



# **LAGOS NOTES & RECORDS**

**Journal of the Humanities**

**Vol. VIII, February, 1999**

**FACULTY OF ARTS  
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS.**

**LAGOS NOTES AND RECORDS:**  
*Journal of the Humanities*

EDITED BY

EMMANUEL KWOFIE  
A.E. ERUVBETINE

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It is published annually. Subscription rates are as indicated in the leaflet inserted. Subscription orders should be addressed to the Editor, c/o Dean's Office, Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria.

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Published by

**FACULTY OF ARTS  
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Nken Anyek  
27-1-20



*Funded by The University of Lagos  
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ISSN: 0075-7640

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Printed in Nigeria by  
Murtab Press, Lagos.

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## *Glimpses of the Humorous in T.M. Aluko's Short Stories*

**E. A. Babalola**

### **Abstract**

*T.M. Aluko's short stories mark his entry into the literary world. Most of these narratives were published in the late nineteenth-forties. However, a critical analysis and appreciation of Aluko's writing at this level has not been done. The present essay lays emphasis on satiric humour in these tales about Yoruba city life which Aluko understands clearly as a product of European "civilisation" in Nigeria since the colonial era.*

Aluko's short stories are not available in a single volume or anthology. We do not know the exact number of these works, and the author himself seems not to think much about them. For him, they are stories he wrote a long time ago and his movements from place to place have led to the loss of many. Some of the stories broadcast on the B.B.C. radio and others published in *The West African Review*, in the late 1940s, will be examined here.<sup>1</sup>

It is understandable if Aluko has been discriminated against by the editor of an anthology of African short stories.<sup>2</sup> But the criteria Charles Larson used for his selection of publishable materials are not well defined. Needless to say, in spite of all the prejudices against Aluko, he deserves to be described as the father of Nigerian prose writing in English as another critic has justly observed:

Aluko was contributing short stories to the *West*



# *The Nature and Forms of Socio-Political Administration of West Niger Igbo Communities before 1900*

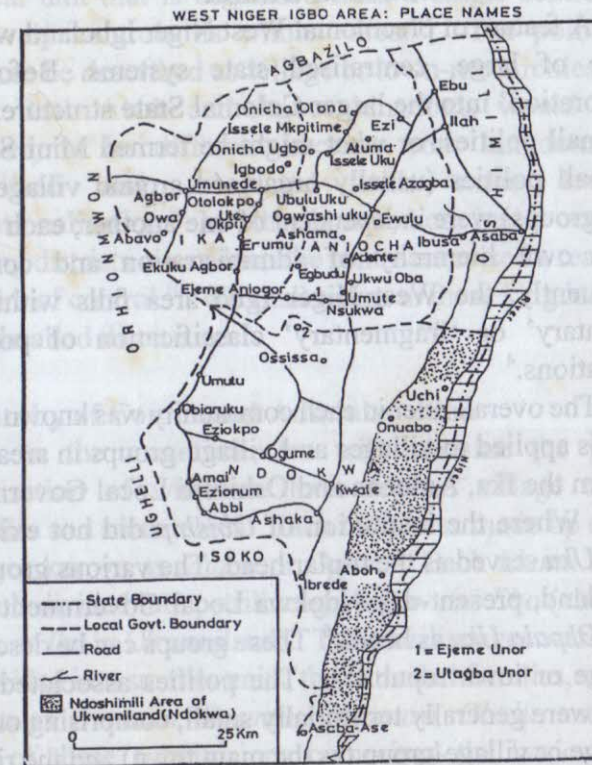
J. G. Nkem Onyekpe

## **Abstract**

*This paper shows that the absence of the large and expansive state system in the West Niger Igbo area does not mean that the communities did not evolve any organizational forms suitable to their needs. It also shows that the communities in fact developed methods of organising their social and political administration. The paper demonstrates more particularly that the communities were intensely democratic, involving all sections of the populace both in decision making processes and in policy implementation. An essential aspect of the democratic involvement of all in the administration was the evolution of role definition and differentiation. Significantly, it is demonstrated that as a mark of the fullness of their democratic practice, women featured prominently in the social and political lives of the communities. The paper is divided into seven parts, each part dealing with a specific aspect of socio-political administration.*

## **Introduction**

Igbo communities, West of the Niger, form the Western sub-division of the larger Igbo society. The other four 'subcultural' groups are in the east Niger area; they are the Northern or Onitsha Igbo, Southern or Owerri Igbo, Eastern or Cross River Igbo and Northeastern or Abakaliki Igbo.<sup>1</sup> During the colonial period, the Western Igbo area under study (also referred to as Midwestern Igbo) was constituted into the Asaba Division of the Benin Province and also the Aboh Division of the Warri (later Delta) Province. The West Niger Igbo area is today divided into Ika, Aniocha,



Oshimili and Ndokwa. The area is bounded in the east by the river Niger, in the west by the Edo, in the north by the Ishan and in the south by the Urhobo and Isoko. The above map shows the West Niger Igbo communities.



### Forms of Administration in Outline

A feature of precolonial West Niger Igbo land was the absence of large, centralised state systems. Before its 'incorporation' into the larger Colonial State structure, there were small polities, or what might be termed Mini States.<sup>2</sup> The small polities (usually organised around villages and village-groups) were independent of one another; each polity had its own hierarchy of administration and control.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the West Niger Igbo area falls within the 'segmentary' or 'fragmentary' classification of political organisations.<sup>4</sup>

The overall ruler in each community was known as the *Obi*. This applied to villages and village-groups in areas that now form the Ika, Aniocha and Oshimili Local Government Areas.<sup>5</sup> Where the institution of *Obishop* did not exist the *Okpala Uku* served as the titular head. The various groups in Ukwani land, present-day Ndokwa Local Government area, had the *Okpala Uku* as heads.<sup>6</sup> These groups can be described as village or town republics. The polities associated with *Obishop* were generally territorially small, comprising only of the village or village-group (as the main town) and the ring of farm colonies which formed part of the town.<sup>7</sup>

The power and authority of the *Obi* were not exercised beyond the boundaries of the town. This was because every other village, village-group or town was independent and also had its *Obi*. These polities, in so far as they were headed by kings, can be regarded as monarchies or kingdoms. It is noteworthy that these kingdoms did not transform into

empires. For our purpose here, an empire is defined as "a political unit that is organised from a single centre which effectively controls its whole area."<sup>8</sup> The polities can therefore be described as village or town-monarchies.

Both Aboh and Agbor kingdoms would appear, however, to be different because both kingdoms were centralised and associated with some level of institutionalisation.<sup>9</sup> In other words, both had a centre and outlying districts over which the centre exercised a reasonable measure of control.<sup>10</sup> We shall return to these kingdoms later for a detailed discussion.

### Hierarchy of Communal Administration

In the meantime, we will examine the political organisation of what we have termed village or town republics and monarchies. Each town was made up of many lineages known as *Idumu* or *Ogbe*.<sup>11</sup> Each *Idumu* or *Ogbe* was sub-divided into patrilineages known as *Ebo* (also called *Imusu* or *Iku* in Ukwani land). The patrilineages were in turn subdivided into smaller units, the extended families, variously known as *Umunna*, *Onuntu*, *Onumuzo*, *Obulu*, and so on. Each of these subdivisions comprised the basic units of *Ezinuno*.

The head of the nuclear family, or the *Ezinuno*, was the man. His wife (or wives) and children were under his authority and would take orders from him. He managed the affairs of the household. Each *Umunna* or *Onuntu*, the next upwards in the hierarchy, was headed by the oldest surviving male of the group. He was the *Okpala* of the group. He met



with the other elders of the group from time to time to manage the affairs of the group. Next in the hierarchy was the *Ebo* headed also by the oldest surviving member of the group. He was the *Diokpa* or *Okpala* of the group. His palace known as the *Ogwa* was the rendezvous of the elders of the *Ebo*. Matters affecting the group and its members were discussed and handled in the *Ogwa* as the occasion demanded. Disputes were settled and fines imposed. The *Okpala* presided at the meetings. He was the custodian of the *Ndiche* and the *Ofo*.<sup>12</sup>

The *Okpala* was the direct link between the group and their ancestors. As the oldest living male of the group, he was the 'ripest fruit'<sup>13</sup> and therefore, the nearest to the ancestors. Thus, he communicated with them on behalf of the living members of the group.<sup>14</sup> He was also the custodian of the group's land. He, in conjunction with the head of all subdivisions of the group or *Osa-Onumut-Ebo* (or *Osa Umnna Ebo*), was responsible for the allocation and the reallocation of land in the patrilineage.<sup>15</sup> The functions of the *Okpala* and *Ndi-Ikenye* (council of the group's elders) also included settlement of disputes between members of the *Ebo* such as matters relating to adultery within the group, levirate marriage, and so on.<sup>16</sup>

Next, in some polities, was the *Idumu* or *Ogbe*.<sup>17</sup> The *Idumu* was made up of a number of patrilineage groups. The head of the *Idumu* was the most senior *Okpala* of all the patrilineages (or the *Osa Ebo*) in the *Idumu*. He and the other *Okpala-Ebo* in the *Idumu* managed the affairs of the group. Meetings were held in his palace or *Ogwa*. In some of

the polities, however, there were no *Idumu* and so the *Ebo* was next to the highest body in the hierarchy of administration, the *Obi* (or *Okpala-Uku*), the council of elders, *Ndi Ikenye* (or *Neokwa* in Ukwani land) and the council of chiefs or titled men, the *Olinze* (or *Ndi Olinzele*).<sup>18</sup>

Finally there was the *Okpala-Uku* who was the most senior *Okpala* in the village. In some polities the *Okpala-Uku* was automatically the oldest living male of the oldest or founding lineage.<sup>19</sup> In some, the position was rotated<sup>20</sup> while in others where there was the institution of the *Obishop*, the ruling group or groups did not provide for an *Okpala-Uku*.<sup>21</sup> Whatever the criteria used in obtaining the *Okpala-Uku*, he served, theoretically, as a ruler in polities which did not have the institution of *Obishop*. It is instructive that the *Okpala-Uku*, whether the institution of the *Obishop* existed or not, was more of a religious figure than a political leader.<sup>22</sup>

In Ukwani land where *Obishop* did not exist, effective leadership rested not on the *Okpala-Uku* but on the *Onotu*, a titled chief.<sup>23</sup> In West Niger Igbo polities where *Obishop* existed the *Okpala-Uku* was just a link between the people and their ancestors. Politically, the head was the *Obi* who was thought to have great powers. He was also thought to be infallible. He ruled in conjunction with the *Okpala-Uku*, the elders of different lineages and patrilineages in the town who were variously known as *Ndi Okpala*, *Ndi Chi Idimu*, *Ndi Khi Ebo*, *Ndi Ikenye*, and so on. There were also the titled men or the *Olinze*. Where the office of the *Obi* was vacant, during the interregnum, the *Okpala-Uku* acted as the *Obi*.<sup>24</sup> Where the *Obishop* did not exist, the *Okpala-Uku* ruled in



conjunction with the council of elders. This applied mainly to Ukwani land where the Council of Elders was known as *Ndeokwa*.<sup>25</sup> The most senior of the age sets in each Ukwani polity known as the *Otu-Uku*, was also actively involved in politics and government.<sup>26</sup>

Matters beyond the competence of heads of subdivisions, the *Idumu* and *Ebo*, for example, those involving murder, suicide, kidnapping, injury to an *Obi*, *Okpala* or a titled man, and witchcraft, were brought before the *Obi* or the *Okpala-Uku*.<sup>27</sup> Before matters of village interest were brought before the supreme authority, the *Obi* or *Okpala-Uku*, they were first discussed at the levels of the lineages and patrilineages. At the village level the ideas, decisions and, in some cases, positions of lineages or patrilineages were presented by the various groups' heads.<sup>28</sup> Where groups were unsure of their position on particular subjects, they went into consultation sessions in order to formulate joint positions.<sup>29</sup>

In the politics, the *Obi* was extremely powerful, albeit theoretically, because in practice government was by consensus.<sup>30</sup> The *Okpala-Uku*, as ruler, hardly exercised effective political power. The *Onotu* led by the *Onotu Uku* was the effective political force. Other than the *Obi* or *Okpala-Uku*, the Council of Elders and the titled men or chiefs were important political forces. In particular, the titled men advised the *Obi* or the *Okpala-Uku*; wielding both legislative and executive powers.<sup>31</sup> Titled men who were especially important were consulted on specific matters as is often the case with the head chief, the *Onishe* and the war

chief, the *Iyase* or *Odogwu*.<sup>32</sup> The war chief featured prominently in matters related to war and peace.

### Age Grade System

There was also the age grade system. The population of each village or each village group was divided into age grades, usually four, namely the youths, young adults, middle-aged and elders. Each grade was in turn subdivided into units made up of persons within the same age bracket.<sup>34</sup> The age grade system occupied an important place in the social and political organisation. Functions and roles were defined and distributed among grades and units according to their ages, numerical strengths, abilities and resourcefulness.<sup>35</sup> These functions included general environmental sanitation and other communal activities such as clearing footpaths and public squares. These were the functions of the youth.

Young adults and the middle-aged performed the following functions: construction of roads, sinking of wells and the construction of public buildings like market stalls and palaces. Other duties entailed war efforts,<sup>36</sup> settlement of disputes, execution of communal and collective decisions reached at Town Council Meetings, and so on.

The age-grades and units also served the villages and village groups as principal agencies for regulating behaviour, for social mobilisation, enculturation, democratic participation<sup>37</sup> and integration in societies that were largely composite.<sup>38</sup> Age-grade and unit competition<sup>39</sup> were usual factors in the process of change; young adults constantly made radical demands on the old.<sup>40</sup>



The elders were also important. The *Obi* or *Okpala-Uku* ruled in conjunction with them. They were the *Ndi Ikenye* or *Ndeokwa*. In Ukwani land where the institution of *Obishop* did not exist the *Okpala-Uku* ruled in conjunction with the elders. However, they were usually too old for effective leadership. Consequently, executive functions were, in practical terms, performed by the *Onotu*. The *Onotu* was made up mostly of the *Otu Uku* which was the senior age unit just below the *Ndeokwa*. The head of the *Onotu* who was called the *Onotu Uku* had so much power that he was one of the most politically influential persons in pre-colonial Ukwani politics.<sup>41</sup>

### Women's Role

Women were also mobilised in the socio-political activities of the communities through a number of organisations. Some of the male institutions and organisations had parallel female counterparts.<sup>42</sup> At the patrilineage level (the *Umunna*), for example, where male elders constituted the *Ndi Ikenye*, there was a corresponding organisation of the eldest female members of the group. The organisation, known as the *Umu Ada* and led by the *Ada*, handled matters of primary interest to women. They settled disputes and imposed fines when and where necessary. They attended to sex related problems of the unmarried young adult daughters of the group, promiscuity, adultery, divorce, and so on. They also waded into serious quarrels between male members of the group and their wives.

Significantly, their pronouncements were respected

because of their experience and age.<sup>43</sup> In particular, the words of the *Ada* were binding. She was the custodian of the female *Ofo* of the group and so the link between the group and their ancestresses whom she served from time to time on behalf of the group and propitiated as the occasion demanded.

The *Ebo* also had its *Umu Ada Ebo* led by an *Ada*. The *Umu Ada Ebo* performed the same functions as the *Umu Ada Umunna* at a higher level. Moreover, at the village level, there was an organisation of women corresponding to the *Ndi Ikenye* (or *Ndeokwa* in Ukwani land). The organisation was made up of the eldest living female members of the various lineages and patrilineages. It was variously known as *Osa Ada Obodo*, *Ikposo Ani*, *Umu Ada Obodo*, *Osa Ada Ani*, et cetera. It was headed in some communities by the *Omu* and by the *Ejine* in others.

The organisation adjudicated on complex matters above the competence of the junior female organisations. In particular, the *Osa Ada Obodo* performed cleansing rites for the town. They organised the market, ensured that it functioned properly, and settled disputes arising in it. Moreover, they advised the *Obi* or *Okpaka Uku* and the *Ndi Ikenye* (*Ikenye Ani*) or *Ndeokwa* on matters bordering generally on the womenfolk. In times of war, they helped to mobilise the womenfolk for non-combatant duties, especially in the supply of fighting sticks. They also consulted the spirits, goddesses and ancestresses of the land and performed the necessary sacrifices for the success of the fighting forces and all persons within the territory.<sup>44</sup>



### Governing by Consensus

The foregoing shows that precolonial polities in West Niger Igboland involved all categories of persons, young and old, men and women. Society was not divided into two, one of rulers, the other of the ruled, in the very strict sense of the words. Everyone of age was, in fact, a *homo politicus*. In each of the polities, whenever there were important issues to be discussed the *Obi* or *Okpala-Uku*, as the case may be, called a general meeting of the community. The attention of the people was drawn by the Town Crier, publicising the date, rendezvous, usually the *Obi's* or *Okpala-Uku's* palace, and time. The attention of the people was drawn by the Town Crier by beating the gong, and then echoing the name of the town, before making the relevant announcement thus:

Obi/Okpala-Uku chi unu bia egwa lio-o-o-o-o!  
K'Ikenye-Ani, K'Ikposo-Ani;  
k'Olinjele;  
K'Ikenye, K'Ikposo;  
K'Ikolobia, K'Umagbo;  
Osamadu,  
Nti nu ni gwa ibe-e-e-e-e !<sup>45</sup>

(English translation)

The Obi/Okpala-Uku is calling the town  
for a meeting !

Male elders, Female elders;

Titled men;

Men, Women;

Young male adults, young female adults;

Everybody is summoned.

Anybody that hears this should inform  
his neighbour!<sup>45</sup>

And when the issue or agendum was of crucial interest - the announcement was quickly followed with the warning :

Onye ibianeni,  
Obu nsa-a-a-a-a !

or

absenteeism  
shall attract a fine.<sup>46</sup>

The Igbo expressions above are rendered in Ejeme dialect. It should not be concluded, however, that the practice was peculiar to the Ejeme community.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, oral investigations in other communities confirm that the practice was universal in West Niger Igboland.

The meeting was presided over by the *Obi* or *Okpala-Uku*. Everyone was an active participant at meetings. In some cases, the lineages or patrilineages each spoke with one voice.<sup>48</sup> In others, every one was invited to contribute who had any views to air.<sup>49</sup> At the end of open deliberations some of the titled men and elders and some other individuals known and respected for their wisdom would temporarily retire from the gathering to 'whisper together'<sup>50</sup> for policies and decisions. However, the 'whisperers' ensured that their decisions reflected the feelings and perspectives of the people.<sup>51</sup> Their work was simply to articulate and condense the people's views and then advise the *Obi* (or *Okpala-Uku*).<sup>52</sup> Decisions reached and announced were binding on all



members of the community.<sup>53</sup>

### “State” Systems: Aboh and Agbor

To return to the Aboh and Agbor kingdoms, the point has been made earlier that West Niger Igbo polities were autonomous village monarchies and republics. Thus, there were no large scale polities in the area. However, Aboh and, to a lesser degree, Agbor emerged as kingdoms of some political consequence. In particular, Aboh was a powerful kingdom with outlying peripheral areas under its central control. The peripheral areas under the influence of the Aboh kingdom were said to have consisted of the entire riverine areas of Ukwani land formerly collectively known as Ndosumili.<sup>54</sup> A part of Ukwani mainland was said to have been under its influence.<sup>55</sup>

The Aboh Kingdom which depended on riverine commerce dominated the lower Niger valley trade and had a powerful navy with which it enforced its terms and will.<sup>56</sup> Trade was conducted with the Igala kingdom of Bida, and with Benin, Asaba, Onitsha, Ossomari and various Delta groups, especially Nembe (Brass), and Bonny.<sup>57</sup> A primary factor in the rise of Aboh as a dominant force in the lower Niger valley trade was her strategic location which she exploited to her advantage.<sup>58</sup> However, this subject has received the attention of scholars and so cannot be re-examined here.<sup>59</sup>

In terms of administration, Aboh was centralised with the hierarchy topped by the *Obi*.<sup>60</sup> He was assisted by a council of titled men.<sup>61</sup> The growth of the Aboh kingdom and the

creation of State or State-like institutions and structures were associated with its dominant position in lower Niger trade.<sup>62</sup> The development of its navy was geared towards ensuring effective control and management of the trade.<sup>63</sup>

Although the immediate Ndosumili communities and some mainland Ukwani villages and village groups were under the influence of the kingdom, the extent of Aboh influence is difficult to determine, especially in Ukwani mainland where groups claim they were never under the dominion of the Aboh monarchy.<sup>64</sup> While it may be true that the riverine Ndosumili groups formed part of the larger Aboh ‘empire’, the *Obi*’s influence over the mainland Ukwani groups seemed minimal. As a riverine power, the Aboh monarchy was dependent on its fleet of canoes and consequently the *Obi*’s effective control “did not extend much beyond the reach of his canoes.”<sup>65</sup> It would appear, too, that whatever influence the Aboh monarchy exercised diminished fast in the period after the reign of the no-nonsense *Obi* Ossai. Writing in 1854, Dr. Baikie noted that “the sovereignty, since the death of *Obi*, having as I have mentioned, been in abeyance, many towns . . . ceased to pay tribute and have become independent.”<sup>66</sup>

We know very little about the Agbor monarchy. Nevertheless, it is evident that like the Aboh kingdom, the administration of Agbor was centralised.<sup>67</sup> The *Obi* was the head of government. He was assisted by a council of titled men. The Agbor Kingdom started in the Proto-Agbor Ime-*Obi* settlement.<sup>68</sup> Migration to new areas led to the creation of secondary settlements which developed into Agbor villages.



These included, Ali-Ifekede, Ali-Ihagu, Ewuru, Agbo-Nta, and largest of all, Boji-Boji Agbor.<sup>69</sup> There were also three distant peripheral villages of Ekuku-Agbor, Obi-Agbor and Agbor-Alidimma.<sup>70</sup> The three distant villages did not form a continuous stretch with the rest of Agborland from which they were geographically separated by Owa and Ute-Okpu communities. It is this physical discontinuity with the rest of Agborland which underlines their 'stranger status' in the view of their neighbours.<sup>71</sup>

The administration of the peripheral areas rested on village elders and chiefs appointed by the *Obi* of Agbor. The various Agbor districts were part of the Agbor Kingdom, not merely because they had Agbor either as prefix or suffix in their names as, for example, in Agbor-Nta, Agbor-Alidimma, Ekuku Agbor (formerly Agbor-Eku) and Obi-Agbor but because both those with or without the Agbor prefix or suffix were under the protection of, and hierarchically responsible to, the Agbor monarchy. Tributes were paid annually to the *Obi* during ceremonies and festivals such as the *Osezi* festival.<sup>72</sup>

Agborland, therefore, had a centre-periphery structure in the area of political administration. To that extent, the Agbor system approximated an empire even though the Agbor villages were created not by military conquest and subjugation but by peaceful migrations of farmers and hunters. Political organisation among the Owa and Ute-Okpu was similar to that of Agbor. While the central administration of Owaland was based at Owa-Oyibo, that of Ute-Okpu was at Ibi-Egwai.<sup>73</sup>

West Niger Igbo land polities in which the authority of the administration did not extend beyond the boundaries of the village or village group have been classified as village monarchies when they have an *Obi* as the head while those with *Okpala-Uku* as head have been classified as village republics. Those polities with a 'centre-periphery' structure have been termed empires.

### Defence Organisation

It is significant that in spite of differences, all polities had defence systems that were suitable to their needs. The Aboh kingdoms had a strong navy. The fact that the kingdom was successful in the trade in arms and ammunition also added to its strength.<sup>74</sup> In the case of the Agbor kingdom, the development of defence had much to do with the people's relations with Benin. Benin accounts have it that they, the Agbor, were under Bini imperial overlordship.<sup>75</sup> However, according to the same sources, the Agbor were never tired of rebellion.<sup>76</sup> The Agbor, on the other hand, hold that they did not at any time form part of the Benin empire. They stress that they were a formidable politico-military challenge to the Bini who were constantly harassed "with successful wars which led them to dig trenches around them"<sup>77</sup> The two accounts underscore the tension which characterised Agbor-Benin relations, tension that often resulted in military encounters. The Agbor would seem, therefore, to have built up their defence systems as foils for the power of the Benin monarchy.

The West Niger Igbo empires were by no means the only ones with some military might. Inter group relations in the



area involved the small polities in conflict and wars, though they were generally small-scale encounters or skirmishes. Besides, some of the small village monarchies encountered Bini military incursions and invasions. There were military encounters in the mid-eighteenth century between imperial Bini forces and the Ubulu-Uku who operated a village monarchy.<sup>78</sup> Bini claims of victory in the final encounter have been challenged by the Ubulu-Uku. According to them, Bini forces were routed in a most humiliating defeat.<sup>79</sup> The period 1700-1705 saw the annihilation of Bini forces by the Ogwashi-Uku at the bank of the River Ubu (in Ogwashi Uku land).<sup>80</sup> Ejeme traditions speak of incessant wars in about mid nineteenth century with *Idu* forces that were said to have been mass buried in an *Ogbe Agini* deep trench known among the Ejeme as *Onyinyi Idu*.<sup>81</sup>

Pertinently, it would seem that not all Bini forces said to have been defeated represented large-scale expeditions. In the case of the Ejeme the defeated Bini forces were said to have been from Itenigbe, an outpost on the frontiers of the Benin empire.<sup>82</sup> Be that as it may, the ability to defeat Bini adventurers would suggest that the small, 'stateless' polities were already at a level of political development strong enough to defend themselves. It would seem that mobilising people for defence purposes was more than a spasmodic effort. In a situation where a standing army did not exist, the age grade system and the role differentiation built into it made the different grades and units conscious of their responsibilities at all times. Thus, the relevant fighting grades and units knew themselves and when to reach for their sticks, clubs, stones,

*opia, agbada, oblede, egbala, anyaju*, and so on.<sup>83</sup>

### Conclusion

The above has been an examination of the nature and form of social and political organisation in West Niger Igbo communities before 1900. We have seen that there were no large political units, although the Aboh and Agbor kingdoms were relatively large with the central authority exercising control over district areas. Although the village monarchies and republics involved greater democratisation through popular participation,<sup>84</sup> there was little difference between them and the empires even though, to some extent, both systems involved the creation of institutions like the *Obishop* and *Okpalaship*.<sup>85</sup> Roles were assigned to different persons and groups of persons based on specific definitions of socio-political duties, obligations and functions.

Apart from the village monarch and the council of titled men (or chiefs) and elders, the age grade system was very important especially in the execution of policies. Another important aspect of the political administration was the existence of female institutions. These corresponded to the male institutions which helped in the mobilisation of the womenfolk and in the execution of policies affecting them.

A further demonstration of the fullness of democratic practice was what might be termed the non-professionalisation of politics and administration. The people were compulsorily mobilised for participation in policy and decision making processes. Sometimes, this involved the threat of, or actual imposition of fines for non-participation.<sup>86</sup>



Thus, while some Nigerian polities of the contemporary period were characterised by the imposition of some form of dictatorship and oligarchism, the experience in this region was largely what might be described as the imposition of democracy.

From this discussion, it must be stressed that the absence of large political units or 'greater political institutionalisation' did not mean the absence of government since the hallmark of any political system does not consist in mere institutionalisation or territorial expanse but in its effectiveness in solving problems that arise in society. The small polities and 'stateless' groups in the area of study seemed to have been capable of addressing communal problems, including those of defence. As has been demonstrated in this study, this was achieved through some measure of institutionalisation, through role definition and distribution, and through communal mobilisation.

#### Notes and References

<sup>1</sup>D. Forde and G.I. Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio Speaking Peoples of Southeastern Nigeria* (London: Oxford University press, 1950).

<sup>2</sup>The concept is borrowed from Ade Obayemi, 'The Yoruba and Edo Speaking Peoples and their neighbours before 1600' in J.F.A. Ajayi and M. Crowder (eds.), *History of West Africa*, Vol. I Second edition (London: Longman, 1976) pp. 196-263.

<sup>3</sup>Interviews, Mr. O. Uzu, Ejeme-Aniogor, 2/8/87; Chief Okoh, Ejeme-Unor, 19-8-87; Chief Kumbia Eseiji, Abbi, 25-8-89; Diokpa Okonye Asuai, Umutu, 12-12-90.

<sup>4</sup>Robin Horton, 'Stateless Societies in the History of West Africa' in J.F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowder, op. cit., J.B. Webster and A.A. Boahen (with H.O. Idowu), *The Growth of African Civilization: The Revolutionary Years: West Africa Since 1800* (London: Longman, 1967),

<sup>5</sup>Interviews, H.R.H. Obi Ikegbu, Ejeme-Unor, 25-4-86; Chief Michael Uyamasi, Agbor-Alidimma, 26-8-87; Diokpa Odigadefu Odozie, Nsukwa, 24-8-87.

<sup>6</sup>Interviews. Chief Kumbia Eseiji, Abbi, 25-8-87; Diokpa Okonye Asuai, Umutu, 12-12-90; Chief J.N. Osondu, Obiaruku, 14-12-90.

<sup>7</sup>See Notes 5 and 6 above.

<sup>8</sup>Lucy Mair, *African kingdoms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>Institutionalisation is an essential feature of the development of State Systems. See for example, Ade Obayemi, op. cit., Robin Horton, op. cit.; J.C. Miller, *Kings and Kinsmen: Early Mbundu States* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1976); E.J. Alagoa, 'The Development of Institutions in the States of the Eastern Delta', *Journal of African History*, XI, 2, 1971, pp. 269-278; Abdullahi Smith, 'The Early States of the Central Sudan' in J.F. Ade Ajayi and M. Crowder, op. cit., p. 152-195.

<sup>10</sup>Interviews, Diokpa Eboka (Ojenoeb), Agbor-Alidimma, 26/8/87; Mr. Nduka Ugbejei, Ekuku-Agbor, 18-/9/87; Mr. John Obuzor, Ossissa, 21-6-90. See also Obaro Ikime, 'Native Administration in Kwale-Aboh 1928-1950: A case Study', *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 111, No. 4, June 1967, pp. 663-682.

<sup>11</sup>Discussions of the administration and the hierarchical structure are based on oral investigation conducted by the writer and also on the following archival sources- National Archives, Ibadan (NAI) C.S.O. 26 : File 30693, *Intelligence Report, Nsukwa Native Court Area, Asaba Division*, 1932; File 31350, *Intelligence Report on Ogwashi Uku Clan, Asaba Division*; File 30927, *Intelligence Report on Asaba clan, Asaba Division*; the following Agbor Districts Files - 30384, 30957 respectively on Agbor, Oligie and Emuhu clans and on Abavo Clan; and File 29300, *Intelligence Report on the Kwale-Ibo Clans, Kwale Division* 1932 and File 26769, *Intelligence Report on the Benin-Aboh Clans Ibo Tribes*, 1929 (both in Warri Province).



<sup>12</sup>The *Ofo* and *Ndiche* are symbols of ancestral and traditional worship. They served as staff of office too.

<sup>13</sup>This is a loan-phrase from Prof. Wole Soyinka 'Abiku' in D.I. Nwoga, *West African Verse: An Anthology* London: Longman, 1967), pp. 62-63.

<sup>14</sup>Interviews, Chief S.N Oseji, Ejeme-Aniogor, 24-8-87; Mr. Enegede Opia, Umutu 12-12-90; and Chief Kumbia Eseji, Abbi, 25-8-87. See also K.O. Dike and J.F.A. Ajayi "African Historiography" in David L. Sills (ed.) *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, (Macmillan and Co. and the Free Press, 1968).

<sup>15</sup>Interviews, Diokpa Okoh, Ejeme-Unor, 19-8-87; Diokpa Eboka (Ojenoebo), Agbor-Alidimma, 26-8-87; Chief J.N Osondu, Obiaruku, 14-1-90.

<sup>16</sup>Interview, as in 15 above, Also, O. Uzu, Ejeme-Aniogor, 19-8-87. See also the archival references in note 11 above, esp. file No.30927.

<sup>17</sup>Interview, Mr. Germany Obodo, Ugiliemei, 20-6-90; Mr. Chief Chidi Ekpu, Ejeme-Aniogor, 24-8-87.

<sup>18</sup>Interviews, Mr. Kingsley Isichei, Anthony Onyibe and Alex Oseji, Ute-Okpu, 31-7-87; HRH Obi G. Nzemeke, Ejeme-Unor, 9-9-87, Mr. Wilson Otono, Obiaruku, 14-12-90, Chief Edward Ogbodo, Abbi, 25-5-89. See also O. Ikime, 'Native Admin in Kwale-Saboh...' op. cit., and O. Ikime, 'The Peoples and Kingdoms of the Delta Province' in O. Ikime (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan Heinemann, 1980), pp. 89-108.

<sup>19</sup>Interviews, Chief Kumbia Eseji, Abbi, 25-8-89; Chief Okonye Asuai, Umutu, 12-12-90; Chief Eboka (Ojenoebo) Agbor-Alidimma, 26-8-87; See also archival ref. No. 29300 in note 11 above and also O. Ikime 'Native Administration in Kwale-Aboh...', op. cit.

<sup>20</sup>Interviews, H.R.H. Obi Olisenekwu Aghaunor, Ejeme-Aniogor, 4-9-87 and Mr. Chukwuka Modeme, Ejeme-Aniogor, 12-9-87.

<sup>21</sup>For example, in Ejeme-Aniogor Community, while the founding group, the Umu-Akulu, traditionally provided the *Obi*, the *Okpala-Uku* was rotated between the Ogbe-Unor and Obelese groups, both later arrivals. Interviews, as in 20 above.

<sup>22</sup>Interviews, as in note 14; See Also Chief Edward Ogbodo, Abbi, 26-8-89.

<sup>23</sup>The *Onotu*-titled group was open mostly to the *Otu-Uku* age set. that is, those within the age bracket, about 50-60 but also to members of the *Otu-nta* (40-50). Professor Ikime has pointed out that in some Ukwani politics membership was not automatic by age. Prospective members must be "men whose character was proven to be exemplary and who boasted considerable wealth". See his 'Native Administration in Kwale-Aboh', op. cit.

<sup>24</sup>Interviews, as in note 20.

<sup>25</sup>Interviews, Chief Kumbia Eseji, Abbi, 25-8-89; Chief Okonye Asuai, Umutu, 12-12-90; and Chief J.N. Osondu, Obiaruku, 14-12-90.

<sup>26</sup>Interview, Chief Edward Ogbodo, Abbi, 26-8-89; O. Ikime, 'Native Administration in Kwale Aboh...'

<sup>27</sup>Interviews, Mr. O. Uzu, Ejeme-Aniogor, 19-8-87; Chief Obi Ibolokwu, Umutu, 12-12-90 and Chief Ikehi Oba, Ubulu-Uku, 22-12-90.

<sup>28</sup>Interviews, Diokpa Okoh and Chief G. Okolo, Ejeme-Unor 19-8-87; H.R.H. Obi Olisenekwu Aghaunor, Ejeme-Aniogor, 16-9-87.

<sup>29</sup>As in note 28.

<sup>30</sup>Interviews, Chief Uzor Chikwusa, Ejeme-Aniogor, 9-9-87; Mr. Wilson Otono, Obiaruku, 14-12-90 and Mr. Joseph Osafele, Otolokpo, 20-9-87. See also J.B Webster, A.A. Boahen (with H.O Idowu), op. cit.

<sup>31</sup>Interviews, Chief Edward Ogbodo, Abbi, 25-5-89; Chief Chidi Ekpu, Ejeme-Aniogor, 4-9-89; Chief J.N Osondu, Obiaruku, 14-12-90.

<sup>32</sup>Interviews, O. Uzu and Chukwuka Modeme, Ejeme-Aniogor, 12-9-87; Chief J.N. Osondu, Obiaraku, 14-12-90.

<sup>33</sup>As in note 32 above.

<sup>34</sup>Discussion of the age grade system is based on oral evidence. See also archival references in Note 11 above, File Nos., 26769 and 31350. See also Chieka



Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among The Igbo- An Historical Perspective* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publisher, 1979), pp. 81-87. See also R. Horton, 'Stateless Societies in the History of West Africa', op. cit., pp. 94-95.

<sup>35</sup>Interviews, Mr. Sunday Okolo, Ezionum, 27-8-87. Mr. O. Ozu, Ejeme Aniogor, 19-8-87.

<sup>36</sup>The politics did not have standing or regular armies. Society was not militarised. However, in war times young adults were mobilised or even volunteered for military services. Women also participated as non-combatants.

<sup>37</sup>Interviews Mr. Isaac Oriwe, Agbor-Alidimma, 26-8-87; O. Ozu, Ejeme Aniogor, 19-8-87; chief Kumbia Eseiji, Abbi, 25-8-89.

<sup>38</sup>The composite or heterogeneous character of the politics resulted from the fact that each polity was largely made up of migrant groups arriving at different periods and from different sources.

<sup>39</sup>Interviews, O. Uzu, Ejeme-Aniogor, 19-8-87; Chief J.N. Osondu, Obiaruku, 14-12-90.

<sup>40</sup>See note 34.

<sup>41</sup>Interview, Chief Kumbia Eseiji, Abbi, 25-8-89; Chief Edward Ogbodo, Abbi, 25-8-89; E.O. Okolugbo, 'Ukwani Religion and Christianity: A Study in Religious Encounter Ph.D Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1972, pp. 33-36; J.S. Odogbo, 'The Precolonial Akashiada Peoples, B.A. Essay in History, University of Lagos, 1988, pp. 21-22.

<sup>42</sup>Interviews, Mr. Onwelikwu Uzu, Ejeme-Aniogor, 19-8-87; Madam Ekwukwor Ogeleka, Abbi, 25-8-90; Madam Njokamma Ugbejei Agbor, 9-6-87.

<sup>43</sup>Interviews, Mr. O. Uzu, Ejeme-Aniogor, 19-8-87; Madam Celina Ibolokwu, Umutu, 12-8-90; Madam Diana Ofili-Enwemadu, Illah, 18-4-91.

<sup>44</sup>Interviews, Madam (Ogene) Echiagu Omonuwe, Ejeme-Aniogor, 19-8-87.

<sup>45</sup>Based on interviews in the communities covered in this study.

<sup>46</sup>As in note 45 above.

<sup>47</sup>The Ejeme dialect is one of the numerous dialects of the Igbo Language spoken in our area of study. Moreover, the Ejeme community is more or less a border community between the Ika, Aniocha/Oshimili and Ndokwa Local Government Areas and evidently reveals considerable dialectal fusion

<sup>48</sup>See Notes 28.

<sup>49</sup>Interviews, Chief Uzor Chukwusah, 14-12-90. Chief J.N. Osondu, Obiaruku, 14-12-90. Chief Odigadefu Odozie, Nsukwa, 24-8-89. Chief Edward Ogbodo, Abbi, 25-5-89.

<sup>50</sup>'Whisper together' is a loan-phrase from the works of Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.

<sup>51</sup>Interviews, as in note 49.

<sup>52</sup>Interviews, as in note 49.

<sup>53</sup>Interviews, as in note 49.

<sup>54</sup>B.I. Izuagbu, 'Colonial Rule and Aboh/Ukwani Relations, 1900-1970', M.A. Dissertation, University of Ibadan, 1984 (Introduction).

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>O. Okime, 'The Western Niger Delta and the Hinterland in the Nineteenth Century' in O. Ikime (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigeria history*, op.cit., pp. 262-279; T.J Hutchinson, *Narrative of the Niger, Tshadda and Binue Exploration* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), p. 250; R. Hallet (ed.) *The Niger Journey of Richard and John Lander* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 226-243.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, See also Elizabeth Isichei *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 31-32, p.72.

<sup>58</sup>See note 56 above.

<sup>59</sup>This is very ably summarized in O. Ikime, 'The Western Niger Delta and the Hinterland in the Nineteenth Century' as cited in note 56 above.

<sup>60</sup>O. Ikime, 'The Peoples and Kingdoms of the Delta Province', op. cit., as



cited in note 18 above, esp. pp. 100-101.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 101-102; E.J. Alagoa, 'Long Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta', *Journal of African History*, XI, 3, 1970, pp. 319-329; E.J. Alagoa, 'The Development of Institutions in the States of the Eastern Delta', *Journal of African History*, XII, 2, 1971, pp. 269-278.

<sup>63</sup>See not 56 above; see also E.J. Alagoa 'Long Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta', op. cit.

<sup>64</sup>B.I. Izuegbu, op. cit., pp. 39-41, O. Ikime, 'Native Administration in Kwale Aboh Division', op. cit.

<sup>65</sup>R. Hallet, op. cit., p.251 (foot note); B.I. Izuegbu, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>66</sup>W.B. Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage Up the Rivers Kwora and Binue in 1854* (London: Frank Case, 1966), p. 50.

<sup>67</sup>Interviews, Mr. O. Nwaibeli, Abavo, 17/8/90, Chief Eboka (Ojonoeb), Agbor-Alidimma, 26-8-87; Mr. Nduka Ugbejei, Ekuku-Agbor, 18-9-87. See also N.A.I. C.S.O./26, File No. 30384, Intelligence Report, the Agbor, Oligie and Emuhu Clans, Agbor District.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup>Interviews, Chief Eboka (Ojonoeb) Agbor-Alidimma, 26-8-87; Mr. Nduka Ugbejei, Ekuku-Agbor, 18-9-87 and Mr. Chukwuka Modeme, Ejeme-Aniogor, 12-9-87.

<sup>71</sup>Interviews, Mr. Kinsley Isichei, Mr. Anthony Onyibe and Mr. Alex Oseji, Ute-Okpu, 31-7-87; Mr. Chukwuka Modeme, Ejeme-Aniogor, 12-9-87.

<sup>72</sup>Interviews, Chief Eboka (Ojonoeb) Agbor-Alidimma, 26-8-87; Mr. Nduka Ugbejei, Ekuku-Agbor, 18-9-87.

<sup>73</sup>Interviews as cited in note 71 above. Also Mr. Omeleze Nwaibeli, Obi-

J.G. Nkem Onyekpe: The Nature and Forms of Socio-Political Admin

Anyima, Abavo, 17-8-90.

<sup>74</sup>O. Ikime, 'The People and Kingdoms...' in O. Ikime (ed.) op. cit., pp. 107-108.

<sup>75</sup>J.E. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin* (Ibadan: I.U.P., 1968 ed.), p. 83, (Appendix XII).

<sup>76</sup>Chief J.E. Egharevba's book is full of references to Agbor rebellion.

<sup>77</sup>J.E. Egharevba, op. cit., pp. 40-41, J.O. Ijeoma, 'War and Diplomacy in Igboland West of the Niger in the Precolonial Period', *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 145, 1983, pp. 10-15; A.E. Afigbo (1987, op. cit., pp. 165-169.

<sup>78</sup>A.E. Afigbo. *The Igbo and their Neighbours* (Ibadan; Ibadan University Press, 1987), pp. 15-16.

<sup>79</sup>J.O. Ijeoma, op. cit.

<sup>80</sup>A.E. Afigbo, op. cit. (1987), pp. 168-169.

<sup>81</sup>Interviews, H.R.H. Obi, S.O. Aghaunor, the Obi of Ejeme-Aniogor and Chiefs S.N. Oseji, Chidi Ekpu, Ashikwe Ekepuwe, Okalegweli O. Uzu and Diokpa Chukwuka Modeme. Ejeme-Aniogor, 12-8-87. Also Chief Eboka (Ojonoeb), Agbor-Alidimma, 26-8-87; Diokpa Michael Uyamasi Agbor-Alidimma, 26-8-87.

<sup>82</sup>Interviews, H.R.H. Obi, S.O. Aghaunor and some of his chiefs, Ejeme-Aniogor as cited in note 81 above; Chukwumezie Onyibe, Ejeme-Aniogor, 9-9-89 (Itengibe here is a corruption of Usonigbe or Urhonigbe).

<sup>83</sup>*Opia, Agbada, oblede*, all are various kinds of matchets especially designed for fighting. *Egbala* is a kind of amulet or charm worn as ring by fighting forces for support, defence and bravery. *Anyaju* is a kind of flint-flock.

<sup>84</sup>In the case of 'empires' based on 'centre-periphery' structure, the periphery enjoyed large latitudes, but politics at the centre was by representation of the districts by the chiefs owing their position to the 'metropole'. Interviews, as in note 72 above.

<sup>85</sup>In both systems the *Okpala Uku* performed the same functions - strictly



religious. In Aboh, the *Okpala Uku* was known as *Odua*. He acted as the *Obi* whenever the *Obi* was absent or when the position was vacant as in an interregnum.

<sup>86</sup>Generally fines were paid in palm wine, but in the later period cowries were also involved.

## *The Importance of Mining to Nigeria's Economy in Colonial times.*

**E. K. Faluyi**

### **Abstract**

*Nigeria's sudden leap into oil wealth in the early 1960s caused the neglect of agriculture and solid mineral resources which sustained her economy during the colonial period and the critical years of the civil war. But the oil glut in the 1980s and the subsequent collapse of Nigeria's economy brought about a rethinking of how to reactivate these resources which laid the foundation for the nation's fortunes. Hence, the renewed interest in the exploitation of solid minerals and the growth of cash crops which had ensured the survival of the Nigerian economy before the oil boom.*

### **Introduction**

The Nigerian economy is today heavily dependent on petroleum. But not many scholars realise that this dependence is a Post-Independence phenomenon. Before October 1960, the bulk of the nation's revenue came from agriculture and non-oil mineral resources. The discovery of petroleum in the country virtually shifted the economic base from agriculture and solid minerals to the service sector, leading to the eventual neglect of the former. Similarly, the exploitation of minerals which formed part of the nation's wealth during the colonial rule was abandoned as oil gradually dwarfed other sources of revenue.

However, since the early 1980s there has been a glut in the price of oil in the world market, leading to a substantial