistent scarcity. But this appeared not to have deterred Mbano and its immediate neighbouring communities in the interior from receiving, sheltering and feeding refugees under the war situation.

Mr. Chidi Onwubuariri expresses his delight on how the war situation helped Inyishi people to show their age-long relations with refugees from Igirinta. According to him, many people took refuge in Inyishi during the war to save their lives. People from Igirinta took refuge there. When the war reached their area, they moved in their numbers to Amaudara village. More than a village came here from Igirinta. Amidst the war, relations continued as many people married their wives from amongst the refugees. I am quite sure and can remember that Stephen Onwuka's wife is from Igirinta. They met during the war. Also Madujiweonweya and many others married Igirinta women during the war. The war did not affect the relationship Inyishi had with Igirinta; rather it strengthened their relationship with the people.<sup>451</sup> Apart from refugees from Igirinta who came to Inyishi for safety, some Mbano people who lived along the major roads like Amaraku also moved to Inyishi. As Onwubuariri further explained, when Nigerian soldiers got to Okigwe through Enugu and parts of Atta through Owerri, Amaraku people, Umudim, Atta, Isu people, even people from Okwelle and Mbaise ran into Inyishi because the soldiers would pass through those places. Inyishi people are geographically lucky because we do not live along the major road like Amaraku, Atta and Akabo people. This geographical advantage explains why we were able to provide shelter

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<sup>451</sup> Chidi Onwubuariri, C. 71 years, Pensioner, interviewed at Amakpaka Umuoti Inyishi-Ikeduru, 08/24/2010.

for those who lived along the major roads. We did this in collaboration with Obollo, Ibeme, Ogbor and Oka Mbano among other communities.<sup>452</sup>



Renovated Ibeme primary school used as refugee camp during Nigeria-Biafra War.

Similarly, Chief Marcel Ibe informed on the refugee situation in Okwelle Onuimo neighbours of Mbano increased when Biafran soldiers came into the villages for conscription. That was how Okwelle youths got involved because those that were conscripted were taken to Okigwe to fight. The soldiers came mainly through Okigwe, forcing refugees from that area into the villages. Refugees from Udi, Ogwu, Okigwe and Onitsha settled in Okwelle. We embraced them as our brothers. In fact, I could confidently tell you that we treated them well and provided accommodation, food as much as we could under the war situation.<sup>453</sup> There was intense hunger for both the refugees and soldiers. It was common for people to eat whatever they could to survive the war.

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<sup>452</sup> Onwubuariri interview cited.

<sup>453</sup> Chief Marcel Ibe, C. 69 years Pensioner/Secretary Eze's Cabinet, Umuduruodu Okwelle, Onuimo, 08/ 24/2010.

Godson Ogu Onyirimba narrated his experience about the refugee situation in Umueze II, in Ehime Mbano. He said "the refugee problem in Umueze II was alarming. The closeness of Ahiara Mbaise to Umueze II caused Mbaise people to run into Mbano in their numbers to seek refuge. Mbano and parts of Mbaise, especially, Ihiteafoukwu and Eziana (the whole of Ekwereazu) have common historical ties. They were protected as our brothers when they ran to our villages for safety. Our people fed and gave them our beds to sleep on. For instance, the secretary of Etiti Council, Chief Richard Onyeneho came to my house as a refugee with his wife and four children. Mr. Reginald Nwogu from Mbaise also came to stay in my house. I sheltered them. I served as their watchman at night. My wife cooked their meals. They never stopped visiting me when the war ended."<sup>454</sup>

Okoro Peter Ogu of Eziana Mbaise believes Mbano served as a great refuge and relief area during the war. He thinks the claim by the people to common ancestry and cultural ties united them during the war. Hence, he said

The war did not really affect our relationship with Mbano people, our brothers and neighbours. You know we are one and are all part of Igboland and Biafra. So we fought against those we saw as our common enemies during the war -the Nigerians, that is the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba people. We opposed them the way we opposed the British colonialists. I would say the war united us the more as brothers because we were protecting one another from being killed. When Nigerian soldiers came into Mbaise

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<sup>454</sup> Ogu Onyirimba interview cited.

from Owerri and Okpuala, many of our people moved to Mbano to seek refuge. Because of the location of Mbano in the interior, the place was safer for refugees.<sup>455</sup>

However, Elder Okoro P. Ogu noted that before the war reached Mbaise, the area served as a refuge for people from Owerri, Rivers and Calabar, but as the war drew closer to Mbaise, people fled to Mbano. The war was very hot in those parts of Igboland, so people ran into Eziamma and other Mbaise communities. When the war came to Ahiara, Eziamma people and their refugees moved into Mbano communities. Some people ran to the *mbara* towards Ugirike, where no one lived to seek refuge in the farms. *Ogba-aghara dara ebe nile, enwekweghi onye mara aka nri ya na aka ekpe*<sup>456</sup> (There was confusion every where no one knew what to do).

According to Innocent Chijioke Obiukwu at Umuezegwu the people shared the same experience during the war in Ihite-Uboma and Etiti communities. We enjoyed peace till refugees from Calabar, Port-Harcourt and Owerri came into our villages. It was through the refugees that Uboma and Etiti people knew the war was close to the area. When the war reached Ahiara and Umuahia, the people moved towards Umunumo, Nsu, and Agbaja. Many people moved to their maternal homes in Mbano for safety. We were a bit lucky because the type of muddy soil we have in Etiti hindered the soldiers from moving into the interior.<sup>457</sup> This movement into the interior especially into Etiti was confirmed by Madiebo as he writes that, after the fall of Umuahia the seat of Biafra Government and all administrative Directorates moved across the Imo River to the areas

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<sup>455</sup> Elder Okoro Peter Ogu, C.85 years, Retired Civil servant/Ex-Biafra Soldier, interviewed at Eziamma-Oparanadim Ahiazu Mbaise, 08/23/2010.

<sup>456</sup> Okoro P. Ogu interview cited.

<sup>457</sup> Mr. Chijioke Innocent Obiukwu, c. 65 Years, security man, interviewed at Umuezegwu Ihite-Uboma-Etiti, 25/08/2010

of Etiti and Owerri. The rest of civil population also moved with the government and the Directorates. The first major problem that confronted the 12 Division was acute shortage of manpower because each Division recruited its men from local civilians within its operational area.<sup>458</sup>

Mbano and its neighbours hosted many refugees during the war. As stated earlier, geographical location of some of the communities further afar from the major cities and war concentrated areas, helped make the area largely safe. The influx of refugees into the area imposed hardship on the people. Many people abandoned their farms. Chidi Onwubuariri said "not many people dared plant anything. Those who did had their crops stolen before harvest time. Under the war situation, people did what ever they could to survive. So we may not call that "real stealing". Let us say people "took" whatever they saw to survive the hunger brought by the war. Cassava was the major food that was produced in Inyishi. The Umu-uri and Amaimo people produced yam. They were harvested at night by hungry people. Soldiers climbed palm/raffia trees (*ngwo*) to collect palm wine of the *diochi* -wine tapper."<sup>459</sup> Onwubuariri appeared not to have seen the stealing by people to survive during the war as a crime. He perceived it as part of abnormal conditions associated with conflict and war situations. But he decried "the atrocities the soldiers committed were the raping of many young girls. Some were forcefully taken by the soldiers. Others were forced into early and unwanted marriages. Yet many others voluntarily followed the Nigerian soldiers for the protection they were promised."<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Madiebo, *The Nigeria Revolt and the Biafra War* p. 335

<sup>459</sup> Chidi Onwubuariri interview cited.

<sup>460</sup> Onwubuariri interview cited.

*Mbaa* River in Oka and Inyishi communities attracted many refugees. According to Onwubuariri,

The *õMbaa* Inyishi and *õMbaa* Okaø rivers attracted so many refugees to Inyishi and Oka. Many people depended and survived by fishing from the rivers. It was a source of protein at the time. Inyishi and Oka Mbanò are like brothers. All those who came into our communities as refugees were protected and the relationship was mostly cordial until the war ended. The name Biafra bound us together as brothers to assist one another, unlike the rabid Nigerian soldiers who moved around killing people. The *Mbaa* was Godø gift to our people especially, during the war. Even the soldiers used the river.<sup>461</sup>

Nonetheless, it was common place that people ate whatever they saw during the war to survive -yam, cassava, plantain, goat, and fowl. It was even said that people ate rats, lizards, bats, locusts, snakes and frogs. It was indeed a traumatic period for the Igbo.

In some communities, people caught stealing were punished. Peter Ogu recounted one incident in Eziama. This is what he said,

A particular man named Ogaraku from Umunumo was very notorious for stealing both farm produce, peopleø properties and even livestock mainly

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<sup>461</sup> Onwubuariri interview cited.

goat and fowl. He was caught when he stole clothes from the C.M.S. church in Eziama. Many people knew about it and I know no body would say it's a lie. I would challenge any one who says it is not true. He was taken to the Eke Eziama market where he was subjected to *iri Mbube* and he confessed. Within a short period, his stomach got swollen and he died of it. One Iheonunekwu Emegbulem was another notorious thief in Eziama who was captured. He was heavily fined by Eziama for stealing plantain and yam from a farm belonging to *Mazi Ignatius Okoro*. He was lucky because he was later set free. These measures were taken to discourage people from stealing. But under the war situation, that was almost impossible.<sup>462</sup>

Ogu Onyirimba confirmed the Eziama incident when he said, "I witnessed the *iri Mbube* in Eziama during the war when one notorious thief, (though I can't remember his name right now) who was terrorizing both the people and refugees was caught. Luck ran out on him when he stole from the C.M.S church. When we heard the *Ikoru* we moved to Eziama only to discover it was the criminal that was caught. He did not survive the ordeal."<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Okoro Peter Ogu interview cited.

<sup>463</sup> Ogu Onyirimba interview cited

Despite measures undertaken by most communities to curb crime, it continued because of the necessity to survive the hunger occasioned by the economic blockade and starvation war strategy imposed on Biafra by the Gowon-led Nigerian government. The social, economic and cultural life of the people suffered greatly. Adiele Afigbo observed that 'different communities in their actual day to day experiences have had to co-exist and interact in peace and in war.'<sup>464</sup> Relations between Mbano and its neighbours were largely peaceful as mechanisms were available to quickly assuage unsettled nerves. The war itself was a factor of contact and interaction between the people on the one hand, and the refugees that ran into the area on the other. However, the war made people to mutually aid one another.

The age-long mutual relations between the people were factored by their claim to a common ancestry as exemplified in the numerous cultural festivals celebrated to mark their brotherhood. Therefore, the belief in common ancestry played out in the way the people cooperated during the Nigeria-Biafra war. Ogu Onyirimba said

Our people understood their neighbours were also their brothers, so people from different communities continued to cross boundaries to trade with their neighbours in the area. Movements between communities were safe through the bush paths that linked them. The war affected the peaceful relations prevalent in the area by bringing fear and tension. But I will tell you one thing; the war strengthened relations between the people because our people

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<sup>464</sup> Afigbo, *The Igbo and their Neighbours* , p.24



showed kindness and assisted one another through out the war. Such kindness was extended to refugees from distant Igbo areas.<sup>465</sup>

Community leaders were also said to have used age-grades and able bodied men to ensure that inter-community movements were safe between neighbours. Especially, traders, and people that went to fetch water from the stream located in neighbouring communities. For instance, this situation existed between Ogbor and Inyishi, Amaimo Ikeduru and Umuozu Ugiri, and between Umueze 11 in Ehime and Ugirike in Ikeduru. The mutual relations that existed between the people probably made it possible for refugees to find Mbano and some of their neighbouring communities, safe during the war. If Mbano and their neighbouring communities were hostile to one another, refugees would have avoided the area. In spite of the challenges of over population, shortage of food, increased hunger, out break of diseases and discomfort associated with refugees, many of the refugees were accommodated by the people. Those refugees who were safeguarded in Mbano will never erode their experience and the hospitality accorded them. Those who lost their loved ones still live with the grievous experience.

### **Biafran Veterans' Experiences, Biafra made Weapons and Relief Agencies**

Some people who took part in the war had some disturbing experiences. Some who joined the Biafra army experienced hard times during training, especially, those conscripted. Narrating his experience and what he saw at St. Dominic's Secondary School, which served as an army camp-Tenth Battalion, C.E. Okoroike said "many young boys were conscripted in communities in Mbano area and brought to the Tenth Battalion camp at St. Dominic's. They were poorly trained and sent the war front. A lot of them

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<sup>465</sup> Ogu Onyirimba interview cited.

died because of lack of food and lack of stamina. The strong ones who stood the harsh training were taken to the war front, but few returned. Many were maimed. Some were shot and were amputated; some lost their eyes; some, their limbs; while others sustained various degrees of injuries.<sup>466</sup> Many able-bodied young men who voluntarily joined the Biafran Army deserted when they were confronted with the stark realities of the war. Many parents hid their young male children in the bush or on the *uko* (a wooden hanger in the kitchen where food was stored) to evade conscription. The brutal way the soldiers went about the conscription brought fear in the communities and made movement of people difficult during the closing stages of the war. There was pandemonium and confusion as people struggled to avoid being killed or captured. Relating with people from different communities became difficult; markets were deserted, church buildings were also attacked. In fact, interactions reduced as movements were almost impossible because to do so was almost suicidal.

Because of his horrendous experience, Chidi Onwubuariri was reluctant to speak on the war during my interaction with him. But when he finally put his emotions behind to share his personal experiences, he stated thus,

The Nigeria-Biafra war was a bad omen that I do not want to remember again. It disorganized every body in Igboland. Personally, I hate to hear or talk about it because the poverty I am faced with today is as result of that evil war. It stopped me from doing my Teacher Training College (TTC) programme. I was drafted into the Biafra Army to go and die, but only sustained injuries. I fought at Oguta

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<sup>466</sup> C.E Okoroike interviewed cited

when the Nigerian war machine later nick named òOguta Boyö was captured. Many people from here were wounded and many died. Many families closed as their only sons were killed in the war front. People like James Iwuoha, my friend Onyeka, Mr. Osuagwu a fellow T.T.C mate, many of them that I am saddened about died. The issue of kwashiorkor, hunger and disease killed many children. People were mal-nourished. To be honest with you *nnaa!* (referring to me), I hate to talking about the war because I lost my brother to the war. It was a bad omen. I was at Owerri-Shell Camp when the war ended. Wait! You are talking about relations! How could people have related peacefully, attend the celebration of our festivals and trade with others in such condition? Communities and people were almost cut off and found it difficult to visit each other except through bush paths or as refugees.<sup>467</sup>

Honestly, listening to Onwubuariri narrate his war ordeal evokes emotion. Many people had similar experiences in Mbano and Igboland at large.

In a similar vein, Peter Ogu told the writer that òhis sons, Ogu Nnamdi, escaped to Mbano through Ezealapkaka stream when he was conscripted. He luckily escaped when the soldiers were on the chase for another young man that tried to escape. His son was rescued by Mr. Iheanacho Iwuoha from Umudimodu Mbano. Mbano and Mbaise are

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<sup>467</sup> Chidi Onwubuariri interview cited

really good brothers and neighbours. Signs of our good relations manifested in the way they accommodated and assisted refugees from other communities.<sup>468</sup>

My father always told me how he abandoned his *fiancée*, one Miss Elizabeth from Inyishi-Ikeduru. He said she was almost conscripted a second time after he was saved by Ven. Obilor. He went to see off Elizabeth when he heard the noise from the soldiers. It had been by God's grace that he ran into his cousin's house - Godwin Mbalisi, who was a police officer. He refused them entry into his house. It was that day that he canceled that marriage. Subsequently, when the soldiers came back, his mother would hide him at the plantain stem and cover him with the dry leaves.<sup>469</sup>

The challenges faced by Biafra soldiers in terms of inadequate weapon forced Biafrans to manufacture their own. They must salvage the situation if Biafra must survive the onslaught of the well-armed Nigerian army. Ogbudinkpa stated that one fact of the Nigeria civil war was the seemingly many innovations in the field of mechanical engineering in the blockade and war-torn Biafra. If these are accepted as significant technological innovations, they seem to bear testimony to the often heard expression that necessity is the mother of inventions. Consequently, Biafrans assembled a team of engineers to manufacture a number of weapons. The team was headed by a ghost innovator known as 'UZUMMUO'; that is 'Fairy Smith'.<sup>470</sup> He further stated that Uzummuo, the Biafran ghost innovator was an indigenous illiterate innovator who hearkened to the desperate but clarion calls of the secessionist Biafran government to its subjects to use high level manpower and resourcefulness rediscovered during the war to

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<sup>468</sup> Peter Ogu interview cited

<sup>469</sup> Mbalisi interview cited

<sup>470</sup> For details on these see chapter three of Reuben N. Ogbudinkpa, *The Economics of the Nigerian Civil War and its Prospects for National Development*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 1985, p.17

help the blockaded economy to withstand the strain of hostilities. Uzummuo led his men in tinkering with every mechanical device that would help check the powerful Federal Army. Their perseverance led to the following mechanical innovations: Hand grenades (*udala*), Guns (automatic rifles, double barrels, and pistols), bullets, helmet, cartridges, mortars, shells, explosives, ground-to-air rockets; landmines and anti-tank weapons (Biafra beer, foot cutter, coffin, Ojukwu's bucket, (the flying Ogbunigwe) shore batteries and anti-aircraft guns. Tanks and armored vehicles (Red Devils, Genocide) often converted from bulldozers and harvesters, Battery reactors.<sup>471</sup> Below are pictures of some of the Biafra made military hard wares found at War (now Peace) Museum at Umuahia.



Ojukwu flying bucket (Biafran Ogbunigwe)



Biafra red devil



Biafra armored tank

However, Nigerian Army had the upper hand and with their superior and sophisticated weapons and ammunition, Biafra was forced to surrender. The horrendous war situation imposed untold hardship, hunger and diseases on the Biafrans. Mbano and their neighbours were not left out the ugly situation. It was said that the Biafran Ogbunigwe was used at Amaraku in 1969. The *ogbunigwe* created a hole on the road to stop Nigerian soldiers from entering the Ugiri area where most refugees were

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<sup>471</sup> Ogbudinkpa, pp. 18-40

accommodated. The influx of refugees into the area caused increased hunger and hardship.

The presence of some international relief agencies provided some relief and helped alleviate the plight of those who managed to survive. L.E. Opara who served as World Council of Churches (W.C.C.) agent at Umueze I and Mbano Joint Hospital explained that,

During the war, the World Council of Churches which I represented operated in Umueze I and that was a source of help to many who survived. It was from my office that I left for military training. I was a teacher before the war. These bodies helped; the Caritas of the Roman Catholic rendered help to people. These bodies and the Red Cross were very helpful to those who could get to them to survive. As agents, we did not discriminate in the distribution of relief materials to people.<sup>472</sup>

Such items like salted fish, corn meal, milk, egg yolk were supplied to those affected and many people survived through their help. People with kwashiorkor were taken to the sick bays situated in schools and churches. Even some healthy people were attended to and assisted with some quantity of corn-meal to curb their hunger.<sup>473</sup> In deed, survival of many people, especially refugees, depended much on the relief materials brought in by the international relief agencies stationed in most primary schools in Mbano

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<sup>472</sup> L.E. Opara interview cited

<sup>473</sup> C.E. Okoroike interview cited

communities, Inyishi Ikeduru, Umuezeala, Ezeoke, St. Theresa's church and many other places. The war experience of Mbano people and the Igbo at large is of a truth, devastating.

By the closing years of 1969, there were unmistakable pointers that an end to the war was imminent. People had been disillusioned with the war as Biafrans ran out of ammunition and manpower. The Nigerian Army bombarded every possible place in Igboland, including hospitals, schools, churches and private homes towards the end of the war. The number of casualties increased by the day. According to Achebe, in February 1969 alone nearly eight hundred civilians were massacred through targeted Nigerian Air-Force strikes on open markets near Owerri- Umuohiagu and Ozu-abam. The Nigerian Air-Force pilots were particularly notorious for not respecting the Geneva Convention resolutions described civilian safe heavens such as hospitals, refugee and food distribution camps, and centres of religious worship.<sup>474</sup>

Achebe writes that in October 1969, Ojukwu reached out desperately to the United Nations to mediate a cease-fire as a prelude to peace negotiations, his pleas were met with a deafening silence<sup>475</sup>. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe had outlined a fourteen-point peace plan to be implemented by a proposed UN Peace-Keeping force made up of international and local peace keeping forces. Azikiwe's proposal which was submitted to both United Nations officials and the Federal Government of Nigeria was rejected as unworkable<sup>476</sup>. Consequently, six months from February, Nnamdi Azikiwe decided to discontinue any public support for the secessionist aspiration of Biafra and turned in his

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<sup>474</sup> Achebe, *There was a Country* p.212

<sup>475</sup> Achebe, p.212

<sup>476</sup> Achebe, p.215

diplomatic credentials. There was general dissatisfaction over the escalating number of casualties on possible negotiation impasse.

The situation disrupted the peaceful socio-cultural, political and economic relations of Mbano and their neighbours. The desertion of markets hindered effective trade relations between the peoples. The big markets in the area, such as the Orié Amaraku, Nkwo Umuezeala and Eke Atta that used to serve as a point of contact and interaction between the people from different communities could not function. Trade articles such as palm oil, salt, fish and rice were in short supply. Hunger and disease claimed many lives and kept many more on the fringe of death. Mbano Joint Hospital and some sick bays were attacked and health workers deserted for safety. Many families were devastated towards the end of the war. At this point the centre could no longer hold, Mbano people and their neighbours were said to have joined the clamour for an end to the war. The Biafrans could no longer afford to continue their course.

What was more, the news reached the villages that Ojukwu, the resistant Biafran leader had fled to Ivory Coast for safety. Biafra was left in the hands of Sir Louis Mbanefo, the Chief Justice of Republic of Biafra and General Philip Effiong who would eventually surrender Biafra to the Gowon led Nigerian government.

### **Socio-Economic Effects of the War**

The story of Biafra surrender to Nigeria began with news of the flight by the Biafra commander Col. Ojukwu. With Ojukwu's departure, Biafra troops lost heart and began to massively desert the war fronts. The Nigerian troops closed in as Biafran defences collapsed. On 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1970, the acting Head of State, Major General Philip Effiong, yielded to the pressure from Biafran troops to sue for peace. In a broadcast that



afternoon, he called on the Biafran forces to lay down their arms and stop fighting. The war thus ended on 12<sup>th</sup> of January, 1970. It has been claimed that Gowon ordered the federal troops in Biafra to stop fighting on January 14, 1970.<sup>477</sup>

People jubilated and heaved sighs of relief as they were informed by returnee Biafran soldiers about the end of the war. Mixed feelings reportedly pervaded the communities, at least, in the then Biafra enclave. One thing was certain, their fears, sleepless nights and sufferings would be reduced. The initial concern was how to survive the hard times at the end of the war. The refugees left Mbano and other communities where they had sought refuge. Many feared uncertainties and stayed longer in their host communities. Emmanuel Onyenze informed that some refugees including Nnanna Odika from Umuahia, Mr. Uche kalu and Mr. Chukwuma Ukaiwe from Ohuhu near Umuahia, were in his house till late February 1970 before they returned home.<sup>478</sup>

The end of the war exerted a devastating and overwhelming pressure on the socio-economic and general living conditions of Mbano people, their neighbours and the Igbo in general. The war ended with the declaration made by General Gowon in a national broadcast where he made his ñno victor, no vanquishedö speech.<sup>479</sup> It took a while for the meaning of that statement to manifest. Achebe averred that,

At the end of the thirty-month war, Biafra was vast smoldering rubble. The head count at the end of the war was perhaps three million dead, which was approximately 20 percent of the entire population.

This high proportion was mostly children. The cost

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<sup>477</sup> Ozigbo, *A History of Igbolandí* , p.162

<sup>478</sup> Onyenze interview cited

<sup>479</sup> Achebe, *There Was a Country,í* p. 226

in human lives made it one of the bloodiest civil wars in human history.<sup>480</sup>

Mbano indigenes at home and in Diaspora were affected by the war. Many private houses, school buildings, markets and bridges, among other infrastructure, had been destroyed by air raids. The health centres were not spared. The people could only but count their losses and pick up their pieces.

The socio-economic effects of the war are certainly unquantifiable. The war destroyed and impeded infrastructural and general development in Mbano and around Igboland. Ozigbo rightly pointed out that by the time Nigeria declared war on Biafra in July, 1967, the Igbo had attained a high degree of economic prosperity, modern industrial growth, educational advancement and social sophistication<sup>481</sup>. These developments in infrastructure were either put on-hold or destroyed. Some of the secondary schools built before the war, were shattered. For instance, Boys Grammar School (later Ibeme High School) built in 1963 and the house where the first principal Mr. W. Ekwoanya lived were destroyed by air raids. Others were Boys Grammar School Onicha-Uboma, built in 1963; Girls Secondary School, Atta 1965 and Teacher Training College (TTC and later Girls Secondary School) Ezeoke built in 1967, by the Anglican Church in collaboration with communities were affected. St. Aquinas Secondary School, Anara built by the Catholic Mission in 1962 was not spared.<sup>482</sup> The same happened to majority of the primary schools used as refugee camps. The buildings were equally attacked and

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<sup>480</sup> Achebe, *There Was a Country* p. 227

<sup>481</sup> Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland*, p. 172

<sup>482</sup> For details see, A. O Iwuagwu, *The Foundation of the Anglican Church in Imo State, 1905-2000* p.185-186. The interviews of with Mr. Orbed Nwachukwu of Ezeoke and Nze Boniface Chukwuma Alagwa of Umuagwu, Umuakagu Nsu were cited.

shattered by air raids. Following the destructions, many people were rendered homeless. School children who were able to return to school, studied under the trees before the buildings were reconstructed. Economic activities at the Amaraku, Nkwo Umuezeala, Eke-Atta and other major markets in the area, were carried out under the hot scorching sun or drenching.

Business men and women who lived in urban centres like Owerri, Aba, and Port-Harcourt were forced back to their villages without any property. S.B. Onwuka said as a result of the war, most people lost all their property, especially, those that were resident outside Mbano. Many were in Igirinta near Port-Harcourt, Aba, Onitsha, Oru, Ogbaru and Enugu. A few were in the North and some were trapped in those places. The war shattered the economy of the entire Biafra.<sup>483</sup>

At the end of the war, the Biafran currency became worthless. This further heightened the socio-economic hardship of the people. Money saved in banks by Biafrans was seized by the federal government. Obi-Ani writes that initially, General Gowon insisted that nothing would be paid in exchange for the Biafran currency, describing it as worthless and useless. However, Gowon later relented in his stand and the Igbo people who deposited the Biafran currency, got (£20) each irrespective of the amount of the Biafra money an individual deposited. This token gesture cost the Federal Government about £4 million, but was a colossal loss to the Igbo.<sup>484</sup>

Obviously, the outcome of the war had implications for relations between Mbano people and their neighbours. First, the cessation of hostilities enabled refugees to return to their homes. Mbano communities were free from the challenge of over population

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<sup>483</sup> Onwuka interview cited

<sup>484</sup> Obi-Ani, p.24

caused by the war. Secondly, schools that were closed because of the war were reopened. School children and teachers resumed learning. Mutual and peaceful interactions between pupils from different communities resumed. Markets were cleared of bush and trade resumed. Trade and cultural relations between communities which were affected by the war resumed as people went to different markets to buy and sell. Movements of people from one place to another gradually improved. Social security and peace had been jeopardized by the war. Most farms had been over-taken by bushes and many people had lost their farm crops to thieves. But the people of Mbano and indeed the Igbo were resilient enough in their survival endeavours. These survival efforts form the thrust of the next discourse.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### POST-WAR DEVELOPEMENT AND RELATIONS TO 2006

#### Self -Help and Survival Efforts

The period after the war was very trying for the Igbo. Most individuals embarked on various menial jobs and suffered in order to survive. The demand for food, drugs and other necessities in the rural communities and villages in Mbano was quite high. People moved to friends and neighbours house in search of available drugs and food. The need to survive enhanced relations as people who had more food shared with their brothers, in-laws and neighbours. The mutual relations that existed between peoples manifested in their willingness to assist in the repair of houses and digging of water wells to cushion the effects of the war.

For individuals in the core Igbo area the immediate post-war period was, as Herneit-Sieevers put it, òa period of desperate search for money with which to buy goods and make available other preconditions for future planning.ö<sup>485</sup> People had the intention to leave their homes and return to the cities where they had lived before the war. But the problem was, how do people raise money for transportation? The options available were trekking, the use of the bicycle or lorries that were scarcely seen. Most people followed track routes to Port-Harcourt, others trekked to Onitsha, Umuahia, Owerri, Ogbaru and Oru. Some invaded and carted away items in the sick bays at Obollo, Umuozu, Amaraku and Umuezeala. Stocked kernels and other properties of Electrical Corporation of Biafra (ECB) were also vandalized and the items stored there were removed. People moved to

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<sup>485</sup> A. Herneit-Sieevers òThe End of the War and First Steps towards Reconstruction,ö in Herneit-Sieevers, J.O Ahazuem and S. Emezue, *A Social History of the Nigeria Civil War: Perspectives from Below*. Enugu: Jemezie Associates, 1997, p.177177

Enugu, Aba, Owerri, Port-Harcourt, Onitsha, Umuahia and Okigwe to sell items in order to obtain Nigerian currency.<sup>486</sup>

Available information from the writer's research suggests that overwhelming majority of individuals basically survived through the sale of their household property like shirts, bicycles and looted items. Those who had items sold them in search of Nigerian currency. Narrating his experience, S.E. Mbalisi stated, "I travelled to Umuahia in conjunction with my brother Godwin Mbalisi, John Onyenze I, Chidi Opara, Josiah Ejiogu, among others on bicycle to look for Nigerian money. I had to sell the camera I bought from one Ugoji from Owerri at the cost five pounds (£5) Nigerian money. I also sold some stockfish my mother stored to the soldiers at Imo River head-bridge."<sup>487</sup> The monies realised from the sale of these items assisted the individuals tremendously in their post-war recovery efforts. Some worked for their community chiefs and other privileged individuals and were paid paltry sums for their services. The people were able to sustain their families with the earnings.

The Nigerian Red Cross Society (RCS) in collaboration with the National Commission for Rehabilitation (NCR), were saddled with the responsibility of providing succor to the people at the end of the war. In this regard, J. Isawa Elaigwe noted that the Federal Government, through its National Commission for Rehabilitation (NCR) and the Nigerian RCS, provided some relief supplies to the people shortly after the war. The Nigerian Red Cross had stockpiled 13, 000 tons of food and was making arrangement for another 7, 000 tons by the end of January, 1970. The foodstuffs were used in feeding about 700, 000 war victims in the Eastern states during the first quarter of

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<sup>486</sup> C.E Okoroike Interview cited

<sup>487</sup> S.F. Mbalisi Interview cited

1970.<sup>488</sup> Most individuals had to survive through the provisions brought by the relief agencies. Pre-war teachers were recalled. Those who had no formal education did menial jobs. Most young boys took to climbing and cutting palm fruits to save money to start some petty businesses. Through the petty businesses, many Igbo individuals through sheer enterprise became prominent business moguls within a few years after the war. The Igbo gradually re-established their businesses in commercial cities like Lagos, Kano, Aba, and Port Harcourt. Mbanda communities and those their neighbours, assisted their citizens during and after the war.

The Nigeria-Biafra War brought to the fore, one of the guiding theories of this discourse, the theory of Natural Anarchy discussed earlier in chapter one. To recap, this theory essays that, the natural state of man is one of unrestricted war and competition; a war of all against all; one based on continued unrest predicated on the survival of the strongest over and against the weakest. The different conflicting political and economic interests impinged on harmonious cohabitation between Nigerians and the defunct Biafrans for thirty-six months. This view is in tandem with the nature of relations and interactions among the Igbo, particularly, Mbanda and its neighbours during the war years.

Obviously, people all over Igboland had found encouragement through several means, such as families, communities and churches. Paul Obi-Ani stated that the Igbo were spurred on by some consolatory, philosophical music. The music counseled patience and the need to avoid a reoccurrence of such a disaster. It acknowledged the calamity that befell the Igbo as a result of the war. Okwedy also admonished that it is

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<sup>488</sup> J. Isawa Elaigwe, *Gowon: The Biography of a Soldiers Statesman*, Ibadan: West Books Publishers Ltd., 1986, p.141.

only God that can truly apportion blame in a dispute between brothers and advised that we (the Igbo) all should be happy for surviving.<sup>489</sup>

Expectedly, such music among other numerous factors emboldened the Igbo to bring themselves together, put the war behind them and forge ahead with life. Many town councils and associations that later became known as town unions in 1976 emerged. The town associations and social clubs embarked on various reconstruction works. Through sheer determination, the people were able to rebuild most of the infrastructure damaged during the war within a few years of cessation of hostilities. Mbanjo people embarked on some self-help projects in the communities. By 1985, all their communities with support from government of the East Central States had reconstructed damaged infrastructure. The creation of Imo State in 1976 also played a major role through the Local Government Councils and Town Unions in speeding up reconstruction and further socio-economic developments in many communities. An insight into some of the major infrastructural reconstruction and development projects in Mbanjo up to 1985 would suffice.

### **Aspects of Infrastructural Reconstruction and Developments**

At the end of the war in 1970, the Igbo were determined to reconstruct the destructions brought by the war. The people ignored the lukewarm attitude of the federal government and piloted their own affairs. The East Central State administrator, Ukpabi Asika, in his maiden budget speech, urged the Igbo to move on when he said, we must take giant strides forward in order to recover lost grounds, let none of us make any mistakes, the journey is fraught with difficulties, but if we persevere, we will triumph and

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<sup>489</sup> Obi-Ani, *Post Civil-War Political and Economic Reconstruction of Igboland* p.31



reach our goals.<sup>490</sup> Such words of encouragement contributed to spur the Igbo into positive and effective reconstruction efforts. Ozigbo writes that

Reconstruction is about rebuilding damaged structures and facilities. The socio-economic base of the Igbo society (structures and infrastructures) appeared to have totally collapsed at the end of the Biafra war. Ruins and devastations were everywhere. The educational institutions at all levels, the industries, public utilities, health services communication systems and financial institutions were severely battered and needed to be rebuilt. The air raid shelling and bombings devastated Igbo lives and property.<sup>491</sup>

The observation by Ozigbo appears cogent. Our effort here is to examine the extent to which the damaged schools, industries, public utilities, markets and other infrastructure were reconstructed by Mbano people and how they enhanced inter-group relations. These areas are approached thematically.

### **Education: Reconstruction and Development of Schools**

Generally in Igboland, education suffered the most devastating losses as a result of the war. All schools closed down during the three academic years when hostilities made it impossible for them to function. Despite the prevailing conditions of the schools

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<sup>490</sup> . òA greater future is Ahead of Usí says Asika in Maiden Budget Speech,ö *Daily Times*, Lagos: May 29, 1970, p.13

<sup>491</sup> I.R.A Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland in the 20<sup>th</sup> Centuryí* , p. 176

in Igboland, the Ukpabi Asika government courageously reopened primary and secondary schools in March, 1970 barely three months after the cessation of hostilities.<sup>492</sup> Before the civil war, schools had been administered by missionaries. But after the war, schools were taken over by the government of the East Central State (ECS) in their bid to provide essential social services to the people. As reported by the *Daily Times Newspaper*, the government enacted the Public Education Edict of 1970, which legally transferred the running of all schools to the state government.<sup>493</sup> Schools in Mbano reopened alongside other schools in Igboland. Most of these schools had been used as homes for refugees and others as battalion training camps for Biafran soldiers.

As C.E. Okoroike stated, "immediately after the war, Mbano people paid serious attention to education. They mobilize men and women from the communities to clear the schools for academic work."<sup>494</sup> Since Mbano was not a major theater of the war, much devastation did not occur as was the case in places like Owerri, Nnewi and Oguta, among others. S.B.C. Onwuka presented the situation thus, in fact, we were lucky in Mbano, most of our schools were not seriously affected. Like I said, there was not serious fighting and shelling in the hinterland areas of Mbano, even Inyishi. But the school buildings that were touched by air raids, the minor repairs were carried out by the communities. With the repairs, academic work commenced.<sup>495</sup>

The schools renovated include Ibeme High School, St. Dominic's Secondary School used as Tenth-Battalion, St. Aquinas Secondary School, Anara, Ibeme Primary School and Igwebuike. There were also renovation works in the neighbouring schools like, St.

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<sup>492</sup> Obi-Ani, *Post Civil-War Political and Economic Reconstruction* p.36

<sup>493</sup> "300,000 To Get Free Education in E-Central States", *Daily Times*, Lagos: October 22, 1970, p.1.

<sup>494</sup> Eze C.E. Okoroike interview cited

<sup>495</sup> Sir S.B.C. Onwuka interview cited

Columba Secondary School, Amaimo Ikeduru, Boys Grammar School, Onicha Uboma, T.T.C. Ezeoke (now Ezeoke Girls Secondary School) and Girlø Secondary School, Atta-Ikeduru among others. These schools were affected by air raids late in 1969.<sup>496</sup>

Because of the population surge, there was need to build more schools to accommodate the primary school children. Consequently, most communities embarked on building new schools even before government assistance. The newly created government of Imo state provided funds for building more schools. During the period, Imo State government built in 108 communities, 166 schools (both primary and secondary) at a cost of over N900, 000<sup>497</sup> between 1976 and 1985. Mbano communities got their fair share. See table 9

**Table 9 Schools built through government and community efforts, 1983-1984**

S/N	Communities	Names of schools
1.	Umuozu	Community Secondary School, 1984
2.	Ogbor	Ogbor Secondary School, 1983
3.	Amaraku	Community Secondary School, 1983
4.	Obollo	Secondary Technical School, 1983-84
5.	Amuzari	Community Secondary School, 1984

According to Sir E.C Onyenze, a member of Imo State Education Board, when the government provided funds for the schools, the committee set out to work. We went to parts of Ugiri, Umuozu, Ogbor, Anara and many other communities. We were riding on

<sup>496</sup> C.E. Okoroike interview cited

<sup>497</sup> Imo State Annual Report of Community Development and Self-Help Project Division; 1984/85, Owerri: Government Printers, 1985. p.28

our bicycles to most of these places. In fact, by 1985 most of the communities within Mbano had at least one secondary school.<sup>498</sup>

Besides, apart from the building of schools, some communities also gave financial assistance to deserving indigent but intelligent secondary school students. This was done with a view to encouraging educational pursuit of their children. In Ehime, the community initiated palm fruit harvest and sale for payment of our children's school fees. Financial challenges at the time caused communities to embark on fund raising through communal sale of palm produce. From the successes recorded through this method of fund raising, the example was extended to other communities. Through these means, students' school fees were paid communally. This helped to reduce the burden of school fees on parents.<sup>499</sup> The communities assisted greatly both, in the building of schools and payment of school fees. This was because the Imo State Government lacked the funds to do so.

E.O. Egbo observed that the financial commitments of the various communities towards the education of their children were quite high. For instance, he stated that 127 communities spent over N528, 000 on the education of their children in the 1974/75 academic session.<sup>500</sup> Before 1980, the population of post-secondary school candidates was high, necessitating the building of many secondary schools through community effort during the period. Most communities in Mbano took these schools as their property, and so contributed immensely for their upkeep. This was done mostly through fund raising and communal labour and individual contributions. Mbano, like most Igbo

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<sup>498</sup> E.C. Onyenze interview cited

<sup>499</sup> L. E. Opara interviewed cited

<sup>500</sup> Edmund, O. Egboh, *Community Development Efforts in Igboland*, Onitsha: Etukokwu Press Publisher, Ltd., 1987, p. 101

communities, places high premium on education, knowing that education is indeed a catalyst to most other developments in human society.<sup>501</sup> Students from across the neighbouring communities attended any nearby school. The students from different communities converged at specified places before trekking to school. This engendered *esprit de corps* among them. These relations often continued in their after school life. Such relations between school mates also resulted in inter-marriages of various sorts. Where such marriages occurred, the different families and communities enjoyed mutual relations and cooperation in various areas of endeavour. In some cases, both families as in-laws could assist one another in training their relatives in schools or to learn trade. Besides, where such in-laws are grouped under different political units, individual interests resulted to peaceful or conflicting relations. Where such interests resulted in conflict, marriage bonds helped to ensure it does not go down beyond the veneer to the marrow.

There has been continuous increase in the number of schools, especially secondary schools since the creation of Imo state in 1976. Many of the schools as noted earlier were built during the Gov. Sam Onunaka Mbakwe era as governor of Imo state. A number of seminary schools were built by the churches, for instance, Annunciation Convent Ehime at Umueze I, it was built by the Anglican Diocese of Okigwe in 1988.

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<sup>501</sup> Obi-Ani, *Post Civil-War Political and Economic Reconstruction...*p.45



The front view of Annunciation Convent Umueze 1 Ehime Mbano and New Bethel Secondary School Umueze II Ehime Mbano

There were just two (2) primary schools in Inyishi Ikeduru before 1960. One was built by the C.M.S; the other, by the R.C.M. The number has increased to about eight (8) primary schools and four (4) secondary schools in the years, 1985 to 1995. In Umuoti, there is Inyishi Community Secondary, School; Bishop Pepple Secondary School owned by the Anglican Church; Umuoziri Community Secondary School built in 1986; Godson Commercial Secondary School built in 1993. The first was Inyishi Community Secondary School built between 1962/65.<sup>502</sup> These schools were attended by people from far and near.

Education brings development in different facets of community relations. Relations between students were enhanced through the introduction of football competitions between schools. Football competitions added a new phase to the factors that helped improve mutual relations between people and communities. It also brought animosity too. For instance, there was fight between Obollo Technical Secondary School

<sup>502</sup> Chidi Onwubuariri interview cited.

and Umuozu Community Secondary in 1996 over disagreement during a football match. The fighting caused some misunderstanding between the two communities. It took the effort of elders from both communities to settle the crisis. These matches were alternated between different schools and communities. They provided avenues for people to interact and build long term relationships with different people. Football competition caused mass gathering of people that came to support their school and communities. These matches were also organised between different communities at the local government level. The positive impact of these matches would not be over emphasized.

Some educated Mbano people, with time, occupied some vital positions in government and in the public and civil services (both at the state and federal level) and have attracted various development projects to Mbano. These prominent indigenes include, Chief. E.C Echeruo, Chief Ahumibe of Oka, Chief Nnadozie and Senator B.C Agunanne.<sup>503</sup>

The academic sector, boasts of people like Professor Ralph I. Onwuka, one-time Provost of Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri, Prof. Ralph Azubuike of Oka at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Prof Maurice Iwu, former INEC chairman, Prof. Dave Onyejekwe of Ezihie and Prof. SCOA Osuji of Amaraku, among many others. In the political arena are the likes, Chief Egbuziem, Sir Alwell Onwuka, one time commissioner for Agriculture, Imo State, Dr. C.D. Ofoegbu (*Miri na ezero oha of Umunachi*), Senator Ifeanyi Ararume, Hon. Chief Onyirimba, Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, Hon. Sam-dede Anyanwu from Amaimo and Eze Zeb Philips Nwosu, among others. All these people and more too numerous to mention attained their

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<sup>503</sup> Ven. E.E. Obilor interview cited

achievements because of the education they had.<sup>504</sup> These educated persons and politicians contributed in attracting both state and federal government attention to Mbano communities and those of their neighbours.

### **Health Institutions**

The medical needs of the Igbo people after the war were quite enormous and urgent. Many war-wounded soldiers and civilians needed adequate medical attention. But most hospitals, health centres, maternity homes and dispensaries in Igboland were in ruins and needed to be rehabilitated and equipped to perform the expected services.<sup>505</sup> But lack of finance to renovate most of these health centers added to the number of deaths at the end of the civil war. E.O. Egbo stated that after the war the Federal Government gave the East Central State Government the sum of £500,000 for drugs in 1970. But this was grossly inadequate to procure the essential drugs to treat various diseases ravaging people. Forty-six people died of hepatitis at Owerri General Hospital between May and December 1970. The medical officer in charge of the hospital, Dr. I.N.O Asinobi, disclosed that 2,123 cases of the diseases had been reported in the hospital within the period.<sup>506</sup>

When the civil war ended, there was urgent need for most of the abandoned health institutions in Mbano to be cleared. The communities without delay to clean up and renovated some of the damaged buildings to afford patients the opportunity to receive medical attention. But very often, as Ozigbo pointed out, doctors and nurses were not immediately available; so were the drugs.<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> Obilor interview cited

<sup>505</sup> Obi-Ani, *Post Civil War Reconstruction* , pp. 59-60

<sup>506</sup> E.O Egboh, *Community Development Efforts in Igboland...*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>507</sup> Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland* p.179.



It would be recalled that the federal government had expelled missionaries from Igboland, accusing them of influencing the Igbo with strong ideology of resistance. The expulsion of the expatriates by the federal government in 1970 from Igboland affected the operation and provision of adequate medical attention to patients. Mbano, being a rural area at the time the war broke out, had only one major cottage hospital, the Mbano Joint Hospital, established in 1961. That hospital was not spared by the war. It was renovated after the war.



Part of renovated Mbano Joint Hospital

Other new health centres were built after the war such as Anara Health Centre built in 1978, Etiti Medical Centre 1980, and Ibeme Health Centre, built in 1982, Umueze11 Health Centre in Ehime Mbano, Okohia and Amuzari Health Centres, built in 1976-1981.



Umueze II Health centre under reconstruction

Many private health centres have also been built over the years,<sup>508</sup> most of them via the efforts of communities through their town unions. Apart from constructing hospitals, some communities built mortuaries.<sup>509</sup>

However, due to managerial challenges, most of these health centres were handed over by the communities to voluntary agencies upon completion while some struggled to manage theirs. The principal objective was to bring nearer home medical services for those who could not afford to go to Owerri or Umuahia. This as Egbo confirmed, People were able to receive medical attention without having to travel long distances to satisfy their medical needs and this had resulted in the saving of many lives.<sup>510</sup>

The Mbanda Joint Hospital served the health needs of the people and those of its neighbours especially people from Okwelle, Nsu, Ugiri area and IHITEAFOUKWU among others. These communities in recent times have built their own health centres to serve the people. For instance, Chide Onwubuariri informed that the Inyishi Town Union (ITU) built the Inyishi Health Centre, which was the biggest in the area in 1982. At least it

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<sup>508</sup> S.B.C Onwuka interview cited

<sup>509</sup> Egboh, *Community Development Efforts* pp.39-41

<sup>510</sup> Egboh, p.41

minimizes the sufferings people passed through frequenting Owerri for any small health need.<sup>511</sup> It was common place for communities to emulate development projects embarked upon by their neighbours. There had been continued development of health institutions and provision of facilities that served the health needs of the people and those of their neighbours. The Mbanjo Joint Hospital was one big hospital that attracted people from far and near for medical attention. During this period, patients had contact and built new friendly relations.

### **Water supply Scheme**

Related to health is the provision of good water supply, an essential factor for the existence of a healthy community. The provision of good water had posed a serious problem to most Igbo communities.<sup>512</sup> Apart from the water reservoir at the Umuelemai, Headquarters of Mbanjo Local Government used by British administrators, most other communities in Mbanjo had no borehole and pipe-borne water before the Nigeria-Biafra war and even some years after -for about a decade. Most of the communities depended on streams and rivers in their villages or those of their neighbours for domestic use.

One prominent spring water that served people from distant communities was òNwokochiò. The òNwokochiò spring serves the Agbaja, Umuelemai, parts of Ehime and its environs. People from Ugiri, Umueze I, Mbeke, Umuezeala and other distant places come to fetch water from there, even with the sinking of boreholes over the years. It was one Mr. Onyeobia, the Divisional Council Officer (D.C.O.) at the time, who built concrete wall around the spring water. The spring has been a good source of natural water

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<sup>511</sup> Chidi Onwubuariri interview cited

<sup>512</sup> E.O Egbah, *Community Development Efforts* , 41

for people in the area, especially, those around the local government headquarters. Many people from different Mbano communities and beyond fetch water from the spring.<sup>513</sup>



The Nwokochi spring at Umuelemai provides drinking water for many communities in Mbano area and those of their neighbours. The government built the wall around the spring to protect its source from contamination.

Individuals also dug underground water reservoirs which helped them save water during the rainy season. From late 1970s and 1980s, boreholes were built by the government in many communities in Imo state. In fact, in Imo state, during the 1977/78 period, forty-nine communities spent over N1, 310, 000 on various water projects. In 1978, sixty-three communities contributed the sum of N332, 387.28 which they deposited with the Imo State Water Corporation (IMSWC), so that pipe-borne water would be extended to them by the water board. In the 1979/80 period, some communities spent

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<sup>513</sup> L.E. Opara interview cited

over N2, 685, 000 on eighty-seven water projects.<sup>514</sup> It was during this period that boreholes were sunk in Anara, Ibeme, Amaraku, Umunkwo, Amuzari and Umueze II, among many other communities. There was also the establishment of the type called òMan Powerò which was operated manually. The use of boreholes helped minimize the incidences of water borne diseases.



One of the water borehole built by Governor Sam Mbakwe in 1981 at Ibeme Ugiri that served people from Ogbor, Obollo, Ibeme, Oka, Umuozu, Umuneke and Ugiri communities.

The provision of water boreholes by local governments and communities increased from the 1980s. Town unions also embarked on borehole projects. Many families in recent times have personal boreholes for private and commercial purposes. Commercial water tanker vendors have been supplementing the efforts of individuals and communities. Such actions resulted in fighting between Oka and Ibeme in the past which

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<sup>514</sup> Obi-Ani, *Post Civil-War Political and Economic Reconstruction* p.66

the writer was an eye witness in December 1998. However, elders from both communities intervened to calm the raging nerves. It was common to see young people from different communities fight on their way to the stream or while they struggled to fetch water at the boreholes. People crossed boundaries to fetch water from the stream which also helped bridge the disparity in the distribution of natural resources between communities.

### **Market Development and Trade Relations**

Mbano and its neighbours, as noted earlier, have several markets which they attended before the war. These markets served as major points of contact and interaction between the people. However, the war caused people to abandon several economic activities carried out in these markets. Consequently, many of the markets which were mainly built with wood and thatch collapsed and were overgrown with bush. After the war, communities embarked on reconstruction of most of the markets, in some cases with iron poles and zinc. The major markets such as, *Orie Amaraku*, *Nkwo Umuezeala*, *Afor Ibeme*, *Eke Ezeala*, *Eke Atta*, *Orie Umuozu*, *Nkwo Imo* and the *Afor Inyishi*, among other smaller markets were reconstructed.<sup>515</sup> From 1976, various communities, with the help of the local government councils and state government, built concrete structures. Individuals also erected stalls within these markets. Various town unions made some considerable achievements in developing markets in their communities. Egbo essayed that until the emergence of the development unions, the building of market stalls in village markets was taken up by the individuals wishing to have such stalls.<sup>516</sup> The effort of the town unions was later supported by the local government councils. An example of such town

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<sup>515</sup>L.E. Opara interview cited

<sup>516</sup>Egboh, *Community Development Efforts* , p.73

unions was the Ibeme Improvement Union (I.I.U). According to the traditional ruler of the community, Eze C.E. Okoroike, the I.I.U had a Four-Year Plan for their markets.

In *Afor* Ibeme and *Orie* Umuonyeogu markets, the various villages were given portions of land in the market square by the Ibeme Improvement Union. Each village was then asked to erect stalls. That was between 1976 and 1980 when we had our Four-Year Development Plan. That was how the *Afor* Ibeme began to develop before Chief Nwigwe, the then Chairman of the Local Government built twenty (20) lock-up stalls in most of the major markets in Mbano in the 1990s. Before then, the town union developed the market.<sup>517</sup>



Side view of the lock-up stalls built by the Isiala Mbano L.G.A, and the open market built with iron and zinc

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<sup>517</sup> Okoroike interview cited

It is noteworthy that most of the markets in Mbano were developed and maintained by the various communities until the government took them over. For instance, the Orié Amaraku, Anara, Eke Ezeala and *Nkwo* Umuezeala, among others, have modern motor parks constructed to ensure organised car parking and transport system in and around the markets. An example is the Orié Amaraku market. Following the development of these markets, people from other neighbouring towns who owned stalls relocated to communities near the markets. They attended schools and churches in Amaraku. Some also formed associations structured after their various communities of origin to further protect and maintain relations with their kin. The Anara market also attracted people from Okwelle, Isu and Nkwere, parts of Mbeke and Umulolo communities.

The factors that attracted people from different places to the market centres included the provision of such infrastructure as access roads to the markets, pipe-borne water and electricity. These are necessary conditions for socio-economic development in human society. In fact, the development and growth of markets depended largely on the accessibility of motorized transportation to the markets. Most of these markets located along the major state and federal roads. Their accessibility attracted traders from far and near.

The development of other markets in Mbaise such as *Afor-Ukwu* in IHITEAFOUKWU, *Afor-Oru*, *Eke-Okwe*, *Nkwo Ala*, *Afor-Ogbe*, *Eke-Amuzi* and *Eke-Eziama* markets cost over ₦237, 000.<sup>518</sup> These markets had good and accessible network of roads for the transportation of goods and services. O.N. Njoku stated that, transportation is a key factor

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<sup>518</sup> Cosmos Konyaso Iwuh, *Local Government and Community Development: A Case Study of Ahiazu-Mbaise* L.G.A. B.Sc., Project, Department of Political Science, U.N.N, 198, p.41.



in the movement of goods and services, its availability determines the spatial extent of the market; the cost defines the depth in social terms, while the freight capacity fixes the volume of goods traded.<sup>519</sup> Most markets in the area have developed largely due to improved road transportation. They have also helped in the general modernisation of the area over the years. The markets were avenues for contact and interaction. Produce such as yam, cassava, palm oil and kernel were brought from different communities and sold in these markets. There is at least a big market and a small one in every community. This implies were continuous commercial relations between traders and their customers from the area and other Igbo communities. The buying and selling of goods in these markets opened new vistas for people to interact.

Besides, most of the cultural festivals are celebrated in the market squares. Visitors and neighbours brought their products which they sold during these ceremonies. For instance, during *iwa akwa* celebration, people from Mbaise, Umuahia, Aba and Obowo brought their wares to Mbano. Such activities resulted in either peaceful or antagonistic situations intrinsic in group relations. Commercial relations were returned by Mbano people when the visiting communities celebrated their cultural festivals. Cultural celebrations are associated with merry making and therefore provide opportunities for commercial relations to thrive. This was probably because of the historical and cultural ties which the people share. However, improved trade relations between Mbano and their neighbours are not unconnected with the good network of roads and improved modern means of transportation by various administrations in Imo State over time. There was also the desire for better living conditions by individuals in the area.

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<sup>519</sup> Onwuka, N. Njoku, *Economic History of Nigeria 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Enugu: Magnet Business Enterprises Publishing Division, 2001, p.101.

## **Road, Bridge and Communication developments**

Good roads are important facilities that help raise the standard of living of people. They enhance participation and mobilization of people in economic development and in their political and socio-cultural activities.<sup>520</sup> E.O. Egboh laments that road development in the rural areas of Igboland had been greatly neglected. Only some trunk roads under the Federal and State Governments received direct attention from the governments concerned. Inter-community roads and roads linking communities with the trunk roads were left to local government authorities to construct or to maintain. Very often, he noted, the already constructed ones were not maintained. The reason for poor maintenance had always been lack of funds. Under this circumstance, the communities, under the leadership of the development unions had to step in to help themselves.<sup>521</sup>

Apart from the Okigwe-Anara-Amaraku- Owerri federal road and Umuahia-Etiti-Umuelemai-Anara-Orlu that passed through parts of Mbandia and its neighbours, all other roads were constructed and maintained by the local councils, town unions and age grades of various communities. Local governments also built the bridges across the streams that served as boundaries between one community and the other. For instance, as recorded in the 'Imo State Community Development and Self-Help Projects Annual Report 1977/1978', during the period, communities in the state built 709.5 kilometres of roads, 115 bridges, and thirty-six culverts, at an aggregated cost of N3, 109.8 excluding the cost of free labour.<sup>522</sup> In 1979/1980, the communities constructed 1, 310 kilometres of roads,

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<sup>520</sup> Government of Imo state 'Annual Report 1977/1978, Self-Help Projects, Owerri; Government Printers, 1978, p.13

<sup>521</sup> Egbo, *Community Development Efforts*, p.64

<sup>522</sup> Imo State Community Development and Self-Help Projects Annual Report, 1977/78, p. 121

105 bridges and 49 culverts at a total cost of N4, 556, 938.97, excluding the cost of labour.<sup>523</sup>

The people of Umudike-Abueke in Etiti Division completed the construction of a bridge linking the community with Amainyi community in the same area at the cost of N33, 560 naira.<sup>524</sup> Other bridges and roads constructed during the same period include the Obollo to Umueze I and Umuelemai road with the Ezealanyanwu bridge, Duru Owerre bridge, the Oka - Inyishi road and the Mbaa River bridge at the cost of over N70, 000, excluding free cost of labour.<sup>525</sup> The Onuimo River bridge in Okwelle was constructed by the federal government while the Isu-Nkwere-bridge at Nkwo Miri was constructed by Imo State Government. There were also numerous other minor bridges and culverts constructed in the communities to link one community and the other, to make movements easier and faster. These culverts were constructed mostly by the communities of wood. A few others were built with concrete by the different local government councils in the area.

The social and economic importance of the roads and bridges built by the communities abound is enormous. They enhanced motorized transportation in and out of the area. Mobility between communities became faster and relations and communication improved. Motor cars and buses conveyed people from one community to another and from one market to the other more efficiently. Movements and distances that would have otherwise taken a whole day by trekking were completed in a matter of minutes or hours. In this regard Egbo averred that,

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<sup>523</sup> Imo State community Development, 1979/97, p.71

<sup>524</sup> News from the Division, *Olu Obodo* II, 1-8, 1974, p.39.

<sup>525</sup> Imo State Community Development p 73-75

In this age of motorized transportation system, moving from one community to another by motorized transport would have been very difficult if not impossible without the existence of good roads and bridges. With all these infrastructure provided in the communities, it became easy for people to move from one community to another in motor cars and buses.<sup>526</sup>

The construction of roads and bridges in Mbano eased transportation of farm produce to the various markets in the area. Urban dwellers found it easier to travel to the markets in Mbano and its neighbouring communities to buy food commodities from the area. People from Owerri, Aba, Umuahia, and Orlu have been able to attend the Orié Amaraku, Eke Atta, Nkwo Umuezeala, Afor Inyishi and Eke Ezeala markets for the palm oil and kernel which abound in the area.

In addition, the availability of the roads and bridges in the area revolutionised transportation and made modern communication in the area easier and faster. The roads reduced the stress and transportation challenges hitherto faced by traders and travelers in general. Heavy goods were easily carried to the markets by buses instead of by human portorage. Information dissemination became quicker as letters or mails were delivered in the communities through the postal agencies. Also messengers who ran errands between communities by trekking could do so faster by using the improved means of motor transport.

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<sup>526</sup> Egbo, *Community Development Efforts* p.70

In 1979/80, communities in Imo State constructed postal agencies and post offices to serve their communication needs.<sup>527</sup> Among these post offices are the Amaraku post office near the Orié Amaraku market, Obollo post office at Eke Obollo and the Anara post office. There are also the post offices at Umuelemai and one at Aba-Branch in Ehime. Mbaise community post office was the biggest in the area.<sup>528</sup> The post office at Obollo for instance, served communities around the Ugiri area such as Ogbor, Ibeme, Oka, and Umuneke among others. The post offices helped in the dissemination of information between the people at home and those in the Diaspora. Most times also, individuals and friends contributed to jointly own a post office mail box.<sup>529</sup> For instance, it was said that people from Obollo shared the same mail box with Amaraku before the Obollo post office was built.

Farm produce dealers in the urban centres could easily make contact through correspondence to people in the rural areas, and obtain useful feedback. This facilitated trade and interaction between city and rural dwellers. Correspondence to schools in Mbano area from the Ministry of Education at Owerri passed through the post offices. Also letters for churches and information between home and abroad branches of various town unions passed through the post offices. However, due to the poor condition of roads in the area, bicycles and motorcycles were mainly used by the post masters to deliver urgent letters to their owners.

It is a truism that good roads are vital for effective movement and communication and all other forms of social and economic activities. Most of the roads in the interior communities were usually in constant state of disrepair. Being earth roads, they were

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<sup>527</sup> Imo State Community Development and Self-Help Projects, Annuals Report, 1979/80, p.14

<sup>528</sup> Imo state Community Developmentí , p.31

<sup>529</sup> S.E. Mbalisi, Interview cited

impassable during the rains. The writer's personal experiences as a primary school pupil would suffice.

It was a regular show to see buses conveying school pupils to Umuelemai, the local government headquarters during the children's and Independence Day for the usual match-past celebration. But often the buses got stuck on the Ezealanyanwu hill. Pupils' school uniforms were stained even before we reached the Mbano stadium, the venue of the celebration. In fact, it was a yearly experience for pupils in the area until 1999-2001, when the road was tarred by Governor Achike Udenwa's administration. The same scenario played out on the Ugiri-Amaraku, at *Nkwo* Mbaa, where buses got stuck and most times, goods were damaged by rain. In fact, most people preferred bicycles and motorcycles during the rainy season. Most often as pupils, we trekked from Central School, Obollo to and from Umuelemai to avoid the risk of missing out on the Children's Day celebration and Independence Day match-past and other accompanying games. As was usually the case, one saw his white shirt battered with rain and red mud. In fact, visiting my maternal home at Umueze II, in Ehime was almost made impossible during the rainy season. The Alaiyi-Owerre-Duru-Owerre road and bridge to Umueze 11 was usually slippery and the river would often overflow its banks and covered the wooden bridge. In spite of their deficiencies, these rural roads served as vent for socio-cultural, economic and political relations between Mbano communities and their neighbouring communities.

The return of democratic rule in 1999 was to usher in an era of marked improvement in the condition of motorable roads in Mbano. During Governor Achike Udenwa's administration in Imo State, 1999-2007, roads in Mbano were tarred, for

instance, the Amaraku- Ugiri-Obollo - Umuelemai. Another was the Eke-Obollo-Umueze II- Eziamma - Afor Oru Mbaise road at the cost at over N260, 000,000. These two roads have contributed significantly to the speedy development of the area, with special regard to modern transportation as well as socio-cultural and economic interactions between Mbano and Mbaise communities.<sup>530</sup>

Some prominent politicians, top public and civil servants from Mbano influenced the construction of these roads by the state government. These, *inter-alia* include, Sir Alwell Onwuka, who was the Imo State commissioner for Agriculture, Chief Zik Nwachukwu, the then Isiala Mbano L.G.A Chairman; Chief Jasper Ndubuaku, representative for Isiala-Mbano in the Imo State House of Assembly; Chief Stanford Onyirimba from Umueze 11 in Ehime, who represented Ehime Constituency in the State House of Assembly as the Majority Leader of the House of Assembly. Others include, Senator Ifeanyichukwu Ararume, who represented Okigwe Senatorial zone, in the Senate, Chief Ikedi Ohakim, who was a commissioner in the government of Achike Udenwa administration, Chief Tony-Black Nduka, the president of Obollo General Assembly (OGA) and Sir Jason Nwaiche, a senior civil servant and Secretary General of Obollo General Assembly among many other prominent Mbano citizens.<sup>531</sup> Since the construction of these roads, the people have experienced faster movement and interaction between different communities.

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<sup>530</sup> Eze, C.E Okoroike interview cited

<sup>531</sup> Sir Ephraim Iroegbu, C. 80 years retired civil servant, interviewed at Alaiyi-ama Obollo, 20/04/2011



1. Part of Amaraku-Ugiri-Umuelemai road and,  
Ehime-Ekwereazu Mbaise road

2. A Portion of Obollo Ugiri-

It is instructive that within the period, the telecommunication network, the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) reached Mbano in 2003. It was the Mobile Telecommunications Network (MTN) that first came into Mbano. They were followed by the Globacom network. The presence of these modern communication systems in Mbano brought tremendous transformation in communication in the area.





One of the first MTN Mass erected in Ugiri, Obollo Community in 2005

Together with the tarred roads, Mbano people have continued to enjoy modern transportation and communication system in their interaction with other communities. There has been continuous improvement and development in the socio-economic and political advancement of Mbano over the years, especially, modern transportation and communication system. The use of GSM in the area enabled information about happenings in the neighbourhood to spread faster to other communities. Interactions between rural and city dwellers improved. The mass movement of people increased cooperation between individuals and groups significantly, though inter-personal contacts reduced as many people interacted through mobile telephones. At least both infrastructures affected positively, the movement of human and material resources in the area. Modern transportation and communication systems also quickened aspects of socio-cultural, economic and political relations between individuals and groups. At least, interaction took shorter time than was the case.

## **Rural Electrification**

Rural electrification in most communities in Igboland was highly limited. It was seen largely as a preserve of dwellers in such cities as Enugu, Aba, Onitsha, Umuahia, Lagos and other big commercial city centres. Other communities that had access to such amenities may have been those situated near the major roads through which the high-tension cables passed. Most rural communities were almost ignorant of such amenity.

However, with the passage of time, electricity was no longer seen as a luxury, but as one of the necessities of life. The federal and state governments showed some interest in providing electricity to the rural communities, and had taken some steps to do so. The efforts of the governments appear not to have been enough to satisfy every community at the time. Only a few communities were said to have benefited from the government's rural electrification scheme. The provision of electricity was largely in the market-square generally regarded as the business and commercial heart of communities. As a result, the extension of the scheme into the various communities became the responsibility of the recipient community.<sup>532</sup> Many Igbo communities had to embark on rural electrification projects through self-help efforts.

Communities that were unable to provide in bulk, the amount of money required for the extension of the scheme to them, made part payments to the Electricity Corporation of Nigeria (ECN) later renamed National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) or the government. For instance, Akokwa community was said to have deposited N29, 000 with the Imo state government as the first installment for its rural electrification, estimated to cost over N290, 000.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> Egboh, *Community Development Efforts*, p.77

<sup>533</sup> Egboh, *Community Development Efforts* p.78

There was no electricity in Mbano before the Nigeria-Biafra war. After the creation of Imo State in 1976, the Sam Mbakwe administration (1979-1983) embarked on rural electrification projects. Mbakwe established some power stations in local governments to encourage rural electrification in Imo state. Mbano was not left out as a power station was established at Amaraku. Town unions at this point organized fund raising ceremonies. The commonest method used by most community town unions was to place a ban on palm fruit harvest. When ripe, the palm fruits were harvested by the communities and monies realized were used to purchase both wooden and concrete electric poles and also take care of NEPA personnel. Eze E.C. Okoroike of Ibeme Ugiri confirmed this, stating, my people had to place ban on the harvesting of palm fruit. They harvested them on a general date and were sold to people. It was done more than three times. We realised over N80, 000 from the sales. The proceeds were used to purchase some wooden and concrete electric poles. Part of the money was also paid to NEPA to mobilize them. We did the same to raise funds for the purchase of wires before government brought the transformer, cable and other facilities to help energize them and give light to the this area.<sup>534</sup> Some communities undertook such projects without the involvement of NEPA. For example, Umuluwe-Ajirija in Mbano L.G.A. in 1979, purchased a 55-kva generating plant and awarded a private firm the contract for the installation of the plant, wiring, erection of poles and the provision of street lamps. The project cost the community about N96, 000.<sup>535</sup>

Obollo town and other Ugiri communities benefited from the national greed that passed through Ehime to Mbaise. Obollo community through funds raised from the sale

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<sup>534</sup> Okoroike interview cited

<sup>535</sup> *Daily Star*, 23 June, 1979

of palm fruits acquired a 55KVA transformer in 1980 which was mounted at Eke Obollo market near the post office. The project cost about N68, 000. This was under the administration of Mr. Peter Ekezie, who was the President of Obollo General Assembly (OGA) at the time.<sup>536</sup> The transformer at Eke Obollo served other villages in the community. Ogbor community also extended electricity into their area from Obollo. Inyishi community within the same period brought light into the area through Atta and Amaimo. Oka community also extended electricity into their area in 1982/83. Most communities that could not achieve the electrification on their own, received grants-in-aid from the state government. By 1995, there was no community in the area that did not have electricity. The available ones were usually over loaded. Most communities around Umuelemai, Anara, Umunumo, Nsu, Etiti and Ihiteafoukwu were electrified within the same period. From the writer's observation, one challenge which faced rural electricity in the area was the inadequacy of transformers. .

However, electricity in communities helped enhance economic activities. It encouraged the establishment of small scale businesses in the area such as iron construction business. Some people established garri processing plants and other non-food processing light industries such as metal and wood works, timber-sawing, electrical and mechanical workshops and hair-dressing.<sup>537</sup> Many youths established barbing salons and disk jockey (DJ) businesses. Business hours were extended till late hours in the night. Some people from communities without the benefit of electricity often relocated to those who had. This greatly enhanced interaction between the people. These traders attended church services along-side the people. Their children also enrolled in schools. The church

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<sup>536</sup> E. C. Onyenze interview cited

<sup>537</sup> Egboh, *Community Development Efforts*, p. 79

activities and schools helped enhance interactions and relationships between peoples from different communities. They also enjoyed cultural festivals of the people. In fact, apart from the different dialects, one could hardly differentiate indigenes of Mbano and a person from Mbaise, Isu and Umudim in Ikeduru. These relationships were largely peaceful though not without face rifts which were quickly settled. Most of the developments and social changes in the area were by sheer determination on the part of the people to improve their society over time.

### **Politics, People and Changing Relations**

Before colonial rule, Mbano and most of its neighbours were under a single traditional political unit called Mbasaa. It was during British colonial administration that it became recognized as Mbano following the establishment of different administrative structures and Native Courts (NCs) by the British. These NCs have been discussed in some details earlier in chapter two. In 1945 the area came to be recognized as Mbano Federated Native Authority.<sup>538</sup> The area became known as Mbano Local Government Area in 1976 with headquarters at Umuelemai following the creation of Imo State from the East Central State. In the same 1976, Etitu which had been under Mbano was grouped under Obowo Local Government and subsequently, with the creation of more local governments in Imo State in 1991, Etitu became part of Ihite-Uboma Local Government with its headquarters at Isinweke. The same year, 1991, what had been Mbano Local Government was further split into two separate LGAs; Isiala Mbano and Ehime Mbano<sup>539</sup>.

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<sup>538</sup>C.T.C Annals, District Officer Okigwe Division, Annual report 1945 ORLDIST 3/1/89

<sup>539</sup> "Local Government Creation in Imo State," Owerri: Government Printers, 1991, pp.15-18

After the creation of Ehime as a LGA from old Mbanjo, their political relations with Isiala Mbanjo people changed. The two local governments were under different political administrations and they assumed the status of neighbours to one another. As a result, Ehime pursued a separate political interest as a local government. There were occasional boundary disputes and disagreements over the sharing of properties of old Mbanjo LGA. Civil servants and employees from Ehime and Isiala moved to their respective local governments. The attitude of the people towards individuals from the different local government became less cordial, making peaceful relations problematic. One conflict witnessed by the writer was the struggle for ownership of Nkwo Umuezeala market located near Umuelemai, headquarters of Isiala Mbanjo LGA. On one market day, in 1993, youths from both local governments disrupted movement of people to the market. I had gone to sell Broilers in the market, but was forced to return home with them as a result of the conflict in the market. These were people who had lived peacefully under Umuduru Native Court during the colonial era and later under old Mbanjo local government. Their relationship became antagonistic when Ehime clan was separated from Ugiri, Mbama and Osu clans. The people began to see themselves as neighbours under the new political creation. I recall an incident in 1993 when my father and I were prevented from going to Umueze 11, my maternal home. The youths told us that Isiala people were not allowed to pass through Ehime until further notice. Such development in the people's relations was unusual. The creation of Ehime local government added antagonistic dimension to the peaceful co-existence and relations prevalent between the people. This antagonistic relationship manifested in subsequent political activities between the people. Each local government pursued their political interests sometimes

against each other's interests.

In recent times, especially, since the year 2000, new autonomous communities and development centres have been created in Imo state. The aim was to take government closer to the people and ensure rural development. Some of the newly created autonomous communities include; Amaukwu-Obollo, Ibeme Amaise, Amaato Amaraku, Umuenyi and Ekwedim. By implication, there have been more town union presidents and councilors to represent the new communities in the state and local government levels. Such infrastructures as new markets, transformers, and the construction of new schools have been attracted into the communities.

The creation of autonomous communities, in Mbano and Imo State at large, was followed by the selection of new traditional rulers. In some communities, the selection of traditional rulers was peaceful; in some others, the reverse was the case. A case in point is in Amaukwu-Obollo communities where the selection of a traditional ruler has lingered in court since the creation of the autonomous community in 2003. In fact, it has not been settled by terminal date of this research.

Similarly, in Ezihe autonomous community in Isiala Mbano, the selection of a traditional ruler for the new community was challenging. In fact, the community was forced to appoint a retired Anglican priest, Ven. D.C, Ogamba temporarily to hold brief on the stool. The Ven. Ogamba was the writer's principal at St. John's Chrysostom Junior Seminary, Osina. I worked with him personally as the senior prefect at the seminary. (Note, this writer has been both an observer and a participant in some of these crises).

Elsewhere, some communities experienced peaceful selection of their own traditional rulers for their newly created autonomous communities. One example of such

a community is Okwelle Onuimo, neighbours of Mbano. Chief Marcel Ibe, the palace secretary of Okwelle autonomous community, explains the political situation in the area. In his words In 1999, Onuimo Local Government was carved out of Isukwuato Okigwe Local Government. There was further political expansion in terms of creation of autonomous communities. Before 2002, we had only, Okwelle autonomous community, with Eze Chukwukere as the traditional ruler. But in 2002, three new ones were created. They are Okpokodike autonomous community with Eze Benson Maduako as the traditional ruler, Obinaulo autonomous community has Dr. Bar. Alex Uzoma as the traditional ruler and Ikwuato autonomous community has Eze Ihuaku Shedrack as the traditional ruler. These creations of a truth, evidence that our communities are growing politically. The selection of these new traditional rulers was peaceful. There were no crisis, nor court cases as seen in some newly created communities. Beside, Okwelle also has one development centre as an adjunct to our local government. Okwelle is still growing politically. These creations are indeed bringing some noticeable physical developments in the area of infrastructure and urbanization.<sup>540</sup>

Through the new autonomous communities and local governments, the people became further integrated under different zonal political arrangements in Imo State. Hence, the tendency has been for them to pursue common political interests at the state level. But at the local government level the interest differed. For instance, Ezianya Mbaise is grouped under Owerri zone, along with Inyishi-Amaimo, Atta and Umudim. However, Isiala Mbano, Ehime-Mbano, Ihite-Uboma, Obowo and Onuimo are politically grouped under Okigwe zone. The people pursued peacefully, common group interests under the old

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<sup>540</sup> Chidi Onwubuariri interview cited



arrangements. Under the new creations and political structure, relations became antagonistic and tensed between the people as they became conscious of their new group interests. Elder Okoro Peter Ogu stated that "the people have different political interests when it comes to local government and state politics. But it does not have any serious negative effects on our relations. We do not fight to kill each other because of our common heritage and ancestry, but we may disagree in the choice of political parties and candidates."<sup>541</sup>

From political developments in recent times, the view expressed by Elder Ogu appears to be incongruous. A closer observation at the political developments in Nigeria, Imo State and indeed Mbano tends to show unprecedented increase in political violence in recent times. New breed politicians in a bid to score political victory, engage in all manner of political maneuverings to actualise their ambition. This is especially the case since 1999, in Mbano and neighbouring communities. In most cases, this result in attempted political assassinations and violent demonstrations, which often lead to wanton loss of lives and disruption of peaceful co-existence and relationships. Unemployed youths are used by various political office seekers to cause confusion among brothers. In fact, at times, these forms of disruptions create unpalatable atmosphere among people and communities. Such disturbing situations could aptly be described as "inter-group relations in crisis." Example of this scenario was in 2007 when supporters of Chief Ikedi Ohakim and Senator Ararume clashed at Orié Amáráku market along Owerri ó Okigwe road. However, in spite of perceived changes resulting from increasing pursuit for diverse political and economic interests by different individuals, groups and communities, the

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<sup>541</sup> As quoted in G. Schneider and S. Bailer, "Between Power and Preferences", Unpublished Manuscript, Department of Politics and Management, University of Konstanz, August 27, 2001, p.5

people still enjoy cordial interactions. Most Mbano communities and their neighbours enjoy common ancestry and cultural affiliations through which they soothe raging nerves and have continued to relate.

### **Christianity and Inter-Group Relations**

Since the introduction of Christianity, some church activities have continued to serve as platforms for group interactions. Such activities like church anniversary celebrations, conferences, church synod and youth programmes, among numerous others, bring people from all works of life together. They have helped to foster to some extent, good relations between individuals and communities in Mbano and beyond.

Cyril Agbugbaegbu of Amachara Amaimo stated that, "the role of the Christian churches in the relationship between Amaimo, Mbano and Mbaise communities has been in the area of marriages."<sup>542</sup> In recent past, in contracting marriages between Mbano and Amaimo indigenes, the bride wealth was usually very expensive in the traditional setting. But the Christian church plays an important role by influencing the bride wealth collected in most Christian marriages in Amaimo. This has continued to encourage more marriages between Amaimo and their neighbours of Mbano, Mbaise and other people.<sup>543</sup>

Besides, developments in the area of modern transportation and communication systems have had tremendous impact on group relations through church activities. Good access roads and fast traveling cars aided movement of people from different communities to attend church activities such as, harvest, and evangelism which also includes inter-church football matches and other Diocesan programmes. During these programmes, contacts are made and new friendly relations established. Such gatherings

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<sup>542</sup> Cyril Agbugbaegbu interview cited

<sup>543</sup> Agbugbaegbu interview cited

often result in marriages between youth from different churches. For example, Mr. Charles Onyekaebi met his wife Miss Nnenna during a diocesan youth conference at Ezihe in 2003. Movement of people from Owerri, Aba, Port-Harcourt, and Enugu to their rural communities for such church activities has been easier. New contacts and friendships are made which helped expand peaceful relations. Since the introduction of Christianity, the church has brought new dimensions to inter-group relations. The gathering of these Christian faithfuls constituted an aspect of inter-group relations.

It could be said that the introduction of Christianity into Igboland, provided different avenues that enhanced group interactions positively and negatively. On a positive side, Christian activities serve as vents for contact and peaceful interactions between peoples from different backgrounds and classes, rich or poor. On the negative side, there are relationships of hate between Christians and traditionalist one hand and different denominations on the other. This enigma notwithstanding, the proximity of Mbandia and its neighbours makes it difficult for churches in the different communities to organize programmes without people from Mbaise, Ikeduru or even Isu in attendance. For instance, during synods, people from different communities are accommodated through out the duration of the synod. This provides one good way churches encourage intra-and inter-personal relations on one hand and on the other hand inter-group relations by the gathering of people from different communities.

Marcel Ibe said that, Okwelle people used to worship at St. Paul's Church in Osu Mbandia under St. Paul Parish until 1998 when they were regrouped under Okwelle parish. The grouping encouraged good relations.<sup>544</sup> However, Ibe was quick to add that relations were not only maintained through the church but also through cultural/religious festivals.

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<sup>544</sup> Ibe interview cited

During different cultural celebrations such as the *Ekere* and new yam festival, people from Mbanu, Umuna, Isiekenesi and Isu were invited. During these festivals people meet new friends and such contacts and interactions sometimes led to marriage. Mbanu, Isiekenesi and Okwelle have enjoyed close relations through cultural/religious festivals, church activities, marriages and trade over the years. The above activities provided the enabling environment for interactions. Christianity in Igboland and particularly between Mbanu and its neighbours has been a veritable agent of inter-group relations. Despite some divisive challenges, relations through the churches traverse beyond communities and immediate environments of Igboland. Its role on group relations is indeed emphatic.

Christianity helped promote the stages of assimilation and integration in the people's relationship. These stages in relations involved the gradual process of assimilation and integrating factors that bring changes in societies spanning decades if not centuries. Christianity helped integrate people into societies and groups where they had been discriminated against by custom and tradition. Iwuamadi observed that, the church to some reasonable extent, helped to close the wide gap between the freeborn (*nwadiala*) and outcasts (*osu*). Though *osu* still exist and are stigmatized, at least, in the Christian era they enjoy some interaction which was almost prohibited in the pre-colonial times when an *osu* was little less than a slave. In spite of discriminations that exist between denominations and traditionalists, the church accommodates into its fold, people of different classes and statuses.<sup>545</sup> Ven. E.E. Obilor, a retired Anglican priest and educationist stated that, it was partly the coming of the Christian church into Mbanu that enabled individuals and groups discriminated against by tradition and custom to interact with less fear. These aspects of changes were brought about by Christianity and Western

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<sup>545</sup> Iwuamadi Sidney Nwaigwe, c.78 years, farmer /pensioner, Umudimoma Obodo, Amaimo, 28/08/2010

education.<sup>546</sup>

Mbano communities and their neighbours see Christianity and Western education as two institutions that have helped liberalise the society from aspects of bad tradition. However, Christianity and Western education have dealt mortal blows on intrinsic Igbo cultural heritage, encouraged undue individualism and materialism against traditional communalistic tendencies. The situation explains the duality in life that for every coin, there are two sides. Hence, the relationships that existed between Christianity and Western education and Igbo socio-cultural, economic and political systems have been mutually peaceful and antagonistic in nature.

### **Contributions of Women to Inter-group Relations and Socio-Economic Development**

Women have been a veritable factor of inter-group relations and socio-economic development in Igboland. At least, inter-marriages helped in building socio-cultural, economic and political synergy of interaction and co-operation and in cementing relationships in the area. Women through marriages helped in uniting communities, promoted trade and other aspects of group relations have been discussed earlier in the work, but in traditional setting. Over the years, the socio-economic statuses of women have improved significantly. There has been a significant shift from 'what was' and 'what is' with regards to contributions of women in Mbano society and those of their neighbours.

In some communities, women were fully involved in farming, trading and other economic activities. For instance, U.C. Anyanwu writes that 'Ezza women were not only involved in agriculture, but floated local industries in salt and pottery production. They

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<sup>546</sup> Erastus E. Obilor interview cited.

were also involved in agriculture alongside their men counterparts.<sup>547</sup> Women in Mbano and neighbouring communities are hard working. They were active in building trade relations and social harmony between communities. The introduction of Christianity and Western education helped to enhance the role of women in inter-group relations and socio-economic developments in many respects.

The missionaries also built schools. The schools brought enlightenment into the area, though women appeared not to have enjoyed immediate freedom until probably, the Aba women uprising of 1929. According to Ven. Obilor, ÷women in Mbano, Mbaise, and most of their neighbours were prohibited from attending schools. Most men also prevented their wives from attending schools because of fear of the unknown. The Aba Women riot of 1929 helped women to assume greater responsibility and liberation from traditional prohibitions.<sup>548</sup> The Aba Women riot had great impact on Mbano women as was the case in entire Igbo area. Mrs. Regina Ibe of Okwelle averred that

the Aba Women Riot of 1929 changed the way women were treated in Igboland. The women movement got to Owerri, Mbaise and Okigwe and we live close to Okigwe. Women in Okwelle, Mbano and other neighbouring communities learnt from the event. Women in these societies began to question what the men did which they never liked. Once something affects a woman, it also affects every other woman that hears of it. You know

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<sup>547</sup> U.C. Anyanwu, ÷Women in Traditional Ezza Economyí ,ö pp.3-5

<sup>548</sup> Erastus, E. Obilor interview cited

what is good for the goose is good for the gander.<sup>ø</sup>

Women mostly since 1929, began to be more united and to do things in common. They had greater interactions and cooperation in their communities.<sup>549</sup>

Nkechi Osuagwu of Inyishi Ikeduru noted thus, òin Inyishi and other parts of Ikeduru and Igboland, Christianity and Western education helped women to enjoy greater recognition and contribute to the development of their communities. They helped in building schools, civic centres, maternity homes and skill acquisition centres. These projects were avenues for interaction and human development.<sup>550</sup>

S.B.C. Onwuka observed that education was a key factor in the changing status of Mbano women. Those who became educated helped enlighten the rural women on the achievements recorded by women in other parts of the world.<sup>551</sup> In the same vein, L.E. Opera stated that òthe building of schools in Mbano and indeed Igboland in the post independence era, helped many women who could not trek to distant places to enroll in the schools in their communities. Education gave a boost to the changing status of our women, especially in community development, social cooperation and harmony. Their activities united women from different communities.<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>549</sup> Mrs. Regina Ibe, c.74years, retired teacher, interviewed at Okwelle, 25/08/2010.

<sup>550</sup> Nkechi Osuagwu, c.77 years, Trader interview, at Inyishi Ikeduru, 24/08/2011

<sup>551</sup> S.B.C Onwuka interview cited

<sup>552</sup> L.E. Opara interview cited

Professor Ogbu U. Kalu expresses the view that education and urbanization opened women's eyes in ways which have characterized the modern period and bred aggressive feminist postures.<sup>553</sup> W. Burckhardt writes that

The legitimate aspirations of the world's women, their yearning not only to grow interiorly but to leaven each land with their God-given gifts, to contribute their rich potential to the world's redemption, depend on their realization of the extent to which men and women become aware of the issues involved, grasp the genesis of the pertinent problems, relive women's history, and re-evaluate the traditions and stereotypes that keep women in her place.<sup>554</sup>

By and large, educated women in Mbano made noticeable impact on the society. Women became involved in development projects through their yearly 'Women Abroad Meetings'. In some communities, women built civic centres, church halls, market stalls and health centres or maternity homes. For instance, in Amuzari, the Aladinma Women Association (AWA) helped rebuild the Amuzari Maternity Home and equipped Aladinma Hospital Amuzari in the 1980s. This was under the leadership of Mrs. Regina Okere. The women contributed money totaling about N500, 000 in carrying out these two projects.<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>553</sup> Ogbu, U. Kalu, 'Gender Ideology in Igbo Religion: The Changing Religious Role of Women in Igboland,' in E.J. Otagburuagu, A.F Afigbo (eds.), *News Brides, More Hopes: Igbo Women in Socio-Economic Change*, Nsukka: Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, 2008, p.137

<sup>554</sup> W. Burckhardt, (ed), *Woman: New Dimensions*, New York: Paulette Press, 1977, p. viii

<sup>555</sup> Erastus Osuala, 83 years, retired teacher, Ekwe Amuzari, 01/11/2011.



Similarly, in Obollo community, women through their association meetings assisted the men in building a civic centre. The women contributed over two million naira (N2, 000, 000.00) to the project. The women also championed the building of Queen of Apostles Secondary Obollo (now St. Theresa's College).<sup>556</sup>



Obollo Civic Centre where also is located the *Oganiru* Obollo Women Skills Acquisition complex

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<sup>556</sup> E.C. Onyenze interview cited



Front view of St. Theresa's College building Obollo. Many students from Ehime and Isu area attend the school which is an avenue for inter/intra human interactions.

Politically Mbano women have served in many capacities at both state and federal government levels. It is true no Mbano woman has occupied the position of a governor for instance. However, many have occupied some significant positions of power. Mrs. Rubie Emela was a Senior Executive Assistant in the Governor Achike Udenwa administration (1999-2007). Subsequently, she contested for Isiala Mbano Local Government chairmanship position in 2003 but was not successful. She was later appointed Sole Administrator of the local government. In 1999-2002, Chief Mrs. May Agbiogwu was elected Chairperson of Ehime Mbano Local Government. Mrs. Florence Duru was appointed Sole Administrator in Ehime Mbano LGA, 1995-1997.<sup>557</sup> Such

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<sup>557</sup> Jude Ibezim, òEhime Mbano Data Bankò. This is an unpublished compilation of available data on Ehime Mbano Local Government. The document contain information on the various social, political and economic

examples go along way to buttress the changing status of women in Mbano in post-colonial Mbano society.

There are women organisations at the community, local government and state levels. Also there are numerous women cooperatives formed to enhance interaction and cooperation amongst women. The Oganiru Mbano Women Organisation formed in 2001 to assist women of the local in their economic and political endeavours had branches in all the communities. Women from different communities came together under this body to discuss matters of common interest. Through such bodies, women interacted and built relationships. Through these bodies, some women received support and sponsorship for their political ambition.

From the foregoing, women in Mbano and their neighbours enjoy improved socio-economic and political status in their relations. The Aba Women Riot of 1929 marked a parading shift for greater participation in the socio-political and economic development of their communities and relations. Women have deeper desire for change, greater involvement and participation in societal affairs. This is exemplified in the continuous campaign for women empowerment world over. Women in the society no doubt enjoy continuous change and better relations within their communities and the neighbouring ones. Women serve as stabilizing factor in inter-group relations/harmony and socio-economic and cultural developments.

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aspects of the communities, it also contain the list of all the past local government chairman since, 1989; list of the entire primary, & secondary Schools in the area both private, government and mission owned schools. The list of all the autonomous communities, with their traditional rulers, town union presidents and their secretaries as well as projects built, e.g. market and local industries in the local government. It was compiled in August 2007, through various sources.

## Aspects of Continuity and Change in the Relations

Scholars of Igbo extraction and their counterparts from beyond Igboland have written extensively on the socio-cultural, economic and political changes brought to Igboland by Europeans. These changes also influenced relationship between Mbano women and their neighbours. Especially, Christianity and Western education imposed remarkable changes in major aspects of the hitherto existing medium and factors of inter-group relationship. Many cultural and traditional institutions were either positively or negatively affected. Edmund Ilogu writes that Igboland came in contact with Christian religion and Western culture and the contact created significant alteration in the life condition and behaviour patterns of the people. The situation under which collective behaviour expresses itself is changing; habitual and traditional actions are becoming more difficult because their basis in customs; social ethos, group relations and expectations is being destroyed.<sup>558</sup>

Chinua Achebe in his *Things Fall Apart*<sup>559</sup> reasoned that colonial rule and its impact on Igbo cultural and inter-group relations is inextricable linked with Christianity and Western education. He portrays the Igbo on the eve of colonial rule, as a people whose culture and custom laid emphasis on unity and respect for elders. Achebe expresses regret that contact with Western culture influenced significantly, aspects of Igbo culture and traditional society. Obviously, Achebe's view applies to situations in the area of study. In the first place, Christianity preached against some aspects of Igbo cultural practices and traditional institutions like the *osu* caste system, killing of twins,

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<sup>558</sup> Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, Enugu: Nok Publishers Ltd., 1974, pp.7.8.

<sup>559</sup> Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is an embodiment of the culture. It discusses the influence the contact with the western systems has on the Igbo traditional society and cultural heritage. The impact of such influence on group relations in Igbo society is aptly portrayed in the novel.

oracle consultation, masquerades, slave immolation, ritual ceremonies and traditional religious practices, among many others.

Secondly, Western education exposed the people to western values, culture and systems, alien to Igbo way of life. Western education created a new class of elite whose life style paid little or no attention to extant traditional prohibitions. It created new individuals with capitalist orientation. These new elite as products of colonial education deviated from the known communal orientation and foundation of the people. In this regard James S. Coleman observes that,

Even today, it is not uncommon to find a semi-educated Nigeria (Igbo) working as a steward who could name the principal English cities, quote the Bible, and recite Hamlet, but who has little knowledge of the geography, the proverbs and folk tales, or the prominent leaders and outstanding events in the history of his own society.<sup>560</sup>

Their importance to cultural relations exemplified in continuous interactions in recent times cannot be compared to the pre-colonial era. Coleman opined that the result of this concentrated institutionalized indoctrination was the creation of a new class. Conversion to Christianity, knowledge of and preference for English, imitation of European behaviour, and post school employment in an urban milieu, all helped to isolate the educated from his traditional environment.<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>560</sup> James. C. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*. Benin: Broburg and Winstrom, 1958, p.115

<sup>561</sup> Coleman, p. 115

It is instructive that Mbanos have retained aspects of their custom, cultural practices and identity intrinsic in their relationship with their neighbours. As A.E. Afigbo contends, the Igbo have been astute enough to retain their 'ethnic essence'.<sup>562</sup> Some of the traditions and customs of the people have survived colonial and Western cultural onslaught. This situation is in tandem with what constitutes change and continuity in inter-group relations between Mbanos and its neighbours. L.E. Opara observes that

In the relation between Mbanos people and their neighbours, the high premium our people placed on unity is not questionable. Some of our traditional and cultural dances and institutions are still in existence, though with some modifications. The *Alijah* cultural dance among the Amaukwu-Obollo community in Ugiri, Amaigbo, and Eziamas (Ekwereazu) Mbaise, and some other villages is very active. The *nmanwu* are very much practiced, though the old way that involved *juju* and magical powers and charms appear significantly reduced. The pattern has changed from '*nmanwu ogwu*' to '*nmanwu church*'. Most of these traditions as they were before colonial incursion are still practiced in most communities today with minor modifications.<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>562</sup>A.E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, p. 284

<sup>563</sup>L.E. Opara interview cited

Besides, some of the traditional economic practices of Mbano society are very much extant. For instance, despite the introduction of banks, most people in the communities still practice their local means of saving money such as *isusu* and *udodiri* contributions. These traditional contributions serve as ways of raising capital to support fellow traders. Women have not abandoned their traditional role of sweeping and weeding the market and village roads. This is usually done by all women in each village on the eve of the main market day. Some of these practices transcend boundaries and traders from neighbouring communities were not excluded. The markets served as *rendezvous* for this aspect of the people's economic relations. It is common knowledge that this system is still practiced among local traders in the area and in most parts of Igboland. Most of the traders attested to the continued existence of the practices in the local markets

Through these practices, the people maintain mutual trade relations as participation is not limited to people from a particular community. The membership which cuts across different communities helps to foster friendly relations. Besides, the four-day and eight-day market systems are still common. The market days are referred to as *Afor ukwu*, *Eke ukwu*, *Orie ukwu* and *Nkwu ukwu* by different villages.

The observance and practice *umune* ritual is still extant in many families. It is a common belief among the people that the *umune* is the spiritual identity and protector of their fortune. It serves as a factor of unity and brotherhood among brothers, families, lineages and communities. Many families still offer sacrifices to *umune* to emphasize kinship. Hence, the people would always say in their local parlance that, *umeju anaghi egbu obi.* (People related by blood do not harm each other). This traditional practice and

beliefs ensure that hostilities do not go beyond the veneer to the marrow. They are at the threshold of age-long peaceful co-existence and helps in maintaining the brotherly love existing between the people in spite of hostilities.

Belief in reincarnation is still strong in the area. At the birth of a baby, most parents still consult diviners to ascertain which of their dead relations returned to them. Ven. Obilor also confirms this when he said, *õndi nne na nna ayi ha, ka na-aga na ebe dibia afa ichoputa onye loro ha uwa ma amuo nwa ohuuö* (our elders still consult *dibia* to find out which of their grandfathers or grandmothers has come back to their generation). *õNdi uka emelanwughi ilo uwa na ala Igbo anyi,ö*<sup>564</sup> -Christianity has not stopped the Igbo belief in reincarnation).

In almost all communities, the deities are very much revered. People still go beyond their immediate communities to consult oracles. The role of oracle consultation as a factor of inter-group relations has not been obliterated. Such deities and oracles as, *Ogwugwu, Okwara Ogbuleke, Ezealanyanwu, Ezealaogaraku, Mgbanudim, Urashi, Alaogbaga-Mbaise, Ezealakamu* and many others are still factors of contact and interactions. During *Ekweji, Awa, Mbom uzo, Iwa akwa* and other cultural festivals, sacrifices are still offered to them. As was practiced before colonial incursion, most communities do not go to farm on specific market days set apart for the deities. For instance, in Obollo Ugiri clan, people do not go to farm (*mbara*) on *afo* market day that precedes *Nkwo-Obollo* market. The *iroko (orji)* tree believed to be inhabited by strong deities is still revered by most communities as *osisi agbara*. In fact, Ama-orji community in Ibeme is a perfect example. The people still believe that the deities dwell in such big trees. Occasionally one still found ritual and sacrificial objects (*ihe eji kwa-aja*) beside

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<sup>564</sup> Ven. E.E. Obilor interview cited



these *iroko* trees. People from different communities still consult the priests of these deities to solve some personal and group challenges.

The traditional land tenure is still observed in the area. Prior to colonial rule, like in most parts of Igboland, the first son and eldest male child in the family controls the family land. He is consulted before any part of the family land is used. He protects the land from intruders. This tradition has not changed in the area, though one would not claim that this tradition is still observed without some modifications. Respect for land ownership still holds, but occasionally, disagreements over land use arise. In recent times, this has been source of numerous litigations between brothers, families and communities. The commercialisation of land is causing some great societal damage to peaceful relations and creates hostilities. Land disputes increase as urbanization reaches into the interior Mbano and their neighbouring communities.

From the foregoing, it could be fair to state that despite changes occasioned by colonial rule, Mbano and its neighbours have been resilient enough to retain some agents of group interactions. These essential factors such as cultural festival and belief in *umune* ritual have been largely responsible for the peaceful nature of relations between Mbano people and their neighbours. At least, these are pointers to the fact that the people still retain their traditional identity and 'ethnic essence'. They serve to buttress the claim that Mbano and its neighbours relate more as brothers than neighbours. A status imposed on the people by colonial rule and the consequent balkanisation of the then Mbasaa polity and its impact on inter-group relations.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### Summary

From the findings made in this research, it seems obvious that Mbano and its neighbours share a lot in common from very early times. Hence, they live peacefully and are largely knit together by a host of cultural heritage. The impacts of the common ties of history are exemplified in the numerous cultural festivals, traditions, customs and similar dialect. The oral traditions point to the strength in unity and peaceful co-existence before colonial rule. Even in the colonial era, such traditions helped to unite the people in the face of colonial situations accompanied by the far-reaching changes it had on the people's relations and their society.

Oral tradition provides valid data used in reconstructing the past of Mbano and its neighbours. Afigbo has affirmed that "the strongest evidence in favour of the model postulating a network of inter-group relations comes from oral tradition."<sup>565</sup> He further posited that "this is partly because this source is now being more intensively exploited day to day; and partly because oral tradition contains the only authentic effort on the part of the people to explain their world, their environment, how it was built up and how it functioned."<sup>566</sup> These traditions are very important and informative, in that they help to suggest to the range and intensity of the contacts which existed amongst these peoples in the remote past. A people cannot incorporate into their world view, those they know nothing about or have nothing significant to do with. The traditions also give us a

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<sup>565</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *The Igbo and Their Neighbours: Inter-Group Relations in Southeastern Nigeria to 1953*, Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1987, p.32.

<sup>566</sup> Afigbo, *The Igbo and their Neighbours* , p.32.

healthier idea of the rich diversity of these contacts than we get from the speculations of the historians and anthropologists of the colonial period or even from the few existing records dealing with the pre-colonial period.<sup>567</sup> The traditions regarding Mbano and its neighbours as used in this study helped in the understanding of the relationship between the people over time.

This enquiry derives from the desire to attempt an *expose* of the common issues or ties holding Mbano and its neighbours. The issues discussed in the work are as exemplified in their oral traditions. There is greater degree of agreement on the general Orlu area in the traditions, though there are some pockets of differing views in the existing traditions. For instance, some communities in Ihteafoukwu Mbaise claim Aro origin. But the origin of such communities is traced to the era of ÷Aro ascendancyø in trade, especially, slave trade in Igboland. The Aro had established their settlements in some Igbo areas like Ndikelionwu, Ajalli in Orumba North Local Government in present Anambra State. Such traditions only add colour to the original and widely accepted oral tradition about Mbano and the proximate communities.

In the traditions discussed, the neighbours of Mbano, Ikeduru communities of Inyishi, Umudim, Atta, Amaimo, and Umu-uri except Okwelle Onuimo claim kinship with Mbano. Parts of Ekwereazu Mbaise, like Ihteafoukwu and Ezizama communities, also claim common ancestry with Mbano. Some parts of Obowo are said to have migrated to their present location from Osu area in Mbano. The legend regarding their migration revolves around the killing and roasting of a sacred animal ó antelope- (*Ele*) with the skin. The action which was a taboo resulted in the outright banishment and expulsion of the culprit and his wife. Ibeme community that inhabit a land mass between

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<sup>567</sup> Afigbo, p.32.

Ogbor and Oka community in Ugiri also shares a similar fate on their legend of origin and internal migration within Mbano. These internal migrations appear not to have much significant effect on the legends of origin in the people's history. They merely constitute internal shifts and relocations within the Mbano enclave. Inyishi in Ikeduru also are said to have migrated from Amuzari in Mbano to their present location. In their traditions of origin, the legends that claim descent from Abba in Orlu area of (Isuama) Igbo appear the most credible.

The current effort as we have stressed earlier would appear to be a trail-blazer in an attempt at examining the context of inter-group relations between Mbano and its neighbours. This work has tried to extract available data and used them in explaining the issues in their relationship. It covers the five cardinal stages adopted for this purpose, which include contact and interaction, compromise and cooperation, competition, conflict, assimilation and integration. These stages helped to provide clearer understanding of the nature of inter-group relations and also assisted in the interpretation and analysis of the information and situations that arise therefrom. They also helped examine the factors that brought changes in their relations over time.

It could be stressed that over time, the groups studied have mutually related under peaceful and conflictual circumstances. Colonialism in the area from 1906-1960 and the Nigeria-Biafra war, 1967-1970 brought far-reaching socio-cultural, economic and political changes in the way Mbano people related with their neighbours. These changes thrived amidst peaceful and hostile environments and relations between the peoples and different communities were continuous. This continuity explains the interdependent nature of relations prevalent in human interactions. Invariably, humans in a bid to satisfy

their personal and general needs and bridge the gap in the unequal distribution of natural resources mutually aid each other. The increasing drive by private and community interests, competition for limited natural resources and space, occasionally gave rise to disagreements that resulted in skirmishes. These conflicts were usually in the forms of infighting, inter-village and community skirmishes and land disputes among others. The conflicts tend to reveal and bring into focus, the anarchic aspect of human nature which forms part of the human relations. It is through these two theoretical models and stages of interactions, that we have tried to attempt an explanation of the form and nature of inter-group relations between Mbano and its neighbours.

Therefore, from *a posteriori* knowledge we have attempted to draw conclusions of the study. On the eve of colonial rule, communities in Mbano and contiguous communities of Ikeduru, Okwelle, Isu and parts of Ekwereazu Mbaise (Ihiteafoukwu and Eziama) were simply and typically traditional rural Igbo society. The area was not known by the name **Mbano**. It was rather called **Mbasaa**, because it comprised seven clans. Subsequently, the area was divided into different Native Court administrations. The Umuduru Native Court (U.N.C) was created to administer the area. Following the establishment of U.N.C. in 1906, the name Mbano emerged. The U.N.C jurisdiction covered only four clans out of the initial seven viz., Osu, Ugiri, Ehime and Mbaama. These Mbano clans and their neighbours, trace their origin and migration to Orlu area, which shows they enjoy some form of homogeneous ancestral history. However, group relations between the various communities in Mbano and those of their neighbours were made manifest through various socio-cultural, political and economic activities.

Some adherents to traditional religion still perform ritual obligations to some of

the perceived common deities in their communities. Such deities include *Urashi Nsu*, *Onugotu* of Ehime and Ekwereazu Mbaise, *Ebummiri*, *Ezealakatamu*, *Ezeala-anyanwu*, *Duru-Mburu*, *Ala* and a host of others. They form the basis of the numerous important festivals such as the new yam festival (*Ekweji*, *Awa* or *nrim ji*), *Mbom uzo uyi*, *Iwa akwa*, *Nne ngene*, *aruru* and other religious and cultural concerns. Other cultural ceremonies include wrestling (*ekere mgba*), *ubo-ogazi* cultural dance, *nkwa-otele*, *nkwa umuagbogho*, *ekpe*, *egwu inwakiriinwa*, *alijah*, *nmanwu*, *atiero*, *egwu onu-nwa*, and *agbachaa-ekuru-nwa*, among many others. Apart from being sources of entertainment in some aspect of these ceremonies, they also help to strengthen the bonds of inter-group relations between the different communities as people move in their numbers to witness the displays.

There are numerous markets of varying sizes within Mbano. Some are small while others big. Some are daily markets while others operate on a four-day and eight-day cycles. Majority of the markets operate on eight-day market system. The proximity of the communities guarantees that there is a market to attend every two or four days within the area. The dialect of Igbo spoken in the market transactions makes for easy communication and flow of trade between the people.

The mainstay of the people's economy, especially in the pre-colonial and colonial times has been agriculture. This includes farming and non-farming practices. The chief crop has been yam. There are other agricultural produce such as cocoyam (*ede okoriko*), oil palm, palm wine (*nmanya ngwo*), and three-leaved yam (*una*), among other crops. Yam was produced mainly by men while women produced cocoyam, cassava, fluted pumpkin, maize and other vegetables. Both men and women engaged in crafts such as

pottery and weaving; basket. Men engaged in blacksmithing, wood-work-carving in some of the communities. Blacksmithing in the area is believed to have been introduced from Nkwere area. This is evidenced in the celebration of common deity-*Ogadazu* -god of iron, by both Mbano and Nkwere blacksmiths. Their products are sold in the many local markets.

Trade between Mbano and its neighbours supplemented shortfalls in agricultural produce. Some traders engaged in long distance trade. They traded with the Aro, Uturu, Owerri, Ikwere, Calabar, Uburu in Afikpo, Abakaliki, Oru and Igirinta, among others. The main articles of trade were salt, baskets, palm oil and kernel, palm wine, cocoa yam and fish. Trade remains an important aspect of inter-group relations for it provides the person with scarce products which helps bridge the gap in the spatial distribution of natural resources. Trade and markets served as important highway for socio-cultural and political relations between the people.

British advent in the area from 1906 caused a remarkable shift in the history and the nature of relationship between the people. Through British colonial administrative reorganization, some communities that had hitherto been part of Mbano became neighbours. Such communities include Inyishi, Atta, Umudim and parts of Agbaja Isu. The establishment of native courts forced some of these communities to be grouped under Ikeduru. They have since been administered as part of Owerri zone till date. By that creation, the status of these communities changed from brothers to neighbours, though they are still held by common ancestry and some cultural festivals. The imposition of British rule disrupted to some degree, the pre-existing political and social-cultural organization of the people. The establishment of British courts and the institution

of the warrant chief system almost swept away, at least, at the initial stage, the participatory democratic system of traditional administration of Mbanjo and its neighbours. In some areas, British administration brought about bigger unions by bringing together some independent groups, villages and clans to form larger groups and a new source of brotherhood or kinship. There were some changes and modifications in aspects of traditions, custom and cultural practices of the people. For instance, the killing of twins, oracle consultation, and the discriminatory life suffered by the *osu* and *umeh* caste systems was checked.

These changes were made possible through two related institutions, Christianity and Western education. The spread of churches into the area beginning from 1912, and the establishment of schools, further strengthened relations between Mbanjo and its neighbours. The first churches and schools were attended by people from across the different communities. The grouping of churches into parishes and dioceses caused people from different communities outside Mbanjo to meet and interact during various Christian activities. Through this means, Christianity and Western education became new agents of inter-group relations. Some friendly relations between school mates and church members sometimes resulted in marriages. This new form of inter-group relations was aided by the British penetration of the hinterland. Motor transportation made movement of people a lot easier but with associated hazards like accidents. Mobility enabled people to attend the numerous church programmes and other activities outside their communities. In his view on Christianity in the area, Chidi Onwubuariri said that

The coming of Christianity and Western education  
enhanced our relationship with our neighbours.



Christianity more than anything else, enhanced group interaction. For instance, an Anglican in Inyishi Ikeduru sees an Anglican in Mbanjo or Mbaise as his öbrother in Christ.ö The same applies to the Roman Catholics. The church provided new forms of interaction between Inyishi and their Mbanjo brothers and neighbours. In fact, most friends and family friends we have today are either church members or school mates. We either belong to the same parish or we belong to the same Diocese. The churches and schools have been good agents of inter-group relations. In spite of all odds, our people are enjoying interactions through churches and schools.<sup>568</sup>

Besides, the expansion of roads and introduction of motor transport further reduced trekking and other sufferings by traders and people in their daily socio-cultural and economic activities. Group contact and interaction became faster and easier. Though the economic and social life of the people was under the dictates of the foreign rulers, there was greater mobility and improved life style. Many young men and women moved to the urban centres like Enugu, Owerri, Aba, Umuahia, Lagos and Port-Harcourt in search of ögreener pasturesö and white collar jobs. While in the cities, these Mbanjo indigenes maintained continuous contact with their kith and kin at home and in Diaspora.

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<sup>568</sup> Chidi Onwubuariri, c.77 years, Pensioner, interviewed at Akpakama Umuoti Inyishi Ikeduru, 24/08/2010.

Their relationship remained continuous and rural-urban interaction was effective.

Education and improved economic life put the society on the path of urbanization before the end of colonial rule. Generally, it could be stated that on the eve of Nigeria's independence, Mbano and its neighbours had attained some sort of modern and urban way of life. Colonial administrative re-organization, boundary adjustments and the balkanization of the area notwithstanding, mutual relationship between people prevailed. At least, claims to common ancestral origin and cultural festivals celebrated by the people and belief in the efficacy of *umune* ritual served as factors of brotherhood and unity. These factors manifested in the socio-economic and political lives shared by the people and helped maintain both mutual antagonistic and peaceful relations.

Post-colonial developments have also had some impact on the nature and form of relationship existing between the people. The struggle for political power and economic control between the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria -the Hausa, Yoruba and the Igbo -created a new dimension in inter-group relations. Especially, the political situation at the time caused the war between Nigeria and Biafra. Igboland was the main theatre of the war. Hence, the war constituted a cog in the wheel of progress and relations between the people. The war situation though destructive and disastrous, enabled the people to demonstrate the spirit of brotherhood inherent in their relationship. Mbano communities served as a comfort zone for many refugees during the war. Refugees from Igirinta, Umuahia, Okigwe, Orlu, Calabar, Owerri and Enugu were quartered in many Mbano communities. Many individual houses, schools and churches served different purposes. Some were used either as military training camps and/or refugee camps. Many Mbano people suffered varied losses, during the war. Some of the development projects like

schools, health centres, markets, bridges and houses were destructed. The socio-economic and psychological effects of the war were enormous. War experiences and the manner of survival varied according to each individual and community as discussed in chapter four.

Nevertheless, the war period showed the nature of relationship existing in the area. People were their brothersøkeeper and assisted each other in any way possible. The international Red-Cross Society and the Caritas Organization also helped in the survival efforts of the people. The closure of schools and the returning home of Mbanò indigenes from war torn cities, increased hardship and suffering. However, the high spirit of brotherhood was the greatest part that manifested in the survival efforts amongst the people. The end of the war ushered in a period of reconstruction. Different communities embarked on self-help development projects. Town unions and other associations rebuilt their schools, hospitals and markets devastated by the war. Some Wells were provided by the town unions in various communities to cushion the effects of the post-war era.

Women organizations helped in building health-centres, schools, and civic centres and so on in different communities. The contributions of both the Federal Government and East Central State Government were inadequate. As a result, Mbanò communities and their neighbours, as in many Igbo areas, relied on self-help efforts. It did not take decades before the war affected infrastructures were reconstructed. Besides, the creation of Imo State in 1976 brought some relief to most communities. The government of Governor Sam Onunaka Mbakwe embarked on aggressive rural development and assisted many rural communities in providing social amenities. Governor Mbakwe, built a power station at Amaraku town in Mbanò, sank many boreholes and built roads across Imo State and indeed including Mbanò. Mbanò and its neighbors enjoyed better relations through

the improved social amenities that put the people of the area back on track for further modernization and urbanization. By 1985, the devastating effects of the Nigeria-Biafra war on the people had waned, though the memories still linger.

The post-war reconstruction era was followed by a period of further developments in the socio-political and economic life of the people. Education in the first place, was accorded priority attention by all the communities. Many schools, both primary and secondary, were built. Some private schools were also built. Consequently, many Mbano indigenes enrolled in the schools in their numbers. Girls who, before then could not enroll in schools because of the long distance, were able to do so as schools were built in their communities. Adult literacy schools were established and provided opportunity for adults to receive Western education. The schools were mostly attended in the evening period when younger school children had dismissed and returned home. Education contributed immensely in changing the socio-economic and political status of women and their increased role in community development. It was in the course of these developments that Mbano was divided into two local governments, Isiala and Ehime Mbano respectively in 1991.

Town unions and women associations played important roles in community development in the area. Political consciousness among the people increased. Through the efforts of the educated elite, business men, and the government, new infrastructures were built. More health centres and hospitals were built to complement the existing ones. New roads were constructed and tarred across communities. These new roads enhanced transportation and communication, not only between Mbano and its neighbours at home, but with those in the diaspora and Igboland in general. More modern facilities such as

boreholes, lock-up stores and market stalls, new school blocks were built. For instance, the period 1999 to 2006, saw the tarring of many roads in Mbandia by the Achike Udenwa administration. The local government contributed to the construction and maintenance of local markets, stalls, motor lots, and the grading of rural roads. It was during this period, that the mobile communication and internet facilities were established in the area. Through these facilities, relations between Mbandia and its neighbours became further enhanced. Development centers and more autonomous communities were created to enhance rural development and bring government closer to the people.

Over the years, Mbandia and its neighbours appear to have enjoyed long periods of cordial political relations. The impact of individual, community and ethnic leanings as identifiable driving forces of political interests may not be over-emphasized. Arthur Nwankwo posits that "socio-political behaviour of a people is a direct output of their environment in which they find themselves."<sup>569</sup> The mutual relations between the people accounts for positive and favourable political behaviour and cooperation they enjoy.

This is in spite of the high incidence of sectionalism found in our political system today. Political activities in recent times depend on effective articulation of individual, community and group interests and influences decision-making between the people. G.A Almond and G.B. Powell contend that

í interest articulation is particularly important because it makes the boundary between the society and the political system. If groups within the society do not find open demands through which to express

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<sup>569</sup> Arthur Nwankwo, "The Igbo and the Tradition of politics: An Overview", in U.D. Anyanwu and J.C.U. Aguwa (eds.), *The Igbo and the Tradition of Politics*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 1993, p.3.

their interests and needs, the resultant dissatisfaction may erupt in violence or may require suppression by the elites. It is through interest articulation, whether from elites or from the masses, that the conflicts inherent in political culture and social structure become evident.<sup>570</sup>

The influence of Western ideas, ideologies and systems notwithstanding, the people have remained astute enough to maintain their cordial relationships, as well as retain their ethnic essence. Writing on change in Igboland, Simon Ottenberg noted

í the formal elements of social, religious, economic and political structure, such as lineages, family groups, age grades and secret societies, have been modified through culture contact, many of the basic patterns of social behaviour such as emphasis on alternative choices and goals, achievements and competition and lack of strong autocratic authority, have survived and are part of the newly developing culture.<sup>8571</sup>

From the foregoing, it is apt to state that Mbano and its neighbours have remained dynamic in their interactions. It may be added that, the village groups have since their

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<sup>570</sup> G.A. Almond and G.B. Powell Jr., *Comparative Politics: A Development Approach*. Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1916, pp.73- 74.

<sup>571</sup> Ottenberg, ðlbo Receptivity to changeö, in W.R. Bascom and M.J. Herskovits (eds.), *Continuity and Change in African Culture*, 4<sup>th</sup> Impression, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959, p.130.

earliest point of contact with their neighbours sustained the different identified stages in human relations discussed earlier. Over the years, Mbanjo and its neighbours have tried in ensuring the sustenance of age long cordial and peaceful co-existence between them.

## **Conclusion**

This study has tried to demonstrate that inter-group relation is not a one-way traffic. Human society, though driven by distinct interests, either as individuals, groups or community is inter-dependent. No society can exist in total isolation and independent of the other. The study among other things, tried to consider the existence of mutually enriching and intensive interaction between Mbanjo and its neighbours over time. However, the work has attempted to examine the contour and dynamics of their interactions and extent to which colonialism and Nigeria-Biafra war impacted on inter-group relations. The issue of why the people enjoy peaceful co-existence against all odds has been analysed. From the findings made by this study, the nature of group interactions between Mbanjo and its neighbours, stresses mutuality, autonomy and occasional conflictual relations.

The research has also made modest attempts to present insights into the nature of relationship that existed between the people. From the foregoing, some reasonable conclusions have been made on the inherent factors responsible for the dynamic nature of their relations. First, the traditions of origin of all the groups studied showed they share a common ancestry from the Orlu area. Secondly, some communities seen to be neighbours of Mbanjo today óAtta, Umudim and Isu were integral part of Mbasaa in the pre-colonial times. Thirdly, colonial rule balkanized the society and introduced new systems that impacted on the hitherto known customs, socio-political and cultural *status quo*. Fourthly,

the Nigeria-Biafra war upset smooth relations between the communities in its wake. The people's belief in *umune* ritual was a strong bond that guided them in the face of all new challenges and had helped them to be resilient to maintain mutual relations since their contact. It identifies that claims of common ancestry and cultural practices/celebrations were part of the evidence responsible for the largely peaceful and minimal conflictual relations. Most of these findings are unknown to majority of the people in these communities. This study has also attempted in a modest way, to bring to historical knowledge the factors responsible for the nature of relations between Mbano and its neighbours for a centenary. By so doing, the problem of the absence of alphabetic literature in this aspect of their past has received historical attention. Therefore, it could be safe to conclude that inter-group relations between Mbano and its neighbours is a demonstration of the Igbo saying that indeed; people's neighbours are their brothers/sisters, *óagbata obi madu wukwa umunne ha*.



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**Table 10: List of Oral Interviews**

Name	Date of Birth	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
Mr. Okoro, Peter Ogu	85	Retired Civil Servant	Eziama Oparanadim	23/08/2010
Mr. Onyirimba, Godson Ogu	76	Retired Teacher	Umueze 11, Ehime Mbanjo	23/08/2010
Chief Ibe, Marcel	67	Umuduruodu Okwelle	Pensioner	24/08/2010
Chief Ikemenogo, Innocent	78	Retired Teacher	Umulolo Oboh	24/08/2010
Sir Onwubuariri,	71	Pensioner	Umuoti Inyishi	24/08/2010

<b>Chidi</b>			<b>Ikeduru.</b>	
<b>Mr. Obiukwu, Innocent Chijioke</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>Security Man</b>	<b>Umuezegwu Ihite Uboma, Etiti</b>	<b>25/05/2010</b>
<b>Nze Ehenamba, Boniface Alagwa</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>Retired civil servant</b>	<b>Umuagwu, Umuakagu Nsu</b>	<b>25/08/2010</b>
<b>Sir Agbugbaegbu, Cyril</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>Pensioner</b>	<b>Amachara Amaimo Ikeduru</b>	<b>25/08/2010</b>
<b>Mr. Iwuamadi, Sidney</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>Farmer</b>	<b>Umudimoma Obodo Amaimo</b>	<b>28/08/2010</b>
<b>Chief Oguine, Herbert</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>Architect</b>	<b>Anara, Osu-ama Isiala Mbano</b>	<b>24/08/2010</b>
<b>Ezeala, Erastus</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>Retired Teacher</b>	<b>Amuzari Mbama,</b>	<b>24/08/2010</b>
<b>Sir Ibe, Simon</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>Pensioner</b>	<b>Mbeke, Isiala Mbano</b>	<b>23/04/2011</b>
<b>Sir Njoku, J.I.J</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>Pensioner</b>	<b>Umunkwo, Isiala Mbano</b>	<b>25/04/2011</b>
<b>Sir Opara, Chidi</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>Pensioner</b>	<b>Umueze 1, Ehime Mbano</b>	<b>22/04/2011</b>
<b>Chief Nwabugo, Lazarus</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>Trader/Farmer</b>	<b>Amaraku</b>	<b>25/04/2011</b>
<b>Mr. Okoroikpa, Justin U.</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>Public Servant</b>	<b>Umunkwo</b>	<b>25/04/2011</b>
<b>Sir Onwuka, SBC</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>Pensioner</b>	<b>Oka Ugiri</b>	<b>28/04/2011</b>
<b>HRH. Okoroike, C.E</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>Traditional Ruler</b>	<b>Ibeme Ugiri</b>	<b>03/05/2011</b>
<b>Sir Mbalisi, S.E</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>Community Leader</b>	<b>Umuche Amaukwu-Obollo</b>	<b>20/04/2011</b>
<b>Hon. Diala, Chima</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>Community Leader</b>	<b>Ogbor Ugiri</b>	<b>24/04/2011</b>
<b>Ven. Dr. Obilor, Erastus E</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>Retired Lecturer/Priest</b>	<b>Alaiyi-ama Obollo</b>	<b>20/04/2011</b>
<b>Mr. Nwaneri, Felix Oriokata</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>Farmer</b>	<b>Umuche, Amaukwu-Obollo</b>	<b>20/04/2011</b>
<b>Nze Onwuegbu, Herbert</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>Farmer</b>	<b>Umuhu Atta, Ikeduru</b>	<b>26/04/2011</b>
<b>Mr. Uchegbu, John Uwaoma</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>Farmer</b>	<b>Umuhu Atta, Ikeduru</b>	<b>26/04/2011</b>
<b>Mrs. Osuagwu, Nkechi</b>	<b>c.77</b>	<b>Trader</b>	<b>Umuoti Inyishi</b>	<b>26/04/2011</b>
<b>Mrs. Ihemegbulam,</b>	<b>c.72</b>	<b>Potter</b>	<b>Umunomo</b>	<b>16/08/2011</b>

<b>Virginia</b>				
<b>Mrs. Ibe, Regina</b>	<b>C.74</b>	<b>Pensioner</b>	<b>Okwelle, Onuimo</b>	<b>25/08/2010</b>
<b>Ohanele, John</b>	<b>c. 78</b>	<b>Wood Carver</b>	<b>Umunumo</b>	<b>25/08/2010</b>
<b>Obiefuna, Mike</b>	<b>c.77</b>	<b>Weaver</b>	<b>Nsu</b>	<b>25/08/2010</b>
<b>Njoku, Samuel</b>	<b>c. 79</b>	<b>Trader</b>	<b>Umuezeala-ama</b>	<b>26/08/2010</b>
<b>Mrs. Osuagwu, Nkechi</b>	<b>c.77</b>	<b>Trader</b>	<b>Inyishi Ikeduru</b>	<b>24/08/2010</b>
<b>Mrs. Ibe, Beatrice</b>	<b>c.74</b>	<b>Pensioner</b>	<b>Okwelle</b>	<b>25/08/2011</b>
<b>Mrs. Ejioogu, Cecilia</b>	<b>c. 88</b>	<b>Farmer/Trader</b>	<b>Umuozu Ugiri</b>	<b>10/08/2010</b>
<b>Cannon Okeke, Oliver</b>	<b>c. 60</b>	<b>Christian Priest</b>	<b>Amainyi, Ihite Uboma</b>	<b>25//08/2012</b>
<b>Mrs. Okeke, Claribel</b>	<b>c. 57</b>	<b>Civil Servant</b>	<b>Amainyi Ihite Uboma</b>	<b>25/08/2012</b>

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