

The Dynamics of Inter-group Relations in Nigeria Since 1960

Essays in Honour of Obaro Ikime @ 70



Edited by
C.B.N. Ogbogbo
R. O. Olaniyi
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Dedication

Dedicated to those who laboured in the Department of History, University of Ibadan in the years 1956-1961 – those who laid the foundation of Professor Ikime's career as a historian.

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Land Disputes and Inter-Group Relations in West Niger Igboland*

J.G. Nkem Onyekpe

Introduction

A major problem of predominantly agrarian rural communities in Nigeria is the growing scarcity of cultivable land. This is especially true of areas that were associated with commercial tree-cropping during the colonial period. The commitment of large portions of rural lands to tree-cropping had drastically reduced the portions left for food crops. The problem is today aggravated by the large-scale expropriation of communal lands by urban-based private interests. Land disputes are the natural results of the growing problems of land scarcity. An interesting aspect of the disputes is the claim of ownership of land by strangers and tenant communities. Land disputes have been associated with bloody violence and deaths. The problem of land scarcity is further aggravated by a combination of factors, viz, the absence of modern agricultural inputs, the use of obsolete tools and technologies, the absence of alternative employment opportunities and the total neglect of the area by successive administrations. The response of the state to the disputes have been largely superficial and out of touch with the practical realities on the ground. Consequently, state responses have been an abysmal failure. It is the argument of this chapter that the phenomena of land disputes are not only a reflection of the crisis in the agrarian economy of the area, but also the major factor that has turned most West Niger Igbo communities against one another.

Land and its allocation and distribution are fundamentally important in economies where crops production is the major economic activity and especially where scientific methods and modern technologies are not widely used. The West Niger Igbo area is a rural economy based on the cultivation of the land. The area is largely culturally homogeneous and this was a major factor in the harmonious inter-group relations among the communities. There were occasional disagreements and even skirmishes among the communities but these were generally short-lived and easily resolved. It is very important to note, however, that up to about the 1920s – 30s land was never a factor in the disagreements and conflicts among the communities. Of course, land was plentifully available in relation to the population. Moreover, the pressure for expansion of production was minimal until the 'transformation' of the area's economy following its incorporation into the colonial capitalist mode of production. It was the dynamics of this 'transformation' which disrupted the 'natural' or 'traditional' economy and its equilibrium and tranquillity. A major manifestation of this disruption was the emergence and accentuation of disputes over land. The subject of this chapter has been examined under five subheadings, viz, (1) the peopling of the area and the nature of the settlements and land use, (2), capitalist penetration of agriculture and economic change, 1920s-1950s, (3) post-colonial realities: encroachment by the elite and the state, (4) intercommunity disputes over land, and (5) the continuing nature of land disputes. There follows a conclusion.

The Peopling of the Area, Nature of the Settlements and Land Use

Research on the West Niger Igbo communities reveals that the area was peopled between the 15th and 18th centuries by migrants from Benin, Igala and the East Niger Igbo area.¹ There are three categories of settlements, viz, (1) the proto settlements such as Adiani (later Onicha Ugbo) which was the cradle of the Eze Chima communities – Obior,

¹ J.G.N. Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis and Land Question in West Niger Igbo Area, C. 1886-1987', Ph.D Thesis, University of Lagos, 1996, pp. 33-62.

Onicha Olona, Onicha Ukwu, Ezi, Obomkpa, Issele Mkpitme, and Issele Azagba; Umusu (later, Eziokpor), the cradle of the Akashiada communities – Ezionum, Umuebu and Ovilil (or Ovirri), the nucleus of the present day Abraka; Owa Oyibo, the cradle of Owa communities; Ute Okpu, the cradle of Ute communities; other proto settlements included Utagba Unor, Aboh, Agbor, Ahaba (Asaba) Igbuzo (Ibusa) Ababu (Abavo) Ogwashi Uku and the Enuani communities such as Ejeme, Nsukwa and Egbudu Akah; (2) the offshoots of these settlements which emerged between C.1550 and 1750; and (3) new settlements which emerged between C.1750 and 1900. The third category was made up of communities of migrants, who had moved out of their indigenous homelands in search of cultivable lands. Among these were the Isumpe migrants from Utagba Unor settled in Ejemeland, Etua migrants also from Utagba Unor settled in Ejeme and Nsukwaland, Umusam and Umusedeli from Utagba Unor settled in Ejeme Unor and Ejeme Aniogor respectively, Agbor migrants settled in Agbor Alidimma and Ekuku Agbor in Ejemeland, and Owa migrants settled in Owa Alidimma in Ejemeland. There are many others such as Ani Efume jointly peopled by Egbudu Akah and Ute Okpu migrants and Ichi-Mili (Obi Okoh) jointly peopled by Ejeme, Nsukwa and Ukwani migrants.

The proto settlements and their offshoots, which are the secondary settlements, may be regarded as the indigenous settlements with rightful claims of autochthony. The third category of settlements, to the extent that they emerged as communities of migrants who had relocated from their homelands, may be classified as stranger communities. The point here is that those who arrived in the local area after the area had been settled were regarded by their hosts as strangers. The first sets or waves of settlers or "founders" usually laid claim to the local area. They were historically responsible for the initial development of the land. This was achieved through the colonisation of the high forests for cultivation, the establishment of permanent settlements and the development of small farm colonies. All areas cultivated by the first settlers (i.e. those under crops and those lying fallow) and the uncultivated areas separating them constituted the group's land.

As their basic means of production, land occupied a central position in the people's philosophy, religion and cosmology.² Thus, the land or the earth (known among the people as *ani* or *ali*), and the spirits, and ancestors who, in their belief, dwelled in it were all worshipped. It would appear that through this form of worship, which is said to have started in the very early period of the settlements, their founders and their descendants established primordial and ritualistic relationships with the land before the arrival of the later migrant groups.

There were two categories of later migrants. The first comprised those who arrived in a locality in which settlements were in their formative stages. In most cases such migrants were incorporated into the earlier group or groups. The second category of later migrants were groups who arrived in the different localities long after settlements had been established and consolidated. These sets of migrants were accommodated in farm colonies belonging to the founders of the settlements or their descendants. These colonies formed the nuclei for the expansion of the migrant settlements. The migrant settlements maintained their distinct identities as stranger communities in the land of their host communities. The farm colonies or new settlements in which they were accommodated either belonged to the entire host community or a subdivision of it which was either a lineage or a patrilineage.

There are no traditions of outright sale of land to migrant groups. The migrant groups paid land rents, but this was not in the classical economic sense, for rents were not monetised. They were paid in kind. Usually the stranger-community assisted the head of the host or landlord community (i.e., the village head or the head of the landowning lineage or patrilineage) in his farm work.

² Oral Interviews with H.R.H. Obi S.O. Aghaunor and his Council of Chiefs and Elders, Ejeme Aniogor, 4.9.87; Diokpa O. Uzu, Ejeme Aniogor, 12.9.87; Chief Odigadefu Odozie, Nsukwa, 24.8.87, Chief J.N. Osondu, Obiaruku, 14.12.90. see also C. Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1979) pp. 33-37.

Apart from direct labour assistance, the stranger groups were tribute-paying.³ Tributes were generally paid in lumps by each stranger group. They were usually paid in foodstuffs, especially yams. Kolanuts, goats, sheep and fowls were also involved. Yam tributes were counted in hundreds, with each member of the tenant-group contributing yam tubers never exceeding ten and much less in cases where the strangers were large in population. Berry's remarks apropos of migrant cocoa farmers in Yorubaland hold apt for our area. In his words, tributes were merely "a token payment acknowledging the limitations of a stranger's right to land."⁴ Tributes paid by the stranger groups to the landlord communities were therefore of little economic significance and were demanded not because of their economic value but essentially to give the strangers the consciousness of tenant groups.⁵

Tributes received from stranger groups were usually shared among the various lineages making up the community. Where the host-community was a descent group the tribute belonged to the group alone.⁶ It is instructive that indigenes also helped their village and lineage heads in working their farms and also offered gifts to them. To that extent, it may be argued that in rendering labour services and offering gifts the stranger groups were only conforming with the tradition of their hosts. But nevertheless, it is important to note that, while the services rendered and gifts offered by the indigenes to their heads were social obligations, in the case of the stranger groups such services, gifts and tributes were more significant in the sense that they represented rent paid on land. Although they were of little economic value

³ Oral Interviews as cited in note no.2. Also Diokpa Chukwuka Modeme, Ejeme Aniogor, 12.9.87; Diokpa Okoh P. Nwaka and his Council of Chiefs and Elders, Ejeme Unor, 19.9.87; Chief Okonye Asua and his Council of Chiefs and Elders, Umutu, 12.12.90.

⁴ S. Berry, *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 108. see also G.I. Jones, 'Ibo Land Tenure', *Africa-Journal of the International Africa Institute*, Vol. XIX, No. 4, October 1949, pp. 309-323, especially, p. 320.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Oral Interviews as cited in note no. 3. See also N.A.I, C.S.O 26, File No. 30927, Intelligence Report on Asaba Clan, Asaba Division, Benin Province, p. 22.

considering their sizes (the amount involved), especially those of the tributes, politically they underlined the status of the stranger groups as *users* as opposed to *owners* of land; they were an acknowledgement of the fact that the ultimate title to the land belonged to the host group (or groups).⁷

It is relevant to stress once again that land was abundantly available in the West Niger Igbo area in relation to population. As a result of this, migrant groups were given farmlands on very liberal terms and those who were absorbed by the autochthonous groups in the villages acquired ownership rights.⁸ Generally, land areas allotted to the strangers were never defined and so the strangers expanded the plots under use year by year.⁹ Moreover, the value of tributes was not determined by the size of land.¹⁰ In cases in which a host community had different stranger groups on its land, the stranger groups paid more or less the same amount regardless of the land area they cultivated.

It remains to add that the low level of political centralisation and the absence of the state (as it exists in the classical Marxist dialectical sense as an instrument of class rule, conquest and exploitation) were a basic factor in the liberal orientation in land matters. There was the absence, in most of the area, of complex state systems and the accompanying political class and army such as were boasted in Hausaland, the Benin and Oyo Kingdoms, nineteenth century Ibadan, and so on. This in turn meant that there was no mobilisation of surplus (that otherwise would have been necessary for the maintenance of the state and its organs and functionaries), no feudalisation of land and tax-farming.¹¹ Thus, the stranger communities were largely left on their

⁷ S. Berry, *Cocoa, Custom*, pp. 96-97, 108; and G.I. Jones, 'Ibo Land Tenure', p. 320.

⁸ Oral Interviews as cited in notes nos.2 and 3

⁹ Oral Interviews as cited in notes nos 2 and 3 Also, Chief Obi Ibolokwu, Umutu, 12.12.90.

¹⁰ Oral Interviews as cited in notes nos. 2 and 3. This is true of most other areas not associated with critical land pressures. An example of such other areas was Yoruba land studied by S. Berry in *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change*.

¹¹ This contrasted sharply with other areas such as Ibadan, Benin, Nupe and Hausa land. See S.A. Akintoye, 'The Economic Foundations Ibadan' in A.I. Akinjogbin and S.O. Osoba (eds) *Topics on Nigerian Economic and Social History* (Ile-Ife: University of

own. An important dimension of the prevalent liberalism in land matters was the fact that the strangers were given a free hand in production. Indeed, production and its organisation were planned and controlled not by the landlord but by the stranger who was the direct producer.

Generally, the massive availability of land in precolonial West Niger Igbo land in relation to the population meant that friction over land was never a frequent feature of intercommunity relations, whether among the indigenous settlements or between them and the stranger communities. The healthy and peaceful relations ensured by the absence of a land question was further promoted by such potent unifying and centripetal forces as common traditions of origin, common experiences of migration, ancestral and genealogical affinities, common exploitation of shared natural resources, especially streams, rivers and forests, trade and commerce, exogamous marriages and the necessity to come together in times of external threats.¹²

Capitalist Penetration of Agriculture and Economic Change, 1920s-1950s

Colonial Nigeria was incorporated into the British capitalist system as an appendage to meet the industrial raw material requirements of

Ife Press, 1980), esp. p. 57, P.A. Igbafe, 'The Pre-colonial Economic Foundations of the Benin Kingdom', in Akinjogbin and Osoba (eds) *Topics*, esp. p. 24; P.A. Igbafe, *Benin Under British Administration. The Impact of Colonial Rule on an African Kingdom, 1897-1938* (London: Longman, 1979), p. 26; R.E. Bradbury, *Benin Studies*, P. Morton-Williams (ed) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), Chapter 3, pp. 44-75; T. Falola and D. Oguntomisin, *The Military in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Politics* (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1984), pp. 56-58; A. Mahadi and J.E. Inikori 'Production and Exchange in Nigeria up to 1900', paper prepared for the workshop on the Teaching of Nigeria History from a National Perspective, organised by the Historical Society of Nigeria, at the University of Lagos, 3-8 February, 1986; M. Mason, *The Foundations of the Bida Kingdom* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1981), pp. 89-90, 113.

¹² Studied in J.G. Nkem Onyekpe, 'Conflict and Cooperation among West Niger Igbo Communities before 1900', in G.O. Oguntomisin and S.A. Ajayi (eds) *Readings in Nigerian History and Culture: Essays in Memory of Professor J.A. Atanda* (Ibadan: Hope Publications Limited, 2002), chapter 18.

factories in the Mother Country and for the sale of metropolitan industrial products and consumables.¹³ To meet the first aim, i.e., the desire for industrial raw materials, the British government and its colonial state in Nigeria emphasised agricultural production. In the West Niger Igbo area, the major crops were oil palm and rubber.¹⁴ Initially the peasants depended on wild oil palm trees and the communally owned palm grooves for fruits. Similarly, they depended on wild rubber trees such as *Funtumia Elastica*, *Landolphia* and *Clitandra*. Up to the 1920s, the peasants depended on wild sources for production. The wild sources were, however, inadequate for the ever-increasing demand of the expatriate trading firms such as John Holt and Company and United African Company. To meet the growing demand, the peasantry took to planting. Progress in planting was quite fast. For example, by 1937, 75 acres had been committed to oil palm planting in Aboh Division alone, and by 1938 152.5 acres had been committed to the same crop in the Agbor District of Asaba Division.¹⁵ The 1940s witnessed greater expansion. British demand for these products rose steeply during the Second World War. In particular there was an aggressive colonial campaign for expansion in rubber production. The demand for these products was further increased by post-war reconstruction requirements. At the same time, the Korean war of 1950 - 51 affected rubber supplies from Korea which had been a major source. This gave an additional fillip to expansion in the industry during the period.¹⁶

A number of factors contributed to the expansion in the agricultural raw material sector of the economy. Apart from the ever-

¹³ J.G.N. Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis and Land Question', chapters 3,4 and 5; R.W. Shenton, *The Development of Capitalism in Northern Nigeria* (Tororito: University of Townto Press, 1986; O. Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria* (London & Ibadan: Heinemann, 1977), Part one.

¹⁴ J.G.N. Onyekpe, *Agrarian Crisis and Land Question*, chapters 4 and 5, pp. 296-297.

¹⁵ J.G.N. Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Cisis', Tables 4.2 and 4.3, pp. 296-297.

¹⁶ JGN Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis', Table 5.2, p. 341, from R.O. Ekundare, *An Economic History of Nigeria, 1860-1960* (London: Muthuen and Co; 1973), p. 285. See also G.K. Helleiner, *Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic Growth in Nigeria*. (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, 1966), p. 121.

increasing demand, or what is referred to as "vent-for-surplus",¹⁷ the colonial economy had become pervasively monetised.¹⁸ Everyone needed some cash earnings on a regular basis to survive in the "modern" economy. Cash earnings were required for the purchase of imported items such as cutlasses, hoes, cloths, bicycles, radios, kitchen utensils and corrugated roofing sheets; for obligations such as colonial taxation and levies; and for meeting the people's social needs, especially children's education.

Besides, labour was available.¹⁹ The peasants continued to use the "free" labour resources of members of their households, friends, in-laws and members of their rotational labour cooperative units. In addition to these traditional, precapitalist sources of labour, the relatively bigger planters also depended on the wage labour of migrants from Urhoboland and the East Niger Igbo districts. A good number of them were Efik.

It should be noted that planting was done after the harvest of food crops. It therefore did not demand much of extra labour for clearing fresh plots. This was an important factor in the spread of rubber. Again, those who did not want to plant rubber were approached by prospective

¹⁷ Integration with the "world market" created the opportunity for export of agricultural commodities, or what Adam Smith terms the "vent for surplus". See A. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) ed. E. Cannan (New York Bantam Dell Edition, 2003). For a summary of the subject of "vent for surplus", see J.G.N. Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis', pp. 2554-258; A. Apena, 'A Socio-Economic History of the West Delta, 1914-1960', Ph.D Thesis, University of Lagos, 1988, pp. 8-9, 97-99, 137-138. See also H. Myinth, 'The "Classical" Theory of International Trade and Underdeveloped Countries', *Economic Journal*, June, 1958; idem, *The Economics of the Developing Countries*, 4th Revised Edition (London: Hutchinson, 1973).

¹⁸ Moretisation refers to the pervasive use of money in transactions and exchange. It is part and parcel of capitalist development and its commoditisation process. Commoditisation itself is the transformation of products from use-values (i.e. products created for the consumption needs of the direct producers) to exchange-values (i.e. products created with the market in mind). Products are said to be commoditised when they are produced primarily to meet the producer's needs for cash. See J.G.N. Onyekpe, *Agrarian Crisis*, pp. XIX and XX.

¹⁹ See JGN Onyekpe, *Agrarian Crisis*, pp. 310-313.

planters and their farmlands were acquired on liberal terms. Some peasants also sold their young rubber plantations to others.

The massive availability of land was by far the most important factor in the development of the agricultural export crops industry. It is important to note that, owing to the availability of land, migrant capitalist farmers penetrated the area and acquired land from both individual peasants and the communities. These were mostly Urhobo planters who had long been introduced to the colonial system both as traders and planters. Indeed, participation in colonial trade had enabled many of them to accumulate capital and, from the outbreak of World War II onwards, they began to acquire virgin lands outside their homelands for rubber planting. Notable among the planters were Chiefs Dafe, Agagaraga, Ogboru and Palmer.²⁰ Some Ukwani "native strangers"²¹ who had been introduced to the expatriate firms as agents and subagents, and to the rubber industry, also acquired land in the West Niger Igbo area and planted rubber. A notable example was Chief Nelson Oji Anamali of Umutu.²² Other notable Ukwani planters were Chief Obi Ibolokwu of Umutu and Chief Joseph Osuya of Abbi. Two areas of West Niger Igboland where Urhobo and Ukwani planters left a lasting impact are Ejeme and Nsukwa communities. At Ejeme, they acquired expansive areas and converted them to large plantations. Here, Urhobo and Ukwani planters were aided in the acquisition of land by

²⁰ Oral Interviews with Diokpa. C. Modeme, Ejeme Aniogor, 1.9.87 and 12.9.87; Diokpa O. Uzu, Ejeme Aniogor, 19.8.87 and 1.9.87; Chief J.N. Osondu, Obiaruku, 14.12.90; Mr. Uwabayo Oji-Anamali, Umutu, 12.12.90.

²¹ A term used by colonial writers and proconsuls to refer to the indigenous stranger or migrant. In their context, the Native Stranger is "a native of Nigeria who does not belong to the tribe or community having control over the land...". See Lord Lugard, *Political Memoranda. Revision of Instructions to Political Officers on Subjects Chiefly Political and Administrative, 1913-1918*. Third edition with a new Introduction by A.H.M. Kirk Greene (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd 1970), pp. 390-391. By this definition, the following are Native strangers: An Urbobo migrant in Isokoland, a Tiv migrant in Nupeland, an Egba migrant in Ijebuland, etc; or An Asaba migrant in Onitsha, an Ibadan migrant in Ile-Ife, a Kano Migrant in Zaria, an Ogwashi Uku migrant in Ibusa, an Utagba Unor migrant in Ejeme, an Owa Migrant in Agbor, etc.

²² Oral Interviews, Mr. Uwabayo Oji-Anamali, Umutu, 12.12.90; Mr. Gabriel E. Ashimonye, Ejeme Aniogor, 3.9.87.

the fact of their settlement on the River Adofi at Iyi-Ogbe and Mmokolokpor and their integration with the host towns of Ejeme Aniogor and Ejeme Unor.²³ Some of the migrant Etua settlers from Utagba Unor took part in the large-scale planting of rubber at their three settlements, viz, Etua Uzor (or Etua Ukpo), Etua Etiti and Etua Ime (or Etua Oliogo).

The massive conversion of the land to tree crops especially rubber and the expropriation of communal lands by Urhobo and Ukwuani planters generated fundamental contradictions in the economic life of the people. First, the spread of rubber had serious implications for a people whose only means of revitalising the soil was rotational bush fallow or shifting cultivation system. Moreover, the cultivation of rubber introduced the phenomenon of privatisation of land.²⁴ Privatisation was a major manifestation of the planting of tree crops even in situations where there was no large-scale planting. In the area under study, rubber planting stimulated and progressively accelerated this tendency. Tree crops are permanent crops which conferred ownership of the land on which they are planted on the planter.

There was also the development of peasant differentiation,²⁵ a phenomenon generated and promoted by privatisation of land. Differentiation of the peasantry refers to the objective stratification of

²³ Oral Interviews, H.R.H Obi S.O. Aghannor and his Council of Chiefs and Elders, Ejeme Aniogor, 4.9.87; Diokpa O. Uzu, Ejeme Aniogor, 12.9.87; Diokpa C. Modeme, Ejeme Aniogor, 12.9.87, Diokpa Okoh P. Nwaka and his Council of Chiefs and Elders, Ejeme Unor, 19.9.87.

²⁴ JGN Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis', pp. 401-402; P.A. Igbafe, *Benin Under British Administration*, pp. 370-371, Lord Lugard, *The Dual Mandala in British Tropical Africa*, 5th Edition (London: Frank Cass, 1965), pp. 286-287; H.A. Oluwasanmi, *Agriculture and Nigerian Economic Development* (London: Oxford University Press 1966), pp. 41-43. T. Falola, *The Political Economy of a pre-colonial African State: Ibadan, 1830-1900* (Ibadan: Africn Press Ltd, 1984), p. 183; G.B. Kay, *The Political Economy of Colonialism in Ghana A. Collection of Documents and Statistics 1900-1960* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 7-8, note 13.

²⁵ JGN Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis', p. 401-407; see also, V.I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), chapter 2, p. 71-190; Y.M. Ivanov, *Agrarian Reform and Hired Labour in Africa* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979), chapter 3, 93-170.

the peasantry into different strata each identifiable by (1) its distinctive position in the allocation, distribution and, ultimately, ownership of land, (2) the methods and technologies of cultivation, (3) the extent to which wage labour is employed, (4) the extent to which the producer is alienated from his produce, (5) the degree of commoditisation (or production for the market) and (6) the degree to which agricultural production is combined with industrial production; etc. In the area under study, the peasantry were, for the first time, split into "poor" and "rich" strata, defined by the sizes of their holdings.

The most serious contradiction in the growth and expansion of tree or permanent cropping was the reduction of the land areas available for food crops. This was simply a dialectical phenomenon, as the gains of tree-cropping were paid for by the losses of food-cropping. By the 1940s, this contradiction had become so acute that it attracted the attention of the colonial authorities.²⁶ Indeed, efforts were made to regulate and control the planting of tree crops and also to control the prices of foodstuffs, although the efforts achieved no significant results.²⁷ For one thing, the efforts were half-hearted and superficial. Again, the policies were circumvented by those who were charged with their implementation. Moreover, the planters thought they could not cope in the monetised economy without export agriculture which was the major source of cash earnings. With regard to the attempted control of foodstuffs' prices, the people resisted, albeit subtly, because the prices of imported items were not similarly controlled.

²⁶ JGN Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis', p. 407-421; see also NAI. Agbor District I. File No. Ag 600. Extract from Minutes of the Conference of Agbor Obis at Agbor on 3.8.1942; NAI. Kw DT 1, File No. 72c, Letter No. 72c/67 of 1.4.43, from D.O Aboh Division to Kwale Executive Connul, Amai, and Letter No 72c/169 of 5.1.44, from D.O. Aboh Division, Kwale to Senior Resident, Warri Province, see esp. para. 7; NAI. Kw. DT. 1/1, File No. 72c; NAI. Asa Div. 5/2, File No. AD/PA/BA; NAI. Agbor Dist 8/1: Annual Reports for the years 1940, 1942 and 1943; NAI. Asa Div. 8/2.

²⁷ JGN Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis', pp. 407-421. *Idem*, 'Export Agriculture and Food Crisis in colonial Asaba and Aboh Divisions of Western Nigeria: An Example of Contradictions in Colonial Economy', *Ilorin Journal of History*, Vol 1, No 1. 2003, pp. 57-68.

Post-Colonial Realities: Encroachment and Expropriation by the State and the Elite

From the 1950s to the 1980s, there was an unprecedented upsurge in the acquisition of communal lands. In addition to private individual acquisitions, there was also the involvement of the state in plantation agriculture. There were many reasons for state involvement in plantation agriculture.²⁸ First, there was a need for raw materials to feed the Pioneer Oil Mills and Rubber Factories established by the Western Regional Production Development Board (which later became known as Western Regional Development Corporation). Second, it was felt that plantation system would pave the way for scientific methods and thereby improve on the traditional precapitalist methods and technologies adopted by the average peasant planter.²⁹ There was also the additional argument that the plantation system would provide employment for the youth.³⁰ Thus, between 1952 and 1954 the Board acquired large acres of land from local communities in the West Niger Igbo area. Between 1952 and 1953 about 1040 hectares of land was acquired between Umutu and Urhonigbe for rubber.³¹ By 1987 the total area under the management of the estate was 4012 hectares out of which 2405 hectares were fully planted.³² Between the same period, 1952 and 1953, about 1300 hectares were acquired at Utagba Unor also for

²⁸ For a Comprehensive discussion of the subject, see JGN Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis', pp. 362-367.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 365. see also, United Africa Company, 'The future of the Nigerian Oil Industry', *African Affairs. Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 47, 1948, pp. 41-51.

³⁰ Traditional rulers and Chiefs were generally promised job opportunities for their people by the prospective large-scale farmers. Oral Interviews, H.R.H Obi S.O. Aghannor and his Council of Chiefs and Elders, Diokpa Okoh Nwaka and his Council of Chiefs and Elders, Diokpa O. Uru, Diokpa C. Modeme, Chief J.N Osondu, as already cited. Also Chief Ikehi Oba, Ubulu Uku, 22.12.90; Mr. C.O. Ojianwuneh, Egbudu Akah, 10.9.87, Diokpa Eboka Ojoebo and his Council of Chiefs and Elders, Agbor Alidimma, 26.8.87.

³¹ NAI. Kw. DT. 1/1, 149/2, Letter No. J. 61/33 of 25.8.52, from D. Westmacott, Unit Manager Agbor to Project Manager Western Regional Production Development Board (WRPDB), Regional Secretariat, Ibadan.

³² I owe this information to the Estate Manager, Mr. Mike Okolo, Interviews and discussions were held with him at the Urhonigbe Rubber slete, Urhonigbe, 13.2.90.

rubber.³³ Similarly, the Board acquired large expanses of land at Ubulu Uku and Akwukwu Atuma for oil palms.³⁴ With the creation of the Midwest Region in 1963, its Development Board acquired about 2023 hectares at Egbudu Akah in Ika Division for the Atochi rubber estate.³⁵ By 1975 about 651 hectares of the Atochi Rubber Estate at Egbudu Akah had been planted.³⁶ It was projected that about 1053 additional hectares of new planting would be done during the Third National Development Plan period, between 1975 and 1980.³⁷ Between 1974 and 75 the Midwest State Government acquired 3012.35 hectares at Nsukwa in Aniocha Local Government Area for an additional oil palm estate.³⁸ By 1987 55% of the land had been planted.³⁹

Apart from the state, private individuals were involved in the acquisition of communal land with some of them such as state bureaucrats and 'super' civil servants hiding behind the state in their land deals with the local communities. Among private individual acquisitions were 1000 hectares acquired by Chief Clifford Eneli at Ejeme Aniogor in 1961-62, 250 hectares at Ejeme Unor by Dr. Ajuebor and Professor Ndika (1973), 234 hectares at Agbor Alidimma by Ika Business Association (1974) and transferred to National Root Crops Production Company Limited, Enugu in 1981, 816 hectares at Nsukwa by Dr. Isaac Okonjo (1974-75), 278 hectares at Nsukwa by Mr. Tayo Akpata (1974-75), an unspecified area at Nsukwa by Dr. S.O. Ogbemudia (1974-75), 1000 hectares at the Isumpe settlement in Ejemeland by Mr. Ebinim Njede (1976-77) (By 1987 the Njede farms

³³ A.I. Apena, 'A Socio-Economic History of the Western Delta', p. 146.

³⁴ Oral Interviews, Chief Ikehi Oba, Ubulu Uku, 22.12.90; Mr. Joseph Aighobahi and Mr. Amaechi Emeni, Oil Palm Company, Nsukwa, 28.8.87.

³⁵ Oral Interviews, Mr.C.O. Ojianwuneh and Mr. Patrick Okocha, Egbudu Akah, 10.9.87.

³⁶ Federal Ministry of Economic Development, *Third National Development Plan, 1975-80*, Vol. I (Lagos: Central Planning Office, 1975) p. 28.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ I owe this to Mr. Joseph Aighobahi and Mr. Amaechi Emeni, Estate Officer and Personnel Officer respectively, Oil Palm Company Estate, Nsukwa, 25.8.87.

³⁹ As in note 38.

had extended to 1500 hectares), 175.709 hectares at Ejeme Aniogor by National Root Crops Production Company Limited, Enugu (1981), 718 hectares at Nsukwa by National Root Crops Production Company Limited, Enugu (1981), and an unspecified area between Ogidi - Nsukwa and Etua Settlement by Group Captain Akaraiwe. Others included 500 hectares acquired in 1984-85 at Ejeme Unor by Mrs. Dele Ehikwe, 200 hectares at Ejeme Unor by Mr. J. Aroro (1984-85), 250 hectares at Ejeme Unor by Mr. Okpa (1984-85), 500 hectares at Egbudu Akah by Mr. Augustine G. Modeme and 200 hectares at Ejeme Unor by Mr. Sam. Akam (1985-86).⁴⁰

The pervasive acquisition, indeed expropriation, of communal lands in the West Niger Igbo area, particularly in the Ejeme, Nsukwa and Egbudu Akah triangle was facilitated by a number of factors.⁴¹ First, the government presented itself as the harbinger of progress which needed the support of the local people. Similarly, private individuals posed before the local people as agents of the government. It should be added that the local communities were generally abysmally bereft of social amenities and public utilities. Thus it was very much easy for the prospective expropriators to bamboozle them with talks about bringing development to them through the provision of amenities, utilities, infrastructure and employment. The problem of land disputes of the period (to be disused shortly) provided the expropriation with leverage. Some of the communities leased out their lands to big private interests to forestall the encroachment of their neighbours.

The Land Use Decree (later Act) of 1978 played a cardinal role in the loss of land by the local communities.⁴² The Decree vested all land in the territory of each state in the Governor. Besides, it placed no limit on

⁴⁰ The information on land expropriation is based on interviews and discussions with traditional rulers and Councils of Chiefs and Elders in the area, Leaders of Youths' Associations and Movements, Members of various Progressive (or Welfare) Unions and Development Committees, Management Personnel of the various farms and the caretakers of lands not developed, etc.

⁴¹ For details, see JGN Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis', p. 372-383.

⁴² For all references to the Decree or Act, see Federal Government of Nigeria, 'Land Use Decree, 1978' in Official Gazette Vol. 65, No. 14 of 29.3.78 (Lagos: Government Printer, 1978).

the extent of land the state may acquire from the local communities for "public purposes". The idea that the entire land within each state belonged to the government was foisted on the people. Thus, it was very much easy for the government and its functionaries to acquire the people's land. Thus again, the Decree became an ideological instrument for the growth of capitalist interests in a hitherto existing communalistic economic and social order.

We end this section with an important emphasis, that the phenomenon of loss of communal lands which began during the 1920s-50s, was exacerbated by the highly unbridled capitalist penetration of the area in the 1960s-80s and its concomitant of large-sale expropriations.

Inter-Community Disputes over Land

With the loss of community lands first to permanent tree crops plantations developed by local peasants and then to large-scale private capitalist farmers and the state, the areas available for food production became progressively diminutive. The results have been the phenomena of: (1) intensive use of available small plots, (2) reduced variety of crops cultivated, (3) fragmentation of the available land, (4) rent payment, (5) poor productivity and declining incomes, and (6) land disputes.

The last of the phenomena, i.e., disputes over land, are our major focus.⁴³ Disputes over land have been the major manifestation of the land problem and indeed "the agrarian crisis."⁴⁴ Over the last three or four decades, the West Niger Igbo area was associated with fierce struggles for farmlands. The struggles were at two levels, viz, (1) within

⁴³ The other phenomena (i.e. 1-5) have been examined in JGN Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis', pp. 455-485.

⁴⁴ For an authoritative examination of the subject, see J.G.N Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis and Land Question', see also Y.M. Ivanov, *Agrarian Reforms and Hired Labour*; V.I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*; idem, *The Agrarian Question and the "Critics of Marx"*, 2nd Revised edition. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), R. Ulyanovsky, *Agrarian India between the World Wars. A study of colonial-Feudal Capitalism*. Translated from the Russian edition by Jane Sayer (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985).

the communities, i.e., intra-community struggles and disputes and (2) between communities, i.e., inter-community struggles and disputes.

Within the communities the beginning of the farming or planting season was usually characterised by claims and counter claims on different portions of the landmass.⁴⁵ It is interesting that this involved not only members of the same lineages and patrilineages, but also those of the same units of production, the households. Thus, there were disagreements between father and children and among the children. The phenomenon of fragmentation of land in the area mentioned earlier was the direct result of the struggles among children over their common inheritance. This was especially associated with polygynous household units. Women were also drawn into the disputes. In some cases the women started it. In such cases their children naturally became involved.

The dispute in each case resulted either from conflicting definitions of boundary or from conflicting claims to a portion of land. Where the rivals disagreed, they embarked on clearing and slashing of the same portion for cultivation. Disputes involved some combination of: burning of each other's farms and barns, and destruction of farm huts, work equipment and seedlings. Rivals were said to have sometimes employed the use of deadly charms, 'juju' and witchcraft against their 'more powerful' claimants.

The settlement of disputes at this level was usually through traditional mechanisms. Cases brought before the traditional administration were investigated. Usually the areas in dispute were visited by the representatives of the traditional administration. The rivals were invited to prove their claims and where necessary with the support of witnesses. Adjudication in each case was based on the history of land use. Finally, new boundaries were fixed. Where the dispute was not over boundary but over whole portions, claimants who were able to prove their ownership beyond doubt were recognised as rightful owners. Those

⁴⁵ Based on oral interviews with traditional rulers and their Council of Chiefs and Elders already variously cited. Also interviews with individual farmers: Diokpa Nduka Ugbejei, Ekuku Agbor, 18.9.87; Mr. Omeleze Nwaibeli, Obi-Anyima, Abavo, 17.8.90; Mr. Austen A. Osiegbu, Ogwashi uku, 28.9.90.

who were not satisfied with the ruling reserved the right to take their case before the customary court.⁴⁶

Some of the disputes involved violence. Where such disputes could not be resolved by the traditional administration, they were referred to the police.⁴⁷ Indeed, disputes associated with bloodshed were reported straightaway to the police. In this case, it was either that one of the parties in the dispute or both by-passed the traditional authorities and took their case directly to the police, or that the traditional authorities invited the police. Where the police were unable to resolve the case, it was referred to a court of competent jurisdiction for adjudication.⁴⁸ We will now turn to the second level of disputes, i.e., inter-community disputes.

Inter-community disputes were extensions of intra-community ones. Disputes among the peasantry in each community were generally incapable of any meaningful resolution either by traditional mechanisms or by the intervention of the police or the customary court. Indeed, the resolution of a dispute did not mean that there would not be a recurrence of it; and where it did, the loser was simply turned by his loss against some other peasants or peasant households in the community over land.⁴⁹ Consequently areas of dispute within the community were progressively extended through the inevitable occurrence and recurrence of disputes. As the pressure of land became more and more aggravated, the phenomena of disputes also became increasingly accentuated in their spread to all directions from the community. The result was greater cultivation of the frontier and boundary areas shared with other communities.⁵⁰ This in turn produced

⁴⁶ Oral Interviews, HRH Obi S.O. Aghaunor, Ejeme Aniogor, 4.9.87, Mr. Clement Chidi, Ejeme Aniogor, 1.9.87; Diokpa M. Uyamasi, Agbor Alidimma, 26.8.87; Inspector Stephen Obi, Ogwashi Uku, 29.9.90.

⁴⁷ Oral Interviews, H.R.H. Obi S.O. Aghaunor and Inspector S.Obi, as Cited in note no. 46 above.

⁴⁸ Oral Interviews, as cited in note no. 46.

⁴⁹ Oral Interviews, Diokpa M. Uyamasi, Agbor Alidimma, 26.8.87; Mr. C. Ojianwuneh, Egbudu Akah, 10.9.87; Chief Edward Ogbodo, Abbi, 25.5.89.

⁵⁰ Oral Interviews, as in note no. 49. Also, Diokpa O. Uzu, Ejeme Aniogor, 1.9.87. See esp. O. Adejuyigbe, *Boundary Problems in Western Nigeria. A Geographical Analysis*

greater contact between peasant communities sharing common boundaries. It was this greater contact which often generated friction in the form of claims and counter-claims on boundary positions and their direction.⁵¹ The disputes were however not only over boundary positions. Indeed, many of them were over whole territorial areas. These involved the cases *between* the historically stranger communities which began to reject their status as strangers or tenant communities and their host communities which naturally insisted on their status as owners and landlord communities.

Over the postcolonial period, there have been four main areas of inter-community disputes in West Niger Igboland, viz, (1) Umunede - Mbiri - Ekpon, (2) Ute Okpu - Owa - Agbor, (3) Ejeme - Nsukwa - Egbudu Akah, and (4) Ukwani mainland.

As already noted, the disputes were all the logical results of extreme scarcity of land in the aftermath of large-scale expropriations. The loss of land had generated greater pressure on the available land and placed greater commercial value on it. Greater commercial value meant that new terms were imposed in cases where only tokens had been paid in the form of tributes and rents in the form of labour services. The host communities which had given out large areas of land for settlement on liberal terms began to demand economic rent or encourage their members to cultivate the land.⁵² On the other hand, some of the stranger groups in the settlements refused to pay on the grounds that such terms were strange and oppressive.⁵³ Some of them began to argue that having lived in their settlements for 100-200 or more years, they

could not be properly regarded as strangers.⁵⁵ Moreover, the stranger communities began to hide behind the Land Use Decree which had vested all land in the state in the Governor and thereby reduced both owners and strangers to tenants of the government.⁵⁶

Some of the settlers or stranger communities began to deny their status as settlers or strangers, rejected their designation as such and even laid claim to the settlements.⁵⁷ Typical examples of these stranger communities were the Isumpe community on Ejemeland and Etua community on Nsukwaland. There were also some stranger groups who went beyond the claim of ownership - over the areas in which they were accommodated - and laid claim to areas settled by their hosts.⁵⁸ In such cases, the stranger groups distorted historical facts not only to claim autochthonous status, but even to present their hosts as the actual strangers and tenants. The Isumpe community on Ejemeland are an epitome of these groups.

Most of the land disputes in the west Niger Igbo area began in the early colonial period.⁵⁹ During the period the disputes were associated with disagreement over the royalties on the exploitation of timber resources. Communities in each locality simply laid claim to the forests so as to benefit from royalties paid by timber concessionaires. Besides, the Native Administrations and Native Court Areas and their agents sought to improve their tax returns, fees and fines by laying claim to communities outside their jurisdiction, especially communities in the boundary areas.

(Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1975), p. 58; G. Parker and P. Pfukani, *History of South Africa* (London: Bell and Hyman Ltd, 1975), chapter 5.

⁵¹ Oral Interviews, cited in notes nos 46-50 see also O. Adejuyigbe, *Boundary Problem in Western Nigeria*, pp. 58, 70.

⁵² Oral Interviews, as cited in notes nos. 46-50.

⁵³ Oral Interviews, Diokpa O. Uzu, Ejeme Aniogor, 1.9.87; Mr. Christopher Onwubuyah, Agbor Alidimma, 26.8.87, Mr. Wilson Otono, Obiaruku, 14.12.90.

⁵⁴ Oral Interviews, as cited in note no. 53 Also, Diokpa C. Modeme, Ejeme Aniogor, 12.9.90; H.R.H Obi S.O. Aghaunor, Ejeme Aniogor, 12.4.92; Mr. Austen Ebinim, Lagos, 15.12.93.

⁵⁵ Based on interviews and discussions with informants cited in notes nos. 53 and 54

⁵⁶ Oral Interviews, H.R.H. Obi S.O. Aghaunor, Ejeme Aniogor, 4.9.87; Mr. Austen Osiegbu, Ogwashi uku, 29.9.90; Mr. Austen Ebinim, Lagos, 15.12.93. See also the High Court Judgement of 20.4.79 on the Ejeme vs Isumpe Land Suit No 0/18/75 (High Court of Justice at Ogwashi uku).

⁵⁷ Oral Interviews, as cited in note no. 56. Also Diokpa Chukwuka Modeme, Ejeme Aniogor, 12.9.87

⁵⁸ Oral Interviews, as cited in notes nos. 56 and 57. Also Diokpa Eboka Ojonoebos and his Council of Chiefs and Elders, Agbor Alidimma, 26.8.87; Diokpa Okoh P. Nwaka and his Council of Chiefs and Elders, Ejeme Unor, 7.8.87.

⁵⁹ J.G.N. Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis', pp. 502-506.

However, the disputes from the 1940s onwards and especially those of the post-independence period were of greater intensity and agitation than those of the preceding decades. As has already been emphasised, this was the natural result of the pervasive expansion of private capitalism in agriculture and the greater commitment of the land to permanent tree crops. Thus, the incidence and intensity of disputes were highest in neighbourhoods most hard hit by land expropriation. For example, the loss of large areas of land to rubber and later to the production of cassava on a commercial scale in Agbor Alidimma and Isumpe communities led to dispute between them in 1940s-1970s.⁶⁰ The disputes between Ejeme Aniogor and Ekuku Agbor in 1939-1960s, Nsukwa and Etua in the 1960s-1980s, Umutu and Urhonigbe in the 1950s-1980s, Mbiri and Ekpon in the 1970s, and so on, were the logical results of extreme scarcity in land in the aftermath of large-scale expropriations.

The high cost of the disputes, in both human and material terms, and the desire to secure the land often forced some of the communities to lease out or sell off the disputed areas or some portions of them to some powerful interests, usually among the private capitalist class.⁶¹ However, the unilateral transfer of a disputed land by a party in the dispute to a third party simply aggravated the problem of scarcity and provoked more conflicts. The cost of disputes was not only in financial terms. Indeed, litigation on which huge sums were spent was mostly in the last state of each dispute. Disputes generally started with physical clashes and conflicts. Most of these were associated in different degrees with violence and arms. The extent of violence and the level of resort to arms – usually sticks, clubs, machetes and guns – in each case depended primarily on the depth and height of the land problem in the neighbourhood. It is important to note that inter-community clashes and conflicts were generally more complex and startling than the internal ones and, consequently, far deeper and greater in their impact and significance. Apart from the involvement of larger populations and

indeed whole communities, inter-community disputes concerned larger areas of land.

It should be stressed more particularly that inter-community conflicts involved greater degree of violence and use of arms. While the internal ones did not go far beyond the exchange of blows and sometimes the use of clubs and sticks, most of the inter-community conflicts took the character of war and were associated with bloodshed and loss of human lives. In 1965, for example, an indigene of Ejeme, Maduamaliye, was gunned down by the Isumpe in the armed conflict between both communities (i.e. Ejeme Aniogor and Isumpe).⁶² The Ekpon-Mbiri conflict of 1974 also led to some killings. Although the casualty figures are not available to us, it would appear to have been high on both sides. It is quite intriguing, even, that people who were neither Ekpon nor Mbiri got lost in the conflict. As an Ekpon informant told the writer, "strange persons found in Ekpon and thought to be working as intelligencers for Mbiri were killed. Non-natives seen in Ekpon were regarded as spies; even mad people were thought to be spies in disguise."⁶³ In 1984, the Ute Okpu – Egbudu Akah conflict over Ani Efume claimed over ten lives, most of whom were indigenes of Ute Okpu.⁶⁴ Apart from those gunned down and those knifed to death in these conflicts, there were people killed with 'juju' and poison – simply applied to their water, palm wine and foods in the farmsteads and farmland. There were also cases in which certain persons were not reported killed but the conflict ended with such people missing.⁶⁵

Part of the cost of the conflict were the huge material losses in terms of destruction of, crops, barns, work equipment and even whole farmsteads. In some cases the disputed areas were set ablaze. In such

⁶² Oral Interviews, H.R.H. Obi S.O. Aghaunor and his Council of Chiefs and Elders, Ejeme Aniogor. 4.9.87.

⁶³ Oral Interviews, Mr. Victor Igbogbo, Lagos, 1.2.90.

⁶⁴ Oral Interviews, Mr. C.O. Ojaniuwuneh, Egbudu Akah, 10.9.87. Madam Onyebuchi Nwaefene, Egbudu Akah, 24.6.84; Mr. Patrick Okocha, Egbudu Akah, 10.9.87; Mr. Kingsley Isichei, Ute-okpu, 19.5.87; Pastor Chuks Omeye, Egbe-Lagos, 18.7.05.

⁶⁵ Oral Interviews, Diokpa O. Uzu, Ejeme Aniogor, 1.9.87; Inspector Stephen Obi, Ogwashi Uku, 29.9.90.

⁶⁰ Oral Interviews, Diokpa Eboka Ojenoebe and his Council of Chiefs and Elders, Agbor Alidimma, 26.8.8.

⁶¹ J.G.N 'Agrarian Crisis', pp. 507-510.

cases the land was not only rendered useless for the season, economic trees and wildlife were also destroyed. Where violent conflicts were extended into the towns they were associated with large-scale looting. An Ekpon informant on the Ekpon-Mbiri conflict of 1974 captured the phenomenon of looting when he told the writer that:

After Mbiri had taken us unawares, killing some of our people, Ekpon prepared and on the following day drove Mbiri farmers from their farms and even invaded their town. This was followed with looting and destruction by our people. The looting was so much that the young boys in our area became rich.⁶⁶

Similarly, during the conflict between Agbor and Owa in 1980-81 many shops in Boji Boji Agbor and Boji Boji Owa were looted.⁶⁷

A critical aspect of the cost of disputes was the paralysis of economic activities in the neighbourhood. Generally the disputes were associated with insecurity of life and property. In times of conflict, people naturally dreaded to go about their normal, everyday activities. Consequently, in each case the farms and market places were abandoned while the conflict lasted.⁶⁸ In most cases the affected towns or villages were even deserted as a result of the flight of people to neighbouring communities.

For a rural people whose bio-material existence and social survival depended on cultivation of the land, the implication of economic paralysis associated with conflicts is quite obvious. In each case the affected communities suffered untold hardships resulting from food shortages. The seriousness of their situation is boldly underscored by the fact that the conflicts occurred mostly during the crucial stages in food production: bush clearing and planting.

The Continuing Nature of Land Disputes

Over the post-colonial period, the problem of land scarcity or the land question has been compounded by a number of factors. Thus disputes

⁶⁶ Oral Interviews, Mr. Victor Igbogbo, Lagos 1.2.90.

⁶⁷ This is an eye witness account; the writer was vacating in Agbor during the conflict.

⁶⁸ Oral Interviews, Mr. Igbogbo, Lagos, 1.9.90.

over land have become a permanent feature of inter-community relations in the area. One of the factors is that the system of cultivation in terms of inputs and technology has not changed in spite of the difficult land situation. While intensive land use has been imposed on the people by the reality of loss of their land, production has not transcended the traditional "hoe and cutlass" technology.⁶⁹ Besides, the use of scientific inputs such as fertilizers was generally unknown.

Second, much of the land lost to expropriators has remained undeveloped.⁷⁰ The few portions that were planted in the colonial and early post-colonial periods depended largely on casual workers.⁷¹ These included the rubber estates at Umutu-Urhonigbe and Egbudu Akah and the oil palm estates at Ubulu Uku and Nsukwa. The private holdings of Chief Eneli at Ejeme Aniogor, National Root Crops Production company Limited at Agbor Alidimma and Ejeme Aniogor, and Nwaokobia farms at Ejeme Unor also depended on casual workers until they stopped operation in the 1980s.

In the Ejeme, Nsukwa, Egbudu Akah triangle where the most rapacious expropriation took place, the above farms were examples of farms where there was some operation, and that was the nature and level of employment. On the other hand, most of the lands acquired during the period were left undeveloped. These included those acquired by: (1) Dr. Ajuebor and Professor Ndika at Nsukwa, (2) Dr. S.O. Ogbemudia at Nsukwa, (3) Mr. Tayo Akpata at Nsukwa, (4) Dr. Isaac Okonjo at Nsukwa, (5) National Root Crops Production Company at Nsukwa, (6) Akaraiwe Farms at Nsukwa,⁷² and (7) Mr. Sam Akam at Ejeme Unor.⁷³

Thus, while most of the areas expropriated from the peasantry were not developed, others where there was some development operated

⁶⁹ W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle L'Ouverture Publications, 1972) 23; J.G.N. Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisi', pp. 586-597.

⁷⁰ J.G.N. Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisi' chapter 6 (3) pp. 421-435.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Oral Interviews, Mr. Joseph Aighobahi and Mr. Amaechi Emeni, Oil Palm Estate Nsukwa, 25.8.87; Mr. F. Odozie, Nsukwa, 25.8.87; Mr. Austen Osiegbu, Lagos, 28.9.90.

⁷³ Oral Interviews, Mr. R. Okolo and Mr. S. Otuya, Ejeme Aniogor, 17.8.87.

far below capacity. The import of this was that the dispossession of the peasantry of their land could not lead to the provision of job opportunities. Yet, once an area was acquired, usually for 99 years in the first instance, it was a loss to peasant cultivation.

The land expropriators were mostly absentee urban-based landlords whose interests were more in activities other than agriculture, such as import-export trade, shipping, local distribution of goods, and transportation.⁷⁴ Thus, the land acquired from the various communities in the area were simply for the purpose of promoting the expropriators' other business interests. What little initial development some of them effected on their lands was merely deceptive, to ensure that they were taken seriously by officials of the banks and other financial institutions with which they negotiated 'agricultural' loans. As soon as the loans were granted, they were diverted to comprador concerns based in the urban centres. The point, therefore, is that the urban based landlords used the lands acquired from the communities primarily as collateral for loans.⁷⁵ A major factor exploited by the landlords was that the top management cadres of the banks were not concerned about how the loans were utilised – far from it. Their concern was their own share of the deal, their commission and percentage. Thus, even when it was crystal clear that there was no intention of utilising the loans for agricultural developments the loans were never obstructed. This has been one of the major factors that make nonsense of the agricultural credit schemes of the petty-bourgeois state.

There was also the factor of speculation. Where the expropriated lands were not used for Bank credit, they were given out to other investors. For example, the Ika Business Association which had earlier acquired 234 hectares of land at Agbor Alidimma without compensation⁷⁶ later handed it over to the National Root Crops

⁷⁴ Oral Interviews, Mr. S.U Onyekpe, Ekuku Agbor, 22.8.87, Ejeme Aniogor, 24.8.87; Mr. P. Okwuseogu, Ejeme Aniogor, 24.8.87.

⁷⁵ Oral Interviews, as in note no. 74.

⁷⁶ One of the biggest rubber plantation owners, Mr. Christopher Onwubuyah, took his case against the Modern Gari Industry (or Ika Business Association) and the National Root Crops Production Company to court at Agbor (Suit No Ag/15/77). Mr. Onwubuyah was claiming ₦316,000.00 "being special and general damages" for his

Production Company Limited at the cost of ₦62,015.00.⁷⁷ At Egbudu Akah, the 500 hectares of land acquired by Mr. Augustine G. Modeme was later handed over to Mr. Sam Akam who, in return, provided him with a machine for his palm oil mill at Ekuku Agbor.⁷⁸ At Ejeme Unor, the large area converted to cassava farm by Mrs. Dele Ehikwe was later handed over to the Benin-Owena River Basin Development Authority.⁷⁹

The obvious effect of 'encroachment without development', or what might be termed the Indian type of development,⁸⁰ was the absence of a rural agrarian proletariat. In other words, the rapacious expropriation of land was not accompanied by the creation of a working class out of the peasantry. In the very few estates where jobs were created there was overdependence on casual labourers and hirelings. This meant that the dispossessed peasants were merely reduced to a large reservoir whence casual workers could be 'hired and fired' at will by the estates. This was the universal reality in the area, the reality of pseudo-proletarianisation.⁸¹

economic trees. He lost the case on the grounds that he was a member of the Agbor Alidimma Community which gave the land to the Modern Gari Industry. See, Court Judgement, 13th May, 1980, on the dispute relating to damage and compensation, between Mr. Christopher Onwubuyah and Modern Gari Industry (Nigeria) Ltd. and others, in suit No AG/15/77, High Court of Justice, Agbor, signed by Justice J.W.A. Ohiwerei.

⁷⁷ I owe this information to the Project Manager, National Root Crops Production Company, Agbor Alidimma (Mr. R.J.A. Lawal), 28.8.87.

⁷⁸ Oral Interviews, Mr. C. Ojianwneh, Egbudu Akah, 10.9.87.

⁷⁹ Oral Interviews, Diokpa Okoh P. Nwaka and his Council of Chiefs and Elders, Ejeme Unor, 19.8.87. Messrs R. Okolo and S. Otuya, Ejeme Unor, 17.8.87.

⁸⁰ A major feature of India's agriculture especially in the inter war years, was large-scale landownership characterised by absenteeism, and lack of employment for the mass of the landhungry and landless peasantry. For an incisive study of this reality in India, see R. Ulyanovsky, *Agrarian India between the World Wars*.

⁸¹ Pseudo-proletarianisation is the process of creating what only appears as, but not really, a proletariat. While the emergence of a proletariat is associated with an organised workforce, labour unionism organisational stability, permanence and job security (or a possibility for it), the pseudo process is associated with casualism and the characteristic lack of organisation, instability, and insecurity of job. Proletarianisation itself is the process of creating a proletariat or wworking class. See J.G.N. Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis', chapter 6(3), pp. 421-435.

As we discuss the factors which compounded the problem of land scarcity, it is important to note the absence of an industrial sector all through the colonial period.⁸² The situation has remained unchanged. Consequently agriculture has remained the only source of employment. Thus the expropriation of communal lands without their development was a critical issue. For, while the people were not provided with regular wage employment, the factor of loss of their land drove them out of their traditional economic activities.

State response was generally incapable of resolving the conflicts and disputes.⁸³ State response usually involved some combination of deployment of the police to the disputed area, setting up of an inquiry, division of the disputed area, and take-over of the disputed area. The disputes usually ended up in litigation. The judiciary in each case relied on the history of the settlements and occupation of the land, tradition of land tenure and land use, and more especially the performances of the counsels to the parties in the dispute.

It must be emphasised that these orthodox responses of the state could not revolve the problem of disputes among the communities. The responses were totally blind to the fundamental issues of: (1) private expropriation of land and the failure to develop the large areas involved, (2) the necessity to improve the methods and technologies of rural agriculture, (3) the necessity to create alternative employment for the people and (4) the necessity to radically transform the communities through the provision of amenities, utilities and infrastructure that are basically required for the development of small-scale economic activities and self-employment outside agriculture.

Conclusion

The expansion of tree crops agriculture under the impact of colonial capitalism, and the wanton expropriation of land by the state, its agents

⁸² J.G.N Onyekpe, 'Agrarian Crisis', chapter 8.2(ii), pp. 5 98-618; A.A. Lawal, 'Industrialization as Tokenism' in Toyin Falola (ed) *Britain and Nigeria. Exploitation or Development?* (London. Zed Press, 1987), pp. 114-123.

⁸³ For an examination of the poverty of state response, see J.G.N Onyekpe 'Agrarian Crisis', Chapter 9(2) and 10-Conclusion.

and private individuals over the post-colonial period have had the implication for inter-group relations in the West Niger Igbo area. As the communities and the peasantry lost more and more of their lands to tree crops agriculture to satisfy interests outside the area, the portions left for cultivation and material subsistence became progressively fragmented, diminutive, intensively used and, consequently, less and less productive. The result was that conflicts and disputes over land became a regular feature of the economic and social life of the people.

While the different communities had maintained healthy and peaceful inter-group relations in the period up to the growth and expansion of tree crops farming and state and private capitalism in agriculture, the last four to five decades have been associated with violence, armed and sanguinary conflicts, deaths and mutual destruction of farmland and farm-work equipment. It is important to note that as the communities engaged in their conflicts and disputes over land, they were still conscious of their common traditions of origin and migration, historical relationships, commercial ties, etc. But the consciousness of their historical relationships and shared traditions and experiences was (and still is) of little or no import where the critical issues of subsistence and bio-material survival were (are) concerned.

If the contradictory nature of agricultural change under colonialism was at the root of inter-group conflicts and disputes over land, the expropriations of the post-colonial period and the blindness of the state to the fundamental problems of the communities have compounded them. For example, when an inquiry recommends that a people who had inhabited an area for 100-200 or even more years should vacate it on the grounds that they were settled as tenants, or when the judiciary so rules through the courts, where are the people affected expected to go? This problem and others such as large-scale expropriations are critical ones and must be addressed as the people and the state search for solutions to inter-group conflicts and disputes over land.

The Dynamics of Inter-group Relations in Nigeria Since 1960 is the Ibadan School of History's attempt at celebrating one of its icons - Obaro Ikime - on his attainment of 70 years and recognition that he introduced 'Inter-group Relations' to the History curriculum in Nigeria. Nigeria gained independence in circumstances of intense inter-regional, inter-group, inter-ethnic suspicions and hostility. This is against the background of increased and very multifaceted interconnections amongst its peoples. This book focuses on ethnic pluralism, relations and competition; interrogating ways in which socio-economic, political and cultural cleavages were transformed into sites of struggle over identity, power and resources since Nigeria's independence in 1960. These issues, interrogated by an array of twenty-five scholars across the Nigerian Universities explore the tapestry of various aspects of the network of relationships amongst Nigerians. They bestride questions of citizenship, constitutional developments, ethnicity, state creation, religion, gender, economy and how they have shaped and continue to dictate the matrix of inter-group relations in Nigeria in contemporary times.

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