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A NIGERIAN LIFE HISTORY**

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COLONIALISM AND THE INDIVIDUAL:

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By Simon Ottenberg

I will discuss the life history of a Nigerian of Igbo background to explore and comment on his colonial experience. I believe that much can be learned about colonialism from following the experiences of individuals as well as looking at the broader historical and political perspective. What comes out of this account is not so much the confrontation of groups in the colonial situation or the political machinations of individual anti-colonialist leaders, but the complex experiences of a less well-known figure, with his very subtle blendings and syncretisms of the colonial and the traditional, and with his contrasting experiences with missions and government, all this changing over time. It is this complex mixture, and the various forms that it can take over time, that interests me. I will also draw on my own anthropological research experience in Nigeria in 1952-53 and 1959-60 among Igbo people of a somewhat similar cultural background living at Afikpo, further to the north than where the individual in our case study came from.

The life of Edward Kanu Uku into middle age, *Seeds in the Palm of Your Hand*, was written by Mary Easterfield in 1948-1950 in London, while he was studying law at Lincoln's Inn. Of the 331-page typed manuscript only sections from its early chapters were published in revised form in a four-part article in the *West African Review*.¹

Uku came to England from Nigeria in 1947, remaining until 1951. He returned home, dying sometime after the Biafran war; the date is uncertain. While in London Mary Easterfield and her husband became friends with him. He met the Easterfields through a colonial service acquaintance of theirs in Eastern Nigeria who wrote that he was coming to England, asking them to assist him. Only after some time in England

¹ Mary Easterfield, "Seeds in the Palm of Your Hand," *West African Review*, 23, 303 (1952), 1365, 1367-69; 24, 304 (1953), 49-51; 24, 305 (1953), 141, 143; 24, 306 (1953), 265, 267, 260. This draws on sections in revised form, from the first five chapters of the manuscript: E.K. Uku and M. Easterfield, "Seeds in the Palm of Your Hand" (1948-1950). I wish to thank Mary Easterfield for correspondence over many years concerning this manuscript and how it was prepared. I also wish to thank the African Studies Program at Boston University for inviting me to participate in its seminar on "African Representations of the Colonialist Other" on December 14 and 15, 1991, at which a much shorter version of this paper was presented.

did the idea of writing his biography occur. Mrs. Easterfield took the lead in questioning him, in organizing the information, and she wrote it, putting it in his words, as if it were an autobiography. At this time she had never been to Nigeria, though she did visit him there briefly in 1951. She continued to revise the manuscript for some years for possible publication, which never materialized.

The life story was taken down when Uku was already middle-aged. As Easterfield writes in the Introduction:²

For Mr. Iuku had obviously not come straight from school or college; he was not of that generation which takes further education in its stride with the aid of government scholarships and the support of educated parents. There was nothing about him to suggest the student we had been expecting. For him this was an independent, unprecedented effort, naturally giving rise to the question as to why, in middle life, with a career of school-teaching behind him, he had decided to transplant himself from the familiar warmth of Eastern Nigeria to the inhospitable desert of London with its oasis at Lincoln's Inn. This he was able to answer quite simply in terms of frustration with the existing opportunities and ambition to become, socially and professionally, a bigger and more important man. Nevertheless he revealed tantalising glimpses of the distance already travelled since boyhood, and from then onwards tracing the journey backwards became an absorbing occupation."

Early Life

Uku was born about 1906 in Obinkita Village, one of nineteen communities comprising Aro Chuku, in the southeastern Igbo area of Nigeria, near the Cross River. The Aro were a powerful force before their conquest by the British in December 1901, in the largely stateless southeastern Nigerian area. Igbo-speaking but of mixed Igbo, Ibibio, and Cross River origin, the Aro established settlements throughout Eastern Nigeria, trading in slaves, hiring warriors from other Igbo settlements to fight their battles, and bringing disputants and those accused of crimes to their famous oracle, the Long Juju (*Ibini Okpabi*) at Aro Chuku, for trial.³ Much involved in the European

² M. Easterfield, 1955 "Introduction" to Uku and Easterfield, "Seeds," 1.

³ On the Aro see S. Ottenberg, "Ibo Oracles and Intergroup Relations," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 14, 3 (1958), 295-317; K.O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* (Oxford, 1956), 37-41; G.I. Jones, "Who Are the Aro?" *Nigerian Field*, 8 (1939), 100-103; G.I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers* (London, 1963); F.I. Ekejiuba, "Aro World View: an Analysis of the Cosmological Ideas of the Arochuku People of Eastern Nigeria," *West African Religion*, 9 (1970), 1-11; F.I. Ekejiuba, "The Aro Trade System in the Nineteenth Century," *Ikenga* 1, 1 (1972), 11-26 and 1, 2 (1972), 10-21; E. Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans* (New York, 1973), 33-36, 78-79,

slave trade in back of the coast, they considered themselves superior to other Igbos and others in southeastern Nigeria by virtue of their trading and ritual skills and they were everywhere much feared. They possessed a three-class system comprising a substantial number of slaves, the Ohu, largely used in trading; a freeborn group, the Amuda, composed of freed slaves and others; and the elite Amadi, who dominated trade, the Long Juju, the secret societies, military activity, and politics. While the Aro prized upward mobility, movement into the Amadi class was difficult, though according to Uku an Amuda women could marry an Amadi, and progression from slave status to the Amuda could occur. After the British conquest Aro Chuku became for many years a relatively isolated Igbo area, with many prominent Aro living in settlements elsewhere, if they were not already doing so, such as at Bende, Uzuakoli, Uburu, and Arondizorgu.

The Aro had had friendly trade relationships with the British and other Europeans, albeit often indirectly through African trading intermediaries on the coast, and they were surprised when the British conquered them and "destroyed" their oracle (which nevertheless continues to function to this day in modified form). In fact, the area some distance northwest of Aro Chuku, especially in the Niger River region, as well as some coastal areas, where the Aro had trading interests, had already been taken by the British by 1901, and some Aro must have realized that this would also happen to them. Yet the Aro saw themselves as similar in many ways to their conquerers. They were also hierarchically organized explorers and traders, settling far from home, using recruited military forces to dominate trade, and incorporating their religious beliefs into the religion of others. They were colonialists of sorts, and not the ordinary villagers of most other parts of southeastern Nigeria, though their interest was less in running the local governments of the peoples they settled besides then it was in trade and oracular matters. Like the British, they saw themselves as a chosen people, expanding not only to satisfy a need for wider commercial opportunities but also in obedience to an urge to explore and investigate; they were incapable of remaining a closely confined community. Their trade contacts with the Europeans led not only to the export of slaves, but the importation of European goods, especially firearms, ammunition, cloth, liquor, iron, and brass. These issues are important in considering their reactions to colonialism. There were, of course, important differences between the Aro and the British. The latter were opposed to slavery, polygyny, human sacrifice, and traditional religious beliefs and practices.

Uku, born only a few years after the British conquest, was of Amadi background. His father died before becoming well established and before his son was old enough to remember him. His death does not seem to have been related to the

131-134; E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo Peoples* (New York, 1976), 58-64, 127-129; D. Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford, 1970), 114-145; A. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture* (Ibadan, 1981), 187-281.

British conquest. It appears that Uku did not come from a very wealthy or powerful Amadi family, though his father was known as a peacemaker. Uku was his first son, his mother's only male offspring, and was brought up by his mother and his father's mother. The grandmother emerges as the dominant figure in Uku's early life. A conservative, she believed that the British had destroyed the heart of Aro culture through the apparent destruction of the Long Juju, the secret societies and much of the local political power, the slave system, the trading networks, and the Aro sense of justice. It is from her that he heard early criticism, as a very young boy, of colonialism, and through her that he was taught respect for the Aro past and its traditions, even if he did not practice them himself. The manuscript devotes some fifty pages to Aro culture and society, indicating Uku's (and probably Easterfield's) strong interest in it at the time of writing, a sympathetic, interpretative account. In it he sees positive virtues to the activities of the Aro oracle and to the expansion of the Aro into other southeastern Nigerian areas, a rosier picture than others have portrayed. Much of this section is concerned with status, upward mobility, pride, and the cultural superiority of the Aro over others.

His grandmother presents an idealized picture of Aro Chuku:

Of course you don't see how deserted it is now. You never knew it when it was teeming with slaves, overflowing with food and drink, humming with life and activity, feasting and celebrating, singing and dancing. Now all that is over. Only the young ones like you and the old ones like me stay here now. The others were lured away to places they foolishly think are better, with more wealth. Yet look at what they call wealth now, a few seeds in the palm of your hand. When we counted it in brass rods and slaves there was something to feel rich about.⁴

Articulate criticism of colonialism by this Aro female elder persisted until her death when Uku was a young adult, representing the wish to return to the old ways, the hope that the British would leave. In the writing, her views serve as one pole of Uku's concerns. The other is the attraction of British life and culture as represented in its colonialism. Uku's mother, on the other hand, was more willing to compromise between the two worlds, allowing Uku to go ahead in the newer one; she was occupied with supporting herself, Uku, and his two sisters, as well as Uku's grandmother. The role of a supportive and guiding grandmother is common in Igbo society, but here she plays not only this part but that of a father as well. There does not seem to be any

⁴ Kanu and Easterfield, "Seeds," 2-3. The "seeds" probably refers to palm kernels, which along with palm oil, became the major export crops from this area after the end of the European slave trade and before the British invasion, one of many changes that occurred in the region in the nineteenth century. After the conquest the trade increased even more.

strong male figure at home in Uku's early life, which is surprising, as often an older full or half-brother or an uncle plays this role if the father is dead.

Uku's mother urged and grandmother finally agreed that he should go to the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) mission school at Aro Chuku. Even for the grandmother change was inevitable. Uku indicates that Aro children preferred the mission schools, which were less strict than a new government school — perhaps his first awareness that not all colonialism was the same — and he contrasts the missionary views with those of the Aro.⁵ The latter could not understand the advantages of a belief in heaven and hell; the Christian view held too much to the idea of punishment, of delay in gratification, and local people preferred their beliefs in reincarnation. At first few went to the missions. Those who did "were the ones whose temperament and abilities had not fitted them to play a prominent part in traditional Igbo life, and on whom the harsher customs had pressed hardly" (sic),⁶ as a mother of twins, for example, abhorred in Igboland, and former slaves. And the missionaries urged that disputes between Christians be brought to them rather than to the more costly British-appointed warrant chiefs. There is a reversal for Aro society, for the humble and poor are better treated by the missionaries than in traditional life. But after a while one chief converted and then other Aro did, and with the decline of traditional rituals, church ceremonials were appealing, with their music and singing. The practice of uniform burials regardless of class also attracted those less well off. At first people saw no advantage to education, regarding it "as yet another tiresome invention of the white man which could serve no useful purpose,"⁷ but eventually a nucleus of Christians developed, outwardly accepting the form of Christianity. Uku states: "All white men appeared to be Christians, and the only hope of prosperity lay in imitating them."⁸ But he doubts that imitation can lead to a full understanding or acceptance of another culture. Throughout this manuscript he considers that much of the Aro response to the British involved imitation and that he himself never did more than accept Christianity's outward form, though he was also never involved in the rituals of the Long Juju or the Aro secret societies. I would characterize him as a non-traditional pseudo-Christian, never fully experiencing his own traditional culture, though knowing much of it, and being in the first wave of colonial educated Africans in the Aro Chuku area, experiencing colonialism richly from the African viewpoint. Aware of the influence of the British, he writes that "success and prosperity no longer depended upon the place a man could make for himself in an established community, but on the dispensation of a foreign occupying power, whose ways were largely incomprehensible."⁹

⁵ *Ibid.*, 72-75.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

Uku and his mother were convinced by a prosperous warrant chief that he should go to school. Uku promised his grandmother to remain faithful to traditional practices and beliefs, which, of course, he could not do. He felt that "the white man did not only leave chaos and destruction in his wake but his presence in the neighborhood opened up unheard of possibilities as to what one might do and how one might live in the future."¹⁰ Uku appears to have been ambitious throughout this recorded life, as were many other Igbo.¹¹ At school, he enjoyed meeting children from the other Aro villages for the first time, and the putting aside of family and class distinctions. Of the first generation to be schooled, he was aware of the conflict between his world and that of his grandmother. The missionaries were very strict. They did not allow him to take part in traditional celebrations, and he gave up the possibility of joining the men's secret society, the major avenue to status in traditional Aro life; he did not join in some communal tasks. He believed that some of the traditional songs and public ridicule in Aro culture were wholesome forms of social control and decried missionary opposition to them.

In some ways his primary school experience was the equivalent of traditional Aro initiation rites. School thrust him strongly into a largely male world. An analogy between Aro schooling and Aro traditional initiation is intriguing. School separated him from everyday Aro life, at least during the day, but also inhibited him from taking part in its ritual aspects even when at home. School involved the learning of rules of behavior that the boys did not always understand, as in the bush. There were rituals of reversals in school as well as in traditional initiation, for the boys in school were told to behave in ways quite opposite from traditional Aro life, and they learned a special language. Both situations involved male bonding of boys of the same age. School involved an intended initiation into a specific way of life to be followed later on, as traditional initiation does, and was also led by older males, powerful and feared. Uku undoubtedly found male models in his teachers, whether he always liked them or not, as occurs in traditional initiation. School had its own aesthetic attractions and its own religious basis, as did traditional rites. There were tests of accomplishment and physical punishment for misbehavior in both. The school, as a form of initiation, permitted social mobility with a particular set of social relationships and organizations, as did traditional rites. School activities, however, lacked the immediate quality of secrecy of the Aro initiations, though it is clear from Uku's account that much of the reasoning as to why the boys had to behave in certain ways at school was a mystery to them. In fact, school helped to create a dual identity for Uku and others, being still Aro

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 85.

¹¹ S. Ottenberg, "Ibo Receptivity to Change," in W.R. Bascom and M.J. Herskovits, eds., *Continuity and Change in African Cultures* (Chicago, 1959), 130-143.

and yet something else,¹² and it strongly moved him out of a female to a male-centered world.

The missionaries realized the importance of music and had a brass band at school, which the students "put more into their performing than met the missionary eye or ear,"¹³ slyly continuing in their traditional satirizing ways through song. When skipping school for some local festivities he had his mother tell the headmaster that he was ill; nevertheless he stayed miserably in his grandmother's room for fear of being seen. He came to enjoy European events, such as Empire Day with its sports, feasting and merrymaking, and Christmas, in the presence of students from other schools. But he refused to go to Sunday School due to his grandmother's feelings, and she told him traditional tales, proverbs, and customs. He was given a Christian name at school as were the other students; these names had "some sort of magic attached" to them,¹⁴ though his grandmother ignored this. He had "one foot in one world and one foot in another [and] it was not always easy to keep one's balance."¹⁵ Yet, on the whole, tradition was clearly on the defensive at Aro Chuku and much of the traditional custom and organization was eroding, though not the sense of being an Aro.¹⁶

In writing about these conflicts years later Uku takes something of an observer's stance, almost anthropological, but it is clear that while he was caught in the middle of two worlds, he was moving toward a more British-oriented life. "A child who had been to school could become a clerk, a teacher, or a policeman."¹⁷ While not despising village life he was drawn to "the prestige and authority which the new kinds of work could confer. Warrant chiefs, humble, still illiterate policemen, clerks, teachers, all lived in a superior world, far removed from village life."¹⁸ Schooling was the new avenue to becoming a "big man." While still in mid-adolescence his mother and grandmother asked him to accept plans for an arranged marriage, common in pre-conquest times, but he refused. He wanted to continue at school, and when he married he wanted his wife to be educated, and to dress in English clothes. Is his move to the European mode partly a childhood rebellion against parental authority? We do not

¹² On dual identity see G. De Vos and L. Romanucci-Ross, eds, *Ethnic Identity: Cultural Continuity and Change* (Palo Alto, 1975).

¹³ Kanu and Easterfield, "Seeds," 113.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁶ Eli Bentor, an art historian, who recently carried out research at Aro Chuku, confirms that until after the Biafran war traditional ritual and culture was not extensive at Aro Chuku, though since the war there has been a revival, fueled by Aro returning from the Abakaliki, Port Harcourt, and other coastal areas where they were no longer welcome.

¹⁷ Kanu and Easterfield, "Seeds," 82.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

know, but perhaps this was a factor for some Igbo. The presence of another culture became a possible direction for movement in the maturation process to show one's independence from family. Choices existed and he was attracted to this, though it is hard to know how much input he had as a young boy in decision-making as against that of his mother and grandmother. Possibly his lack of a father, or other dominant male model in his early life with traditional views, made it easier for him to Europeanize.

A half-brother died and he wept, but the school manager told him to stop, otherwise he would be punished — there was nothing to weep for, "since the boy would be all right in heaven."¹⁹ This view made him skeptical of Christianity, though not of progress in his new world. Just before he turned thirteen his mother also died. His grandmother said he could not quit school and go back to the old ways, as they were gone; he had to go ahead. A childless older sister left her husband to come to care for him and the grandmother. He passed the school-leaving exam at age thirteen but he was two years too young to become a pupil teacher, the next stage at that time, and secondary schools were too far away. But the headmaster started the Standard VI year which he attended, doing monitoring and other jobs, and he received a little salary. "The history and geography grew a little more interesting as they at last began to touch on my own country, and the story of the slave trade,"²⁰ though he would have been facing a largely Eurocentric curriculum. He pressed to go on. Of students who left school before finishing, "most of them stagnated and grew embittered,"²¹ as there was no work in isolated Aro Chuku. But he does not criticize the British for this; there were simply no local opportunities.

Uku went down the Cross River to Calabar in a launch to take the Standard VI examination, which he passed. There he saw crowds of people and cars and lorries; he had never before seen a vehicle, nor electric lights, water taps, and cafes, and he felt positive about these. At school he had seen some of them pictured in catalogues of children's wear, probably provided by the British to indicate the new road. He was impressed "by the normal way of life, compared with the barrenness of the missionaries;"²² two meanings of the word "barrenness" may be involved here, for at this time missionaries were often unmarried or appeared barren, for they had no children with them. Nevertheless his grandmother conceived of Calabar as a wicked place. Uku states²³ that what impressed him most about Calabar "was the sight of white children and babies. . . . The complete absence of normal family life among the missionaries, the only white people we knew, had made us seriously doubt whether

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

²² *Ibid.*, 166.

²³ *Ibid.*

they did in fact reproduce like ourselves." He also saw "Syrians" for the first time at Calabar. His conceptions of the colonial world was broadening.

In January 1921, at the age of 15, he became a pupil teacher at the Aro mission school. He had made the transition: "I now felt that I belonged to the school more than to the village compound."²⁴ Now he no longer carried things on his head; grandmother did not cut his hair anymore, nor could she do the traditional Aro body painting on him. A few months later he moved into two rooms on the school compound and acquired a servant, a friend from his village, only returning home to his own village for holidays. When he did return he was "no longer a naked boy, but a tall one, who wore shorts and a shirt, and even shoes on occasion."²⁵ He joined in village sports, dances and celebrations "least likely to annoy the missionaries . . . but we were always careful to keep a little dignity. . . ."²⁶ He was not much concerned about the future of Nigeria at the time. "For myself, and for others, the future was an 'entirely personal affair.'"²⁷ And there was nothing to read except elementary textbooks, certainly no newspapers. This is clearly culture change under very selective and isolated circumstances.

His grandmother died and he comments that although she had given up worshipping the family gods, she was critical of the white man as a judge who did not understand their language, whose interpreters manipulated situations, whose people were critical of polygyny and illegitimate children, and she was skeptical of Christian beliefs in an afterlife. Then Uku writes that there "would no longer be anyone there to restrain me, to make me critical and unwilling to accept new things on their face value."²⁸ He has lost his cultural imbalance, although he has internalized her views. Yet Uku had misunderstandings with his headmaster concerning European cultural elements:

But then, although we were constantly having ways of behavior drummed into us, no-one realized the impossibility of teaching us how all the bits fit together or how to perceive the underlying necessity for certain courses of action. We could not develop any real conviction of what was appropriate and what was not. We could only imitate, and behaviour founded upon imitation alone and devoid of conviction cannot meet any but the simplest situations. There is none of that unconscious

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

selection and rejection of possibilities which goes on in the mind of a person dealing with the familiar aspects of life.²⁹

His unwillingness to follow tradition did not mean that he was uncritical of Christianity and European values and behavior.

He finished the required two years of pupil teaching and in 1922 applied to a missionary secondary school in Calabar (unstated, but probably Hope Waddell Teacher Training College at Calabar), but there was no room and he goes to Abaji Government Teacher's Training College on the coast near Port Harcourt. The missionaries at his Aro school actively opposed his leaving a church school, wanting him to reapply to Calabar the next year and there was serious conflict, for "they interpreted my action as gross ingratitude."³⁰ He states that the missionaries saw "all government educational institutions as godless and pagan without reservation."³¹ Thus he largely turned away from the mission world, though remaining a Christian and maintaining contacts with some missionaries. And his attitude toward government institutions became more positive.

Abaji was a small town, the seat of a government headquarters and a port. There was a hospital nearby, while there was none at Aro Chuku where "the missionaries had made illness and death matters of resignation, since anything that happened here in this life could be shown to have no importance compared with the one to come."³² There were "boys of widely differing background from all parts of the country"³³ at the school, again a widening experience for him. At Abaji he believed (incorrectly) that there was no African political activity in the entire country, although aware that Progressive Unions and Youth Brigades were growing, but quietly, not to call attention to themselves. "The presence of the British in Nigeria was accepted uncritically, and there was a general feeling that the [Nigerian] legislative and executive council should be competent to deal with native affairs without any interference."³⁴ Prosperity was increasing in Nigeria and it was not a time of criticism:

Lagos and Calabar had the franchise, the government nominated candidates for the councils, and there seemed no need to worry oneself about the conduct of affairs in general. The people who were dissatisfied and suffering from the changes taking place were not the ones who possessed any means of self-expression, and the ones who

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 186.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 191.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

³² *Ibid.*, 206.

³³ *Ibid.*, 203.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

might, with no criticism intended, be called the parasites of the new system, the clerks, teachers, policemen, minor officials, flourishing tradesmen and merchants, had plenty of cause for satisfaction as long as they did not look far ahead and wonder where they were going. It was only much later, when people learnt to think and see in new terms, that the ideas of imperialism and exploitation began to develop in their minds. It is important to remember that at this time there were no means of communication with the outside world as far as we natives were concerned; we had no knowledge of other ideas or conditions of life, no means of comparison therefore, and no material upon which to exercise our minds in this direction.³⁵

This probably represented the views of at least some Nigerians of the time, especially those who did not live in large urban areas.

Adult Life

Uku finished the two-year school program and passed the examination. After his return home, one of his father's wives and a female English missionary arranged for his marriage to an educated Christian from Aro Chuku, acceptable to him by "birth, clan, and upbringing,"³⁶ her father being an Amadi and a chief. Missionaries not only preferred to settle marital disputes rather than having them go to court, but also they attempted to arrange marriage among Christians. But he did not marry for a while.

Uku went to teach for two years at Mbamiri, an isolated, riverrain Igbo area near the town of Port Harcourt. Here everyone literally paddled his own canoe, but he had a servant to do so for him! Then he transferred to Mabiri in July 1927, also near Port Harcourt, a substantial town, and he was more in his metier. The headmaster was a Jamaican whom he likes — there were many West Indians in teaching posts in southern Nigeria at that time. He met Africans in high positions — lawyers, police officers, administrators — and realizing the limits of work as a teacher, began to wonder how he might get ahead. He considered becoming a policeman but decided against it on the advice of Mr. Ikoku, an Aro who became his friend. He began to read newspapers. "They commented discreetly on current affairs without venturing to criticize and it is only much later, about 1937, that newspapers become instruments of political criticism."³⁷ He discovered the pleasure of reading Shakespeare and other writers; he now had better access to books. He began to have informal social contacts with Whites. He became friends with a lonely European physician, who helped him

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 219-220.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.

from being transferred to a bush school, and he befriended a European commissioner of police. He was becoming involved in class distinctions among Africans in a colonial atmosphere, where Africans are often socially excluded by Europeans, but he also now looks down at "the bush" as an Europeanized African, perhaps as the Aro used to look down on other peoples. When Uku found he could not afford to join the elite African Club, he started another club for people of his status: "teachers, policemen, prison warders, clerks, traders; almost anybody, in fact, who was interested in the idea of getting together with others for recreation, discussion, and the creation of a sociable atmosphere in which people could get to know each other."³⁸ This interest group for non-elite Africans of colonial education from diverse cultural backgrounds was in response to their new social roles, in a situation where they were also excluded from British clubs and elite African organizations. Still ambitious, Uku later helped his association amalgamate with the African Club, with the aid of the district officer; the effort ended in disaster, however, as the members of his group could not afford the costs or the clothes. By this point Uku was thoroughly enmeshed in the Europeanized sector of urban African life. He became interested in the law as a means of getting ahead, partly through contact with lawyers. "Part of the prestige enjoyed by barristers derived from the fact that it was only in the courts that the black man met the white man on terms of equality."³⁹ He believed that "there was no hostility at this time towards white men, and little except official contact between white and black."⁴⁰

He went through a phase at Mabiri, and later at Aro Chuku, of helping to form voluntary associations — an Aro one at Mabiri, and a headquarters association at Aro Chuku of various Aro improvement associations in their respective settlements in Nigeria. Here he was involved in establishing organizations on an ethnic basis, unlike the club discussed above, regardless of class or occupational interests among the Africans; both the ethnic and the nonethnic types were evident responses to colonialism. These and other associations he became involved in were mechanisms for organizing Africans for self-help activities distinct from missionary and government influence, and for settling disputes among members, an organizational form that became common in Nigeria at this time and still continues today.⁴¹ He visited Enugu, Onitsha, and other southeastern Nigerian cities, and broadened his experience. Enugu

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ S. Ottenberg, "Improvement Associations among the Afikpo Ibo," *Africa*, 25 (1955), 1-25; S. Ottenberg, "The Development of Credit Associations in the Changing Economy of the Afikpo Igbo," *Africa* 38, 3 (1968), 237-252.; C. Geertz, "The Rotating Credit Association: a 'Middle Rung' in Development," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 10 (1962), 241-63; J.S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley, 1971), 213-15; A.C. Smock, *The Role of Ethnic Unions in Eastern Nigeria* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).

surprised him; despite the fact that it was a regional colonial headquarters, he found it a backward town.

While working at Mabiri he went ahead with the arranged marriage described above, but the form of marriage is not described. His wife was a disappointment to him, as all she wanted was to be is a housewife, remaining a Christian but not particularly interested in change or progress. He tried to get her to read the newspapers, to join women's organizations, and to play a part in local affairs, but she did not respond, preferring to speak Igbo at home rather than English, and to keep company with other wives concerned with the domestic life. Although his wife was not the upwardly mobile companion that he sought, they remained together. She had apparently adopted the Victorian missionary housewife model learned in school and church, rather than Uku's progressive model, more available to males than females at that time. After marriage he worried that she would run to the missionaries whenever she had a marital complaint as he felt many Christian wives did. Clearly, his wife is a modern conservative, in some ways the counterpoint to Uku's late traditional conservative grandmother.

In the Aba women's riots of 1929⁴² Uku takes a government view on the importance of taxation to assist development and feels that the riots resulted from a misunderstanding, though he comprehends the economic malaise of the country at the time. He was one of the spokesmen for the government position, but he was not listened to. "I was shouted down as a traitor in the pay of government, a man who had turned against his own people."⁴³ Aro Chuku was one of the areas involved in the rioting. The events awakened Nigerians to general political activity — a political benchmark. "This was the first time that there had been any widespread criticism of government action,"⁴⁴ a statement probably more true for southeastern Nigeria than for the western area. Political thought became common after the riots and "discussions had a wider base and embraced a wider range of interests."⁴⁵

⁴² M. Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (London, 1937), 201-54; H.A. Gailey, *The Road to Aba: A Study of British Administration Policy in Eastern Nigeria* (New York, London, 1970); J.E.N. Nwaguru, *Aba and British Rule: The Evolution and Administrative Developments of the Old Aba Division of Igboland 1896-1960* (Enugu, 1973), 99-107; S.O. Esike, "The Aba Riots of 1929," *African Historian* 1, 3 (1965), 7-13; V.C. Onwuteaka, "The Aba Riot of 1929 and its Relation to the System of 'Indirect Rule,'" *Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies*, 7, 3 (1965), 273-82; Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Proceedings of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disorders in the Eastern Provinces of Nigeria* (London, 1950), 2 vols.; Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disorders in the Eastern Provinces of Nigeria, November 1949* (London, 1950), Cmd 256.

⁴³ Kanu and Easterfield, "Seeds," 266.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 266.

His wife was no more a progressive than before; she remained domestically oriented, which worried Uku, and she visited diviners at Aro Chuku in order to have a son, which they both wanted, but he would not join her in this activity. Now, as an educated man, he found Aro Chuku very backward. He helped to start a secondary school at Aro Chuku with his wealthy Igbo friend, Mr. Ikoku, the man who dissuaded him from a career with the police. They took pride in its being run by Africans, not by government or by missionaries. Again, as in the case of the various associations he was involved in, this was an attempt to distance himself from colonial control and to guide his own progress — though, of course, the school must follow government regulations. Uku continued to teach at Mabiri for a while before transferring to the new school. Of his friend he writes: "He was the first man I knew whose life was not in greater or less degree an attempt to imitate and emulate white men at their own game."⁴⁶

While living at Aro Chuku he decided to help his village of birth, which he saw deteriorating, "a place for old people and children, with a few relatively incompetent young folk who had not the energy or initiative to seek better jobs in the big towns."⁴⁷ He was the only one in his village with some education.⁴⁸ He encouraged going to school, and helped settle disputes on Sunday afternoon rather than going to church, though he still considered himself a good Christian. He helped form a village union, in aims similar to the others he has been involved in. He even assisted some destitute old priests to begin their traditional sacrifices again, much to other people's surprise. He states that "it was equally well known and accepted that my conversion to Christianity was purely nominal, this being one of the conditions on which depended all possibilities of progress ever since our country had ceased to belong to us."⁴⁹ He built a modern house outside the cramped quarters of the village to serve as an example (as well as to live in), and he assisted the people of Aro Chuku to construct a passable road around its villages.

The depression by 1935 created changes in the schools at Aro Chuku, and he went to work at a government school at Okata in Ibibio country, which he considered a mediocre institution in a backward community. There was conflict between the headmaster and a teacher and the school deteriorated until a new headmaster arrived, when the school built a student dormitory and other changes for the better occurred.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 272. The theme of imitation runs through much of the Easterfield-Uku manuscript. Coleman, *Nigeria*, 146-47, considers that this was characteristic of the first generation of colonial educated Nigerians, but not the second.

⁴⁷ Kanu and Easterfield, "Seeds," 282.

⁴⁸ This is surprising given the tendency of educated Africans to sponsor relatives in schooling, and perhaps indicates a degree of isolation of Uku from those at home during his early teaching career.

⁴⁹ Kanu and Easterfield, "Seeds," 186.

The people of Okata had originally come from Uku's home village of Obinkita, but were not aware of it and he helped them learn about their history and to form an Obinkita Union there, among other reasons, so that people would better understand why they were taxed. Later some of them went to Obinkita for a joint meeting of the unions. Uku helped to start a Literary Club at Okata for plays and concerts and to encourage reading, often of Shakespeare, and he was very impressed with the bard's writings. The society also became a loan organization, as many improvement associations have done, as well as acquiring books and newspapers. He also had a part in the development of a local branch of the Nigerian Youth Movement,⁵⁰ an early Nigerian political movement, most of whose members were older than "youths," but he does not discuss this, perhaps because of the time at which he was writing. But clearly regional and national politics were growing at least partly out of experience in local improvement associations.

At this point in the narrative World War II was in progress and there was an economic decline. The Nazi view did not appeal, nor did that of the British. "Our reactions were on the whole limited to the realization that if Germany won the war there would be a change of administration and government,"⁵¹ though he also says "that the majority of people lived in the hope that Germany would win the war."⁵² The war helped provide a broader view of Nigeria and thoughts of independence. He personally preferred the evils of the present government to Germany taking over.

After the war he decided to study law. "If you want to become a public man, to have lots of influence, prestige, money and so on, the sure way of achieving all that is to become a barrister,"⁵³ he said to an English official; he was wearying of teaching and in 1948 he went to England to study law. The reason he chose not to go to America to study — as Azikiwe, Orizu, Ojike and others did (see below) — is not discussed. I can only surmise that it was because Nigerian law was based on British law, or it was financially easier, or he had better contacts; he also had respect for the British despite his growing criticism of colonialism.

In Britain Uku was struck by the lack of communal living compared to Nigeria and he was rather solitary. Visits were generally only on invitation. He was surprised by the energy and strength of Englishwomen in Britain, whereas those in Nigeria had seemed to do little. He was interested to find that most people treasured a sense of independence rather than being dependent on relatives and others. There was also the regular feeding of children in English, unlike at home.

⁵⁰ Coleman, *Nigeria*, 165-166, 225-27.

⁵¹ Kanu and Easterfield, "Seeds," 316-17.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 317.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 322-323.

This ends Uku's life story. I have not, as yet, been able to trace his subsequent career, though he did complete his legal studies and return to Nigeria.

Comments

Uku's life to the time of his trip to England reflects a gradual shift from early self-interest and self-career goals, in which much of his Aro culture was put aside, a period lasting into his early teaching days, to a long period of a broader interest in the welfare of others later on, when he was involved in developing various kinds of improvement associations, with considerable concern for his fellow Nigerians and for improving local conditions, and with greater sympathy for tradition and the damage that changes had wrought. Finally, we see a return to individual concerns when he went to study in England, with his communal interests being temporarily put aside. In the first stage there was a general acceptance of colonialism, with a gradual shift from missionary to government identity. In the second stage he had come to realize that local matters were often best handled by Africans in groups, though sometimes with the support and cooperation of colonial officials. By the third stage he had become increasingly skeptical of colonialism in general and opted for Nigerian independence. These three periods also coincide with the broadening of his own contacts and experiences, from being a parochial student and a beginning school teacher, to a mature teacher and individual who travels about and becomes conscious of a broader Nigeria, to an awareness in the third stage of the importance of obtaining in Britain things he cannot acquire at home.

These changes in life attitudes are, on the one hand, very personal, having to do with Uku's own growth and maturation. On the other hand he was not unique, for many other Nigerians went through similar changes, some earlier in time, as those living in Lagos, some later, as at Afikpo where I carried out research. The changes reflect a turn from local parochial interests to an awareness of Nigeria as a nation and its potential for development, to a further awareness of its place in the larger world. In these processes the development of improvement associations and clubs was a crucial early local step that gave persons leadership and management experience, allowing them to play a role in local development where the British lacked the knowledge, ability, resources, or interest in doing so.

Of course, while Uku was going through these changes in time, colonialism was also changing, and Uku's story reflects some of these, such as the increasing role of government and the relatively lessening role of the missionaries, the expansion of roads and the postal service, and the growth of African printing facilities for newspapers, pamphlets, and some books, leading to what Benedict Anderson calls the Imagined Community⁵⁴ of a nation. In Uku's first school he met boys from other

⁵⁴ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983).

villages for the first time; in secondary school he met boys from many parts of Nigeria. The towns and cities where the schools were located were generally multi-ethnic, as were sometimes the schools themselves. Multiethnicity clearly existed before colonialism, but it was vastly expanded as a consequence of it.

Even as a small boy he became aware that colonialism was not uniform, noting differences between missionaries and government, and this distinction became a primary one in his life. He also found some British interested in him and others rejective of him, becoming aware of the personal element crossing over the rather rigid boundaries of the Nigerian colonial world.

Uku thrived under colonialism, though not without struggle, while being critical of it, particularly of missionary practice and belief. If colonialism destroyed traditional avenues of getting ahead for a member of an elite who was financially poor and fatherless, it opened up other avenues, which at first seemed to be at the level of teacher-police-clerk and then lawyer. He accepted much of the colonial orientation, seeing it, from the rather isolated and not well off Aro Chuku area, as a better way of getting ahead than in the traditional sector. He was probably typical of many males coming from traditional entrepreneurial and upwardly mobile cultures. These features clearly colored his perceptions of colonialism and his relationships to it, as he went through a gradual transformation from a person with localized interests to one with more cosmopolitan attitudes. This is the story of a more-or-less ordinary man who came from a prominent Igbo area, who became a leader at the local level, reflecting the reaction of ordinary males in southeastern Nigeria, who, on the whole, responded positively to British colonialism until after World War II. They moved ahead by entering the Europeanized African sector, but trying to join it with a sense of African control and interest at the local level. He saw his own society somewhat turned upside down in terms of class, but he himself, born into the elite sector of Aro Chuku, despite the early death of his father, came to rest in a good position in the new society.

Uku's early contacts with colonialism through the schools played an important role in shaping his life: he very early determined to succeed in the white world. His grandmother, a surrogate father, could not stop him. I believe in the importance of the early years in an individual's life in shaping fundamental attitudes towards colonialism, and directing individuals on particular paths in regard to it. Colonialism attracted the as yet non-political young. Uku's personal maturation, even in the face of drastic social change, seems to have been healthy and without emotional hitches, certainly so in the sense that he moved, as a boy, from a situation of being controlled by others — grandmother and mother, teachers in mission and government schools, and peer groups — to a state of strong intentionality and independence, where he took increasing control of his life. I do not see him as damaged by colonialism, though, paradoxically, Aro Chuku and other Igbo communities clearly were. Rather Uku dealt quite well with the colonial situation and with resolving conflicts between his Aro and newer worlds.

Comparisons

It is useful to contrast Uku's experiences with the histories of other Igbo whose lives overlapped in time in order to situate him in broader perspective. I limit myself here to the Igbo, reflecting both space limitations and a sense that there may have been some differences in individual responses to colonialism in the southwest and the north of Nigeria, where more hierarchical traditional social systems existed than with the Igbo — a fruitful hypotheses for another paper.

Uku's experience is in a middle position, largely adopting to colonialism, playing the game of imitation with a skeptical eye, but working within the colonial government to get ahead. In contrast other Nigerians were more pro-government and even more accepting of colonial rule, while still others were critical of and hostile to colonialism. I draw on published Igbo life-history materials for this comparison.

In a similar category to Uku, but for somewhat different reasons I would place Sir Francis Akanu Ibiam in a median position.⁵⁵ Born in 1906 in the isolated eastern Igbo group of Unwana, an area with Aro Chuku connections, his father died when a baby, but through his maternal uncle Ibiam became a houseboy to an Efik teacher at the Church of Scotland Mission primary school there. He went to that school and then to further Presbyterian mission schools in the Calabar area. Like Uku he never passed through the traditional initiations required of all Unwana males to gain status in the community, yet he achieved status at home through the missionary-colonial route. After Calabar Ibiam went to Britain in 1925, finishing his medical degree at St. Andrews in 1934 and returning to become a Church of Scotland Mission physician for many years, at various posts in Igboland, while keeping a home at Unwana. While working for the mission he developed ambiguous feelings toward it, since some of its key members felt uneasy over having an African rather than a European physician (there were no African missionaries in this mission in Nigeria at that time), and Ibiam felt that some missionaries were racist. Although he did not work for the mission all of his life, he nevertheless kept close ties with it.

In the 1946-1953 period Ibiam was involved in politics, encouraged, first of all, to run for the Afikpo District Council in his home area by a colonial officer, becoming a member and then its chairman, then serving in the Eastern House of Assembly, the Nigerian Legislative Council, and the Nigerian Governor's Executive Council. He was evidently seen as politically safe by the British, one who refused to be involved in the developing political parties, and he was knighted by the queen in 1956 and later served the largely honorific post of governor of the Eastern Region in 1960-1966. Yet he pushed ahead of the British on some issues, such as compulsory free education, the removal of the term "native" from the government, which he found derogatory (as in Native Authority), and worked for road development and other matters. Like Uku he

⁵⁵ D.C. Nwafo, *Born to Save: The Biography of Dr. Akanu Ibiam* (Lagos, 1988).

very much operated within the colonial system, though at a higher level, yet was critical of both missionary and some colonial policies. Like Uku, Ibiam moved from the missionary to the government world.

Another middle-of-the road position toward colonialism is exemplified in the changing views of Nweke Okafor, born about 1899 in Enuagu village of Enugwu-Ukwa group of villages between Awka and Onitsha, as written by his son, Dilim Okafor-Omali.⁵⁶ Okafor was one of six siblings, and his father died when he was three years old. The British came with military forces when he was seven, with looting by African troops; later came the establishment of a Native Authority Court and warrant chief system, which he, with others, increasingly disliked as it became both powerful and corrupt.

In 1910, against his mother's wishes, but with the assistance of a senior male relative, Okafor went to a nearby government station as a servant of an African police constable. He attended school there and was converted to a strong belief in Christianity, the first in his village to do so, so much so that he refused to take part in many community rituals and events, to the surprise of his fellow villagers. Uku also took little part in traditional events at Aro Chuku, although his non-participation seemed based on fear of mission punishment, but Okafor seems clearly not to have wished to be involved in tradition at all; this eventually led to conflict between him and other Christians in the villages on the one hand and the warrant chiefs on the other.

He finished Standard VI in 1921, got a post office job in Awka, then Lagos, then in Enugu, where he helped found the Enugwu-Ukwu Patriotic Union in 1942, which played a role in the overthrow of the warrant chief system at home. He became involved in various home projects with the union, including a local post office and cottage hospital, and encouraging the use of the union to settle disputes among villagers before going to litigation at the home courts, with its high fees and bribery. In his last years, before his death in 1944, he argued for a return to tradition, having come to feel that missionary and government influence had been too strong. He felt that traditional marriages should be respected as well as church ones, the value of indigenous ceremonies and names should be recognized, and there should be respect for the elders. We have also seen Uku's later more sympathetic views of tradition and his growing opposition to the denial of value in African culture, while accepting specific elements of British colonialism.

Three brief life-histories suggest that there were Igbo even more committed to colonialism, out of which they made considerable personal gain. Nnochiri Oriaku⁵⁷ was a boy when the British came to his home town of Uzuakoli about 1907. Without

⁵⁶ D. Okafor-Omali, *A Nigerian in Two Worlds* (London, 1965).

⁵⁷ M.A.O. Igwi, "The Outline History of Nnochiri Oriaku," *Nigerian Field*, 16, 4 (1951), 168-79.

schooling he became a Christian and was persecuted with other Christians and forced to live elsewhere for eighteen months through an arrangement with the district officer. Returning home he became a successful trader, eventually going to England to arrange to sell palm oil and kernels and buy guns and ammunition, a trip that proved disastrous. Nevertheless, he became a prominent Uzuakoli man, supporting the district officer's new council system, encouraging road and school building, and becoming a court member; his biography was even written with the encouragement of a colonial officer. There is no hint in it of criticism of colonialism, perhaps because his story was published in *Nigerian Field*, a non-government journal edited by colonial and ex-colonial Nigerian officers.

Similarly, the account of Eke Kalu's life⁵⁸ shows prosperity but not criticism under the British. Born in Ohaffia in 1875 he became a blacksmith, travelling widely in Eastern Nigeria as many smiths did at that time, eventually converting to Christianity near the coast and fighting with the British side in the Eket wars. He returned home to become a native doctor. Later he urged his fellow Ohaffians not to oppose the British when they planned to attack the area in 1902, at which he was partially successful, even acting for a while as an interpreter for the military at Ohaffia after the conquest.

The rest of his life was spent assisting the British, largely as a contractor, during which time he became a Christian again. He was involved in clearing a local waterway for trade, building schools, roads and government quarters, organizing lorry trade and constructing a United Africa Company shop at Ohaffia. There was no sign of criticism of the government or of the missionaries in his account (also published in *Nigerian Field*), and he clearly thrived financially in the colonial world.

Another Igbo for whom we have biographical information who worked closely with the British is Igwegbe Odum (c. 1860s-1940), an Aro from the major Aro settlement of Arondizorgu, not far from Okigwe. He is also the subject of an historical novel written by an Igbo in Igbo, but never translated into English.⁵⁹ A one-time successful slave trader, later a dealer in other goods and a farmer, he served as a warrant chief in Ajalli Native Court in the early days of this century and then for a brief time in the higher post of paramount chief in the same region. However, whether through corruption or simply jealousy, he aroused the resentment of other chiefs and fell out of favor with the colonial officers, never holding a formal position again. His views of colonialism are not clear, but it appears that he did much to ingratiate himself with the British and to manipulate local chiefs to increase his position with colonial officers. Certainly, he was not a protestor against the Native Authority system.

⁵⁸ E. Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography: The Autobiography of Mr. Eke Kalu, Ohaffia's Well-honoured Son," *Nigerian Field*, 7, 4 (1938), 158-170.

⁵⁹ P. Nwana, *Omenuko* (London, n.d. (1933 or earlier)); A.E. Afigbo, "Chief Igwegbe Odum: The Omenuko of History," *Nigeria Magazine*, 20 (1966), 222-31.

At the other extreme of reaction to colonialism is Nnamdi Azikiwe,⁶⁰ who is too well known to require detailed discussion, a person who developed strong anti-colonial views early in life. His father completed his missionary education to become a missionary teacher in 1898 at Onitsha. Azikiwe, born in 1904, came not only from an educated background but from one of Onitsha's elite families, the town being an important Igbo political and trading center on the Niger River. His father came to reject missionary life, working as a civil servant in various parts of Nigeria. "Zik," as his son is popularly known, was born in Zungeru in the north, but attended schools at Onitsha, Lagos, and Calabar, becoming a pupil teacher at Onitsha and also at a nearby village. Before adulthood he had learned Hausa and Yoruba as well as English and Igbo, and was exposed to many ethnic groups, including Scottish, Efik, and West Indians in Calabar, Brazilians and Sierra Leoneans in Lagos, and the English everywhere. He went to schools of various Christian denominations and came to know urban Nigeria well at an early age. His early heroes included James Aggrey, whom he had heard talk and had one of his books, Marcus Garvey, and James Garfield, president of the United States through his biography.⁶¹ Garfield might appear an improbable attraction for Azikiwe, but the story of the life of a self-made man who came from a rural background clearly impressed him. He was early impressed that Liberia was an independent Black Republic, as it was then often called. His political ideas and critique of colonialism gradually evolved through his contacts with other urbanized Nigerians who were developing similar views, and through the evolving Nigerian press, for which he began to write. His education in America (1925-1931) rounded out his ideas as to the future of Nigeria and he returned to that country to become one of its leading politicians for independence and in the post-independence world. Coleman states that "one of the main themes in Premier Nnamdi Azikiwe's *Renascent Africa* was an appeal to the upcoming generation for 'mental emancipation' from the attitudes of the older generation,"⁶² including the kind of imitative behavior that Uku himself was so concerned with and which characterized his generation to a certain degree.

Another Igbo whose life history we have, Mbonu Ojike (1915-1956),⁶³ came from the Aro settlement of Arondizorgu, as did Igwegbe Odum, discussed above. Like Azikiwe, he developed strong criticisms of colonialism. His father opposed his going

⁶⁰ N. Azikwe, *My Odyssey: An Autobiography* (London, 1970); V.C. Ikeotuonye, *Zik of Africa* (London, 1961); K.A.B. Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe* (Baltimore, 1965).

⁶¹ J.B. McClure, *Gen. Garfield from the Log Cabin to the White House* (Chicago, 1881), 2 vols.

⁶² Coleman, *Nigeria*, 146-47. The reference is to N. Azikiwe, *Renascent Africa* (Accra, 1937), an early statement of his nationalist views.

⁶³ M. Ojike, *My Africa* (New York, 1946); Anon., "Boycott King Dies," *West African Review* 28, 353 (1957), 125-29.

to school, having fought against the British and been wounded and wishing his son to help at the farms, but he desired education and eventually, with the assistance of an older brother succeeded. Ojike went through a series of Church Missionary Society (Anglican) schools at Arondizorgu and Awka and became a teacher at one of their schools in Onitsha. At Awka, in his teacher's training college, he was housed in a building named after James Aggrey; reading something of the latter's writing, he became entranced with his views on African development and with Aggrey's experience in the United States. Ojike then went to Lincoln University in the United States, where he began to develop his strongly anti-colonial ideas, discussed in Chapter XIV of his autobiography *My Africa*.⁶⁴ Studying elsewhere in the United States as well, he then returned to Nigeria to become a leading nationalist until his death in 1956. Before going to America he had met Azikiwe and become an agent and a journalist for the latter's newspaper, *The West African Pilot*. It is of interest that neither Ojike nor Azikiwe appeared to have bitter personal experiences with colonialism, rather drawing on that of others, and yet they became avid anti-colonialists. This differs from Uku's more direct colonial experience and less intellectualized views. On Ojike's return to Nigeria he became known as the "boycott king" because of his strong views that people should wear Nigerian dress and not European clothing.

Accounts of Igbo women of this period are harder to come by than those of men. Certainly not all of them followed the domestic route of Mrs. Uku. There was another major path for them, which did not necessarily require a colonial education. One distinguished example is the famous trader and politician, Omu Okwei (1872-1943).⁶⁵ She was born in Ossomari, which was an important trading post in the nineteenth century between Onitsha and Aboh. She came from a chiefly and well-known Ossomari family whose earlier heritage was with the Igala people, north of Onitsha. Until the end of the nineteenth century African middlemen along the coast controlled much of the trade with Europeans, but with the opening up of the interior to the British, through the Aro Chuku and other military expeditions, these middlemen lost control and interior traders began dealing directly with Europeans, particularly in the Niger River area. Until the 1920s these traders were mostly women, especially in the Onitsha area, where a new class of female traders arose. Trade to Europeans for palm oil and palm kernels and from Europeans for many items, such as cloth, utensils, liquor, knives and weapons, as well as internal trade in foodstuffs, thus came heavily to involve female traders at the turn of the century. They were displaced to some extent by male traders during the 1930s.

⁶⁴ Ojike, *My Africa*, 251-73.

⁶⁵ F. Ekejiuba, "Omu Okwei, the Merchant Queen of Ossomari: A Biographical Sketch," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 3, 4 (1967), 633-46; F. Ekejiuba, "Omu Okwei: The Merchant Queen of Ossomari," *Nigeria Magazine*, 90 (1966), 213-20.

Omu Okwei is an excellent example of this pattern. Apprenticed at the age of nine to an aunt in Igala country, where she learned to speak the tongue, she later came to live with her mother at Atani, an important Niger River trading town north of Ossomari. Upon her return to Ossomari she began to trade, at first without much in the way of resources, despite her elite family. In 1888 she briefly married a well-established Brass trader, which led her to important trading contacts. In 1895 she married an Abo man living at Onitsha and moved there. Onitsha had become a major center for trade for both Europeans and Africans and she expanded her business there in type of goods and amount of sale, becoming for a while an agent of the Niger Company, and having fruitful contacts with many European traders as well as African ones. She developed a network of African agents, eventually including persons in all the Niger River ports. Her two sons, who received schooling while she never did, were both helpful in her business, though they had their own careers. She developed into a major business entrepreneur in the lower Niger area, skillfully shifting from one form of good to another as market demands changed and becoming wealthy.

She also had a political career. Her influence helped her second husband to become a native court member in 1912, and later chief of the Onitsha Waterside settlement, a new one. In 1935 she became *omu* or queen of Ossomari, an important political and ritual post, and also she represented her town to Onitsha when necessary. Her relationships to colonialism differed in some respects from those of the men we have been discussing. There is every indication that she cooperated with the colonial business sector, its traders, and bankers, and there is some suggestion that she also worked comfortably with government officials. She was one of a number of Igbo women who did not go to school but yet had close contacts with colonialism, through trade in the expanding markets that colonial rule allowed and sometimes encouraged. If she had critical views toward colonialism they do not appear in the accounts of her life.

Yet she remained a traditionalist. Ekejuiba writes: "Although she was socially and commercially in advance of most Nigerian women of her time she never completely imbibed Western ideas. She continued a strong adherent of the traditional religion, thus thwarting repeated appeals and efforts of her children to make her a christian."⁶⁶

In reflecting on Uku's experience and those of the other Igbo discussed here, urban experience, with its contacts with other educated Africans and with books and the press, was an important factor in developing a critical stance toward colonialism. Those who remained more in the rural atmosphere, such as Oriaku and Kalu, and even Okwei, seem to have tended to work more closely in the colonial mold and be more sympathetic to it, though Okwei worked in towns and with colonialists. Nigerian nationalism grew from an urban base rather than a rural one. Note that the 1929 Aba riots started in a major Igbo urban center and then spread to the rural hinterland.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* , 644.

One interesting characteristic, already mentioned, is the growth of local African clubs and associations in Igboland, and some of the life histories reveal this. Uku helped found a number of these, both for home improvement and for other activities, social and literary. Okafor was much involved with one based in Enugu but having concerns at home. Okwei was involved in social clubs in Onitsha, and Azikiwe helped, when still a young man to found the Onitsha Literary Club, which debated theological issues and helped him to perceive the disparities between Christian doctrines of equality and the lack of possibilities for advancement in government and elsewhere for Africans. Some of these associations began at home and others with home members abroad, but they all had ideals of social welfare and some were involved with local politics. As Okafor-Omali writes of his father's Enugu improvement association:

The white man, it should be noted, is completely kept out of the picture. Instead, the new village organization is based on, and closely resembles, the original organization of the traditional independent, republican village. The union which is in power makes use as much as possible of the traditional procedures and forms of administration.⁶⁷

This is a somewhat idealistic statement about traditional Igbo government and the separation from the British. Often these unions asked for and sometimes received government aid for their projects. Nevertheless what we see is the emergence of a sort of quasi-local government in which Africans expressed their interests and worked towards their own goals, sometimes in cooperation with the British, sometimes alone or in opposition to them. Unions representing individuals of similar Igbo sub-ethnic background sometimes later joined together; Okafor-Omali states that by 1947 there were 77 branch organizations of the Enugwu-Ukwu village group in various parts of Nigeria linked in a larger association. Uku helped found the head Aro Chuku organization at home, linking its unions in the Aro settlements and elsewhere. These kinds of associations were later to become rallying points for broader political participation.

A striking feature of these life histories is the physical mobility of the individuals involved. We have seen the many places that Uku worked and lived in, as well as some he visited. Azikiwe resided in Zungeru, Lagos, Onitsha, Calabar, also in the Gold Coast and the United States. Ibiam lived in Unwana, Calabar, Britain, Abiriba, Uburu, Itu, and Enugu. Kalu lived all over eastern Nigeria, including Opobo, Bonny, Aro Chuku, and home. Okafor lived in Lagos, Awka, and Kano, among other places. Okwei traded up and down the lower Niger River area and lived for a while at Idah in Igala country. The dream of going overseas for study was common, and Azikiwe, Uku, and Ibiam did so, and even the trader Oriaku went to England. Mobility seems to have been common for Igbo, as well as other southern Nigerians. Okafor-Omali mentions the mass emigration of persons from Okafor's village between 1917

⁶⁷ Okafor-Omali, *A Nigerian*, 152-53.

and 1921 as a consequence of farmland shortages and high population.⁶⁸ In our life histories, of course, it is mobility to seek schooling and work that is involved. This physical mobility, so characteristic of Western society, while not totally absent in pre-colonial Nigeria, must have led to a broadening of experience, ethnic contacts, and cultural, religious, and political knowledge. Consider that Azikiwe, while still young, attended Anglican, Catholic, Wesleyan and Methodist schools, that Uku early began to distinguish between the government and the missionaries, that not long after an Anglican church was established in Okafor's village a Catholic one was as well, leading to long-standing friction, which he was involved in attempting to resolve. Rural to urban experiences, and later the reverse for individuals, abound in our life histories. What we have is some apparent choice, an awareness of alternatives, even though choice was not always realistically attainable. It becomes clear to most of those we have discussed that colonial culture was not monolithic. Some focus of criticism and of attack was necessary, some aspects of colonialism had to be pragmatically accepted, and some were employed for personal gain. Those in our life histories, including Uku, generally gained in status, skills, and income through colonialism. We do not have the life histories of those who did not prosper, or who just muddled through, whether in the Europeanized or the more traditional sector.

The awareness of differences between missionary colonialism and government colonialism, though both types of agents often worked closely together, did suggest the possibility of different focuses for persons in our life histories. Some of these, such as Uku, Okafor and Azikiwe, exhibit a pattern of early involvement with, and then lessening interest in, Christianity and the missions, and then the growth of a more secular social and political conscience focusing on government. Perhaps this also reflects a conception that missions were unlikely to change, but in the long run colonial government might. Associations and clubs replaced the church as major centers of activity for some, though Ibiam remained deeply committed to religion. For Okwei there was an acceptance of Europeans as business partners, and their trading techniques, but in religion she remained a traditionalist.

The differences in where one was born and in family background in these life histories are important. Uku had to leave home to become prominent, as Aro Chuku was dying as an important center. Perhaps he was also propelled to do so to regain his upper crust conception of himself. Azikiwe's Onitsha background and educated father, both unusual for most of Igbo country at the turn of the century, must have given him a head start in being wordly wise over, say Okafor, the first Christian in a more rural area. Azikiwe was really a second-generation educated person, which I think made a lot of difference. Okwei also came from a prominent Niger River family, and although she started with a few financial resources, family connections undoubtedly assisted her in her business. Ibiam was quickly swept into the Presbyterian missionary network,

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 109-111.

and derived early support from it that allowed him to move ahead rapidly. These factors influenced attitudes toward colonialism.

I note other interesting features. Azikiwe dropped his Christian name, Benjamin, in middle age, and Ibiam his (Francis) when he was a senior, and Ojike moves to wear contemporary African clothes — movements to Africanize their identity and to protest against colonial and missionary influence. A number of our individuals' fathers died when the boys were quite young, including Uku, Okafor, and Ibiam. While mothers (and sometimes grandmothers) continued to play roles, and sometimes uncles or brothers, I wonder whether the lack of a strong male paternal figure as guide did not allow these boys to move quickly under outside male influence at school and in mission hands. One wonders whether they might not have developed other attitudes toward missionaries and colonialism had they had strong and active fathers. On the other hand, Azikiwe did have a strong, educated, father, who moved him toward schooling, at one point away from Catholicism, and at another time from teaching and the missionaries; as Azikiwe matured his father helped turn him against government, as the latter became embittered toward it and retired from the civil service.

The kind of women these men married, insofar as we have information, reflected something of their aspirations living in a colonial world. Uku had an educated wife, but one who did not fulfill his dreams of a "modern" mate. Ibiam married a Yoruba from a well-established and educated family who had been trained as a dispenser. Okafor married a woman from a neighboring village, converted her to Christianity, sent her to school at a time when few females went, and then later sent her for housewifery training with a Sierra Leone couple. As Okafor's son writes of her, "the village girl became a good baker, dressmaker and Europeanized housewife, and acquired some knowledge of the English and Efik languages."⁶⁹ All that I have information on wanted an idealized European-trained wife who would live as the mate of a Europeanized husband, though the details vary. Ibiam's wife was very supportive of his medical missionary life; in contrast, Uku felt that his wife was not helpful. Okwei twice married traders, moving in that circle, and was not particularly interested in getting ahead through education.

Of the four Igbo men mentioned above three married women from their own localities. Ibiam did not, but though his wife was from a well-established Yoruba family, she became very much involved in the Igbo region and neighboring areas in which her husband worked. Okwei did not marry from home though her husband did come from within her trading area. These facts suggest that the pressures of colonialism to move out, to become national, urban, and European in culture and behavior, were sometimes balanced at the level of marriage by a strong tie to the home locality and some commitment to tradition. Even if the wife were Christian and Westernized, the link to home place and culture was strong.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.