



**Thesis**

**By**

**OBIEGBU, James**

**Ngozi**

**Department of  
History  
University of Ibadan  
NIGERIA**

**The Growth of Aba as an Urban Centre,  
1900-1960 : a study of the relative  
contributions of internal and external  
factors**

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**March 1992**

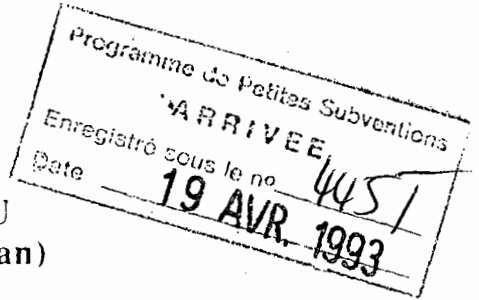
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**THE GROWTH OF ABA AS AN URBAN CENTRE, 1900-1960:  
A STUDY OF THE RELATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS OF INTERNAL  
AND EXTERNAL FACTORS**



BY  
**JAMES NGOZI OBIEGBU**  
B.A. (Hons), M.A. (Ibadan)



A Thesis in the Department of History

Submitted to the Faculty of Arts, in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the Degree of

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of the  
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is basically a study of the rise and growth of Aba in the period 1900-1960. Based primarily on archival and oral sources, it attempts a reconstruction of the history of the town with a view to indicating the relative contributions of internal and external factors to its growth.

There are a number of existing works relating to the Aba area. The general trend in these studies is to look at Aba town either as part of the hinterland of Port Harcourt/Eastern Niger Delta, or part of the general history of the Ngwa. None of them focuses on Aba town or urban area specifically. This study, as far as I am aware, is the first attempt to fill this historiographical gap. Secondly, by laying emphasis on the relative contributions of internal and external dynamics of change, it highlights the error in the notion held in some quarters that Aba town was a colonial creation.

The work demonstrates that the major stimulus for urbanization and growth in Aba was commerce. This factor and others such as strategic location had even before the British presence, engendered a trend in Aba towards urbanism. These existing forces of growth continued to operate after 1900, but were given a fillip by factors introduced by the British such as roads, railways, cash economy, Western education, health facilities, water, electricity and new forms of political and judicial administration. Their combined effect further stimulated population growth, encouraged the rise of entrepreneurship that was manifested in the emergence of numerous foreign and indigenous enterprises, and in fact, laid the infrastructure that has made Aba an important centre of indigenous manufacturing in Nigeria - "Africa's emerging Japan" as some refer to it.

The increased immigration of people attracted by economic opportunities created a situation in which the Ngwa owners of the land became vastly out-numbered by the non-Ngwa residents. This had important consequences for political contests and representation. The work shows that throughout the period covered by the study, the politics of the town was dominated largely by non-Ngwa who also controlled the economy of the town. This political and economic control of the Ngwa by the non-Ngwa has led some scholars to conclude that the relationship between the two was one of complete animosity and rivalry. But as the work shows, this was not the case as inter-group relations in the town, despite occasional tensions, were by and large cordial.

In all, the study demonstrates clearly that while the British presence introduced major changes in the process of Aba's growth, it was not within the context of an unresponsive African population. The work shows that colonialism did not create Aba town; that the town emerged and rose to commercial prominence in consequence of the interaction of internal and external factors. It was in fact a typical case of "continuity and change" at work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the course of producing this thesis, I have, as would be expected, incurred the gratitude of many people and institutions. I am especially indebted to my supervisor, Professor J.F. Ade Ajayi, who kindly guided this work throughout its preparation. His extensive advice and corrections on the various drafts were invaluable. I have never known such humility and hardwork. I thank the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa (C.O.D.E.-S.R.I.A.) for the financial support they gave me. I am similarly grateful to Ogun State University and the University of Abuja for their support.

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I would like to thank all the librarians and archivists who helped me during my research. In this regard, special mention must be made of Felicia Onyema, Rowland Nwaguru, Edith Ugwudike and Innocent Ede, all of the National Archives, Enugu; Messrs. Abraham, Segun and Michael were very helpful in the National Archives, Ibadan. I thank the librarians of the History Departmental library, University of Ibadan (Messrs. Bello and Etuk), Institute of African studies library, University of Ibadan, and the University of Ibadan library, N.I.S.E.R. library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka library, Imo State library Owerri, Alvan Ikoku College library Owerri, College of Technology Nekede library and the library of the Ibadan Polytechnic.

To all the men and women who granted me interview, I am grateful. My gratitude also goes to Mr. A.U. Williams, the typist of this work who, even in ill-health, patiently and tediously laboured to produce the final product; and to Mrs. Cecilia Williams for the encouragement and support she gave the husband during the period.

I must record the help of some of my friends, to whom I am grateful: Rev. Professor L.J. Munoz, Mr. E.N. Mordi who kindly accommodated me at Nsukka, Mr. Chris Ogbogbo, Mr. Benson Osadolor, Mr. and Mrs. Shehu Garba, Mr. Hamani Dari who kindly drew my maps, my colleagues in the Department of History, University of Abuja and several others I am unable to mention.

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My heart-felt gratitude of course, goes to my wife Eno who stood by me all these years and contributed in various capacities towards the production of this work; and my children: Chinedu, Anietie and Wuraola whom I often had to plead with to "go away. Daddy is busy".

Finally, I thank God for giving me the energy and keeping me alive to complete this work.

Department of History  
University of Ibadan  
March 1992

James Ngozi Obiegbu

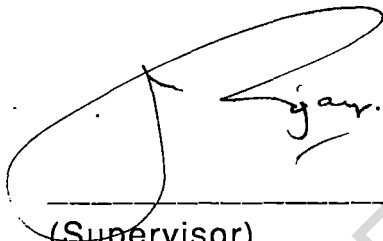
DEDICATION

To my wife Eno; and children: Chinedu, Anietie and Wuraola.

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by Mr. J. N. Obiegbu in the Department of History, University of Ibadan.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ajayi', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is enclosed within a large, hand-drawn oval shape.

(Supervisor)

**Professor J.F. Ade Ajayi**

B.A., Ph.D., Hon. LLD., D.LITT., FHSN., NNMA.

Emeritus Professor of History

University of Ibadan, NIGERIA

March, 1992

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.E.T.C.	African and Eastern Trading Cooperation
ABADIST	Aba District
A.D.O.	Assistant District Officer
Aro. Div.	Aro Division
Cal. Prov.	Calabar Province
C.O.	Colonial Office
C.S.E.	Chief Secretary, Enugu
C.S.O.	Chief Secretary's Office (Lagos)
D.C.	District Commissioner
Dist.	District
D.O.	District Officer
E.N.D.C.	Eastern Nigeria Development Cooperation
H.R.H.	His Royal highness
J.H.S.N.	Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria
NA.E.	National Archives, Enugu
N.A.I.	National Archives, Ibadan
N.B.L.	Nigerian Breweries Limited
N.E.W.A.	National Ex-servicemen Welfare Association
Riv. Prov.	Rivers Province
U.A.C.	United Africa Company.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: ABA ON THE EVE OF EUROPEAN CONQUEST

Urbanization or the growth of towns is one of the most interesting and challenging developments man has been associated with, particularly in the period since World War I. This 20th Century growth has been most spectacular in the developing countries because of the lack of basic amenities like pipe-borne water and electricity to the majority of the population living in the rural areas, resulting in what is generally referred to as rural-urban migration.

Even though substantial literature with regards to the definition of urbanization abounds, scholars are yet to reach a generally acceptable definition of urbanization. This is hardly surprising since various scholars have tended to use different criteria to ascribe urbanism to a particular place. In effect one could say that there have been as many definitions of the term as there have been writers. Louis Wirth regards a particular place as urban if it has "a relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals"<sup>1</sup>. For him therefore, size, density and extent of population mix or heterogeneity are very important issues to be attained before a place could be regarded as urban. For him, any definition of urbanization which does not take cognizance of these characteristics is incomplete. This position by Wirth, as is well known, has been criticised as idealistic, since urbanization could still be attained with ethnic homogeneity if there is occupational heterogeneity.

Yet some scholars have refused to dismiss Wirth's criteria completely. Thus while acknowledging the importance of

heterogeneity, they added another criterion which they felt was very vital, namely, 'writing'. Examples of such scholars include Gordon Childe<sup>2</sup> and Gideon Sjoberg. With this criterion in mind, Sjoberg wrote: "... in addition to size, heterogeneity, public works and so on, writing is essential to the characterisation of the city, implying as it does the existence of a highly specialized non-agricultural group that has a complex skill. Above all the use of writing system is the single firm criterion for distinguishing the city, the nucleus of civilization from other types of early settlements"<sup>3</sup>.

We can see the overwhelming importance given to writing from its description as essential, and as "the single firm criterion". We know however that the rise of cities pre-dates the discovery of writing. Thus, while writing could promote the growth of urbanization, it is certainly not a condition that must be met before urbanism emerges.

There are still other scholars like G.I. Trewartha who relate urbanization to the rate of industrial and commercial development of a particular centre<sup>4</sup>. What this means is that for a particular place to qualify as urban, it must be a centre of Industry and Commerce. It is a well-known fact, however, that it is not all urban centres that are centres of commerce and industry.

In his celebrated study on urbanization in Nigeria, Akin Mabogunje defines urbanization as the "process whereby human beings congregate in relatively large numbers at one particular spot of the earth's surface ..."<sup>5</sup>. But beyond defining it, he entered into discussion of theories of urbanization and concluded that as against the industrialized countries, "the situation presented by cities in the underdeveloped countries has not given rise to any formal theory of city growth and structure"<sup>6</sup>. He, however, states that the fundamental

idea in the theory of urbanization is the specialization of functions among human communities through division of labour<sup>7</sup>. He notes that, for functional specialization to give rise to urban centres, there must be surplus food production to feed the specialists. There must be a small group able to exercise power over the surplus food producers so that they could make food available to the specialists; that "for the work of the specialists to be facilitated and their needs for raw materials satisfied, there must be a class of traders and merchants". He concludes that wherever these conditions existed, urbanization flourished and " wherever one of them ceased to exist, there was an immediate decline in the vigour of the urbanization process, and in some cases, a total eclipse of urban centres"<sup>8</sup>. He concludes that "urbanization can therefore be seen as a process which seeks through maximum specialization, to increase the output of goods and services in a community subject to the three conditions enumerated above"<sup>9</sup>.

Mabogunje's position is very similar to that of Philip Hauser, another urban theorist, who recognised four important basis for the emergence and growth of towns. These are increasing population, new forms of social organization, increasing control of the natural environment and technological development<sup>10</sup>.

These definitions are relevant to this study because they reflect on the evolution of cities or urban centres. They draw into focus, the central themes for examination in the history of any centre we regard as urban. They show that for any centre to be regarded as urban, it must be a centre of industry, increasing population, and commerce. Yet, in these various definitions, an important element in the rise of urban centres which appears implicit needs to be made more explicit. We therefore add that in addition to the above points, individual enterprise or entrepreneurship is a vital element in the rise of urban centres.

Another observation worthy of note is that most scholars tend not to be aware that urbanization, like nation building, is a plant of slow growth. An urban centre evolves gradually reaching various points at which it relies on different factors for growth. It is therefore difficult to accept <sup>the view</sup> that without a particular factor or criterion, urbanism could not emerge. In fact, from empirical evidence, what seems plausible is that the various criteria identified represent particular stages in the evolution of urban centres. Thus, such criteria as heterogeneity, writing, industrialization etc. only represent phases in the evolution of an urban centre. The point to note, however, is that one of the criteria could be the main engendering agent in the growth of a particular urban centre, while the other ones are attained as the centre evolves.

Some scholars, particularly those in the social sciences, tend to believe that urbanization produces predictable results. As a result, much of what they discuss regarding the causes and effects of urbanism are generalizations from the experience of industrialised countries. Empirical studies, however, often show that many of these generalizations are hasty. Indeed as implied above, urbanization produces different results in the developing and the developed worlds. For instance, while currently protection from the health hazards posed by industrial pollution seems to be the major problem arising from urban development in the developed countries, the problem in developing countries would seem to be the uncoordinated urban-rural development leading to rural-urban migration, urban poverty, unemployment and the rise of unmanageable slums<sup>11</sup>.

There is also the belief, mostly among social scientists, that urbanization breaks down ties especially those of family and kinship from which results new social classes and status groups<sup>12</sup>. This belief,



however, is not proven by empirical studies which shows that it is not all urban situations that produce such results. In her study of local government in Aba, Barbara Callaway noted this difference:

In the cities of the East the individual does not become lost or anonymous ... . It would be an abomination for an Igbo man to "disappear" into a city ... his clan improvement union, his town union and his extended family and kin groups would not permit this to happen. An Igbo man, in order to escape confining ties of family and tradition, must leave Eastern Nigeria entirely<sup>13</sup>.

Indeed even beyond the Igbo area, such a breakdown in kinship association is hardly accepted. This is because a man's family and kin groups expect him to contribute his own quota to their growth and development irrespective of his location<sup>14</sup>.

As to the question of when a settlement qualifies to be described as urban, we have contrasting views and there is no universally accepted standard of judgement. Worse still, the basis of judgement has nothing to do with whether a country is developed or developing. For instance, while in Nigeria a settlement with at least 5,000 people is regarded as a town,<sup>15</sup> the accepted figure in Sierra Leone and Kenya is 20,000. In the United States a settlement of 2,500 is regarded as urban while for most of the Scandinavian countries, a settlement of 200 people qualifies as an urban centre<sup>16</sup>.

In general, however, it seems certain that the rate of urbanization has been on the increase since early times. This can be seen from the fact that while only 2.4 per cent of the world's population lived in cities of 20,000 people or more in 1800, this had risen to 20.9 per cent by 1950<sup>17</sup>, and about 35 per cent by 1975. This

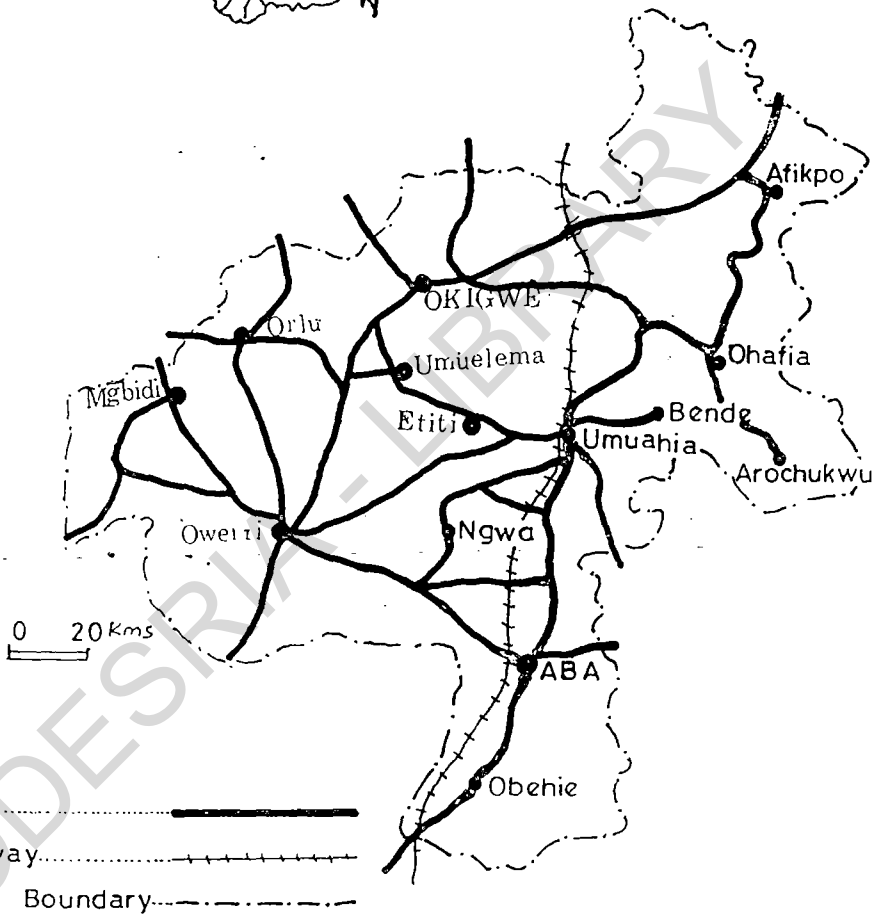
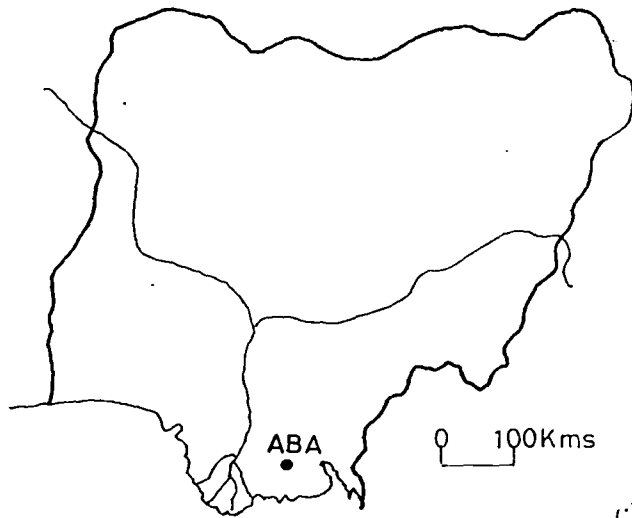
rate of growth, as earlier noted, has been increasing in the 20th Century. One part of the world where this 20th Century growth has been most spectacular is the area that was formerly known as Eastern Nigeria, especially the Igbo-speaking areas. This does not mean, however, that the people did not develop urban centres in the period before 1900 as is suggested or implied in certain works<sup>18</sup>. Urban centres were indeed developed, even though they may not have been as many and as large as those of the Yoruba to the West and Hausa to the North<sup>19</sup>. Some other centres which had not reached urban status were tending towards it by 1900, as was the case in Aba.

This trend towards urbanization was to receive a tremendous boost with the inception of colonial rule. Perhaps this was what Callaway had in mind when she wrote:

Most sociologists writing on the subject "urbanization" agree that the new West African urbanism is fundamentally the product of social changes resulting from western contact. These social changes may be conceived of in turn as a process of adaptation to new conditions, the end result being something akin to westernization. These new conditions have been created by European administrators, businessmen and Christian evangelists<sup>20</sup>.

This western factor no doubt played an important role in the growth of urban centres in Eastern Nigeria. Nevertheless, they did not act independently as internal factors responded to them and acted positively, to produce a fast rate of urbanization in the area. The relative importance of these internal factors, which have tended to be ignored, needs to be explored further.

POSITION OF ABA IN NIGERIA AND IMO STATE



Source: Adapted from Federal Survey Dept. 1961

## The Geographical Setting

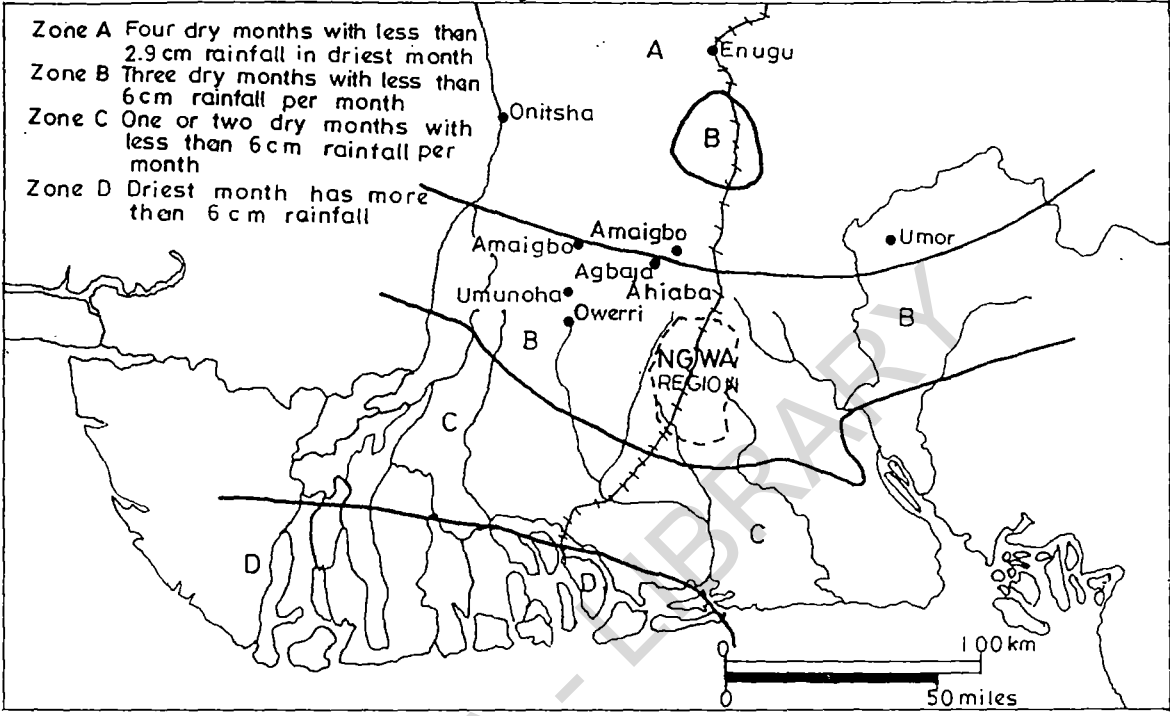
Aba is today the most important commercial centre in Imo State of Nigeria. For most of the colonial period, however, it was in Aba Division of Owerri Province until 1952, when it was part of Umuahia Province. In that same year, Aba itself was made an Urban District Council. However, with the creation of Imo State in 1976, and following the Local Government reforms of that year, the area has now become known as Aba Local Government Council. It is bounded on the West and South by Obioma Ngwa Local Government Council and on the North and East by Isiala Ngwa Local Government Council. Its Divisional neighbours in the period before 1960 were Bende of Owerri Province to the North, Calabar Province to the South, Ahoada and Owerri Divisions of Owerri Province to the West<sup>21</sup>

It is important to note that Aba occupied a central location vis-à-vis her neighbours, in the period before 1900. It should also be noted that the land area of Aba, like that of the entire Ngwa sub-group of the Igbo, is low-lying and undulating with an average altitude of about 200 feet above sea level. There are large areas of plains traversed by the Aba River in the South and the Imo River in the North. There is a wet and a dry season. While high humidity is experienced during the rainy season, the reverse is the case during the dry season. In general, temperatures are constantly high throughout the year. For instance, the hottest months of January and February have mean temperatures of 31°C and 33°C respectively while the wet months of June, July and October have temperatures of 27.4°C, 26.9°C and 26.4°C; <sup>respectively</sup> with an annual average temperature of about 30°C<sup>22</sup>.

In Aba, the rainy season starts from about April and continues through October, often with a short break in August. The early part of

### Rainfall zones south eastern Nigeria

- Zone A Four dry months with less than 2.9 cm rainfall in driest month
- Zone B Three dry months with less than 6 cm rainfall per month
- Zone C One or two dry months with less than 6 cm rainfall per month
- Zone D Driest month has more than 6 cm rainfall



Source:- Susan Martin

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the season as well as its ending are usually characterised by heavy storms accompanied by lightning. The annual rainfall of the area is about 350 inches. In fact, Aba, like the rest of Ngwaland, is well endowed with rainfall. In all therefore, Aba's climatic situation was and still is conducive to large scale human settlement. Both in terms of location and of climate, Aba, from very distant times, attracted population.

The point being stressed here is that within the indigenous setting, Aba had the conditions which were conducive to attracting people to settle in the area, initially to engage in agriculture, with later development of other occupations such as trading, craft production and hunting.

### Origins, Migrations and Settlement

The main features of oral evidence or traditions on the origin, migration and settlements at Aba deserve attention because they help to strengthen our view that Aba and Ngwaland in general had an early history of cosmopolitanism. The accounts on these aspects of Aba before 1900 indicate a civilization that had much interaction with groups outside the Ngwa cultural area. This is true despite the gaps which seem to render the traditions a matter of constant debate. Indeed such gaps are common in oral accounts about pre-colonial African societies and their constraints on historical reconstruction are well known.

The origins of the Ngwa (and so of the Aba) are linked with the migration stories of the Igbo generally. As noted by Elizabeth Isichei, the cradle of human habitation in the Igbo area was probably the Cross River and the Anambra Valley/Nsukka escarpment<sup>23</sup>. In her opinion, northern Igboland was the early nucleus of settlement. Her

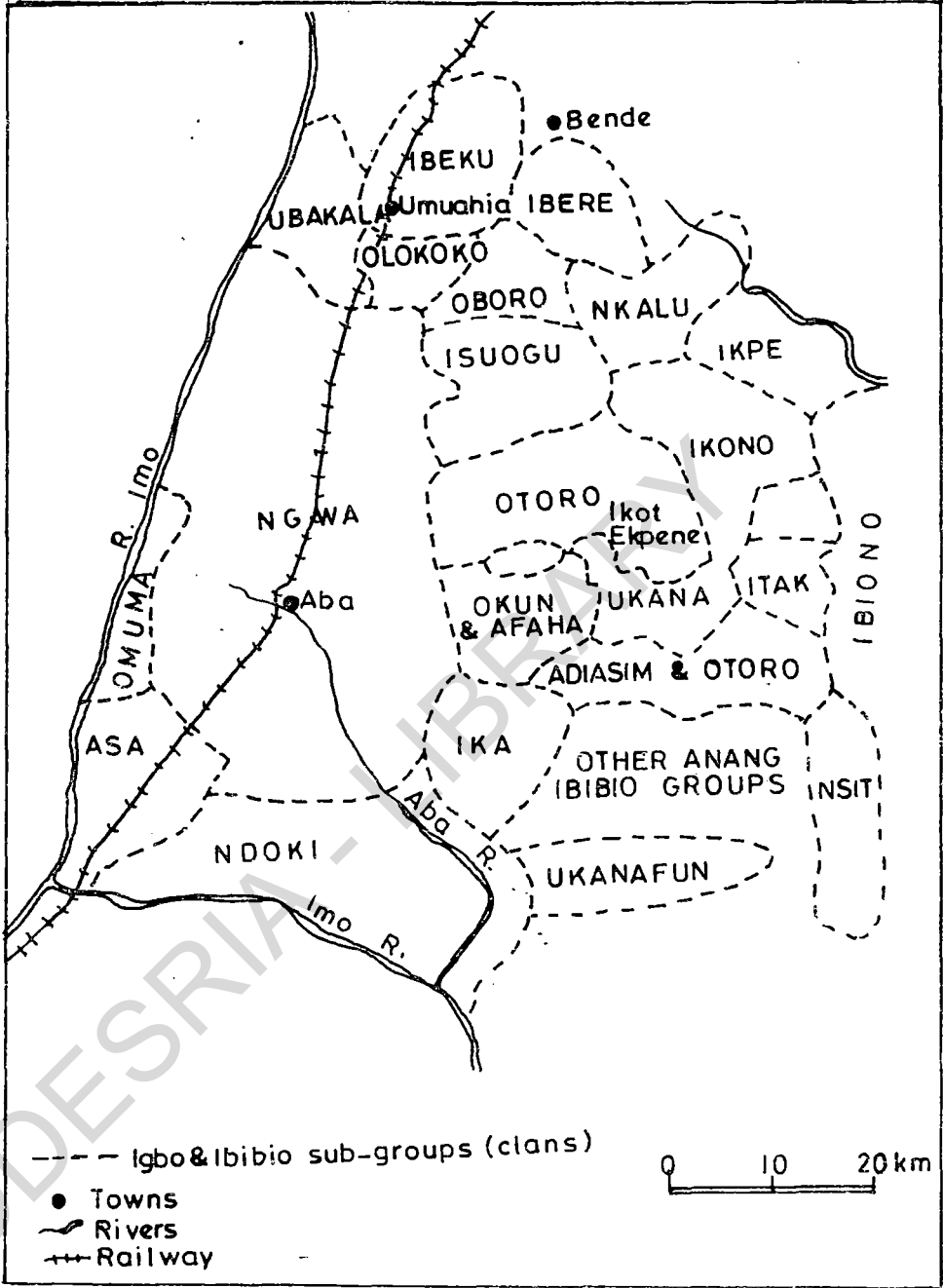
reasons for this conclusion need not bother us here as these have been adequately stated elsewhere<sup>24</sup>. But these proto-Igbo settlements, according to her, eventually dispersed more widely in the forest of Igboland concentrating especially in what later became known as Owerri, Okigwe, Orlu and Awka; an area which anthropologists and other scholars came to regard as the Igbo heartland. She adds that, as a result of increased population pressure on this heartland, several migrations out of the area were engendered. She concludes that it was one of these migrations that resulted in the formation of the Ngwa sub-group. This supports the earlier opinion of G.I Jones which she actually quoted:

One can assume an early dispersion from this centre to the Nsukka-Udi highlands in the east and early drift southwards towards the coast ... one can more positively distinguish a later and more massive dispersal which was mainly South-Eastwards ... into what is now the Eastern Isuama area. From this subsidiary dispersion area there was one movement South-East into the Aba Division to form the Ngwa group of tribes ... <sup>25</sup>.

It is clear from the above that both Isichei and G.I. Jones agree that the Ngwa migrated from the Igbo heartland; but they did not give the name of the area they migrated from, nor the period when the migration took place. Isichei, however, believes that the migrations must have taken place a long time ago, considering the extent to which the vegetation in the receiving area had been altered<sup>26</sup>.

A more detailed version of the origin of the Ngwa is that based on oral traditions collected by Mr. J.N. Nwaguru and Mr. J.G.C. Allen<sup>27</sup>. These traditions have been largely "corroborated" by the field interviews of this writer as well as other scholars<sup>28</sup>, thereby raising the question as to whether Nwaguru and Allen are not themselves

THE NGWA AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS 1930



Source: Susan Martin



the sources of most of the information obtained from recent interviews. Be that as it may, the traditions state that, the main body of the Ngwa Clan originated from a town called Umunoha in the former Owerri Division. According to the tradition, a number of people were travelling in search of new lands to settle. One day, the migrating party sat down by the banks of a small stream to take their evening meal. While they were preparing their food, the stream began to rise. Three of the travellers who were brothers quickly boiled their own yams, ate them hurriedly and crossed to the other side of the river with their belongings. The remaining ones who were roasting their own yams, instead of boiling them - a more lengthy process - delayed their departure until they were through with their meals. By this time, the river had risen to an impassable level. They could thus not follow their companions since they had no canoes or other means of water transportation. They were therefore forced to settle on the right bank of the river which from then became known as 'Imo' because of its sudden and swollen size. The three persons whose promptness enabled them to cross to the left side of the river were brothers named Ngwa Ukwu, Nwoha and Avosi in order of age. To them was given the name "Ngwa" on account of the expeditious manner of their crossing, while those who remained on the right bank were known as "Ohuhu", literally "he who roasts", to indicate the cooking method which led to their delay<sup>29</sup>.

The country to the left of the river where the migrant party entered was said to have been sparsely inhabited by people said to be Ibibios. These people received Ngwa Ukwu and his party peacefully and gave them sufficient land for their needs. Ngwa Ukwu settled at a place now called Umuolike where he established his ancestral shrine 'Ala Ngwa'. This shrine was housed in a small hut known as 'Okpu' from whence was derived the name Okpu-ala.

The three brothers, according to this tradition, lived peacefully in Okpu-ala Ngwa for a long time. As their families increased, they moved apart in different directions, Ngwa Ukwu's descendants founded the present villages of Ngwa Ukwu group; Nwoha's descendants the villages of the present groups of Umuoha, Mbutu Ovuokwu and Ovun-gwu while Avosi founded the villages of the Mvosi group, all around Okpuala Ngwa.

Colonial officials seem to have known of this migration story even before the 1933 intelligence reports of J.G.C. Allen. Writing in 1931 for instance, E.J.G. Kelly, District Officer for Aba Division, noted:

The greatest portion of the [Aba] Division is inhabited by the Ngwa sub-tribe. These people have no tradition as to their origin beyond a vague story of a migration from a country West of Imo River to a place now known as Okpuala - Ekelafor<sup>30</sup> in the Bende Division where a settlement was founded--Most villages claim to have migrated from Okpuala Ekelafor or its vicinity<sup>31</sup>.

According to the tradition, a secondary dispersal southwards from Okpuala occasioned essentially by land hunger led to the displacement of several Ibeme (Annang) settlements<sup>32</sup>. This southward push was initially accompanied by force. But following strong opposition by the Ibemes, a more peaceful method of penetration was adopted. These later migrations were in two waves. The first wave settled in the western area while the second settled in the south and south-western area forming respectively what was eventually referred to as south-western and south-eastern Ngwa groups of villages. Aba village was part of the south-eastern group. Its people migrated from Ngwa-Ukwu, Mvosi, Ovuokwu-na-Ovungwu, Ntigha and Amaogoro parent groups to the North. This migration was led by a man called Aba, after whom the village was named. They

were followed by other groups known as 'Ohazu', meaning "communities behind".

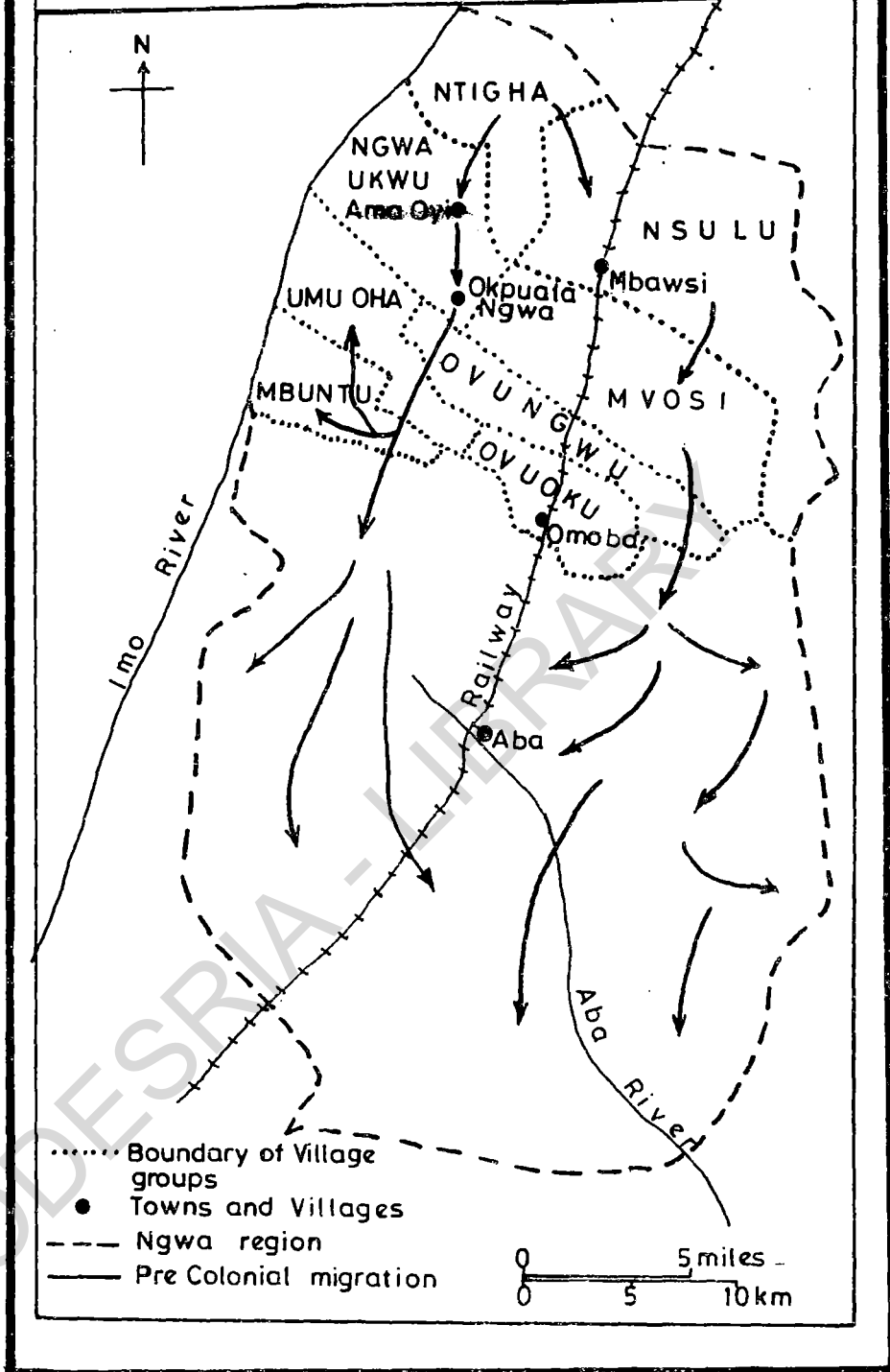
Oral tradition collected by this author in 1987 from Aba Ezes and Chiefs did not dispute the above story, but in fact, supplemented it. The supplementary traditions tell basically the same story but with differences of details about the children of Aba<sup>33</sup>. The traditions could be summarized as follows:

Aba is the name of a person. We do not know of any other person before him. He was our greatest ancestor and founder of Aba village. It was he who led the migrant groups from Ngwa Ukwu and other parent groups in the North to found the village of Aba in the South. Eziukwu and Obuda were his descendants; they formed their own communities as integral parts of the village.

It is not clear from the traditions whether Eziukwu and Obuda were the sons of Aba, his brothers or his grandchildren. One of the versions indicate that Eziukwu and Obuda were sons of Oha the first son of Aba<sup>34</sup>. The traditions also do not agree on who was Aba's first child. The version given by Eze Ogbonna indicates that Oha was the first son of Aba<sup>35</sup>, and was indeed the founder of the famous market which until the colonial period was a periodic market<sup>36</sup>. The version given by Chief Uzoigwe on the other hand indicates that one Ikeatukwu was the first son of Aba<sup>37</sup>. Both versions, however, agree that it was Oha that founded the Eke Oha market.

There is a third problem which has to do with the time when Aba was founded. While traditions fail to give any clues as to dates for the migrations, various sources and inferences have suggested some periodization for the migrations and thus the founding of Aba. Elizabeth Isichei, for instance, thinks that the migrations must have

NGWA NORTHERN VILLAGE GROUPS AND MAIN ROUTES OF PRE COLONIAL MIGRATION



Source:- Susan Martin

been of great antiquity<sup>38</sup>. J.N. Nwaguru drawing inferences from a statement by early British administrators (Harcourt and Koe) dated the secondary dispersal or migrations out of which Aba was founded to the last quarter of the 17th Century<sup>39</sup>. In the view of Orij, the origin of the Ngwa and the dispersals could be traced to a much earlier date. Drawing inferences from the works of Alagoa and others, he suggested a date of between the 13th and the end of the 14th Centuries as the possible date of the migrations leading to the settlement of the area<sup>40</sup>. However, since several population movements and migrations took place, and since that leading to the founding of Aba was one of the very last in Ngwaland, we could conclude that Aba was founded sometime between the 13th and 17th Centuries with the particular date being closer to the end of the 17th than to the 13th Century.

Evidence from other sources seems to support our position. It has been shown, for instance, that the Ngwa country and Aba were already well settled by the time of the Aro dominance of the slave trade and other hinterland trading activities. According to Ekejiuba who carried out extensive research on the Aro, some of this in conjunction with K.O. Dike, the foundations of Aro long distance trade were laid about mid-17th Century shortly after the Aro Society was constituted<sup>41</sup>.

Aba and his followers on arrival settled on a location very close to the Aza River. Tradition indicates that the people built their settlement facing the river. Elizabeth Isichei seems to think that there was no settlement in Aba in the pre-colonial times. According to her, "Aba in pre-colonial times, was a market - Eke-Oha, near the head of canoe navigation on the Aba (Aza) River, but not a settlement"<sup>42</sup>. This is compatible with our position that the area of settlement, which she refers to as market, was a place facing the Aza

River. The market must have been preceded by a settlement. A market is usually created out of the economic necessities of the people to assemble at a point where producers and consumers could meet to either exchange goods for goods or goods for any means of exchange. Moreover, as already stated, all versions of the people's tradition agree that Eke Oha market was founded by Oha who, in one version, is described as the first son of Aba the leader of the migrant group<sup>43</sup>. Aba was thus a settlement near the Aza river and not merely a market.

It is, however, not very clear from the traditions why the people chose a settlement so close to the Aza river since there was adequate rainfall all the year round. Most Igbo groups were afraid of river-borne attacks and tended to prefer settling away from rivers and streams<sup>44</sup>. The best explanations we have for this riverine choice in the Ngwa case are gleaned from the traditions. We are told that there was land hunger, and hence the people moved in search of fertile land. It is thus possible that they thought of an all the year round fertility of the soil even in the unlikely event of a drought in the area. This may have enhanced the advantages of the river as a means of transportation for the people, over the potential use of it by their enemies. It is also possible that the people hoped to get all<sup>the</sup> year round drinking water from the river. Security seems to have been one of the least considerations by the Aba migrant party. The flat topography of the area as well as the river could not have provided good security against hostile neighbours or adventurous power seekers from afar. The topography however encouraged a dispersed settlement pattern among the people in preference to a nucleated pattern of settlement.

This survey of Aba origins, migrations and settlement gives us some idea as to when Aba came into existence as an autonomous community, and therefore indicates how old Aba is. It also enables us

to understand better, why in the early part of the colonial period, Eziukwu and Obuda chiefs were more involved and concerned in the politics of colonial land acquisitions, as well as the compensations arising therefrom, than the other chiefs. Moreover, it helps us to explain why even today, Eze Dike of the Ohazu Community which is in fact, part of Aba township would readily refer to Eze J.G.N. Ogbonna as the authentic person who can speak on issues concerning the remote past, as well as the recent history of Aba<sup>45</sup>. In general, a thorough understanding of the traditions is an essential ingredient in the appreciation of the developments in Aba both during our period and after.

### Social and Political Situation

The Ngwa of Aba as part of the Igbo had most of the organisational features usually associated with the people. Therefore, a detailed analysis of the social and political structure is not considered necessary here<sup>46</sup>. Instead, attention is drawn to some significant elements of the social and political situation in Aba on the eve of British conquest. The emphasis on these elements is to demonstrate the social and political developments which affected the life of the people and conditioned their response to changes in the town after the inception of colonial rule.

Like most of Igbo society, Aba had a social and political organisation based on the lineage, ranging from the family, through the extended family, to the village and village group. The lineage was patrilineal. At all levels of the socio-political structure decisions on the ordering of affairs were based on the consensus of the people concerned in the village assemblies. However, each assembly had at its core an inner council known as the *ama ala* consisting of lineage heads, title holders, and other wise, respected elders who are selected ad hoc. Public matters are openly discussed, and at the end of the

debate, the *ama ala* withdraws for consultation. After that, a spokesman who is a reputable orator announces the decision. In other words, it was a society in which dictatorship or autocratic rule was abhorred. Though factors like wealth, age, religion and title holding gave people some social and political advantages, the principle of consensus was not abandoned. It remained on the eve of British rule, a virile aspect of social and political activity in Aba. It also meant that Aba society was one in which all groups and individuals had almost an unlimited freedom to participate in the legislative, executive and judicial affairs. Specific illustrations of this can be found in the operations of age grades, the Okonko society and the judiciary—all institutions which markedly influenced life in Aba after 1900.

Age grades were an important institution through which village authority and justice was maintained. People who were born in the same period belonged to particular age grades. There were thus senior and junior age grades, the age difference being usually between two and three years. One of the reasons for adopting this method of grouping was to ensure that two brothers did not belong to the same age grade. However, one could move from a junior to a senior age grade through the payment of certain fees which included cash, drinks, goat and even yams<sup>47</sup>. Sometimes two age grades may merge as a result of the substantial reduction in the membership of one of them through the death of its members in war, famine or natural causes. But even in this regard, the remaining members of the older group still remained distinct for certain functions or purposes. Each age grade guarded its good name jealously and thus tried to maintain discipline in its ranks. Among the names used by age grades in Aba at this time were *Oka-ome*; *Igwe-buiké* and *Igbo-kwenu*.



Age grades performed a variety of functions in social, political and even economic spheres aimed at ensuring not only the well-being of their members, but also of the community in general. Often, duties were assigned to particular age grades according to their experience, number of members and stamina. In general, junior age grades were usually allocated duties that required a lot of physical exertion such as construction and maintenance of paths and roads, markets, village squares, fighting wars, performing police duties as well as farming for the chiefs. Of course, in addition, they were expected to settle minor cases involving their members while serious cases were usually referred to organs such as the Village Assembly. On the other hand senior age grades gave advice to the junior ones, provided money and material assistance required for effective societal work, provided occasional hospitality in appreciation of any job that was well done by a particular age grade and also sent representatives to village council meetings. This responsibility for social service by the age grades was carried into the colonial period and could be said to have laid a good foundation for the different self-help activities which the residents of Aba engaged in after 1900.

Secret societies were also an important socio-political institution in Aba on the eve of European conquest and remained so for many years after 1900. As a result, their influence on life in Aba during the colonial period was quite significant. Of the secret societies that existed, the Okonko Society would seem to have occupied a pride of place. The origin of the Okonko is not very clear, but it is generally believed to have been introduced by Arochukwu traders. It is thought to have developed from the Ekpe Society which originated from the Ekoi area and spread to the Cross-River estuary by the early 18th Century<sup>48</sup>. It is believed that Ekpe must have spread to the neighbouring Arochukwu where it became known as Okonko.

Evidence indicates that it was from the Aro that Okonko eventually entered Aba<sup>49</sup>.

It would appear that the Okonko was a society basically for the wealthy and influential members of the society. Indeed its pioneers were wealthy traders who had trading and oracular relations with the Aro; hence they were called "friends of the Aro": Enyi Ndi Aro<sup>50</sup>. Its members were mostly title holders in the community. One had to be of good character and also a prosperous yam farmer before one was admitted into the Okonko. The number of yams a man had to own ranged from about one thousand upwards. In fact, the Eze Okonko - Chief of Okonko - must also be the Ezeji - the chief of yam owners<sup>51</sup>. This was a very important title in the village even though the Eze Okonko was not the president of Okonko. For ahead of him in rank, was the person who got the secret symbol of the society, Ngbara from the Aro. He was known as the Eze Ngbara or President. There were also multi-title holders known as Ndi Akalabu.

Below the Eze Okonko, however, were the yet-to-be initiated known as the Okpo. It has also been said that beyond being a wealthy yam owner, one also needed to present a human head to the Society before being admitted<sup>52</sup>. This latter entry requirement has been held responsible for many of the head hunting incidents in Aba both before and after the inception of colonial rule. The Okonko performed various roles in the community which were not only judicial/administrative in nature, but also included some commercial functions. The judicial role would seem to have had modest beginnings. But with time, the Okonko began to play a more crucial role and evolved an effective machinery for discipline. Initially, they tried only cases involving their members. But as their powers and influence grew in the 19th Century, particularly in the second half, they began to be involved in the settlement of certain types of cases

involving even non-members, such as witchcraft, theft, adultery, slavery etc, formerly handled by authority holders such as the Ezeala and his agents<sup>53</sup>. In fact, as the efficacy and potency of its judicial administration grew, some individuals began to by-pass the village assembly and take their cases to the Okonko, thus encouraging the Okonko to usurp some functions of the Amala, a situation which persisted until the colonial period. However, the possession of an independent law enforcement organ by the Okonko was seen by the authority holders as an encroachment on their prerogatives. As a result, they were very suspicious of the activities of the Okonko. Matters were made worse because, while the decisions of the Amala or village council could not be enforced outside the boundaries of the village, those of the Okonko could<sup>54</sup>. This was because Okonko members, wherever they were, recognised the role and activities of fellow members, and since they were mostly the well-to-do in their areas, they could easily mobilise to defend their interest. It was not until the early part of the colonial period that the Okonko and the authority holders were able to reconcile their differences. This was possible because at that time, both groups found themselves on one side, against a common enemy, namely: "the warrant chiefs".

The Okonko also played a very important role whenever the village was at war with any of its neighbours. During such times, it was often the duty of the society to select those who went to fight in defence of the village. It was very uncommon to find people disobeying the orders of the Okonko. Whoever dared to refuse such instructions was usually seized and sold into slavery.

As noted above, the Okonko also performed some commercial functions in the community. As a matter of fact, if one considers the roles the Okonko played in commerce, one would be tempted to conclude that among other reasons, the Aro may have introduced

Okonko into Aba and Ngwaland specifically to protect their trading interests in those areas. Thus in Aba as in other areas, the Okonko did not only help members economically, but also had an interesting trading collaboration with the Aro. It got to the extent that membership of the society "could confer a pan-Igbo commercial passport on its holder"<sup>55</sup>, and nearly all prominent Ngwa and Aro businessmen became members of the Okonko.

The commercial functions of the Okonko were performed in various ways. First, to ensure smooth and uninterrupted trade, Okonko members expanded old roads and even built new ones. They also provided security on those roads, many of which were strategic ones, and also major trade routes. They built toll-collection points and their club houses on the routes. At the security check points, Okonko members collected tolls from passing traders. In the same vein, Aro members who were long distance traders stopped at Okonko club houses for accommodation as well as hospitality from colleagues. Often, a lot of eating, drinking and dancing took place in the club houses; and passing Aro traders participated in the merriment, a factor which usually delayed their movements<sup>56</sup>. Eventually, when they were ready to move, colleagues often helped them (the Aro) to acquire some of the goods needed, particularly slaves. These activities helped significantly in the furtherance of Aro trade in the area on the eve of European conquest.

Other commercial activities undertaken by Okonko members included debt collection whereby the society helped both members and non-members in collecting debts owed them by their trading partners. This was usually done after the payment of a commission. In this way, they helped to ensure that cases of 'bad debt' which could lead to serious quarrels and possible disruptions in trade were avoided.

Even though the Okonko is believed to have had its roots in the Ekpe Society, it would seem that the Ekpe eventually infiltrated Aba as a separate society. This is so because tradition speaks of the Ekpe as a secret society in Aba, though lower in status than the Okonko<sup>57</sup>. The Ekpe, according to tradition, dealt mainly with the problem of sorcery in the land. Those in the society were credited with the ability to identify and monitor evil minded people in the community. They were taught how to protect themselves from being harmed or poisoned by witches. They wore special costumes, performed various kinds of rituals and were recognised even in neighbouring towns and accorded special respect.

By 1900, therefore, secret societies, particularly the Okonko, were important elements in the life of the people. Their existence was to influence events significantly after 1900 because they played a very important role in the coming and settling of many Arochukwu traders in Aba, and were thus an important agent in inter-group relations. They influenced both before and during our period, the course and extent of trade, first by controlling some aspects of the trade, and secondly, by their demand for high entrance fees which made people to seek wealth through trading and farming. Their demand for a human head from new entrants was to be a source of insecurity in the history of Aba in the period before and after 1900. They could also be said to be one of the earliest protesters against the imposition of colonial rule, as their opposition against new governmental structures, which tended to undermine their power and influence, became an important feature of the early period of colonial administration in the area.

Like the Okonko, Oracles were an important institution of judicial administration in pre-colonial Aba. This meant that they also faced the same problems as the Okonko with the inception of colonial

rule. The most important of the oracles was the Aro oracle, also known in various circles as "Chukwu, Ibini Ukpabi, Long juju and Almighty God<sup>58</sup>". Because of the belief in its super-natural power and because the people generally believed in the efficacy of supernatural forces, much fear and respect was accorded the oracle at Arochukwu. Another oracle from whom justice was sought just before 1900 was the Igwe-ka-Ala oracle at Umuahia. Cases were sent to either of these oracles, especially that at Arochukwu for adjudication. Many also visited the Ibini Ukpabi oracle in search of solutions to problems associated with poor harvest, illness, epidemics and female barrenness. It also acted as a court of appeal in many cases.

In order to strengthen their relations with delegates, the oracle's agents received them hospitably and in some cases gave the leader of the group a symbol of the oracle which enabled him to establish a shrine of the deity (Ihu Chukwu) in his compound where he performed sacrifices for people who could not afford to travel to Arochukwu to consult the oracle<sup>59</sup>. This situation was a clear demonstration of the inter-woven nature of religion and justice in Aba in the pre-colonial period, a situation which continued into the early decades of colonial rule. With the inception of British rule however, activities of the oracles, particularly the Aro oracle, were seriously undermined and eventually eclipsed by new administrative structures set up by the British. In the process, agents of the oracle were forced to engage in new roles in the growth of Aba.

### Economic Situation

Several studies have shown that before the European presence, pre-colonial African economies were dynamic economies, engaged in the production and sale of numerous goods, after the subsistence needs had been taken care of. These studies, particularly those of Walter Rodney, Bade Onimode and A.G. Hopkins<sup>60</sup> have also shown that these economies aimed at fostering self-sustained economic development before their contacts with the West disrupted, distorted, discouraged and eventually reversed this developmental path. The result was that by the time of the establishment of formal colonial rule most of these economies had become dependent on the West for direction and sustenance, and this had unfortunate consequences for the areas concerned.

Aba's economy in the pre-colonial period was not an exception to this rule, except, perhaps that, while the spirit of enterprise would appear to have been damaged, this quality survived in Aba and was to be responsible for tremendous economic developments in later years.

On the eve of the European presence, agriculture was the dominant occupation of the people. Nearly all citizens of working age were engaged in agriculture either directly or in related fields. The area settled by the Ngwa was located in the forest zone and, as noted above, land was fertile for agriculture. Access to land, and land tenure were governed by laws of inheritance<sup>61</sup>. There was adequate supply of labour, provided by members of both the nuclear and the extended family. The technology available to the people was basically a simple one which involved the use of such tools as cutlasses and hoes.

Agriculture was practised at various levels. First, there was the compound level which has also been referred to as kitchen

gardening<sup>62</sup>. Under compound agriculture, mixed farming was practised. Crops such as vegetables, tomatoes, pepper, etc. were cultivated along with poultry keeping and animal husbandry. Homestead tree crop farming involving fruit trees such as oranges, mangoes, avocado pear, African pear, cocoa, oil palm, or raffia palm was also carried on. It was mainly the men who exploited raffia palms and engaged in animal husbandry, while the women kept poultry and cultivated crops such as pepper, vegetables and tomatoes.

A second form of farming among the people during the period has been described as "farmland farming"<sup>63</sup>. This involved cropping on a fairly large scale on farmlands located some distance away from where the people were living. Here, food crops such as casava, yams, cocoyams, vegetables, maize, etc. were cultivated. Women and children performed a very important role in this type of farming. They cultivated, weeded and, when ripe, harvested the crops. The main interest of the men was to tend and harvest yams. Yam was a very important commodity and every man nursed the ambition of becoming an Ezeji (the largest yam owner in the village). In like manner, cocoyam (Ede) was a very important crop for women and it was the desire of most women to have a large collection of cocoyam which would enable them to aspire to the title of (Ezeede).

Besides domesticated crops, what one might call "wild crop agriculture" was also practised. Like other parts of Ngwaland, Aba was endowed abundantly with wild palm trees. What is now the industrial area where factories such as Nigerian Breweries are located was a great palm oil belt in the pre-colonial period. Exploiting the palm trees involved the men climbing the palm trees to cut their bunches of palm nuts. Women and children went round the bush to collect the harvested palm fruits and carry to the compound. Here the women removed the palm fruits from the bunches and cooked them.



The cooked fruits were then poured into a mortar dug into the ground. Sometimes, the fruits were pounded by the women, but most times by the men. Palm oil was eventually pressed out into calabashes from the pounded fruits by women and children.

Besides agriculture, the people also engaged in crafts such as wood carving as well as different types of weaving. The extent of the development of the craft industries in Aba would seem to have been modest when compared to some other Igbo areas or the Ibibios of the Cross River. In fact, Aba's location on the route to the Rivers and Cross River areas enabled it to gain a lot of weaving and carving ideas and techniques from these places through the process of diffusion. Thus various kinds of woods were used for carving title symbols, masks and various wooden objects representing the deities. Other items carved included *Ekwe* (drum), *Ikwe* (mortar) *Odo* (pestle), *Oche* (chair) etc. Products weaved included sleeping mats, baskets, bags called *Akpa Ngwo*, roofing mats called *Akirika* etc. The raffia palm was used in making some of the products while others were made from certain plants near the Aza river such as '*Ugo*' and '*Ukpo*'. With regard to textiles, Ikembe or Akwete cloth was made in the form of modern towel ostensibly influenced by the 'Akwetes' who were their neighbours on the Rivers route. Other products made included calabash decorations and ropes. For metal implements, it appears that the people depended mainly on Awka and Abriba blacksmiths who settled among the villagers<sup>65</sup>; even though a few Aba people also engaged in it. Products made included knives, bracelets, metal gongs etc.

Labour was not a problem in pre-colonial Aba. Labour was provided by a man's nuclear family and his extended family. Those with large farms, for instance *Ezejis* and chiefs hired the services of age-grade associations. The age grades were given food and

entertainment, but no money was paid for their services. The chiefs and other well-to-do people also acquired slaves to work both within the households and also on the farms. Some non-titled people also had slaves. For instance, women who had no children acquired female slaves who, through encouraged interaction with young men in the community, bore children, and also worked for them. Some slaves were kept for security purposes, that is, they acted as body-guards for their owners and were also used when there was war.

The slaves were acquired in various ways such as raids, wars and kidnapping. Kidnapping strangers would seem to have been the most widespread method of acquiring slaves in the 19th Century. Various categories of people from within the community were also sold into slavery to strangers or neighbours. People who committed abominable offences or were regarded as ill omen for the community - for example, those who gave birth to twins, those born with their legs instead of their heads first, those whose teeth grew out first from the lower jaw instead of from the upper jaw, people who were found guilty of poisoning other people etc. There is no evidence that the people enslaved their own kin.<sup>66</sup> On the contrary, they bought slaves from outside sources particularly the Aro, who, in turn, took slaves from the area and sold to other lands.<sup>67</sup> Whatever the source, the point to note is that domestic slavery existed in Aba, though not in the same form as in the 'New World' during the Atlantic Slave Trade. People could, in fact, move from slavery to free-born, for instance, children born of slaves automatically became free and people could also buy themselves out of slavery by paying ransom.

By and large, this adequate labour supply which was a dominant feature of pre-colonial society in Aba was to be an important factor in the town's growth and development after 1900.

Contrary to the opinion of some scholars that the so-called stateless societies produced only for subsistence,<sup>68</sup> the economy of Aba conformed with Hopkin's characterisation of pre-colonial African economies as dynamic economies which operated beyond the subsistence level.<sup>69</sup> The people had to sell their surplus produce and also purchase those things which they could not produce. But in Aba, as in other parts of Ngwaland, the people acknowledged a difference between 'marketing' *Izu-ahia* by which it is meant local trading, and 'trading' *Igba ubiri-ahia* by which they meant long distance trading. The bulk of Aba people, up till the eve of European conquest, engaged mainly in the local exchange of agricultural and craft products, while only a few engaged in long distance trading.

The market where the exchange took place in Aba was the *Eke Oha* market which, until the colonial period, was a periodic market which was held usually every 5th day, that is, *Eke* market day. The *Eke Oha* market was a central Market which served the people of Aba as well as those from neighbouring villages. This was a characteristic of big village group markets, while smaller village markets served individual villages only.<sup>70</sup> Neighbouring markets in the same class as *Eke Oha* during this time included *Orie Ntigha*, *Orie Ukwu Amorji*, *Orie Abala*, *Orie Obegu* and *Eke Akpara*. Some Aba people frequented these markets for business transactions. Of them all, *Eke Akpara* appeared to have been the favourite of Aba people, even though *Orie Obegu*, some eighteen kilometres to the South of Aba was probably the most important.<sup>71</sup>

The main articles of trade included surplus farm products like palm oil, palm kernels, vegetables, pepper, yams, cocoyams, maize etc. The products were usually taken to the market by human portage through foot paths. With regard to means of exchange, several commodities were adopted side by side. Barter was the most consistent

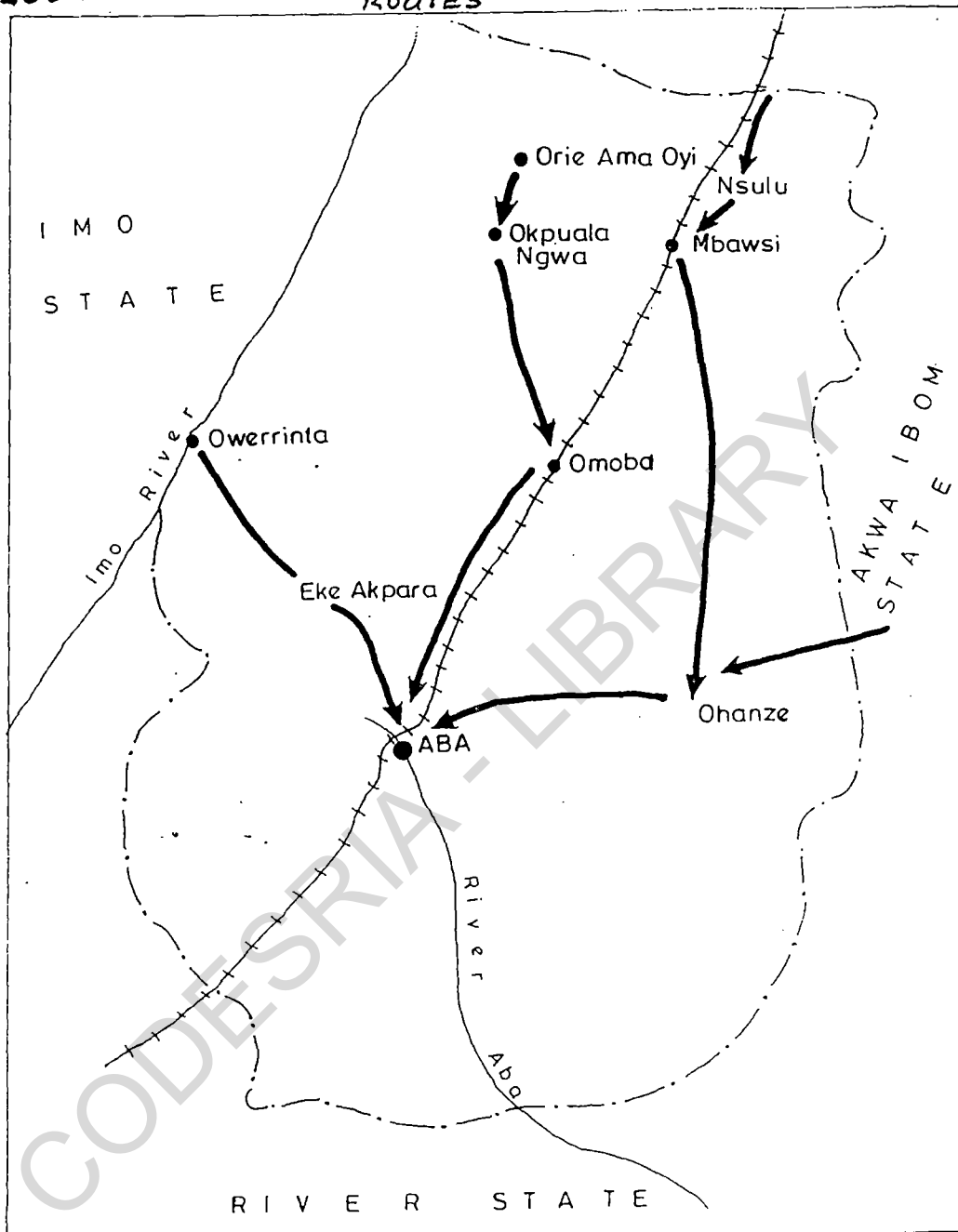
of the means of exchange used; and this continued well into the 20th Century. Cowrie shells which at one point was the most important currency,<sup>72</sup> had by the eve of the 20th Century, largely been overtaken by manillas. In fact, manillas became so popular in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, that they constituted a big threat to the introduction of European money as most Africans preferred transacting their business with manillas.

#### Long Distance Trade and the Trend towards Urbanism

Before the 18th Century, trade was largely localized within Aba and between Aba and other neighbouring Ngwa villages. From the 18th Century however, the nature and scope of trade in Aba as in other parts of Ngwaland witnessed very significant changes. By this time, trading activities had expanded to include long distance trading. The need for long distance trade arose because the people of Aba could not produce all they needed as they had to supplement their production with imports from other Igbo groups, the Ibibios of the Cross River and from the coastal areas. For instance, they got livestock and metal products from Igbo areas of Mbaise, Umuahia and Owerri—all centres of dense population in Igboland.<sup>73</sup> Some of those goods came from further a-field. From the Ibibio, they imported craft products such as baskets and carved wooden products. From the Delta, they got salt both the locally produced and the imported varieties imported from Europe, and other European products.

In exchange for all these, Aba people sold agricultural produce such as yams, plantains, palm oil, pepper and slaves. But the imports from the Delta and Ibibio areas were not all used up in Aba. Some of these were moved further inland to Mbaise, Owerri and Umuahia areas. Some of the Delta products were also sold to the Ibibios. In this way therefore, Aba people and traders became middlemen in the trade between the Igbos, the Ibibios and the peoples of the Delta.<sup>74</sup> This was

LOCATION OF THE RAILWAY-LINE IN RELATION TO PRE-COLONIAL TRADE ROUTES



Produced by the Author.

a very important development which had far-reaching consequences for the trend towards urbanization.

Like other Ngwas, the people of Aba were not experts in long distance trade. Yet geographical imperatives, as we have seen, bestowed middlemen position on them. There was thus a need to have long distance traders who would serve the requirements of long distance trade. The traders who took up this position were those from Arochukwu, Bende, Bonny and Opobo. It was however Arochukwu and Opobo traders, particularly the Aro, that became the principal agents in the long distance trade.

Pre-19th Century, long distance trade in Aba was dominated by the Aro. They are believed to have learnt the art of long distance trade, ahead of other Igbo groups, from the Akpa. The origin of the Aro and their oracle need not delay us here, but it is believed that by the middle of the 17th Century, the foundations of Aro long distance trade had been laid.<sup>75</sup> From then till the end of the 19th Century, the Aro were to achieve a remarkable economic ascendancy in the area, a situation which some have attributed to their dominant, if not monopolistic, role as middlemen in the traffic in slaves.<sup>76</sup> The Aro were always interested in highly priced, non-perishable goods because of the long duration of their journeys. Thus, while they took mainly slaves from Aba and its neighbours, they brought in firearms of all descriptions, ammunition, hats, tobacco, bells, blankets, silk, real Indian madras etc.

A number of trade routes served this long distance trade. One route began at Nsulu through Mbawsi to Ndiolumbe through Ohanze to Ogbor Hill in Aba. Another route took off from Owerrinta across the Imo River, through Ugba junction and Eke Akpara to Aba. Another originated from Ibibio land and joined the Mbawsi—Ohanze route to

Aba. A final one passed through Orié Amorji, through Okpuala Ngwa to Omoba, through Ogbor Hill to Aba.<sup>77</sup>

Aro hegemony over the trade in Aba was challenged in the 19th Century by the advent of Opobo and Bonny traders known as the Ubanis, who by this time had begun to move inland. Unlike the Aros, the Opobo and Bonny were mainly interested in palm oil which at the time had become the most important commodity of trade on the coast. These two groups came to Aba through the Aza and Imo rivers. Using explosives acquired from the Europeans, they were able to make these rivers navigable<sup>78</sup>. They bought palm oil in Aba which they transported in canoes to Opobo and Bonny. In turn, they brought various types of ornaments, beads, spirits and other products.

The Eke Oha market which, as we noted above, served local traders was also the major market that served long distance trade. In fact, the market was transformed in the 19th Century when it operated both as an important central and a border market. Its strategic location at the head of the Aza river, bordering Ogbor Hill, enabled it to serve both Aro and Bende traders as well as Bonny and Opobo long distance traders.

However, the needs of long distance traders were more than could be satisfied by the existence of a popular and well frequented market. The traders also needed accommodation where they would settle down on their arrival, rest, wash up and eat before going to the market. They also needed somewhere to keep the goods brought by them, before it was taken to the market; and those bought by them before they embarked on their homeward journey.

It was these important needs that gave rise to <sup>the</sup> establishment of trading settlements around the Aza river (near the market ) and Ogbor

Hill. Many Bende and Aro traders acquired land from their Aba trading partners and chiefs for settlement. But it was Opobo and Bonny traders who excelled in this practice. This was because a settled accommodation in Aba was crucial for any meaningful and successful engagement in palm oil trade because palm oil was a very bulky commodity. So they too, like the Igberre Bende and Aro acquired land from Aba chiefs and trading agents. It was in this way that there developed a flourishing settlement of the indigenous Aba people, other Igbos from Bende and Arochukwu, as well as elements from Bonny and Opobo all served by the Eke Oha market which became the focal and nodal point. Two prominent families from these groups were those of Chief Offiong Jumbo of Opobo whose Opobo section eventually became known as Jumbo's waterside, and Chief Fred Green of Bonny who was in charge of Green's waterside.<sup>79</sup>

### Conclusion

On the basis of heterogeneity and permanent settlement, the trend towards Urbanism was already on, the result of long distance trade and the needs of traders. It is pertinent to note that when the policy of British penetration through "effective occupation" began, it was in this same area that the British acquired land where they eventually established a consulate and garrison. This is in line with the agglomeration theory in which centres of economic activity often attracted new ones. Agglomeration, it must be noted, is an important agent in the trend towards urbanism. Indeed European methods of expansion always sought out such economic centres as the first step towards penetration and eventual acquisition.

Up till the end of the 19th Century, Aro, Opobo and Bonny traders dominated the long distance trade and made profit therefrom. Up till that time, there was no trading contact worth mentioning



between Aba people and the Europeans on the coast. Attempts by European traders, especially the Royal Niger Company to gain access into the hinterland areas, including Aba, were cleverly resisted by these groups. Alex Miller of Miller Brothers seemed to have realized this when he attributed the failure of British traders to attract patronage to the "Oath of fealty which had been given to the interior tribes by Opobo people not to trade with anybody outside their trade circle, European or African".<sup>80</sup> Sir George Goldie was later to lament how the Aro had been a thorn in the flesh of the Royal Niger Company preventing it from establishing a trade monopoly in its interior territories. Commenting on Moor's proposal for an expedition into the Aro Country, he wrote:

The question of the Umuchukwu's power (the Aro) has been constantly before me for the last twenty years. I believe that Sir Ralph Moor no doubt to avoid any appearance of exaggeration understates the extent of their influence . . . . If the Royal Niger Company had had a free hand, they would have made the over-throw of this power their aim on receiving the Charter in 1886 but in view of the Aro Country containing the markets of all the principal Oil Rivers (except Benin) any such action was for political reasons inadvisable and especially after the formation of the Oil Rivers Protectorate within which the centre of the long Juju lies.<sup>81</sup>

Even though these colonial officials may well have been exaggerating because they were making a case for the assault on the Aro, it is however clear that Aro domination of trade in Aba as well as other interior areas was disliked by British traders. It is not surprising therefore that by 1900, the British saw the conquest of the Aro and penetration into the Igbo hinterland as the major task before them. This thinking was to affect the history of Aba in a very fundamental way.

## Notes

1. Louis Wirth, 'Urbanism as a way of Life' American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 44 No. 2, 1938. P. 8.
2. V.G. Childe, 'Civilization, Cities and Towns' Antiquity, Vol. 31, 1957, PP. 36-38
3. G. Sjoberg, The Pre-Industrial City: Past and Present, Illinois, 1960. P. 33.
4. See G.I. Trewartha, 'Japanese Cities, Distribution and Methodology' Geographical Review, Vol. 24, No. 3, 1934. P. 406.
5. A.L. Mabongunje, Urbanization in Nigeria, London, 1968 P. 33
6. Ibid, P. 175.
7. On theories of Urbanization, see Ibid. PP. 175-184.
8. Ibid, P. 36
9. Ibid.
10. Cited in Margaret Peil, Consensus and Conflict in African Societies: An Introduction to Sociology, London, 1971. P. 262.
11. Bode Olowoporoku, 'National Development Approach to Urban System in Nigeria'. ODU; A Journal of West African Studies, No. 17 Jan. 1978. P. 85.
12. See Peter Gutkind, 'The African Urban Milieu: A force in Rapid Change' Civilizations, XII, 2, 1962. PP. 167 - 191; Monica Wilson and Archie Mofege, Langa, A Study of Social Groups in an African Township, Oxford, 1963. P. 172.
13. Babara Callaway, 'Confusion and Diffusion in Local Government. A case Study of Aba', (Ph.D. Thesis Boston, 1970). P. 227.
14. On December 26 1988, for instance, the Author attended his people's Village Meeting where an ultimatum was given that all citizens of the village in whatever city in Nigeria should form a branch of the village meeting called Obi wuru otu (Litt. Let our mind be the same), even if such a branch was made up of only one person.

15. See Population Census of the Eastern Region of Nigeria, 1953. Lagos, 1956. P. 20.
16. Margaret Peil, Op. Cit., P. 262.
17. Kingsley Davies, 'The Origin and Growth of Urbanization in the World', American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 60 March 1955 P. 434.
18. See for instance, A.L. Mabogunje: Op.Cit. PP. 44 - 68; A.E. Afigbo: 'The Eastern Provinces under Colonial Rule' in Obaro Ikime (Ed): Groundwork of Nigeria History, Ibadan, 1980 P. 427.
19. There were many Pre-European Urban Centres in Igboland. Nike and Awka are very good examples. A recent study has also shown that Nnewi reached an urban status also in the pre-colonial period. See D.I. Ajaegbu, 'The Evolution of Nnewi: An Historical study in Urban Development', (M.A. Thesis, History U.N.N. 1981).
20. Babara Callaway, P. 206. See also Thomas Hodgkins, Nationalism in Colonial Africa New York, 1956. PP 63-84.
21. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1158, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1938. P. 3.
22. E.M. Ezera, 'The Hydrology of an Urban Area: A Study of the Impact of Urbanization on storm run off in Aba' (B.Sc. Geography U.N.N., 1981).
23. Professor Isichei based this assertion on the evidence from excavations at Afikpo and Nsukka. See Elizabeth Isichei, A History of the Igbo People London, 1976. P. 3; See also Danald D. Hartle, 'The pre-history of Nigeria' (Mimeo), Nsukka, 1973. PP 64-6.
24. Ibid. See also L. Frobenius, The Voice of Africa 1 (1913) PP. 274-5 quoted in M.D.W. Jeffries, 'The Divine Umundri Kings of Igboland' (Ph.D. Thesis, London, 1934) Chapter 2. Cited in Ibid.
25. Elizabeth Isichei, A History of the Igbo People P. 6. See also G.I. Jones, The Trading States of the Oil Rivers. London, 1964. P. 30.
26. E. Isichei, A History of the Igbo People. P. 7.

27. See N.A.I. E.P. 7021/68, 'Intelligence Report on the Ngwa Clan' (Vols. 1-3) by J.G.C. Allen, 1933. See also J.N. Nwaguru, Aba and British Rule 1860 - 1960. Enugu, 1973. PP 22-33.
28. Interview with Chief Leo Uzoigwe of Eziukwu Aba, Aged 63 years, 3rd May 1987; Interview with His Royal Highness Eze J.G.N. Ogbonna, Eze Oha I of Aba, Aged 75, 24 Dec. 1987. Interview by Mr. S.O. Achitefu with Chief Hart Amah (the Chief Priest of Ancestral Shrine of Ngwaland, Aged 100 years, 26 Dec. 1976. Babara Callaway, 'Confusion and Diffusion' PP. 213-217, J.N. Oriji, 'A History of Ngwa People', (Ph.D. Thesis New Jersey, 1977). P. 38.
29. The term 'Ohuhu' has now metamorphosed to 'Umu Ohuhu' (Litt. Children of he who roasts), a term used by the Ngwa to describe all non-Ngwa Igbos including those living in Aba.
30. Ekelafor was the name of a village in Okpuala, but it is now a sacred forest.
31. N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/145, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1931. P. 52.
32. The Ibeme are said to have originated from Uruainyang in the Anang country. See N.A.I. File 290033 Vol. II, Intelligence Report on the Ngwa Clan, Aba Division by J.G.C. Allen. P. 2.
33. Chief Uzoigwe has in his personal collection, his own list of Aba's descendants.
34. Interview with Eze Ogbonna.
35. In my interview with him cited above, Eze Ogbonna gave me this response. He had also given the same response when he was interviewed by M.S.O. Achiefu in December 1976. See S.O. Achiefu, 'The Development of an Urban Community, Aba 1917 - 1967'. (B.A. History Essay, Ibadan, 1977). P. 6.
36. On markets in Igboland, See Ukwu I. Ukwu: 'The development of trade and marketing in Igboland' Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1967. A periodic market is one that does not hold daily. It only holds on its day of the week which in this case is Eke.
37. See Interview with Chief Uzoigwe.
38. E. Isichei, A History of the Igbo People. P. 7.

39. See J.N. Nwaguru, Op.Cit. P. 26. See also P.A. Talbot, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Vol. I, London, 1926. PP. 237-38.
40. For details of Dr. Oriji's argument, See J.N. Oriji, 'Transformations in traditional Ngwa Society' Ikenga Journal of African Studies Vol. I, No. 1, 1980. P. 26., See also J.N. Oriji: A History of the Ngwa People; E.J. Alagoa, 'The Niger Delta States and their Neighbours' in J.F. Ade-Ajayi and Michael Crowther (Eds.): History of West Africa Vol.I. (2nd edition) New York, 1976. PP 338-9; A Leonard, The Lower Niger and its tribes, London, 1906. P. 24.
41. F.I. Ekejiuba, 'The Aro trading System in the 19th Century, Part I' Ikenga: Journal of African Studies, Vol. I, No. I, 1972. P. 13.
42. Elizabeth Isichei, A History of the Igbo People. P. 205.
43. Interview with Eze Ogbonna.
44. See J.I. Fjiofor, 'A pre-colonial History of the Aguiyi Clan', (B.A. History U.N.N., 1973). P. 131.
45. The Author made efforts to interview Eze Dike but he referred me to Eze Ogbonna.
46. These have been well treated in the following works: C.K. Meek; Report on the Social and Political Organization in the Owerri Division, Lagos, 1933.; Ikenna Nzimiro, Studies in Ibo Political Systems: Chieftaincy and Politics in four Niger States, Berkely, 1972. P. 21., M. Greene, Igbo Village Affairs, London, 1963; V.C. Uchendu, The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria, New York, 1965; D. Forde and G. Jones, The Igbo and Ibibio Speaking Peoples of Southeastern Nigeria, London, 1967; H. Henderson, The King in every man, New Haven, 1972; Elizabeth Isichei, The Ibo People and the Europeans, The Genesis of a relationship to 1906, New York, 1963; K.O. Dike, Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, London, 1956; A.E. Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs, Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, London, 1972.
47. Interview with Eze J.G.N. Ogbonna. For more, see also C.N. Njoku, 'Political Development History of Ikeduru until 1960' (B.A. History Special Research Project, University of Jos, 1979. PP. 14-18).

48. J.N. Oriji, 'Oracular Trade, Okonko Secret Society and the Evolution of Decentralized Authority among the Ngwa Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria' Ikenga: Journal of African Studies Vol. No. 1, July, 1981. P. 45.
49. Ibid. See also Interview with Eze Ogbonna; N.A.E. Abadist 1/2/54 Long Juju of Aro and Okonko.
50. J.N. Oriji, Op.Cit., based on Interviews with Chiefs H. Amah and Kanu, Gogo in 1976. The term 'Oracular relations' was used by Oriji
51. In pre-colonial Aba as indeed other parts of Ngwaland, yam was a highly regarded crop thus men who had yams in large numbers were highly respected. The man who had the largest number of yams was called Ezeji. It was an important title in the village, but he was no president of Okonko.
52. Various Colonial Intelligence and Annual Reports indicated the practice of this phenomenon.
53. J.N. Oriji, Oracular Trade, Okonko Secret Society . . . P. 46.
54. I.N. Nwaguru, Op.Cit., P. 38.
55. J.N. Oriji, Oracular trade Okonko Secret Society . . . P. 45.
56. See F.I. Ekejiuba, The Aro System of trade . . . P. 26.
57. Ibid. P. 26. See also Interview with Eze Ogbonna.
58. Much work has already been done on the Aro and their Oracle. See for instance S.O. Ottenberg, 'Ibo Oracles and Inter-group Relations', Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1958; A.E. Afigbo, 'The Aro of South Eastern Nigeria' I & II Africa Notes Vol. 6. No. 2, 1970/71 and Vol. 7 No. 1 1971/72. See also G.I. Jones, 'Who are the Aros?' Nigerian Field Vol. VIII 1939.
59. J.N. Oriji, Op. Cit., based on Interviews with Chief H. Amah and Kanu Gogo.

60. See Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, London, 1972., A.G. Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, London, 1973. R.O. Ekundare, An Economic History Nigeria, 1860-1960 London, 1973; B. Onimode, Imperialism and under-development in Nigeria. London, 1983.
61. On land tenure in Igboland, See G.I. Jones, 'Ibo Land Tenure' Africa Vol. XIX, No. 4, 1969.
62. On farming practices in our area of study, see W.B. Morgan, 'Farming Practice, settlement pattern and population density in South Eastern Nigeria', Geographical Journal, Vol. 121, 1955. P. 320.
63. A classification of land and the different crops produced in them in this area has been done by T.C. Mbagwu. See T.C. Mbagwu, 'The Palm Oil Economy in Ngwa-land, Eastern Nigeria' (Ph.D. Thesis, Geography, Ibadan, 1971).
64. Interview with Eze Ogbonna.
65. This situation was not peculiar to Aba as various Igbo communities at this period depended on Awka Blacksmiths for their smith products.
66. One is aware that most Nigerian groups have never agreed that their people enslaved themselves either through slave wars or raids. They would always have evidence to the effect that the slaves they had were from other places.
67. It is clear that the Aros had local agents who raided for slaves secretly and captured many on their behalf.
68. See for instance, Robin Horton: "Stateless Societies in the History of West Africa" in J.F.A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder (Eds): History of West Africa, Vol. I, Columbia, 1976. P. 76.
69. A.G. Hopkins, Op. Cit.
70. B.W. Hodder and Ukwu I. Ukwu, Markets in West Africa, Ibadan, 1969.
71. Ibid. P. 244.

72. See G.I. Jones, 'Native and trade currencies in Southern Nigeria during the 18th and 19th Centuries' Africa, Vol. 28, 1958. P. 48. The various Currencies were also discussed in detail by Jones. See also A.H.M. Kirk-Greene: 'The Major Currencies in Nigerian History'. Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, 2, 1960.
73. J.U.N. Nwachukwu, 'Trade and Trade Routes in 19th Century Ngwaland', (B.A. History, U.N.N. 1977). P. 12.
74. Ibid.
75. F.I. Ekejiuba, 'The Aro Trading System in the 19th Century I', P. 14.
76. See for instance, P.A. Talbot, Tribes of the Niger Delta, London, 1930. P. 289.
77. J.U.N. Nwachukwu, Op. Cit., P. 22.
78. Ibid. P. 32.
79. These Chiefs were to play significant roles in the early years of the 20th Century when the British began acquisition of land for the development of Aba.
80. Blue Book, Africa No. 21888, Alex Miller to the Marquis of Salisbury titled 'The disputes at Opobo' 1890.
81. C.O. 444/41, Memo by Sir George Goldie to the Under-Secretary of State titled 'Detrimental effects of the Aro influence on the Trade of Royal Niger territories', 7th November 1890. See also C.O. 520/14, Memo from Moor to the Colonial Office.



## CHAPTER II

### EUROPEAN CONQUEST AND THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA: 1900 - 1923

#### The Conquest of Aba

The late 19th Century and the early part of the 20th Century saw a great drive by the British to conquer and colonize areas that eventually became modern Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> The result of this drive was that by 1902, Aba had virtually become part of the British Empire, having been occupied by British forces as they engaged in the well known Arochukwu expedition.

By 1898, the British began to refer to the Aro. Even though they knew very little about them at the time, they at least knew that the Aro had control over the trade routes between the coast and the Igbo hinterland. By 1900 when the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria had taken shape, few groups in the hinterland had agreed to sign any treaty with the British. It was thus clear to the British that if they were to establish any effective rule in the area, military force had to be used.

Indeed the High Commissioner, Sir Ralph Moor, believed that contrary to the picture already painted the area was in fact not leaderless; that, indeed, most of the area was under the influence of the Aro; and that, if the area was to be completely subjugated and effective administration established, the Aro and their oracle must be brought under British control. Sir Ralph Moor was in no doubt that the Aro constituted the most effective obstacle to an uninterrupted penetration of the interior by British trade. This is hardly surprising since, as we saw in the last chapter, the Aro and their agents controlled the internal trade routes. In fact, the British

had to expand the scope of their expedition because of their belief that the Aro were everywhere. It was in the course of the Aro expedition that Aba was annexed by the British.

The British drive towards the conquest of Ngwaland (and thus Aba) started as early as the middle of the 19th century with the occupation of outlying villages in the immediate hinterland of Bonny, Opobo and Imo River.<sup>2</sup> Having annexed Ndoki, the British in 1892 also annexed the village of Akwete. This was done through a treaty which the British, represented by Vice Consul Cairns-Armstrong, signed with the King of Akwete and its Chiefs.<sup>3</sup> The British acquisition of Akwete was significant because it became the staging post from which the British penetrated Ngwaland and other neighbouring communities such as Asa.

It was from Akwete that the British made contact with Obegu.<sup>4</sup> Obegu by late 1895 was an Ngwa village ruled by a Chief called Ananaba. Chief Ananaba was said to have been favourably disposed to the British. The reasons for this are not very clear. But it is suggested that Chief Ananaba wanted an ally against the Aro traders to many of whom he was much indebted and who also dominated the markets of Obegu.<sup>5</sup> Another possible explanation was that Chief Ananaba was influenced by his desire to avoid the type of fate Jaja suffered at the hands of the British.<sup>6</sup> Be that as it may, the point to note is that Chief Ananaba welcomed the British without any resistance and in fact, signed a treaty of protection with them on June 4, 1895.<sup>7</sup>

The treaty between Chief Ananaba and the British was of great significance. This was because Chief Ananaba was very influential among the chiefs of Ngwaland. Neither the extent of this influence nor its source is very clear. But the importance of Obegu

at the time as the most important Ngwa market provides some indication of the influence of its ruler. It may be that Chief Ananaba's original connection with the Aro, before he quarrelled with them, could have been one source of his importance and influence. The point to note, however, is that the British saw their treaty with him as a treaty with the whole of Ngwaland including Aba. Indeed the British in those days equated Obegu with the whole of Ngwaland and regarded Chief Ananaba as its King or Emperor.

In their communications, he was often referred to as the 'King of Ngwaland'. But, as is well known, Obegu did not constitute the whole of Ngwaland, neither was it the capital of an Ngwa Empire as the British thought. It was just one of the villages in Ngwaland as Aba was also an Ngwa village. However, it was the first village the British occupied in Ngwaland. Given the influence of Ananaba who one colonial administrator described as a "very influential and useful Chief who had a great deal of power in the surrounding country",<sup>8</sup> it was not surprising that the British thought that the annexation of Obegu meant the total colonization of Ngwaland. The British paid him comeys of about £20 per annum from 1896 until the time of his death.<sup>9</sup> As has been noted, this kind of payment could be said to have turned him into a paid agent of the British.<sup>10</sup> It is even said that he called on the British to build a house in Obegu which, according to him, "would have a most wholesome effect on the country around in preserving order".<sup>11</sup> It is for these reasons that he has been seen as "a torch bearer of British imperialism in Ngwaland".

However, this romance between Chief Ananaba and the British did not go down well with some neighbouring communities, as well as the Aro whose trading hegemony was being threatened by the British presence. One of such communities was Ihie. Thus, a

local dispute which had simmered between Ihie and Obegu, and remained largely dormant before the arrival of the British became the cause of a war between Ihie supported by the Aro on one hand, and Obegu backed by the British on the other.<sup>12</sup> The details of this dispute need not delay us here.<sup>13</sup> The main issue was that Chief Ananaba refused to bring to book an Obegu man who had killed an Ihie man during a fight at Obegu.<sup>14</sup> The people of Obegu and Ihie were still seeking ways of settling this dispute when Chief Ananaba received the British. With the British on his side, and the death during the period of two prominent Ihie warrior Chiefs (Imuka and Ugoji, especially the former who was the community leader) Ananaba felt strong enough to refuse Ihie's request that the killing of the Ihie man should be avenged. Ihie found ready support from the Aro who were not only incensed by the threat posed by the British to their trade, but also nursed grievances against Chief Ananaba and the Obegu people because of the way they received the British.<sup>15</sup>

For several years, the British carried out punitive expeditions against Ihie. These expeditions were aimed at checking the attack planned by Ihie with the support of the Aro, against Obegu. In one of such operations (which took place in early 1901) aimed at showing the people of Ihie the consequences of a defiance of British authority, their yams and livestock were carried away while most of the people ran into the bush.<sup>16</sup> But despite these expeditions, the people of Ihie remained undaunted hence, a fine of 4,000 manillas, to be paid latest by 30th November 1901, was clamped on them by the Assistant District Commissioner of Akwete which was then the British Station in charge of the area. However, nine days to the deadline given for the payment of the fine, the people of Ihie, supported by Abam and Ohafia mercenaries provided by the Aro,<sup>17</sup> went into Obegu in the early morning of 21st November 1901, and

wrecked the village killing about 500 people, according to one account.<sup>18</sup>

The lightning raid baffled the British and indeed hastened the attack they had planned against the Aro. The British had recognised the fact that if they were to abolish <sup>the</sup> slave trade and introduce legitimate commerce, as well as take control of the Igbo hinterland, the Aro and the power of the Arochukwu Oracle would have to be broken.<sup>19</sup> The Aro role in the Obegu massacre had shown the urgent need to deal with them, as well as all unoccupied surrounding country, with dispatch. It is thus not surprising that ten days after that massacre, precisely on 1st December 1901, the general advance against the Aro and unoccupied areas including Aba began.

The attack against the Aro was planned in detail in advance, but at some point had to be expanded in scope because, as noted above, the British believed the Aro were everywhere. In fact, Sir Joseph Chamberlain ordered the administration in Lagos as well as that of Northern Nigeria, to send contingents of soldiers to supplement the 3rd Battalion (of the West African Frontier Force) of the South. Eventually, 87 officers, 1,550 soldiers and 2,100 carriers under the command of Lt. Col. H.F. Montanaro were assembled.<sup>20</sup>

In order to execute the attack, several expeditionary columns were formed. The drive to conquer and annex the Ngwa country was started by the third column. This column was commanded by Major Faunce who had under his control not only soldiers but also hundreds of the so-called 'friendlies'.<sup>21</sup> By the end of February 1902, nearly all parts of the Ngwa country, including Aba, had fallen under British occupation.<sup>22</sup>

To any close observer of the events leading to British occupation, the fall of Aba would hardly have come as a surprise. For, unlike other areas such as Akwete and Ihie that fought against the British, the people of Aba, under their reigning Chief Ogbonna Uruakpa, were said to have received the invading British troops with open arms, knowing that their ultimate destination was Arochukwu. In the words of one of the Chiefs, Aba "was not conquered by the British: they just came in; they came from Bonny to Opobo, from Opobo to Akwete and from thence to Aba".<sup>23</sup> It was not just that the people did not put up any resistance against the British; it seemed in fact that they aided the British advance albeit indirectly. It is said, for instance, that it was the people of Aba who showed the British the way to Arochukwu which, as is well known was the main object of the British expeditionary force.<sup>24</sup>

The reasons for Aba's support of the British are not very clear, but we can identify some factors that may have accounted for it. The first is that before the Aro expedition, the British had already established a foothold in Aba. This was done through the opening of a consulate on a small parcel of land given to the British by Chief Onwuala (the Chief of Eziukwu Aba) in 1898. It would appear that the British needed the place for close exploratory visits in the surrounding country given the fact that the location of their headquarters and garrison at Akwete was far and posed great logistic problems. The circumstances under which Chief Onwuala gave out the land to the British are also unclear. The traditions merely state that at that time, a British expedition of some soldiers and guides came to Aba from Akwete. They were received by Chief Onwuala who was then the 'Onye Ishi Ala'.<sup>25</sup> They asked Chief Onwuala for a piece of land on which to put up their tent. But Chief Onwuala told them that they could not live in Aba because their skin was white, and he did not want them to spoil Aba women and children. In reply, the

group told the Chief that they were in Aba principally to trade and were not interested in other things. In the end, the Chief gave them a piece of land on various laid down conditions among which were that the British should not take their women, steal or confiscate their goats or chickens.<sup>26</sup> The British eventually built a Consulate on the land.

The second reason is obviously related to grievances against the Aro. Aba traders felt unhappy with the way Arochukwu traders dominated the local markets. Moreover, the Chiefs found their positions jeopardized by the widespread influence and wealth of Arochukwu traders in the Ngwa country. The experience of neighbouring villages may also have taught the Chiefs of Aba and their people some lessons about the futility of opposing European penetration backed by superior weaponry and organization. It is possible that they felt they may not get the desired support from their people should they decide to confront the British militarily.

Again, the village did not seem to have any military agreement or alliance with any other village at the time and, given the tense relationship with the Aro, they probably felt the Aro would not come to their help in case of a military confrontation. Most importantly, there was also the fact that they probably considered the possibility of increased trade with the British from which the Chiefs and the people would gain tremendously.

Be that as it may, the point to note is that by February of 1902, the status of Aba vis-à-vis other neighbouring communities, began to change. It now became an important military base for the British forces to prosecute and conclude the Aro expedition. Various smaller military units were sent out from Aba to deal with "recalcitrant" villages in its neighbourhood. Some of these included a Company

sent under Captain Mayne to take over Ohuru and Umuchichi. Other units proceeded to Umuocham and Umuode both of which were eventually taken over by the British.<sup>27</sup> Aba ultimately became an important base for the eventual conquest of Arochukwu.

#### Aba as District Headquarters

As elsewhere in colonial Africa, the immediate problem the British faced after the conquest of Aba and other parts of Ngwaland was how to bring the conquered areas under complete and unquestioned British control. One weapon which the British used was the speedy trial and punishment of all those villages who had opposed British penetration seriously and violently.<sup>28</sup> The British believed that if the ring-leaders, the Kings and Chiefs of such recalcitrant villages were adequately dealt with, it would serve as an added lesson to all those who would dare oppose British imperialism and the smooth take-off of the machinery of colonial administration.

As the British were making strenuous efforts to 'pacify' the conquered areas, the machinery for the trial of all those involved in opposing British advance was set up. Two of the most important of those accused were Chief Okorie Torti, an Aro from Abam and Chief Uchendu Akano of Ohafia. Both men were mercenaries whom the people of Ihie recruited to help them in their war efforts against the British. With the end of hostilities and their capture, they were tried at Obegu. Both men were found guilty and were hanged at Obegu on the 1st of March 1902. Needless to say that it was the same people they offended and fought against that tried them. The hanging itself took place in the presence of the representatives of 33 villages.<sup>29</sup> The British were represented on the occasion by one Mr. James. He made the villages pledge not to have anything to do with Ihie and its two supporters until they had fully accepted the British presence



which they were still resisting.<sup>30</sup> They were also informed that it was an offence for anyone to be found with firearms. Thus they were to submit all the arms and ammunition in their possession to the British authorities. The British also called on all the Chiefs and people who were involved in organising and executing the Obegu 'massacare' and other acts of opposition against the British to give themselves up.

The first noticeable response to these instructions was the rush by many people to submit their guns. The recent executions had taught the people a lesson about the consequences of being found in opposition to the white man's orders. Virtually all the towns submitted their guns to the British. Many Chiefs gave themselves up to the British authorities. Some others were arrested. A third group was forced to give themselves up when the British, specifically Mr. H.M. Douglas, the Assistant District Commissioner, detained 137 boys from Ihie who had been conscripted to work in building barracks at Aba for a garrison being established there. Mr. Douglas insisted that Ihie Chiefs must submit themselves before he would release their young men. Consequently, many Ihie chiefs as well as offending chiefs from other villages gave themselves up to the British.

By the end of March 1902, most of the ring leaders of the Obegu troubles were in the British net. These were tried between the 23rd of March and the end of April under a special warrant signed by Mr. H.M. Douglas, A.D.C. of Akwete, and a court of chiefs under Section 62<sup>a</sup> of the Criminal Amendment Proclamation of 1901.<sup>31</sup> Nwaguru has suggested that the court of Chiefs referred to may have been the Obegu minor court which was set up in accordance with Native Court Proclamation Ordinance of 1901.<sup>32</sup> Many of the Chiefs were found guilty. While some were given various prison sentences,

others were sentenced to death by hanging. Those sentenced to death included Azu, Wokoma, and Omelazu, all of Ihie, Wachukwu and Ozuru of Umugo and Wachukwu Nnegbe of Oza.<sup>33</sup> Their mass execution by hanging at Obegu market on 30th of April 1902 were witnessed by people of the village and other neighbouring villages. The essence of the public executions was to arouse fear in the people. With that kind of spectacle, the people were no longer in any doubt that opposition to the British had become too dangerous a game.<sup>34</sup>

Having concluded the mopping up, the British had to map out how to administer the large area just subdued. The High Commissioner at Calabar considered Aba, Bende and Owerri as possible administrative centres for the various sections of the country covered by the Aro expedition.<sup>35</sup> In the case of the Ngwa country, Aba rather than Akwete was chosen.<sup>36</sup>

Many factors seem to have favoured the choice of Aba as the most convenient centre for the administration of the Ngwa country. As already stated, by the time of the Aro expedition, the British had a foothold in the village, and Aba was centrally located. The High Commissioner at Calabar noted that a central location such as Aba offered limitless opportunities for operation into the surrounding country of the hinterland, and reduced logistic problems. Above all, the people of Aba had received the British more as potential allies than as implacable foes.

The year 1902 thus marked the beginning of a new phase in Aba's development. That was the year in which concrete steps were taken towards setting up Aba as the base for British colonial administration in the area. In that year, the British built a new government garrison and barracks in Aba and moved the troops

they had in Akwete to the new garrison. The following year, they moved the district headquarters based at Akwete formally to Aba.<sup>37</sup>

Though we do not have much information about Aba at this period as record keeping was poor and very few documents of the period have survived, we are nevertheless aware that the station remained a small one with only a handful of British officers and a few hundred African troops most of whom were Yoruba and Muslim northerners. Also available at the station were a handful of government workers: clerks, messengers, telegraph and post office workers nearly all of whom came from the Lagos area.

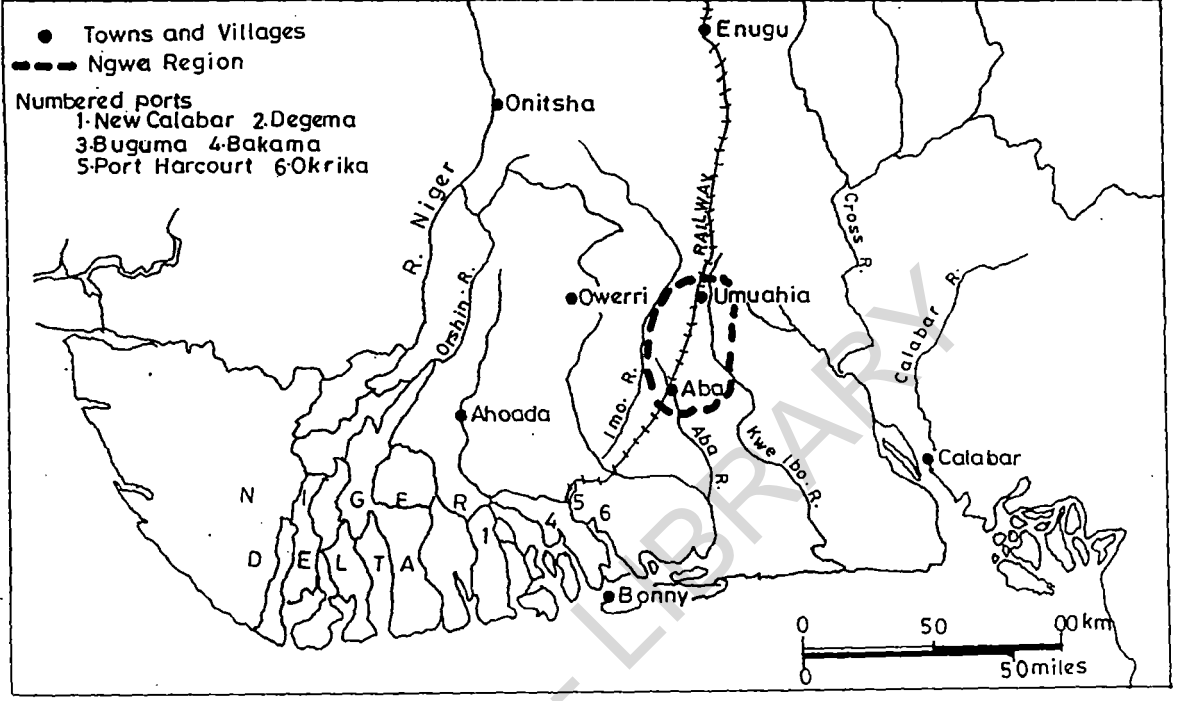
The point to note however is that this establishment of Aba as district headquarters and a government station attracted population to the place from the country-side and other Igbo areas. Some Hausa and Yoruba also came to service the demands of the station's residents. Thus from a sparsely populated area in 1902, the station headquarter's population rose to 855 persons by 1911.<sup>38</sup> Also political and commercial attention was shifted from Akwete as Aba soon began to attract European administrators and merchants. District Commissioners were now based in Aba instead of Akwete. District Commissioners H.M. Douglas and D.E. Price were the last to serve in Akwete in 1902; District Commissioner H.B. Mansfield became the man that managed the early years of Aba's development serving from 1904 to 1907.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, high ranking colonial officials began to pay visits to Aba, a privilege hitherto enjoyed by Akwete. Thus despite the largely undeveloped nature of the area at the time, Governor Egerton in 1905 travelled by bicycle from Owerri to Aba.<sup>40</sup> For Aba therefore, a new era had dawned.

### The Coming of the Railway

With the setting up of Aba as the district headquarters for the Ngwa country, the stage was set for the development of the infrastructure necessary to enable the government station and the officials in charge to function properly. The British embarked on public works projects such as the garrison and barracks mentioned above and also a Native Court and a prison to serve the court, both in 1904. A female section was added to the prison in 1917. Some bungalows were erected, a few of which served as offices while the others were used as residential quarters. A rest house for Europeans was also built. All these buildings were constructed initially with wood and local material such as raffia. With the Proclamation of the Roads and Creeks Ordinance in 1903, efforts were made to provide some new roads to service the station, while existing tracks and footpaths were expanded. All these developments helped to improve the status of the government station.

It was, however, the railway which turned out to be the most important infrastructure provided during the period. The railway itself was not intended by the British for Aba specifically nor for its particular development. Aba happened to be on the 'well' chosen route of the Eastern Railway line which the British started developing after the discovery of coal fields in Enugu.<sup>41</sup> The British believed that a rail line running from Enugu coal fields to Port Harcourt harbour would help in facilitating the movement of coal and cash crops to Europe. Construction work on the Eastern railway started at Port Harcourt towards the end of 1913. This continued through 1914, and by 1915, the line had reached Aba.

PORTS, RIVERS, AND RAIL TRADE ROUTES, SOUTH EASTERN NIGERIA



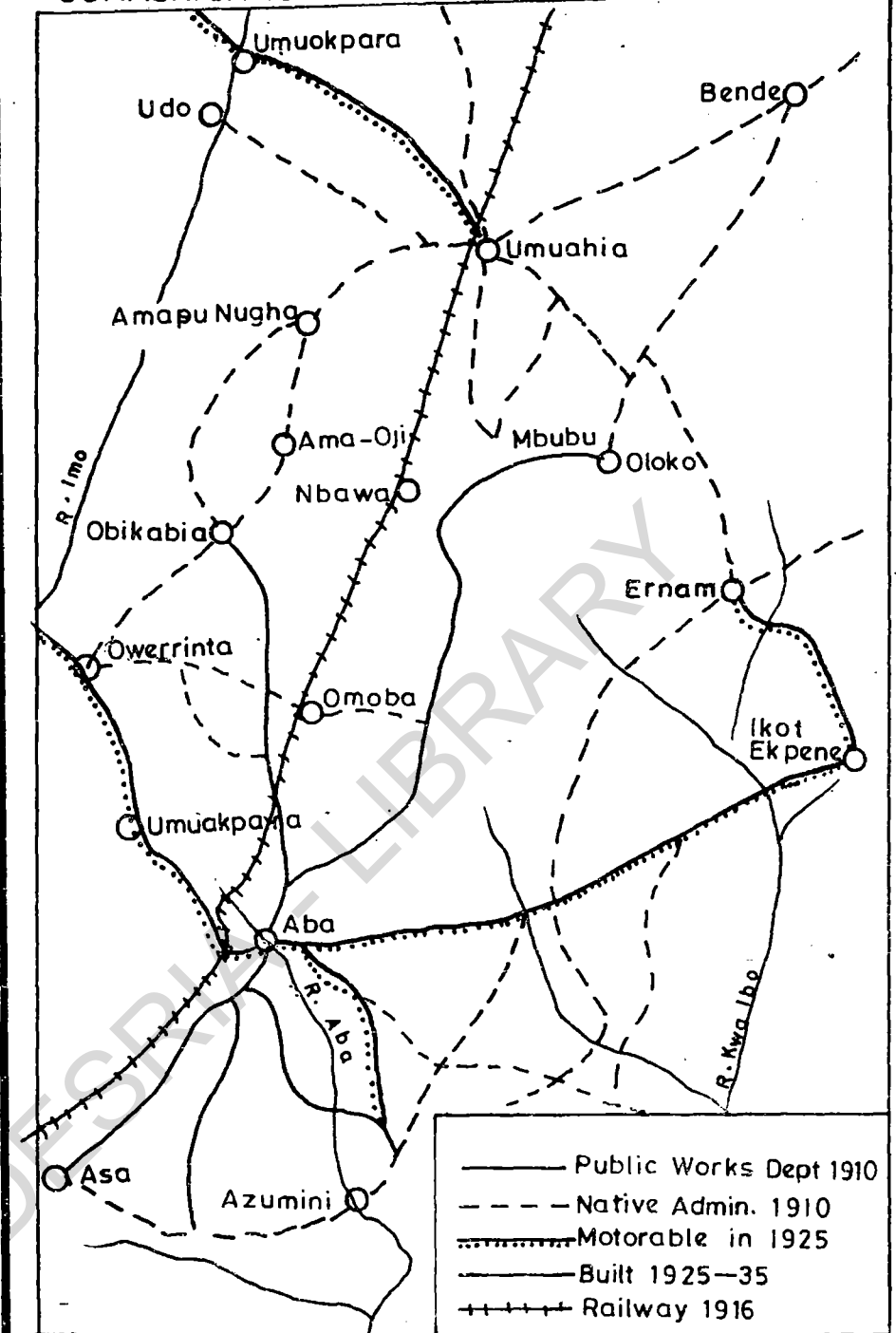
Source--Susan - Martin

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The coming of the railway had significant effects on the evolution of Aba. These were manifested in various forms. In the first place, its construction and completion increased the population of the town considerably. Many of the labourers who came into Aba for the construction often did not return home at the end of their employment. Instead, many of them became squatters in the hope that they would eventually find some sort of permanent jobs as labourers or otherwise. Others were attracted to Aba by the easy communication and transport facilities provided by the railway. Notable among such people were Hausa, Saro and Yoruba settlers from distant places. Thus, the railway quarters built for the housing needs of railway staff became a cosmopolitan area of Aba. The railway provided employment to many settlers who worked as porters, ferrying goods to and from the railway station to the Aba market and other places. Trading transactions, particularly in agricultural produce enjoyed a boost and there was a general increase in commercial activity with attendant prosperity. It is possible to illustrate this position by comparing the produce trading situation just before the coming of the railway with what obtained after.

Before the coming of the railway, nearly all the produce sold in Aba division passed through the river system: Imo and Aba Rivers to Opobo which was the main port of export. Aba did not gain much from this system because it did not provide much multiplier effect. First, it created a situation where the Ubani, Ndoki, Opobo and Bonny traders were the main buyers of produce in Aba hence there was not much competition from which Aba people could have profited from. Secondly it did not create much employment opportunities as few labourers and porters were needed. To move about 4 tons of oil from Aba to Opobo, for instance, only seven men were needed in a six-puncheon canoe.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, business

# COMMUNICATION IN THE NGWA REGION 1910-35



Source:- Susan Martin

turnover for the local people was usually low because it took about 12 to 14 days for a canoe to make a return journey from Aba to Opobo. But perhaps more significant was the fact that produce trading before 1915 when the railway reached Aba ensured that Aba's development only concentrated around the Aba River waterside where many Ubani built personal and business accommodation for themselves.

The coming of the railway however, changed all that. European merchants who moved in provided adequate competition to the Ubani leading to better commercial returns for the Aba people both in price and quantity, hence increased productivity. Soon Opobo was overtaken in the export of produce by the new railway port of Port Harcourt as average oil to kernel exports from Port Harcourt in 1920 was 347 gallons to one ton while that of Opobo was 340 to one.<sup>43</sup> Since much of this was bought and railed from Aba, and since the turn around time of locomotives was faster than canoes, it means that there was increased business turnover in Aba. Thus the railway created greater multiplier effect on Aba: more agents and traders, more porters, more labourers etc. Perhaps more important was the fact that the coming of the railway led to developments outside the waterside area as a more balanced development started with the growth of settlements around the railway station as well as Owerri Road where many of the incoming European firms established their factories.

#### Development of Motor Transport Services

The railway alone could not serve the economic and social needs of the period. The roads which were built to serve as feeder routes for produce from the hinterland to the railways proved essential. This was the beginning and subsequent development of



motor transport services in the Aba area. Motor transport business itself developed in response to the needs of the increasing population, those of produce buyers and agents as well as European firms whose business increased as a result of the railway. Motor transport also served the needs of colonial administrators and their families. Vast amounts of goods and produce needed to be carried from the country-side to and from the railway station.

However, the introduction of motor vehicles to Aba did not come very easily. This was because during this period, the motor car was still a new invention. Even those produced were very heavy and expensive. Indeed few expatriate firms saw any future for motor vehicles in the developing world at that time. Commenting on this problem with regard to West Africa, for instance, the British Cotton Growing Association noted in 1907: "metal roads and motor transport are as far as one can judge, a mistake".<sup>44</sup>

From about 1918, this kind of attitude was rendered obsolete by the introduction of lighter, faster, and cheaper models of vehicles, especially the Ford Brand.<sup>45</sup> In Aba, Companies such as J. Allen opened Motor Sales Offices. Even though the exact prices of particular brands of vehicles is unavailable, oral sources indicate that generally prices ranged between £100 to £125.<sup>46</sup> In general, very few organizations or individuals could afford to own and operate motor vehicles in those days. Indeed by 1921 it was only lorries owned by Miller Brothers, the Weeks Transport Company and Holt Brothers that were operating and transporting produce between Aba and some towns in Owerri Province as well as Itu in the Cross River. Africans in Aba did not begin to operate motor vehicles until the 1930s. In fact, of the European companies that were operating motor vehicles, it was only Messrs. Weeks Transport and Engineering Company that had a comprehensive service in the

sense of produce service, passenger service, mail service and Engineering services while the others operated their lorries as part of their produce buying business.

The Weeks Transport and Engineering Company of Aba, Nigeria, was a well developed company which at the time had offices also in Benin and Onitsha. The Company whose date of incorporation is not certain was owned by George Keriery Weeks with a partner called John Bernard Saxby Hawkins. The Company operated motor lorries which carried goods and produce through a well developed and organized network of routes. With Aba as the central point, it operated lorry service to Ikot Ekpene and Itu in the Cross River, and to Owerri and Onitsha. Its organization and efficient operation attracted the attention of the colonial government which in 1921 appointed it the sole carrier of its men, goods and mail. Under the agreement, Messrs Weeks was to provide motor lorry services to the government between Aba and Itu and back three times in a week, and from Aba to Onitsha via Owerri and back once a week. The high frequency of the service to the Cross River area is indicative of a high level of European governmental, commercial and missionary presence in the area. Moreover, vast amounts of palm produce also came to Aba from that area.

With regard to charges for its services, figures pertaining to individual and commercial ones are not available. But under the agreement the company had with the government, the government for instance agreed to pay as follows in respect of officials and their wives entitled under General Orders to first or second class accommodation on the railway: 15 shillings for transport from Aba to Itu, 7 shillings and six pence for Aba to Ikot Ekpene; 15 shillings for Aba to Owerri and 15 shillings for Owerri to Onitsha. The Company was to provide accommodation or space for this category of

passengers in the front of the lorry. What this meant is that Africans on the back of the lorry would obviously have paid less. Other charges in respect of loads of various weights were also agreed on. 47

These charges would seem to have made motor transportation very expensive. If we assume conservatively that Africans paid half the amount paid by the Europeans, that is as much as 7 shillings for a trip from Aba to Owerri, compared with wages paid for labour at about 9 pence per day, it meant that one needed to work and save a lot before one could avail oneself of the services of motor vehicles. It is clear also that only the big produce merchants, that is, senior employees of the European trading firms, could afford to buy motor vehicles or pay for their services. This certainly restricted the size and class of the population which used motor vehicles. Given its advantages of quickness and convenience, it also meant that economic growth and prosperity must have been hampered.

Despite these limitations, there is no doubt that the provision of motor transport services complemented the railway in giving a tremendous boost to commerce and population growth. It also affected the people's habits and outlook on life. The opportunities provided by the transport facilities, extended the people's knowledge of the world beyond the confines of the country lying a day's or two days' journey from their home. They could now move from Aba to other centres of administration and trade and from the neighbouring countryside to Aba. No longer was produce passed from market to market or sold only to the middlemen. Many producers taking advantage of the transport facilities took their produce direct to the European merchants who bought them for export. In like manner, many European trading firms in their attempt to reduce the role of middlemen, also went into the

interior to make direct purchases of produce. In this way, better prices and profits were obtained by both groups at the expense of the middlemen, many of whom were from the coastal area. Such benefits, however, accrued more to the Europeans who took advantage of the low literacy level of the people. They did the price fixing themselves as Africans rarely had a say as to what price to sell their produce. Even though the middlemen then, as at today, were never eliminated completely, their profit margins were greatly reduced. In all, the producers enjoyed some greater material prosperity. In addition, the time saved through the use of mechanical transport, enabled the producers to increase their output which was in turn sold for more money. All these were small benefits to them arising from a well laid out colonial plan to encourage more production and exploitation of African resources through the institution of a 'good' transport system.

Motor transport facilities also gave a fillip to the activities and movements of European colonial administrators in Aba at a time when motor transport was not yet developed in many areas of Eastern Nigeria. Indeed, the pioneering role of Aba in the development of motor transport services made it the centre or headquarters of the motor transport business of the whole region from the 1920s to the end of the colonial period; and the Central Motor Park at Aba during those years became a very important entrepot.

### Labour Recruitment and Population Growth

Labour recruitment and use under colonialism, particularly in the early years, remain one of the most controversial issues of the colonial era. This is because as the British were campaigning for an end to slavery in all its forms, they were at the same time, in several

of their colonies, engaging in the recruitment and use of forced labour which was analogous to slavery. When eventually they began to pay for labour, the stipend was too little for the amount of work done by the labourers. Aba was not an exception to this generally ambiguous condition of labour under colonialism

At Aba, as elsewhere, forced and wage labour "provided the clout which was needed by the colonial regime to instal the infrastructure required for domination and appropriation".<sup>48</sup> To achieve this objective, as stated above, forced labour was initially used. Eventually, the British induced massive labour supply by the gradual but intentional introduction of a dependency syndrome. This was achieved by encouraging or forcing Africans through various methods to depend on European money. Such means included taxation, court dues and fines, attractive luxury goods and so on, which had to be paid for in European money. This in turn meant that the people had to labour in order to acquire such money.

In 1903, the government of the Southern Nigeria Protectorate enacted the Roads and Creeks Proclamation which compelled able-bodied men to labour without pay in the cleaning of waterways and the construction and maintenance of roads.<sup>49</sup> As has been argued elsewhere, "the dissolution of slave labour was actually meant to release potential labour for the colonial system"; for as Lugard wrote, "the single duty which the law imposes upon the people without remuneration is the maintenance of roads and waterways".<sup>50</sup> The development of infrastructure and transport as we saw was an essential ingredient of appropriation, hence Lugard's statement that "the material development of Africa may be summed up in one word - transport." What he failed to add however, was that without transport, the achievement of colonial goals and appropriation would have been doomed.

It is not clear how the British initially got the labour used for the various projects in Aba. The most likely source of course was through the recruitment into forced labour of able-bodied men from conquered areas. Later on, however, the British started sending colonial officials to the villages, requesting specific numbers of persons to be supplied for public works. In those early days, labour requirement was usually very high, as most projects were labour intensive. The diary of Mr. H.M. Douglas, A.D.C. for Akwete, informs us that as many as 137 young men from villages as distant as Ihie, Oza and Umugo were taken to Aba in March 1902 for the building of a barracks and garrison there. Some of their names were given as Ahamabam, Wakamanu and Ukegu all from Ihie; Agomuo and Wogu from Oza, and Amalaha and Alele from Umugo.<sup>51</sup> The important thing to note here is that these three villages were the principal ones that seriously resisted and fought against the British advance into Ngwaland. This fact tends to give credence to our assertion that the initial forced labour used for public works in Aba was sourced from the conquered areas.

Wage labour began developing in Aba during the construction of the Eastern Railway line. From that period, Aba began to receive migrant labourers who flocked to construction sites not only from the immediate neighbourhood, but also from other parts of Southern Nigeria. Many of these came from the Cross River, particularly the Ibibio-speaking area. Forced and compulsory labour and wage labour were in effect used simultaneously for the execution of projects. By the time wage labour was in place, forced labourers were mainly sourced from those found guilty of committing crimes against the administration. In other words, it was a form of punishment or payment of fines in kind. For those on wage labour, the British initially paid one shilling per day. This

amount was later reduced to nine pence per day. It is not clear why the amount was reduced. It may have been due to an unexpected increase in the supply of labour available for work on the railway.<sup>52</sup> It could also have been an intentional act by the British aimed at increasing the man-hours necessary to pay the poll-tax or at saving money for expatriation. Whatever the reasons, the fact was that such reduction obviously affected the people's living standards adversely; for as we have already shown, transportation costs were very expensive at the time.

It seems, however, that the ease with which labour was recruited during the construction of roads and the railway had vanished when it came to maintenance of the roads and railway. By then wage labour had virtually become the norm. Various colonial officials at different times lamented the increasing difficulties of recruiting labour. Commenting on this in 1921, a British administrative officer noted:

All the labourers supplied to the railway have now returned to their homes. The work was extremely unpopular as may be judged from the fact that, of the last batch sent up, over 130 ran away from Enugu. It would be very difficult to obtain further labour for the railway.<sup>53</sup>

In the case of Aba specifically, the same sentiment was expressed by District Officer, Whiteman when he wrote:

- - - large numbers of adolescent boys and young men not belonging to Aba who hang about looking for "job", not work; on almost any day it is possible to recruit twenty or thirty of them, to retain them is another matter. If the work for which they are engaged does not appeal to them, they take French leave and disappear.<sup>54</sup>

With regards to the conditions under which the labourers worked, every indication pointed to gloom. As already noted, many were not

paid at all, while those who were paid were paid very low wages. Even then, deductions were made on the value of any meal supplied the labourers. In the end, many had very little to show for their labour, and their lot remained largely unimproved.

On the work sites, the labourers were treated harshly. Labour overseers, both indigenous and European, enforced discipline and punctuality with the greatest severity possible. The imposition of fines was frequent while the cane and other forms of corporal punishment were sometimes resorted to.<sup>55</sup> Labourers worked for very long hours, often nine to ten hours for instance, carrying heavy rails through very difficult terrain. As would be expected, many protested their condition. Some protested by running back to their villages only to be sent back on some occasions by the Chiefs, while a few were even shot when they showed unwillingness to work. But such terrible labour conditions did not go unnoticed everywhere. In 1909, for instance, Bishop Tugwell complained to Acting Commissioner William Wallace about the working conditions of labourers which was "difficult to distinguish - - - from slavery".<sup>56</sup> Colonial authorities however felt less concerned with such sentiments than with the completion of the railway and other infrastructure crucial to the achievement of imperial goals.

Nevertheless, the expansion of labour demands contributed tremendously to Aba's growth. As noted earlier, many of the migrant labourers settled in Aba after their employment, thereby increasing the population of the town. Secondly, the rise of wage labour, particularly from the 1920s led to increased economic activity, as wage earners helped to increase the demand for goods and services which in turn generated increased production. The availability of labour also ensured that economic activity was not stalled as a result of labour shortages. It should be noted that, as time



went on, the increasing dependence of the labourers on wage employment gradually led to the rise of a proletarian class who contributed greatly to Aba's growth as will be shown later.

### Commercial Activity and Socio-Economic Life

As noted earlier, the transportation and other facilities provided in Aba led to an influx of various groups of settlers into the town. These groups, namely the Ibibio, Efik and Annang from the Cross River area, the Bonny and Opobo people, the Hausa, the Yoruba, Ghanaians, Saro, Europeans, as well as the Ngwa were in those early days, engaged in various economic activities in the town. Though we do not have the population figures of each of these groups, we are nevertheless aware that by 1921 there were 29 Europeans and 50 'Native foreigners' (Africans who were not Nigerians) resident in Aba. Evidence also indicates that in the same year, there were 325 people from Northern Nigeria living in Aba.<sup>57</sup> The growing intensity of economic and other activities could be gleaned from the fact that the European population in Aba almost doubled to 51 by 1924.<sup>58</sup> By the same year the estimated population of Aba division was 139,380.<sup>59</sup> Though the number of those living in Aba town was unknown, we can conclude that the whole population exerted its greatest socio-economic impact on the growing urban centre since it was the main economic and administrative centre of the division. In general, the kind of economic activity each group engaged in tended to dictate the status such group occupied in the evolving community.

The Ngwa engaged in two main activities: farming and trading. In most cases, Ngwa families combined the two, providing food as well as goods used in trading. This was obviously a carryover of a pre-colonial tendency. Produce included yams, cocoyams, cassava, garri, pepper, vegetables and so on. Some of these were produced in Aba while others were brought in from surrounding

Ngwa villages. The Ngwa also produced and traded in palm oil and kernels. The area which eventually became the Aba industrial area where companies such as Nigerian Breweries and Lever Brothers are presently located, was a major palm belt of the Ngwa at this period. Also many of the Ngwa people from surrounding villages brought their palm produce into Aba to sell to the European firms.<sup>60</sup> Other Ngwas were engaged as labourers, and also as househelps. A few of them had no discernible jobs.

Some economic benefits and prosperity accrued to the Ngwa from the various endeavours, but it was those engaged in produce trading that had the best advantage. Before the coming of the railway they traded their produce mainly with the Ubani who were masters of water-borne produce trade on the Aba river. After the coming of the railway, their market opportunities expanded as they now traded also with numerous European firms. Many of them were able to earn enough money to buy European goods, many of which were initially supplied only through the Ubani and the Aro. Such goods included salt, snuff, stockfish, matches, kerosene, gin, textile materials, guns and in particular gunpowder which was very highly valued. Others were encouraged by their earnings to join contribution clubs otherwise known as 'Isusu Clubs' in which each member made monthly contributions and collected from everybody in rotation. Some used it to pay membership fees of the Okonko Society while a good many others used theirs to buy bicycles which they either used to foster the growth of their produce trade or rented out to young men at an agreed fee. These men in turn used the bicycles to convey passengers within and outside the growing urban area. All these boosted commercial activities as people who could not move their produce from the surrounding country to Aba with either motor transport or through the railway, because they could not afford the expensive charges or because the services did not pass

through their areas, were able to use their own bicycles or paid to have their goods transported. Yet some others used their cash earnings to diversify into new businesses such as the selling of crayfish and dried fish as well as provisions such as soap. A good example is one Nwadike Nwogu.<sup>61</sup>

It is also worthwhile to mention that the Chiefs of Aba were not left out in the lucrative produce trade with European merchants. They seemed to have been deeply involved, and their position enabled them to buy produce from the farmers at cheaper prices and then sell to the Europeans at higher prices. Moreover, given their elevated status in society, they readily attracted loans from the European firms with which they bought the produce and paid for labour in advance of sales.

One such Chief who exploited the opportunities available to advance his fortune and standard of living was Chief Uzoigwe of Eziukwu Aba.<sup>62</sup> In his capacity as the Chief of one of the ruling houses in Eziukwu, he used his position effectively and became an important produce buyer, being an agent of many European firms especially the Niger Company. He had many servants who traversed the interior Ngwa country and bought up produce which he then sold to the Europeans. Prosperity from this trade laid a good foundation for the eventual wealth and opportunities of good education for different members of the Uzoigwe family in later years. In fact one of his children, Prince I. Uzoigwe, became the Deputy Governor of Imo State in Nigeria's Second Republic. The involvement of the Chiefs in the produce trade so pleased the Resident of Owerri Province that he wrote:

- - - this is very satisfactory and in marked contrast to the Chiefs of Diobu who in spite of even greater

opportunities (brought by the railway and sea port) at Port Harcourt have made no attempt to advance with the times or improve their positions in any way.<sup>63</sup>

Other Igbo, especially those from around Owerri, Arochukwu, Bende, Ohafia, Item, Ariba, Nkwere, Orlu and Onitsha engaged in various activities ranging from petty trading to domestic help and all manners of labouring. Of these groups, it was the Bende, and in particular the Aro that were the most important, arising obviously from their earlier position as traders in slaves and European goods. Despite the fact that the long Juju had been sacked by the British and many of their trade routes destroyed or disorganized, many of the Aro still maintained a vast trading network.<sup>64</sup> They engaged in various activities dealing especially in rare goods such as coral beads, rare cloths and so on. It was even said that *anyone* who wanted a human head could easily purchase it from the Aro at the time.<sup>65</sup> Many of them also acted as money changers, exchanging British introduced money for local forms, especially the Manilla at a profitable rate.<sup>66</sup> Given the prominent role which the Bende and the Aro played in this period, it is not surprising that there developed large communities of their people in Aba, with implications for Aba politics in later years. The implications were obvious on the economic front where they have occupied and still occupy prominent positions, especially in commercial sector. A prominent Aro called Willie Ufondu is said to have built the first hotel in Aba.<sup>67</sup>

In general, we need to note that in those days, non-Ngwa Igbo people tended to settle in Aba more than the Ngwa. This can be explained partly by the fact that apart from the Ngwa whose original home was Aba, most Ngwa migrants tended to return to their villages in the neighbourhood after transacting whatever business they had in Aba. Thus, gradually over time, non-Ngwa people out-numbered

Ngwa in the town; a situation which still persists today. It is in fact this trend that made some scholars refer to Aba as a "strangers town".<sup>68</sup>

With regards to settlers from other parts of Nigeria, those from the Cross River area were mainly engaged as labourers, servants and househelps. Some also engaged in trading in fish products and palm produce. But of the non-Igbo settlers, it was the Opobo and Bonny that dominated the produce trade during this period. Between 1907 and 1912 they established numerous settlements on the banks of the Aba River where they engaged in produce buying from the Ngwa people particularly before the coming of the railway in 1915. This explains why before 1915, the port of Opobo exported more palm oil from Eastern Nigeria than any other port.<sup>69</sup> They remained major competitors to the Europeans in the produce trade after the coming of the railway when many European firms came into Aba. A number of them at this period began to work as agents and clerks for European firms. They also participated in the exchange of British money for local currencies.<sup>70</sup>

Hausa settlers were mainly involved in the cattle trade, bringing cattle from the North and selling them (as butchers) to the people. Some of them engaged in trading in kolanuts as well as in handicrafts such as leather shoes and slippers as well as baskets. A majority of the troops in the barracks at the time were Hausa and their presence attracted other Hausa to minister to their special needs, hence the development of a fairly large Hausa community by the 1930s and 1940s, nearly all of whom left Aba just before the Nigerian Civil War.

Of the non-Igbo settlers, the Yoruba would seem to have played the most important role at this period. Their activities ranged

from private enterprise to government work. They were engaged in the retailing of imported European goods such as various types of enamel ware. Their women were also said to have pioneered the catering trade, frying yams and making other foods. The first set of lawyers to practise in Aba in the early 1920s were Yoruba. Along with the Saro, Ghanaians, Efik, Bonny and Opobo, they also formed the first crop of government workers in Aba. They were employed as clerks, messengers, and occasionally as technical staff, in the post and telegraph office, the education and public works departments, as well as the railways.

Finally, of the early settlers, we also had the Europeans. Many of them were government officials, while a large number were merchants. The railway and the establishment of motor transport services had attracted many European firms. Many of those already established in Owerrinta on the banks of Imo River, moved to Aba. It was thus not surprising that its European population which was just 29 in 1921 grew to 51 by 1924, an almost 100 percent increase in the space of just three years. It has also been estimated that by 1917, as many as 14 European firms had established in Aba.<sup>71</sup> The major ones among them were the Niger Company, Messrs. Miller Brothers, John Holts, The African Association, African Traders Company, H.B.W. Russell, C.F.A.O and Messrs. G.B. Ollivant.<sup>72</sup> Many of these firms were mainly engaged in the buying of palm oil and palm kernel. By 1923 for instance, 3,669 tons of palm oil and 3,469 tons of palm kernel were bought by all the firms in Aba.<sup>73</sup> Besides produce buying, some European firms engaged in the sale of commodities of European manufacture, especially Messrs. G.B. Ollivant and Miller Brothers. They traded in goods such as salt, stockfish, cotton dresses, enamel wares, bicycles, cutlasses, matches, guns, gunpowder and so on. All these were in high demand not only among the European residents, but also among the various African communities in Aba.

Prominent among the impediments to the development of trade at this time was the question of means of exchange as well as the issue of what value was to be attached to the various currencies. Indeed this was a general problem that confronted early colonial administrators in Eastern Nigeria. It was in their attempt to introduce a standard currency that 'traditional' currencies used in Aba were banned: manillas in 1902; cowries in 1904.<sup>74</sup> From 1911, all government workers were paid in cash as "manillas ceased to be legal tender in courts and government offices."<sup>75</sup> Efforts were made to use the silver shillings introduced by the Currency Board to undermine the popularity of the manilla, but up to the 1920s, it was still not possible to produce a coinage that could rival the manilla in the local markets. If anything, the manilla remained popular and continued to appreciate in value against the sterling, rising from 20 to a shilling in 1902 to 9 to a shilling in 1909, and 6 to a shilling 1918.<sup>76</sup> This development meant that African government workers "who were paid in shillings faced unpredictable cost of living changes as food was traded against manillas in the markets".<sup>77</sup> The whole problem surrounding value and exchange in trading relations in Aba at this period was summed up by Mr. Ewins, Assistant District Officer of Aba when he wrote:

The currency situation is getting worse. The notes are becoming more and more unpopular, those of the higher denominations being practically non negotiable. It is getting increasingly difficult to obtain equal values for the ordinary shilling and "palm tree" shilling. The latter being accepted readily, the former reluctantly or being refused. The liking of manilla is on the increase. A penny purchase can be paid for

with a nickel, but the offer of twelve nickels for a shilling purchase will probably be refused.<sup>78</sup>

Nevertheless, while the Ngwa were refusing British money, other Africans as earlier noted converted this "short-sightedness" into a profitable venture as typified by the Aro, the Bonny and the Opobos. The Bonny and the Opobo, in addition to currency exchange, used coins to buy produce from the Ngwa and then sold the produce to the European firms for notes at reasonable profit. In this way, they satisfied both the Ngwa who did not want to accept notes from the firms and the European firms who preferred to buy produce with notes. Their activities therefore encouraged the growth of commerce in Aba.

With regard to living conditions of the various groups at this time, the Europeans of course occupied the highest position, living in separate quarters and enjoying the best of the amenities available and in fact, regarded themselves as the overlords. On the other hand, both the Yoruba and the Saro, and to some extent the Bonny, Opobo and Efik people looked down on the Ngwa and people from other parts of Igboland. Obviously this attitude had to do with their early contact with western ways and education. Indeed in their view, the Igbo were very "bush, ignorant, superstitious and backward", lacking in sophistication and administrative capability. The Igbo settlers, including the Ngwa, on the other hand, viewed the "foreign Nigerians" with distrust and disdain and the British as a powerful conquering tribe from a far away land with different and strange customs.<sup>79</sup> These factors of mutual distrust took its toll on Aba's development as the various groups did not see themselves as pursuing the same goal of promoting the growth of Aba. It also laid the foundation for some of the acrimonious inter-group relations Aba witnessed in later years, even though several cooperative



efforts were also recorded. Moreover, that the gap which existed between the Igbo (with the possible exception of the Onitsha Igbo) and other Nigerian groups during this period could be closed within forty years is demonstrative of the speed and aggressiveness with which the Igbo launched themselves into the Nigerian polity. It is thus not surprising that many saw this aggressiveness as a disguised form of Igbo imperialism aimed not only at closing the gap, but also at lording it over other groups. The negative consequences of these attitudes for Nigeria's political and economic development during and after our period, eventually climaxing in a civil war are already well known.

In the meantime, while most of the Saro and the Yoruba working for the government, as well as the Opobo and Bonny who were fairly well settled from the era of the palm oil trade, had decent accommodation, virtually all other immigrants became squatters, crowding around the government station and the railway station. Because their settlements were illegal, they were always ready to move at the slightest opportunity or harassment. Their settlements were neither marked out nor surveyed. In most cases, they paid land rents neither to the Chiefs, other Ngwa owners or to the British. Colonial officials made several efforts to dislodge the squatters usually to no avail as they always ended up squatting somewhere else - a tendency which is still bedevilling planning in some urban centres in Nigeria today.

This rapid growth and tremendous rise in commercial activities in Aba began to attract serious attention from colonial officials. Many of them began to see the need for Aba to be upgraded from the status of a government station which it was up to 1919. They wanted the colonial administration in Lagos to recognise these developments and upgrade Aba's status to that of a town. The need to

upgrade Aba had become even more pressing given the haphazard and uncontrolled nature of developments in the emergent town, a situation which made it possible for squatters to take the law into their own hands by putting up temporary and make-shift buildings anywhere with impunity. The upgrading of Aba with its enabling law would make it possible for the administrators on the ground to bring sanity to its development. It was in response to these developments that Aba was classified as a third-class township in 1919.<sup>80</sup> But hardly had this taken place when the need for another upgrading became necessary; itself both a function and an indication of extraordinary growth.

#### The Re-classification of Aba and Early Township Planning

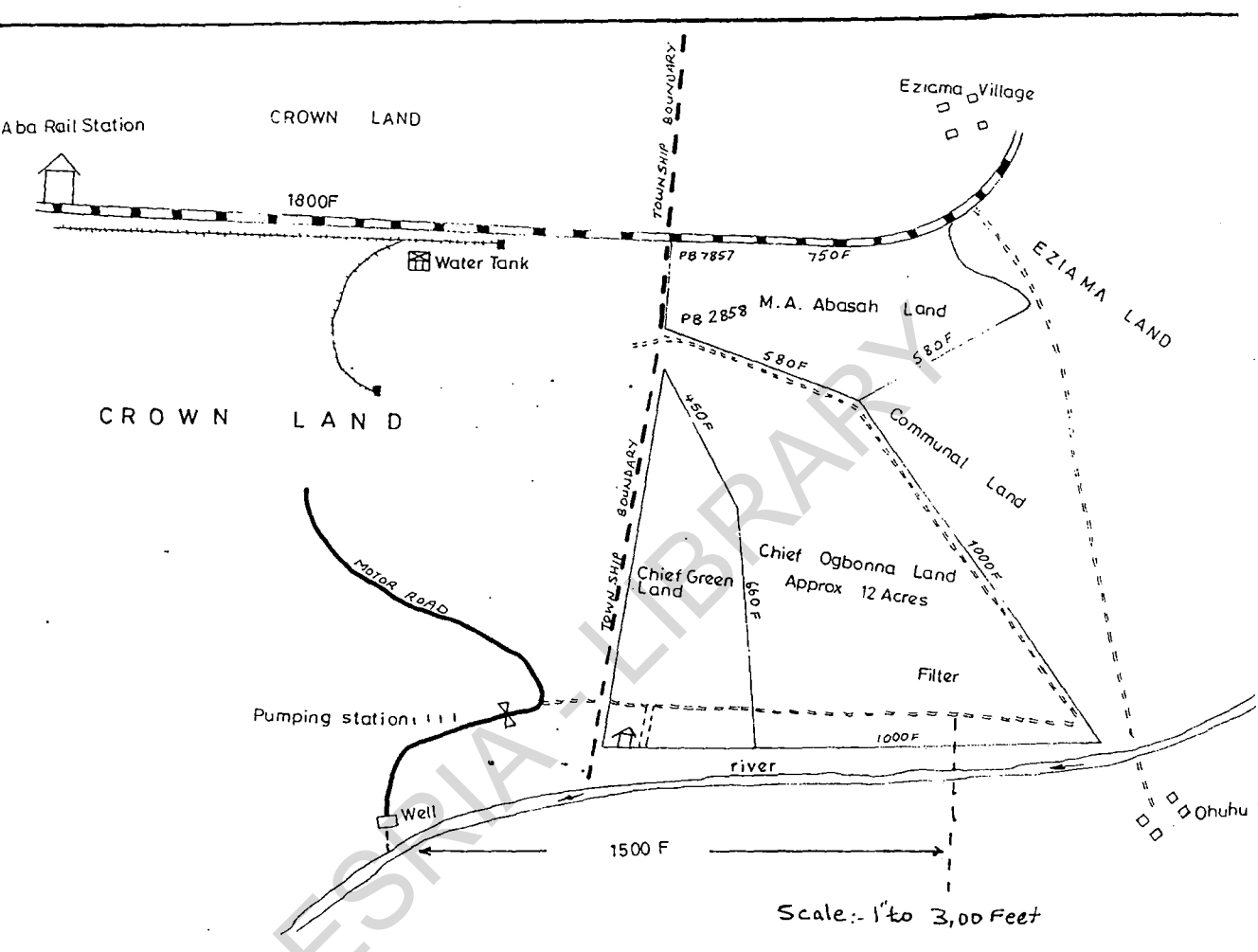
After the declaration as a third-class township, Aba continued its growth unabated. Unfortunately, we have no population figures as of this period except of course, the 1924 divisional figure of 130,380. But even this would hardly have been reliable considering the extent to which people were moving in and out of the town from the neighbouring villages. Nevertheless, the colonial authorities in line with its elevated status embarked on land acquisitions aimed at developing and expanding the town. The first of such acquisitions took place in 1921,<sup>81</sup> when 958 acres of land around the erstwhile government station was acquired from Aba, Bonny and Opobo Chiefs,<sup>82</sup> as well as Saro, Yoruba, Bonny and Opobo residents. Both the Chiefs and the other residents whose plots were forcibly acquired, lamented the acquisition, calling for adequate compensation from the government. While the Chiefs sought redress through litigation,<sup>83</sup> the residents on their part petitioned the Governor. In their petition to Sir Hugh Clifford dated 20th May 1922, they pleaded:

That as these plots have now been acquired by the government your petitioners pray that consideration of

such expenses should be taken so that it may be possible for them to recover, even if not all, a reasonable portion of their outlay. Your petitioners would also state that not anticipating the rapid changes, they had built for themselves and their families - - - comfortable and in some cases fairly expensive houses which under the Aba township extension are in danger of being demolished or partially destroyed.<sup>84</sup>

Despite this and other types of opposition, the government proceeded with the acquisitions. However, after a series of protracted litigation and negotiations in which the Chiefs were represented by Chief Uzoigwe and Chief Ogbonna among others, the government at a meeting held in Aba on July 22, 1921, agreed to pay an annual rent of £200 to the Ngwa Chiefs while new plots were given to the other residents.<sup>85</sup>

The significance of the 1921 land acquisition in Aba's history could be gleaned from the statement by District Officer E.J. Kelly who noted that "the development of Aba township dates from 1921 when government first acquired land for the layout of a European Reservation Area (GRA) and native location".<sup>86</sup> Even though this statement by Kelly is clearly an exaggeration as our discussion thus far indicates, beneath it lies the reality that 1921 marked a significant point in the rise of Aba as a city since that was the year that elaborate land acquisitions for town planning was embarked upon. It was in fact, a fore-runner to a subsequent acquisition in 1923 under which the government acquired the area bounded on the West by the boundary of the Nigerian Eastern Railway boundary, on the North by the then Aba township boundary, on the East by the Aba River and on the South "by a line parallel to the most southerly boundary line of the aforesaid township and a distance of 3,109 feet therefrom".<sup>87</sup> The total area acquired was 829 acres.<sup>88</sup>



SKETCH:- Showing Crown Land and Some other land holdings in Aba, 1940

This second acquisition as would be expected was again opposed by Aba Chiefs who felt that the area needed by the government was too large and the government's compensation package too small. After another series of litigation,<sup>89</sup> the government and the Chiefs at a meeting held on February 10, 1923, finally agreed to a settlement whereby the Chiefs accepted, though reluctantly,<sup>90</sup> an annual rent of £410 instead of the £2,000 they demanded.<sup>91</sup> It may be worthwhile to note here that the government continued to pay this amount until the end of the colonial period, even though Aba Chiefs interviewed by the author still felt bad about the 'pittance' the government paid them as compensation.<sup>92</sup>

After the 1921 acquisitions, the government proceeded with the laying out of Aba into what has been referred to as "a polynuclear structure"<sup>93</sup> which involved the designing of two districts of residential areas with an unoccupied middle or buffer.<sup>94</sup> The first portion of this divide was the area occupied by Europeans which was then known as European Quarters, but today known as Government Reservation Area. This area had the European trading firms section as its service centre. The second section was the African location or native reservation later known as 'Crown Land'. This section had Ekeoha market as its nucleus. Throughout the colonial period, the government collected land rents from both sections. In between both sections was a neutral or building free zone which separated the two areas which formed the township at the time. The surrounding villages of Eziukwu, Osusu, Ndiegoro etc with their service centres became 'minor' nodes.<sup>95</sup>

The point to note however is that, with this pattern of development, the British introduced a culture of separate

development akin to apartheid in the town. It is worthwhile to note that African settlers copied this unfortunate example by the British to the extent that up till today, the different sections of the town are occupied by people from various areas, a situation which as will be shown later, tends to incite group feelings at the expense of cooperative development. However there has been a lot of intermixing since the end of the Nigerian Civil War.

In the meantime, the changes following the 1921 acquisition led to increased commercial activity. The bright prospects of unrestricted entry into commerce and the chances of success even with little initial capital encouraged more population growth. By December 1922 when Aba was upgraded to a second class township, and 1923 when the second land acquisition was made, Aba had emerged as a dominant town in the area, dwarfing in the process, other centrally positioned and economically important settlements such as Akwete, Omoba, Mbawsi, Owerinta, Owerri and Umuahia; all of which now looked up to Aba for economic and political leadership. For example, while 14 European firms had established in Aba by 1917, Mbawsi was to have its first European firm - G.B. Ollivant in 1924,<sup>96</sup> while in the case of Omoba, European firms began to be found there in the late 1920s.<sup>97</sup> Indeed it was partly to redress this growing imbalance between Aba and other areas in Owerri province that made Orlu and Okigwe Chiefs to present a passionate plea in 1922 to Mr. H.C. Moorhouse, Lieutenant Governor, Southern Provinces, that factories should also be established in Owerri. To this plea, the colonial official replied:

Government could not compel any factory to open at Owerri or anywhere else, (that) if the trade justified it and the roads were in good condition so that motor traffic could be employed, firms were sure to come to

Owerri - - - they had already extended from Aba as far as Owerrinta.<sup>98</sup>

### Early Administration in Aba

The administration of Aba, like other aspects of its history, evolved in stages. But whatever the stage, the objective was to set up a peaceful and manageable environment that would make for the effective economic exploitation of the resources of Aba and the countryside surrounding it. This was particularly the case in the period up to 1921 when Aba was administered as part of Aba division which it served as Divisional headquarters.

As we saw, the first step toward the establishment of order in the area was the setting up of a strong military presence through the building of a garrison from where patrols covering the surrounding country was carried out. The next step taken quickly thereafter was the establishment of a native court. The native court was seen as very important by the British, not just as an instrument of justice, but as an urgent means of undermining the power and efficacy of oracles, particularly the Aro oracle in the area. The British saw the courts as the best way of shifting the peoples fear, allegiance, loyalty and respect from the oracles to the British imperial state. It is also worth noting that during this period, the native courts served not only as the judicial organ of the government but also as its administrative organ.

The Aba native court established in 1904 had Mr. H.B. Mansfield as its first District Commissioner. It had jurisdiction over such villages as Asa, Osusu, Abayi, Ovom, Ohanze, Umuocham and others.<sup>99</sup> Its first warrant Chief was Chief Owuala of Eziukwu Aba.<sup>100</sup> The various considerations on which Chief Owuala was chosen need

not delay us here,<sup>101</sup> but it would appear that the most important was that he materially assisted the British in opening up the country. It would be recalled that he was the Chief who welcomed the first British party to Aba in 1898. The British were thus gratifying and compensating a great friend and ally.

Available evidence does not indicate that the British encountered opposition in the appointment of Chief Owuala or his successor, Chief Ugorji. What is certain however is that the Warrant Chiefs in Aba like their counterparts elsewhere were dictatorial, tyrannical and overbearing. The corrupt tendencies which they, along with their court clerks manifested, did not allow them to dispense justice without fear or favour. The result was that some of the people in Aba who did not believe in the efficacy of the court often sought justice from the Okonko Society. This explains why for many years, British administrators kept up a running battle against the Okonko which they saw as a threat to the establishment of a strong British administration in the area. But despite their numerous efforts, the Okonko Society outlived British rule which is a clear manifestation of the fact that the people found its judicial pronouncements fairer than those of the British. Traditional judicial procedures were particularly fairer because it basically sought to resolve or settle disputes and not merely to identify the guilty or not guilty in criminal matters. It was usually not a question of "the winner takes all". Indeed there is still a tendency in most villages in the area to prefer to settle cases by traditional methods instead of having a recourse to the western oriented legal system. In Aba, people often prefer to settle their cases out of court rather than waste their money on the foreign judicial processes, probably without getting justice in the end. This attitude goes back to the era of the misjudgements of the Warrant Chief System. Up till 1921, the



District Officer, the Native Court, the Warrant Chiefs and their agents were the main agents of British administration in Aba.

By 1922, when Aba was made a second-class township, it was also declared a supreme court area. This meant that its residents could no longer be tried under the Native Administration System, but under the Crown System. This development attracted several Yoruba and Saro Barristers from Lagos such as Lawyer Balogun a Yoruba and Awunor Renner a Saro. Thus in theory, every resident came under the system, but in practice, it was mainly Europeans, the Yoruba, Saro, and coastal elites who tried to take advantage of the new judicial processes.

More importantly, the declaration of Aba as a second-class township created the need for the setting up of a township administration, distinct from the administration of Aba Division. The Resident instructed the Aba District Officer to ensure that a township administration with its estimates of expenditure was in place by 1924. It was in line with this thinking that by 1923, a township administration based on the 1917 Township Ordinance was set up. Under the Ordinance, Aba, like Port Harcourt at the time, was run by a Township Advisory Board with a Local Authority who served as its Chairman. The members of the Board were appointed by the Resident. Initially the work of the Local Authority was done by the Aba District Officer who combined it with Native Administration. But by 1928, a Local Authority distinct from the Divisional District Officer was appointed.<sup>102</sup>

The Aba Township Advisory Board was inaugurated in 1923, and from then on, it varied in membership. It began with an initial membership of seven persons; but by 1926, District Officer Jackson increased its membership to 35. Some of the members of the Board in

1930 included the District Engineer of the Public Works Department, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Aba, the District and Produce Manger of U.A.C Limited Aba, the Assistant Director of Surveys Aba, the Lands Officer Port Harcourt (who covered Aba at the time), the Medical Officer Aba, and the District Officer, Aba Division. The Local Authority served as member and Chairman. A few Africans who often did not exceed four were also appointed to the Board. Examples were Barrister W.A. Kisseado who served on the Board in 1924<sup>103</sup> and Mr. Awunor-Renner a Saro Barrister-at-Law who served as a member of the Board in 1930.<sup>104</sup>

The activities of the Board centred on town planning and the day-to-day running of the township under the guidance of the colonial administration. In theory, the Board on which all groups were represented, was expected to serve the interest of all residents of the township. This was however not the case in practice, for the African members only served as a façade to cover the exploitative intentions of the colonial state. In the first place, the presence of both the District and Produce Managers of U.A.C. on a Board dealing with township administration clearly shows that the essence of the administration was first and foremost, the furtherance of the economic interest of the metropole. Secondly Africans were grossly outnumbered and thus lacked any effective voice on the Board. Even if they were not so outnumbered, the Board was advisory, and the Local Authority who served as the Chairman had a veto power on the decisions of the Board. In essence, the Board only carried out policies that were in line with the interest of the colonial administration. The Board remained in existence until its replacement by the Aba Urban District Council in 1953. Its activities in the provision of services from the 1930s to its demise will be examined later.

### Conclusion

In the meantime, we conclude by noting that the early administrative structures set up by the British, created a settled and peaceful atmosphere which encouraged immigration into the town from various parts of the country. It is doubtful if the Saro and Yoruba as well as other Igbo would have risked unguarded immigration into Aba for whatever reasons, were it not for the protection offered by the administration. One is aware of a contrary argument that before the British presence, there was inter-group trade between Aba people and other groups. But as we have already shown, such trade went along well marked out routes, and was in fact unsafe outside the security provided by the Aro and the Okonko Secret Society. To the extent that the administrative arrangement contributed to large-scale immigration and population growth to that extent it was an important factor in the urbanisation process. Even today any city or section of it, that is noted for insecurity soon witnesses a decrease in its residents who often emigrate to more peaceful areas.

Secondly, the administrative structures introduced an alternative legal system to the people, one which was eventually accepted as the authentic system, even though throughout the period of this study, and even now, it existed simultaneously with indigenous forms. The existence of an administrative and legal structure encouraged the growth of commerce and enterprise, especially the European commercial firms who felt comfortable operating under established rules most of which they were already used to. And despite the lopsided nature of the membership of the Township Advisory Board, it provided opportunity for Africans through which they imbibed administrative skills which they used

not only in developing themselves, but also to serve the interest and growth of Aba.

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## Notes

1. There are many works on this subject. See for instance, Obaro Ikime, The Fall of Nigeria, the British Conquest, Ibadan, 1977; J.C. Anene, Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885 - 1906, Cambridge, 1966; S.N. Nwabara, Iboland - A Century of Contact with Britain, London, 1977. See also J. Asiegbu, Nigeria and its British Invaders: 1851 - 1920, London, 1984.
2. J.N. Nwaguru, Op. Cit., P. 42.
3. A text of this treaty could be seen in Nwaguru, Ibid.
4. Akwete was the first government station in the area under study. It was in fact the base from which the British penetrated the surrounding country. However, it must be noted that Akwete people resisted British penetration strongly. For an account of their resistance to British Imperialism, see J.C. Anene, Op. Cit., P.106.
5. Orie Obegu was one of the most important markets in Ngwaland during the period.
6. J.N. Nwaguru: based on an interview with Chief Sunji Ananaba - a great grandson of Chief Ananaba. The interview was not dated.
7. For a text of this treaty, see J.N. Nwaguru, Op. Cit.
8. This opinion was expressed by District Commissioner. A.B. Harcourt in Report of the Expedition to 'Aquetah' (Cal Prof. 8/2/1) 1896.
9. This was obviously a significant gesture because it was mainly 'Waterside Chiefs' that the British paid comney to. It dramatises the extent to which the British regarded him. See Handing Over Notes (Whitehead to Dawson) Aba District, 1908.
10. C.U. Olehi, 'The British Conquest of Ngwaland 1896 - 1906', (B.A. History, U.N.N., 1978) P.20.
11. N.A.E. Cal Prof. 8/2/1 A.B. Harcourt, 'Report of the Expedition to Aquetah', 1896. P.64.

12. This support by the Aro is hardly surprising because besides opposing British Penetration, the Aro ensured that other Igbo communities did likewise by showing hostility towards any village which aided and abetted British penetration or by collaborating with a village quarreling with another village which is friendly with the British.
13. The details of this story could be found in J.N. Nwaguru, Op. Cit.; PP.54-55. See also C.U. Olehi, Op. Cit., PP.25-26.
14. Ibid.
15. It has been argued that even before the arrival of the British, Obegu - Aro relationship was already seriously strained because of the refusal of Chief Ananaba to allow the Aro to establish a trading diaspora in his domain and also because Ananaba was an important competitor to the Aro in the palm produce trade. See Olehi, PP. 21-22.
16. J.C. Anene, Op. Cit., P.209.
17. Some accounts have indicated that the Aro on some occasions even recruited mercenaries from Aba. See S.N. Nwabara, Op. Cit.
18. Official accounts of the killings put the figure at 400; while Chief Ananaba claimed 500. See Memo by Moor on the Aro Expedition, April, 1902 (C501/19) P.600.
19. The various reasons advanced by the British for the Aro expedition was clearly stated in Sir Ralph Moor's despatch to the Colonial Office dated 12th November, 1901. These have been well summarised by Nwaguru. See J.N. Nwaguru, Op.Cit., P.59. See also A.E. Afigbo: "The Aro Expedition of 1901 - 1902" ODU, Journal of West African History, No. 7, April 1972.
20. See Colonial Office 520/10 and 520/13 Reports dated December 24, December 28 and December 31, 1901 cited in Babara Callaway, Op.Cit., P.109.
21. The friendlies as explained by Nwaguru, were people from 'waterside and other helpless towns whom the British usually armed and took along during their expeditions. Some of these people served as guides along the routes of the expeditionary force. They also served in destroying houses, looting and carrying away property, yams and livestock.

22. J.N. Nwaguru, Op. Cit., P.67.
23. Interview with Eze J.G.N. Ogbonna already cited.
24. It is a well known fact that Aba was the base from which the expedition against Arochukwu was eventually consummated. Interview with Chief Leo Uzoigwe already cited.
25. This is the title given to the reigning Chief in Aba who at any point in time is the first among equals. (Lit. The head of the Community).
26. Interview with Eze J.G.N. Ogbonna already cited.
27. The various areas conquered during this extensive operation, particularly in our area, have been well documented by Nwaguru in his book Aba and British Rule. See also C.U. Olehi: Op. Cit., PP. 28-36.
28. Apart from Ihie, some other towns such as Ogire also resisted British penetration initially.
29. Some of the villages represented on the occasion included Akwete, Azumini, Aba, Ohambele, Obohia, Aboyi etc. The villages which were still strongly opposed to the British presence at the time, particularly Ihie, Umugo and Ogire, were not represented. See Entries by A.D.C. Douglas in Akwete District Diary.
30. At this time, Ihie and her two supporters Umugo and Ogwe were still engaged in some kind of passive resistance against the British presence. Despite the fact that they had been defeated in battle, they refused to take any of the orders given by the conquering authorities at this time. Among such orders were the supply of labour, food, and clearing and cleaning of roads.
31. N.A.I. CSo 1/20. 'Southern Nigeria Despatches to Secretary of State' - P.895.
32. J.N. Nwaguru: Op. Cit., P.69.

33. Some of the Chiefs who took part in the planning and execution of the massacre succeeded in escaping these consequences. Examples were Wogu Ekara and Okuekwu of Ihie. See Ibid. Chief Nwankpa Abo from Northern Ngwa who was interviewed by Mr. Oluchi also noted that one Wosu Ndukwe from his village came back free with human heads.
34. A contrary opinion however is that some could have sworn vengeance. But no evidence of this is available to this writer.
35. See Despatches in N.A.I. CSo 1/20 P.806.
36. The beginning of the gradual rise of Aba to an administrative Centre was even noted much earlier. See Major Arthur Glyn Leonard: 'Notes on a journey to Bende'. The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society, Vol x IV, 1898. PP.190-207. In general this period could be said to have marked the beginning of the decline of Akwete.
37. J.N. Nwaguru, Op. Cit., P.68.
38. Southern Nigeria Hand Book, 1912, P.113. This figure obviously did not include residents in the station's surrounding areas. Cited in Ibid., P.76.
39. Ibid., PP.227 - 228
40. Final Report on the Aro Expedition, Moor to Chamberlain, 17 April 1902, C.O. 520/13 Egerton to Lyttelton, 16 July 1905, C.O. 520/31. Cited in Susan M. Martin, Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980. Cambridge, 1988. P.38.
41. The Udi Coal fields were said to have been discovered by a British Geologist called Mr. Kitson in 1909. However, it was not until 1914 that mining operations commenced. For details see P.E. Hair, 'Enugu, an Industrial and Urban Community in Eastern Nigeria 1914 - 1953'. Enugu, 1965. See also F.O. Chikelu, 'The contribution of the Coal Industry to the development of Enugu town 1910 - 1980', (B.A. History Long Essay, Ogun State University, 1988).



42. Suzan M. Martin: Op.Cit., P.49.
43. Ibid., P.53.
44. C.O. 520/55, 'British Cotton Growing Association to Colonial Office,'  
8 August, 1907. P.R.O. Cited in A.G. Hopkins: Op. Cit. P.196..
45. Ibid.
46. Interview with Alhaji S. Subair, Retired Officer of John Holt Ltd, 70 years,  
Ibadan, May 10, 1989.
47. For detailed information on the agreement between Messrs. Weeks  
Transport and Engineering Company and the government, see N.A.E.  
Abadist 13/5/81, 'Messrs. Weeks Transport and Engineering Company',  
1921.
48. See G.R.T. Manase, 'The Kano Peasantry Under Colonial Rule, C. 1903-1966',  
(M.A. History Dissertation, University of Ibadan, October 1985). P.82
49. A.O. Nwagwu, 'Palm Oil Industry in Ngwaland 1800 - 1927' (B.A. History,  
U.N.N., 1980).
50. Cited in G.R.T. Manase, Op. Cit., P.83.
51. For a comprehensive list of the boys involved, see Akwete Diary already  
cited. See also J.N. Nwaguru, Op. Cit., P.68.
52. For detailed information on the question of labour on the Nigerian  
Railway.. see J.O. Oyemakinde, 'A History of Indigenous Labour on the  
Nigerian Railway', 1895 - 1945 (Ph.D. Thesis. History, University of  
Ibadan, May, 1970).
53. N.A.E. Abadist, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1921. P.4.
54. N.A.E. Abadist 15/1/21, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1924, PP.9-10
55. J.O. Oyemakinde, Op. Cit., P.27.
56. N.A.K. SNP 6/5/127/1909, 'Labour Conditions at Baro, Bishop Tugwell  
Complains' Cited in G.R. T. Manase, Op. Cit., P.86.

57. P.A. Talbot, The peoples of Southern Nigeria Vol. IV: Linguistics and Statistics, London, 1926. P.22.
58. N.A.E. Abadist 15/1/21, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1924. P.1.
59. Ibid.
60. The Aba Aza river also helped to draw traders and later settlers especially in the earlier period, from various places, particularly the coastal towns of Opobo and Bonny.
61. Interview with Mr. Nwadike Nwogu, 82 years. Aba, December 28, 1987.
62. A biographical study of this chief would be very useful. The rich documents and files owned by him are now in the possession of his first son Chief Leo Uzoigwe who was kind enough to make some accessible and also granted me interviews on three occasions.
63. For details of this and other observations made by the Resident, See N.A.E. CSE1/85/988, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province, 1918'.
64. It needs be stated however that attempts were made by some Aro to revive the 'Long Juju'. See F. Ekechi, Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland London, 1977. P.125.
65. Interview with Mr. Onwukwe Ukonu, trader, 62 years. Aba, December 20, 1987.
66. Ibid.
67. Interview with Mr. Nwaru, retired washerman, 90 years. Aba, December 19, 1987.
68. An example is Babara Callaway in her study on Local government in Aba which has already been cited in this work.
69. The comparable figures for produce export in the period up to 1913 shows that even at the lowest average of 287 gallons of oil to one ton of kernel, Opobo exports were still higher than Calabar 180 to 1 and Degema 256 to 1. See Suzan Martins, Op. Cit., P.52.

70. N.A.E. Abadist 15/1/13, 'Annual Report, Aba Division'. 1919. P.3.
71. See Nigerian Hand Book, 1917. PP. 179-183.
72. Others were F & A. Swanzy, W.B. MacIver, Nigerian Products Ltd., J.Allen, The Weeks Transport Company and West African Motor Company.
73. N.A.I. CSo 26, 'Annual Report, Aba Division. 1924'. P.28.
74. Suzan M. Martin, Op. Cit., P.43. See also W.I. Ofonagoro, Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria, 1881 - 1929. London, 1979. P.288.
75. Suzan M. Martin, Op. Cit., P.43.
76. Ibid. In Aba, the manilla remained a popular and widely accepted currency up till the late 1930s. Indeed it was not until after the Second World War that the popularity of the manilla declined. This obviously must have had something to do with the final redemption of manillas by the colonial government in 1948. In all 32 million manillas were redeemed by the West African Currency Board "at a cost to the government of £248,000. See Ibid. See also 'The manilla Problem: Post-Scriptum', U.A. Statistical and Economic Review 4: 1949. PP.59-60.
77. Suzan M. Martin: Op. Cit., P.43.
78. For details of this and other observations by Mr. Ewins. See N.A.E. Abadist 15/1/13, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1919. PP.2 and 3.
79. Babara Callaway, Op. Cit., P.221.
80. A.L. Mabongunje, Op. Cit., P.113. The third class townships at the time were still known as government stations.
81. The details of this acquisition can be found in a file held in the private records and Library of Chief Leo Uzoigwe of Eziukwu Aba. But before the 1921 formal acquisition, the government had already acquired land through conquests, for which no payment or compensation was made; and had also obtained another parcel of land through the 'Hargrove agreement' which was used 'for the railway and other purposes including leases to firms in 1915 and compensation was paid for damage done to houses, crops and other property. No rent was paid'. See the write-up "In the Eastern House of Assembly: M.W. Ubani Demands Facts About Aba Crown Land" in the Eastern States Express Vol. 2, No. 410, Aba July 25, 1951. P.1. Here in after referred to as - - - M.W. Ubani Demands Facts - -

82. The various Chiefs who were served the acquisition notice included Chief Fred Green of Bonny, Chief Offiong Jumbo of Jumbo's Waterside, Chief Ogoji (Ugorji) of Aba, Chief Uguzor of Aba, Chief Obonna (Ogbonna) of Aba, Chief Oriaku of Ummugasi, Chief Woru of Osusu, and Chief Wogu of Eziama.
83. The Aba Chiefs who opposed this acquisition were mainly Chiefs Ogbonna and Uzoigwe.
84. See N.A.I. CSo 26 File No. 06199, 'Petition by African Residents in Aba', n.d. P.2. The Signatories to the petition were A.D. Ogunjobi-Labor a Chemist, J. Beresford Jareth and Herbert Macaulay a Catechist all from Sierra Leone; Isaac Wey Licensed Surveyor, Alli Sumonu, trader, J. Fowler trader, all people from Lagos; H. Bowaril trader, and J.W. Pepple both natives of Bonny; P. Bonibo Hoosfall trader, N. Douglas photographer both from New Calabar; Gordon Epelle, Waribo Cookey, Oko Jaja all from Opobo; and Isaac P. Enilfu a trader from Gold Coast. In this Petition, they also pleaded that Aba be made a supreme court area which the government eventually granted.
85. Interview with Chief Leo Uzoigwe already cited. See also - - - M.W. Ubani Demands Facts - - - Op. Cit.
86. N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/145, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1931, P.66.
87. Petition by African Residents - - - P.17.
88. - - - M.W. Ubani Demands Facts - - - Op. Cit.
89. Chiefs Ogbonna and Uzoigwe on behalf of themselves and their people filed a claim through Mr. Charles W. Clinton, their Solicitor, claiming £2,000 cash payment as purchase price or £2,000 annual rent. See Petition by African Residents - - - P.17.

90. It was a settlement involving unequal partners and Chief Leo Uzoigwe confirmed this reluctance to me in an interview.
91. In one of my interviews with him, Chief Leo Uzoigwe told me that the government paid the Chiefs £410 for the second acquisition. But in his book Aba and British Rule, Chief Nwaguru claimed that the government paid the Chiefs £400. See J.N. Nwaguru Op. Cit., P.95. Other sources however confirm Chief Nwaguru's figure of £400. See - - - M.W. Ubani Demands Facts - - - Op. Cit., P.4 Chief Uzoigwe also told me that given the fact that Eziukwu and Obuda were the direct descendants of Aba and had the largest portion of the land acquired, they also got the largest amount of the payment.
92. In all, by July of 1951, the government had paid a total rent of £17,800 in respect of the 1921 and 1923 land acquisition. See - - - M.W. Ubani Demands Facts - - - Op. Cit., P.4.
93. See L.O. Ezutah, 'The Residential Structure of Aba' (B.Sc. Geography, U.N.N. 1978). P.23.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Suzan Martin, Op. Cit., P.93.
97. Ibid.
98. N.A.I. CSo 26 03906, Quarterly Reports, Owerri Province, 1921 - 22 P.3.
99. Other villages in the group included Ariaria, Ndiakata and Ohabiam.
100. J.N. Nwaguru, Op. Cit., P.221.
101. The whole subject of the Warrant Chiefs and local government during this period has been studied by Professor Afigbo. See A.E. Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs, Indirect Rule in South-eastern Nigeria, 1891 - 1929. London, 1972.

102. See Memo from the Resident, Owerri Province to the Secretary Southern Provinces, Lagos. 7th November, 1928, in N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1366. Appointment of Local Authority Aba. P.1
103. N.A.E. Abadist 15/1/21, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1924. P.38.
104. N.A.E. Abadist 8/12/1, 'Aba Township Advisory Board - Minutes of Meeting', September, 1930.

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## CHAPTER III

### FACTORS AND STAGES IN THE GROWTH OF ABA, 1924 - 1945

#### The Boom Years, 1924 - 1929

As earlier noted, Aba was in the centre of Eastern Nigeria's palm producing belt and as would be expected, its fortunes, in terms of growth and development, were largely dictated by the performance of the produce trade. This was especially the case in the period before the beginning of the Second World War. The 1920s was a very active and booming period in the Aba produce trade and trading figures for the period clearly reflected this.

For instance, while in 1923, total produce bought in Aba by all firms amounted to 7,138 tons, this rose to 12,918 tons by 1924,<sup>1</sup> a more than 80 percent growth in just one trading year. Also exports from Opobo and Port Harcourt the two main ports served by Aba fairly confirms this boom in produce trade. For instance, the figures for Palm Oil exports from Port Harcourt show a consistent growth between 1923 and 1929. The only exceptions were in 1924 and 1925 when 25,803 and 28,287 tons of palm oil were exported respectively. Even so, the figures represented extraordinary increases and were therefore positive instead of negative figures<sup>2</sup>.

The economic boom of the period was also reflected in the exchange rates. Since palm produce was paid for in manillas, the exchange rate vis-à-vis the sterling,<sup>3</sup> reflected the economic situation. Thus while the exchange rate was 6 or 7 manillas to the shilling in 1924, by 1926, the value had risen to 5 manillas to the shilling.<sup>4</sup> The increased income to the people was translated into

increased demand for European goods such as spirits, bicycles, stockfish and in particular gunpowder.<sup>5</sup> There was also an increased demand for residential and commercial plots on Asa Road in the African location as more people were able to afford the £5 rent demanded by the government; Asa Road being particularly choicy because it was the main commercial area in the African location. Indeed by 1926, officials were reporting increased scramble and competition for the plots.<sup>6</sup> Also demanded in greater numbers were squatter or temporary occupation licences for those who did not want, or could not afford long leases. Returns from it to the township revenue increased from £446 in 1924<sup>7</sup> to £669: 10s: 0d. in 1926.<sup>8</sup> General township revenue during the period indicated significant surpluses. For instance, in the 1928 financial year Township Administration income was £928: 13: 11d. while expenditure stood at £552: 11: 0d.<sup>9</sup>

This healthy state of the township revenue encouraged the development of infrastructure. New roads were opened up while old ones were kept clean. Perhaps the most important road opened up during this period with regards to contribution to commercial growth was the one linking the railway station with Owerri Road where nearly all the European trading stations were located. The road was built with laterite in 1924. Also three European bungalows and four African first and second class staff quarters were completed in 1926 for the European and African staff.<sup>10</sup> By the same year, 24 permanent stalls were built in the Eke Oha Market. In addition incenerators, a mortuary and a slaughter house were put up. It is clear therefore that the 1920s saw increased economic activity and growth in Aba.

A number of factors help to explain why Aba witnessed a boom during this period. The end of the first world war saw an increased demand in palm produce from the Aba area. This stimulated increased production which was helped by good produce price which rose from



between £11 and £14 per ton in 1921 to above £20 per ton throughout the 1924 - 1928 period.<sup>11</sup> However, it was the vastly improved and diversified transportation system that made it possible for the increased supplies to reach the buying points. These included rail, vehicular and bicycle transport systems. But these various means of transportation had different effects on the different groups of residents. For instance, though rail transportation encouraged the development of trade and boom for all, it was the Europeans that benefited most from it.

Rail transportation as we saw reduced the overall importance of water transport in the produce trade and its introduction hoisted the European firms over the Ubanis. Even though the Ubanis continued to provide stiff competition to the European firms, they were quite unable to take good advantage of the railway like the Europeans. While the canoe house system of the Ubanis equipped them well for river trading in the hinterland, the railway trade on the other hand required a lot of bureaucratic skills needed in dealing with railway officials which the Ubani and other African groups did not have.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Africans lacked the type of working capital needed to pay railway freights. This was because the railway fares did not come cheap. Between 1916 and 1922 for instance, rates for rail transport from Aba to Port Harcourt rose from 10s: 6d. to 18s: 8d.<sup>13</sup> Given the contacts the European firms had with their principals in Europe, they were far better organised for transporting goods in bulk on the railway, and so it was the Europeans who had the best of the boom engendered by the railway.

As for motor transportation, we have already shown in Chapter II that rates for motor transport were even more expensive unless, of course, one operated his own lorry. But African traders did not have lorries, and even in the 1930s when they began operating lorries, it

was usually a generalized passenger/produce service, sometimes owned by those who had no interest in the produce trade. It was mainly European produce merchants who operated their own motor lorries. In addition to the service provided to them by the Weeks Transport Company, firms such as Miller Brothers and Messrs. John Holt had their own lorries. Thus because of the availability of rail and road transport, many of the European firms set up produce buying points at hinterland sites like Mbawsi on the rail line and Owerrinta on the Imo River manned by African clerks. The produce bought at Mbawsi went by rail to Aba, while that bought at Owerrinta was taken to Aba by motor lorries. In this way, the Aba produce trade enjoyed increased supply from these hinterland markets, thanks to the facilities provided by the railway and motor transport; but again, to the greatest benefit of Europeans.

For Africans, it was the bicycle transport that ensured their full participation in the boom of the period. Initially, it was by head portage that Africans from the surrounding villages and Aba took their produce to the European buying sites. But by the 1920s, bicycles began to be introduced. Over 100,000 bicycles were said to have been imported into Nigeria between 1922 and 1929.<sup>14</sup> In Aba the bicycles sold were of two types: the English type sold at prices ranging from £3: 5/- upwards,<sup>15</sup> and the Japanese type which was assembled in Aba by the firms and bicycle repairers. This type was called "fix" and its price ranged from £2: 10/- to £3: 5/-.<sup>16</sup> The cheaper Japanese bicycle was more popular than the British one even though the colonial authorities and the British merchants dismissed it as inferior. As noted earlier, Africans managed to buy bicycles through contribution clubs and from earnings from their produce trade. It was with bicycles that many producers and traders moved produce from the numerous nooks and crannies to the nearest roads for onward movement to Aba. It was not uncommon to find young men and women carrying heavy loads of

palm oil from such distant areas as Ikot Ekpene, Owerrinta, Omoba and Azumini to Aba. For Africans therefore the bicycle was the most revolutionary means of transportation introduced during the period and for them it played the most significant role in the produce trade boom of the 1920s.

In general, all the new means of transportation played crucial roles and complemented each other in helping to move produce which was in good supply because of the favourable produce prices. Produce was moved to Aba because it was the main collecting and buying point for export through Opobo using the river system and Port Harcourt through the railway. This development in turn created opportunities for porters, labourers, agents, clerks, among others all of whom benefited from the increased demand, supply and sales of produce. This was a significant development; for, as will be seen later, it was from this early participation in the produce trade that many Aba residents made the initial capital with which they entered other businesses. The produce trade was thus the most important factor of growth in Aba during this period.

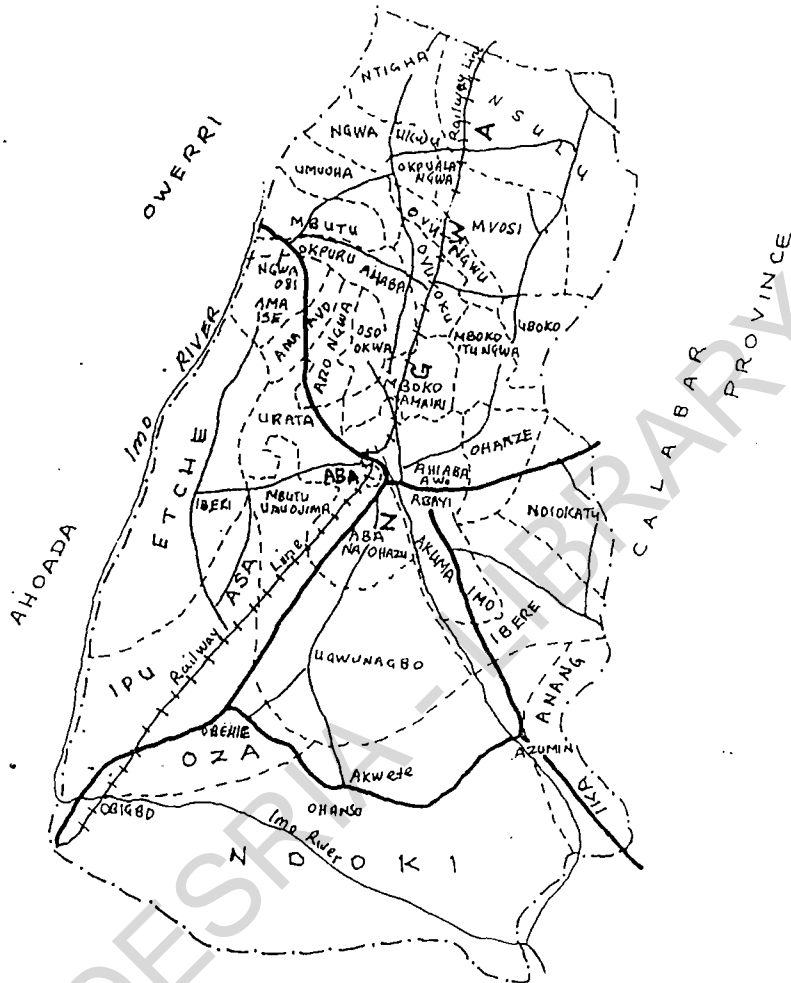
#### The Aba Women's Riots

We have seen that by the mid-1920s, Aba had become an economically important town, enjoying new confidence and economic boom from the activities of both Africans and Europeans. These economic achievements were to be substantially affected by two main developments during the inter-war period. These were the Aba Women's riot and the era of world-wide trade depression.

As it is well known, the first and foremost consideration of the British in their developmental efforts during the colonial period were the economic returns that such efforts held out for the metropole. To

# ABA DIVISION 1940

BENDE



- P W D Roads
- N A Roads
- Divisional Boundary
- Clans

realize such gains in a largely undeveloped area required some investment in infrastructure. Yet, in spite of the often repeated propagandist notion of the 'whiteman's burden', the British were not prepared to 'invest' the capital of the metropole in such necessary infrastructure. Rather, they wanted what we may describe as total exploitation in which the people's labour and capital were used in extracting their surplus. It was this thinking that informed policy formulations, often without a consideration of the effects of such policies on the colonized people.

One of such policies which the British initiated and which substantially, affected the history of Aba, was the introduction of direct taxation in Aba Division. The details need not delay us here as they have been adequately treated elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> It would suffice to state that in spite of official reports such as those of Mr. S.M. Grier and his Assistant<sup>18</sup> which advised the government against the introduction of direct taxation to the Eastern Provinces in the 1920s, the Assistant Secretary Mr. G.J. F. Tomlinson felt that it was feasible.<sup>19</sup> Taxation, he insisted, would provide the much need funds for setting up the infrastructure that would facilitate the achievement of the colonial goals: the exploitation of the resources of the colonized state to the benefit of the mother country.

It was in furtherance of this objective, that a Native Revenue (Amendment) Ordinance was issued in April, 1927. Armed with this Ordinance, the Resident of Owerri Province toured the Districts including Aba, explaining the impending process to the people. As would be expected, the people were unimpressed and uninterested. He lamented this apathy shown by the people when he wrote:

'Taken together, they were as favourable as could be expected. During the next ten months the effervescence that has been

generated in a few places will probably evaporate, though a mild explosion may occur here and there. At all meetings in addition to explaining what was meant by direct taxation, I outlined the system of native administration and native treasuries and sketched generally the benefits which might result from a measure of self rule. But for the most part, my words were wasted: falling upon uninterested, uncomprehending or somnolent ears.<sup>20</sup>

However, despite this poor response, and the Resident's fore-warning of a possible explosion, the British proceeded to institute direct taxation in the area from April, 1928, and which was collected for the 1928 tax year. By 1929, however, an incident in Oloko, then in Bende Division<sup>21</sup> ignited a revolt aimed at demonstrating the people's deep-seated resentment against taxation and the economic situation under which the people lived. Indeed, the economic conditions of the people rather than the immediate problem of taxation seem to have been the main factor that made them to riot. A sudden, but sharp economic decline had set in after a long period of boom. From a high price of £24 per ton in December 1928, the buying price of palm oil in Aba fell to an average of £20: 5/- between April and June of 1929.<sup>22</sup> By December, it had fallen further to £19: 5/-, a price many producers considered so low that they refused to bring out their produce for sale to the European firms. The adverse economic conditions continued into 1930. At Aba prices fell further from £19: 5/- per ton of soft oil<sup>23</sup> and £10: 12: 6d. for kernels in 1929 to £12 and £7 respectively<sup>24</sup> in 1930. These developments affected the people very badly. District Officer Jackson of Aba underscored their role in bringing about the riots when he noted:

My belief is that the primary cause of the discontent among the women was the rapid and sustained drop in the prices paid for

produce that <sup>occurred</sup> during the three months prior to the disturbances. This would naturally give rise to a great deal of conversation and argument in the villages regarding the ability to pay tax if such low prices continued. It does not require a great deal of imagination to understand how such grievance gave ground for a fresh one. From market prices to tax, from tax to extortions in the native courts and the last straw when rumour came from Oloko that women were to be taxed.<sup>25</sup>

Arising from these adverse trading conditions of course, was a fall in the exchange value of the manilla - from an old rate of 7 or 8 manillas to a shilling, it fell to 9 or 10.<sup>26</sup> This meant that the local people now needed more manillas to purchase less goods.

Added to the above problem was the emergence of the United Africa Company on the Aba commercial scene. In 1929, the United Africa Company was formed through the amalgamation Of the Niger Company and the African and Eastern Trading Corporation. With this amalgamation, the U.A.C. closed about five trading premises belonging to the two companies in the town.<sup>27</sup> From that time onwards, the U.A.C., which had become the major produce buying company in Aba, opened two trading sites where they insisted that all purchases must be made. This new development disoriented the local people. Many were confused because they did not know that the United Africa Company purchasing produce on plot D was the same African and Eastern Trading Company which purchased on plot G.<sup>28</sup> Also, the people had no personal knowledge of the new local European agents employed by the U.A.C., as the old and friendly ones they were used to had suddenly disappeared. Worse still, nearly all produce was from then on bought by weight instead of volume measured by tins or bags.<sup>29</sup> This new development bewildered the local people who did not understand the reading of the weights well, and resented the possibility that they

could be cheated. Indeed they were cheated, for, while their produce was weighed and attracted lower prices, the European manufactures imported and sold by the firms were not weighed and attracted even higher prices.

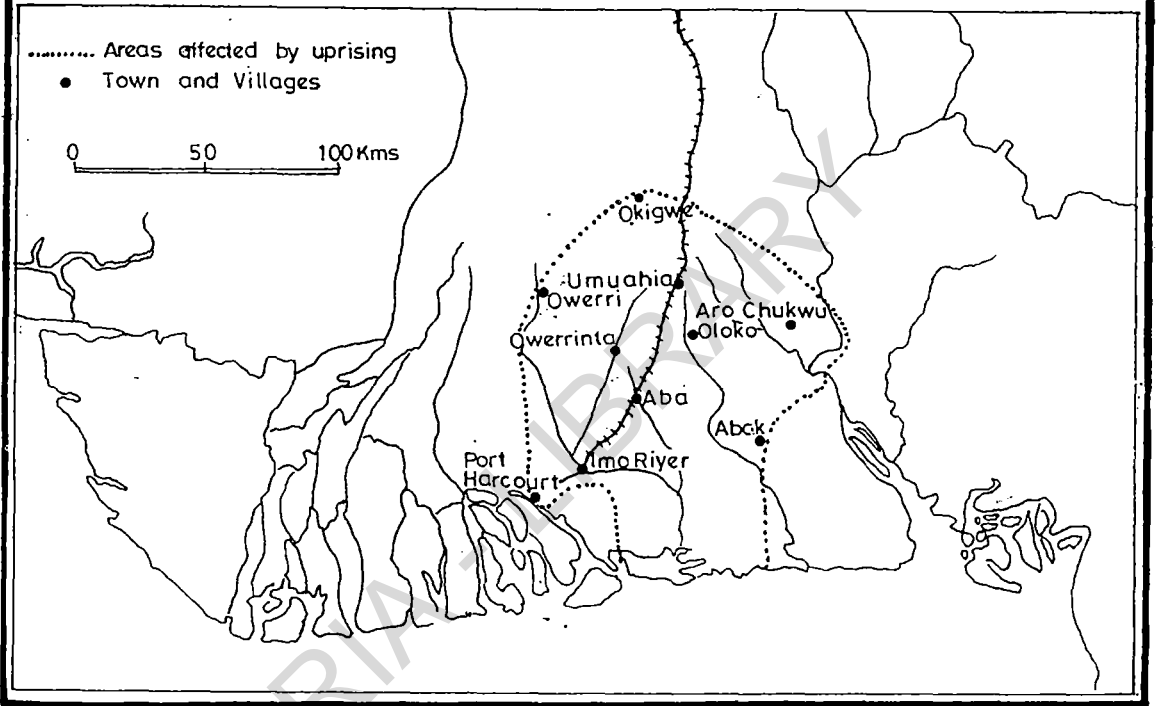
As if these changes were not enough, nearly all the firms stopped buying produce by barter as all produce from then on was bought by cash.<sup>30</sup> The idea behind this was to force the local people to bring out their produce for sale since they must have cash to pay their taxes and fines. Thus since many had refused to bring out their produce for sale because of the very low prices, there was a resultant cash shortage in the city; many European manufactures which the people had been induced to regard as essential in effect became unaffordable. This had negative consequences for the people's standard of living as reflected in this report of an encounter which District Officer Ferguson had with rioting women at Okpala:

- - - I listened to what they said but their demands were impossible - - - The first demand was that women should not be taxed. The second was that the price of produce should go up at once and the price of imported articles should go down. The third was that the tax on men should be reduced - - - Two days later they changed that to the abolition of tax - - - The women said "you want us to pay tax now. Our men have to pay taxes, and they have to borrow money to pay them and an excessive interest is charged. We must pledge our palm trees to get money as the Warrant Chiefs take all our money - - - .<sup>31</sup>

The point to note is that the British firms never consulted African producers, merchants and agents when they were introducing the various changes; an attitude which many firms in Nigeria today, which are their offshoots, still manifest. The firms had their reasons



# THE EXTENT OF THE WOMEN RIOT 1929



Source:- Susan Martin

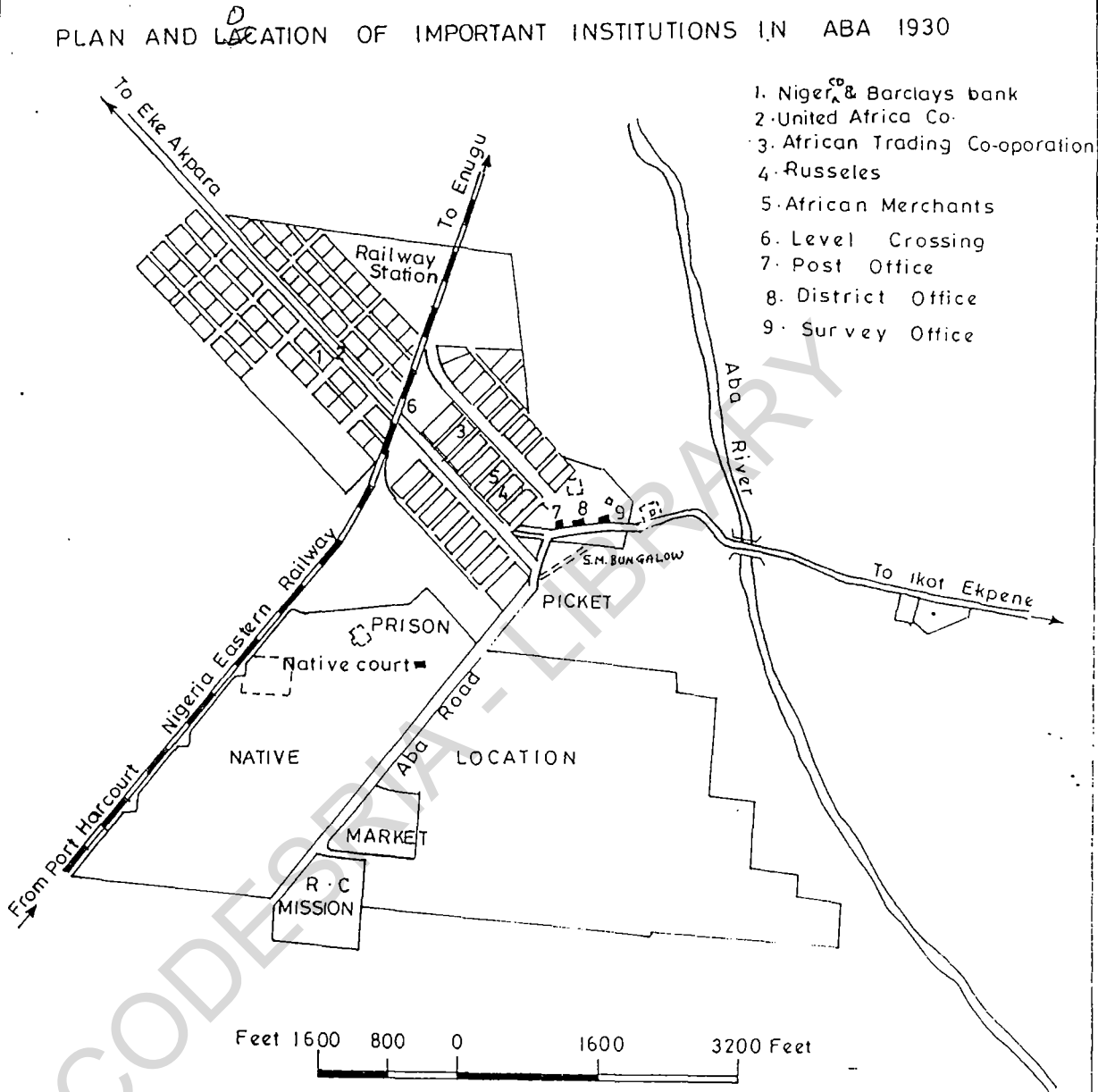
for introducing the various measures and therefore cared less about how it was received by Africans. By and large, the general aim was to encourage a monopolistic situation and the maximization of profits. Unfortunately, the result was far from this as both Africans and Europeans suffered losses in Aba when the riots began.

The riots which began in the town on December 10, 1929, took a dramatic turn the following day when bands of women mostly from the surrounding villages, with one band said to have numbered over 1,000 persons,<sup>32</sup> attacked the District Officer, the Resident who was visiting Aba at the time, and the Station Magistrate, and looted many factories.<sup>33</sup> It needs be pointed out that contrary to the opinion of some Colonial Officials in Aba, there was in fact no prior plan either before or during the riots to loot European factories. The lootings were the result of an accident which occurred when Dr. Hunter, the British doctor stationed in Aba accidentally knocked down two of the rioting women with his car.<sup>34</sup> Afraid that the women would vent their anger on him, he took refuge at the Niger Company which had become the U.A.C. Since the factories were already being perceived by the people as symbols of European domination and exploitation<sup>35</sup>, especially with the fall in produce prices,<sup>36</sup> it was not surprising that the furious women attacked the trading station and others subsequently. Unemployed youths who were becoming a feature of the town at this period joined in the looting. This explains why even though the riots began in Oloko and covered most of the Eastern Provinces, it was called Aba Riots, because it was in Aba and its environs that the greatest damage was done to European interests.

The riots caught the colonial authorities unprepared as only a handful of policemen were stationed in Aba at the time. The D. Company of the Royal West African Frontier Force which served the Owerri Province was located at the more central Okigwe. The

# ABA

## PLAN AND LOCATION OF IMPORTANT INSTITUTIONS IN ABA 1930



1. Niger<sup>CO</sup> & Barclays bank
2. United Africa Co.
3. African Trading Co-operation
4. Russeles
5. African Merchants
6. Level Crossing
7. Post Office
8. District Office
9. Survey Office

Source: Nigeria Surveys Lagos

three platoons that were ordered to Aba, some 129 kilometres away<sup>37</sup> did not reach the trouble spot until the third day on December 12, by which time a lot of damage had been done.<sup>38</sup>

The consequences of the riots for the growth of Aba were multifaceted. In the first place, it adversely affected the commercial status of the town. It led to the closure of all the markets and shops in the town, and this completely destabilized economic activities. Worse still, many of the rioters looted European trading stations and many budding local enterprises. Indeed on some occasions, particularly on December 12, 1929, shop clerks who defied the riots to open up their shops had to fight pitched battles with the rioters. Even though some of the goods stolen were recovered by the police and troops, the fact remains that a lot of damage had been done to the people's business spirit. Consequently, there was a significant fall in the rating of Aba as an important centre of commerce and investments. Many European firms, especially the small ones who were badly affected by the lootings folded up their business and left for more peaceful centres as Aba was now seen as an highly volatile and violent area. The bigger ones such as the Niger Company/U.A.C. and Messrs. Miller Brothers and Company first closed temporarily, then scaled down operations under a partial opening, only to re-open fully when things completely calmed down. In general, the business spirit of the firms was so shaken that it took some time before those who did not pull out could re-establish their businesses. The result was that capital was diverted out of the town to such competing centres as Omoba, Mbawsi and Owerinta; business growth slowed down and whatever employment opportunities the firms would have created were lost.

The riots also led to a rise in prices of European products in demand by Africans as a result of the temporary scarcity which ensued. This in turn affected the people's standard of living as they

could no longer afford what they were used to. But more importantly, it discouraged, at least in the short run, new European enterprises and slowed down capital from entering Aba.

Yet the riots had other consequences: the late arrival of the troops to Aba led to a re-thinking by the authorities about the location of the D. Company of the Royal West African Frontier Force. The authorities now felt that with a well developed rail and road transport network, in addition to a better strategic location than Okigwe, Aba, rather than Okigwe, should be the base of the Company. As a result, the relocation was subsequently effected.<sup>39</sup> The point to note, however, is that the relocation marked the beginning of yet a new role for Aba as an important base of the Royal West African Frontier Force, a role which was to increase in scope and importance with the coming of the Second World War.

The arrival of the troops in the town even during the riots swelled its population and created the need for various types of services and amenities such as barracks, more vehicles for transportation, and increased food supply. While the colonial authorities provided some of these directly, for instance water supply and some accommodation, others were contracted out to some individuals as can be seen from the invoices presented to the government at the end of the riots. One of such claims was presented by the Seriki of the Hausa Community, Chief Mamodu Bello, for the foodstuff he supplied to the troops. He submitted a total claim of £73: 0s: 10d.<sup>40</sup> The contract was given to the Seriki presumably because a majority of the troops were Hausa and it was not the Hausa who were engaged in the protest. At a time when there were no markets in operation, the Seriki must have used his position to get his people to go far and near in search of food supplies. The point is that capital of £73

enabled the Seriki and others in the Hausa Community to become permanent and prosperous residents.

In the meantime, the committee inquiring into the compensation claims by both Europeans and Africans sat at Aba from 2nd to 14th March, 1931. After considering the various claims, it recommended a compensation package amounting to £3,183: 4s: 8d. to be paid to Europeans while £229: 5s: 3d. was to be paid to Africans in Aba Division.<sup>41</sup> Thereafter, the government instructed the Aba District Officer to sell off recovered but unclaimed goods while those not bought should be destroyed. Consequently, a public auction was organized in which the goods were sold for between 6d. and 5/- leading to a realization of £4: 9s.: 0d. by the government.<sup>42</sup> The point to note however is that the extent of the compensation paid by the government is a clear indication of the widespread nature of the damage done. Even though the payment was for the whole division; the fact was that the greater percentage of it was paid to individuals and businesses in Aba town; and by the standards of the 1930s, £3,400 was a large sum of money. With that kind of capital re-injected into the town, and as peaceful conditions returned, commercial activities resumed fully as new immigrants from various places also flocked into the town. Unfortunately, the expected benefits that could have accrued to Aba from these developments were severely dampened by the inception of the depression.

### Economic Depression

As we have already seen, by 1928, Aba had begun to witness economic depression. This trend continued in 1929, culminating in the Aba Women's Riots of 1929 through 1930. However, it was in 1931 that the town faced its worst economic depression. Prices of produce bought at Aba fell to unprecedented levels, changing many times for the worst during the same year. For instance, the January 1931 price

of a tin of palm oil was 3/- 9d while a bushel of palm kernel was 3/- 3d. This was to change between February and May when the price of palm oil for the first time fell below that of palm kernel. While a tin of palm oil was sold at 1/- 6d, a bushel of palm kernel was sold at 1/- 8d.<sup>43</sup> Compared to the January prices, this represented a 200 percent fall in the purchasing price of produce. We are all living witnesses to the effect the drastic fall in crude oil prices is having on the balance of payments as well as the living standards in Nigeria today. It is thus clear why such a drastic fall in palm produce prices (which was the backbone of Aba's economy at the time) had depressing effects on the commercial growth and urbanization. At no time before, in the history of the town, did prices go down to such a ridiculous extent. For African producers and traders therefore, it was the government in collaboration with the European merchants that fixed prices at such low levels.

In response to these developments Africans adjusted their living standards as they reacted variously to European products. Some like cotton goods, earthen and enamel wares, bicycles, knives, and matches were almost completely struck off the shopping list of Africans. Products which were still in demand such as stockish, kerosene, salt and soap received very low patronage. On the European side, the sharp drop in demand for manufactures from their stores forced many to close down while a good number of others reduced the scope of their operations. For instance, the main commercial road, Owerri Road, described once during the boom years as a scene of "bustling activities" had by 1931 metamorphosed into an area remarkable for its "sabbatical calm".<sup>44</sup> At Owerri, a business centre which served as supply point to Aba, as many as three European factories were closed down by 1931 while others had their staff and salaries reduced.<sup>45</sup> This reduced the quantity of produce Aba based firms got from there, and

this in turn affected other ancillary businesses such as transport which served the route.

We have dwelt much on the produce trade because it was from it that most residents of Aba, European and African, got the capital with which they entered other businesses. They were either producers, buyers, agents, porters, labourers etc. It was thus a very important factor in Aba's growth. Nevertheless, other important factors of growth also experienced serious depression. A good example was the motor transport business for which Aba was well known during the period. This business, in 1931, witnessed serious depression because of reduced produce buying and a drop in passenger traffic as a result of cash flow problems. At the beginning of 1931 five motor engineering firms employing no less than eight Europeans were operating in Aba. By the end of that year, sales of new transport vehicles had almost ceased and their European personnel had been reduced to four.<sup>46</sup> This trend in sales was to be reversed in 1936 when evidence indicates a period of boom in the sales and availability of motor lorries in Aba. But the low prices of produce which continued until the beginning of the second world war, in addition to the large number of lorries struggling for fewer passengers and reduced tonnage of produce adversely affected motor transport businesses. As a result of the competition which involved both foreign and local companies, prices reached such an all time low that it became uneconomical to operate motor lorries. For instance, for a fee of 9d. one could obtain a passage from Aba to Owerri, a distance of 65 kilometres while from Aba to Onitsha, a distance of 167 kilometres the charge was between 1/- 3d. to 1/- 6d.<sup>47</sup> Since there was little produce to carry, the transporters could not make up with freighting. Attempts by the transporters to unite against the odds by fixing uniform prices were only moderately successful as various means were employed by some of the transporters to breach the agreement.<sup>48</sup> Because of these terrible conditions, many of the



small operators dropped out of business and those remaining scaled down their operations. The effect of this was that vehicle sales which had witnessed a slight recovery in 1936 had by 1938 recorded a 50 percent drop in both its sales and that of its accessories.<sup>49</sup>

Matters were made worse for the Aba economy by the small amount paid out as wages during the period. For instance, for carrying a big bag of garri from the market to the railway station, a distance of nearly three kilometres a labourer was paid only one penny. An unskilled labourer during the time could only hope to earn 15/- a month.<sup>50</sup> It was not just that wages were low, there was in fact the added problem of unemployment which reached unprecedented proportions during the period, with many young men milling about without jobs. This gloomy economic picture was to continue until the outbreak of the second world war but not without consequences.

In the first place as already noted, the peoples' purchasing power was seriously reduced and this was reflected in their inability to meet their needs. But it was not only feeding and clothing that was affected. The process of urban renewal which had been a continuing process, whereby residents gradually replaced their temporary dwellings with permanent ones also witnessed a lull. More importantly, the great quest for western education, the products of which were necessary for the town's development suffered a serious setback in the period as many parents could not afford the funds to finance their children's education in schools. As District Officer H.P. James noted, even though there were schools, "only a small proportion of children can attend as not only is capacity of existing schools limited but the great majority of parents cannot afford school fees for their children, low as they are, owing to the continued depression"<sup>51</sup> The educated elements already produced could not find jobs. As the D.O. further noted, "there is much unemployment among this class of

persons who have gained a sense of superiority from their education and are naturally unwilling to look to the normal agricultural pursuits of the people for their livelihood".<sup>52</sup>

As is often the case in most urban centres, whenever there is increased unemployment, it is usually reflected in increased crime as many of the unemployed seek unorthodox ways of meeting their personal needs, a phenomenon which still exists in urban centres today. Aba during this period was not an exception. Cash shortages and unemployment led to such crimes as robberies, house breaking, stealing and counterfeiting of currency. In the case of currency counterfeiting for instance, there was a progressive rise in the number of people convicted for the crime during the depression years. In 1935, there were 24 prosecutions while in 1936, 28 prosecutions was recorded.<sup>53</sup> By 1937, the situation was still bad enough for the District officer to write:

Mercantile houses in Aba have reported that there have been a very pronounced increase in the number of counterfeit coins in circulation during the past 3 months. It is probable that owing to the serious fall in the price of palm products the people are getting short of money and attempting to alter counterfeit coins which have been in their possession for some time.<sup>54</sup>

Figures for stealing were even more alarming. In 1938 alone, 111 cases of stealing was reported in Aba township. Because many of those convicted had no cash to pay fines, the Aba prison which in 1938 had space for 200 in-mates became over-filled with prisoners.<sup>55</sup>

The point to note, therefore, is that despite the direct effects of the depression on the growth of the town, there was the indirect effect of social insecurity. When this crime situation is added to the earlier

problems of head hunting and kidnapping, Aba gradually acquired the reputation of a crime-prone city, a reputation which in some ways still persists today. Such reputation was often a disincentive to investors: hence it added to the depression in slowing down the rate of urbanization in Aba.

#### Developments during the Second World War

The war years, 1939 to 1945, were a period of changing fortunes for Aba. In the early period of the war, the pre-war economic depression continued at very serious levels. Produce prices remained extremely low while there was scarcity or very high prices attached to European goods when available. However, by 1941 as the war progressed, the fortunes of Aba began to change as the war induced increased cash flow and economic prosperity in the town.

The problem of scarcity of goods which led to increased prices for those available arose because the British channeled all energies, men and material, to the war effort. When this was added to the existing economic depression, prices of essential goods went beyond the reach of many residents. For instance, by the end of 1939, prices of bicycles and bicycle spare parts rose 25 percent above normal.<sup>56</sup> There was also a 100 percent increase in the cost of motor spare parts.<sup>57</sup> Petrol used in running the vehicles came under severe rationing. Lorry owners were granted permission to purchase only 75 percent of their normal petrol supplies which was 16,000 gallons per month. However, the problem of cash flow ensured that they purchased no more than 11,000 gallons on the average.<sup>58</sup> The result was that the transport of produce by lorries almost ceased as lorry owners operated passenger services mainly, with consequent adverse effect on commerce. Other goods which were in short supply during the period were milk, sugar, salt, butter, whisky, gin and flour. In

most cases, the ordinary citizens had little or no access to these goods. However, European and African government workers considered "habitual consumers" by the authorities were given ration cards which permitted them to buy the quantities indicated on their ration cards from European firms, particularly the U.A.C. As should be expected, Europeans were favoured in the rationing and in 1943, for instance, the maximum allowable ration for a month was 3 bottles of whisky, 2 bottles of gin, 15 lbs of flour and 30 tins of milk.<sup>59</sup>

It was the scarcity of salt that constituted the greatest problem for the African population during the war years. Because of serious shortage, Aba women had to organize themselves in groups in order to get allocations. This provided a great opportunity for some politically minded ones, among them Mrs. Margaret Ekpo who, prior to the time, had been seeking ways of mobilizing Aba women but without success as their husbands did not allow them to attend political rallies. When the salt crisis came, she succeeded in getting allocations from the U.A.C. which she subsequently used as a bait to attract women to attend her meetings.<sup>60</sup> In this way she sensitized the women towards taking an interest in political issues in general and those affecting them in particular. As a result of such political mobilization, many women embarked on a series of business enterprises as well. In general therefore, the first few years of the war were those of extreme scarcity, cash shortage and reduced standard of living which affected the growth of Aba adversely. Yet from the pains of the period, came a realization of the need for greater individual efforts at survival.

This dramatic change of fortune came by 1941 when the scope of the war had spread to the Pacific. It was the war in the Pacific which restricted the supply of fats from Australia, New Zealand and the East Indies. There was thus a need not only to maintain a steady supply of oil from Nigeria but also to increase the quantity supplied. British

anxiety about the supply of palm oil reached the extent that Mr. G.H. Hulme, a representative agent of John Holt and Company (Liverpool) Limited in a letter dated 24th January, 1942, asked the Aba District Officer to arrange for anti-aircraft protection of palm oil tanks to prevent enemy low level aircraft attack.<sup>61</sup> Also, to ensure increased and steady supply, the government banned the export of garri<sup>62</sup> to Northern Nigeria so as to get the producers to concentrate their attention on palm oil and kernels.

Consequently, palm oil purchases in the division, nearly all of which ended up in Aba, rose from 11,782 tons in 1940 to 20,017 tons in 1941 while that of kernel moved from 13,069 tons in 1940 to 15,052 tons in 1941.<sup>63</sup> Similar increases were recorded in other products which were also needed for the war effort. Purchase figures of rubber for instance, rose from 107 tons in 1939 to 117 tons in 1940 and almost doubled to 206 tons in 1941.<sup>64</sup> But despite these efforts at increased production and sale by Africans, the prices paid to them only moved up marginally. For instance, average price for rubber moved from 6d. per pound in 1940 to 7d. per pound in 1941.<sup>65</sup> Thus it was the increased production of commodities, rather than the price, that enabled Africans to earn more cash during the period. This went some way in alleviating the war time sufferings of producers, produce agents and traders.

For white collar workers, however, things remained very difficult up to the end of 1941. By 1942, through the efforts of the trade unions, the colonial government calculated and awarded a cost of living allowance to workers in order to compensate them for the increases in cost of living brought about by the war. Consequently in Aba town, a basic minimum wage was fixed. Unskilled labour received a cost of living bonus of 9d., placing the lowest paid labourer on a wage of 1/- 6d. a day. Monthly paid employees within the township on

salaries up to £4 per month received 50% increase as bonus after which the rates were gradually reduced for the higher paid staff.<sup>66</sup> This increase in wages so pleased the workers that the Aba branch of the Nigerian Civil Service Union were in their address to eulogise the Governor who visited Aba soon after:

Never before, since the days of Sir Hugh Clifford had a Governor been so generous, so broad-minded, so kind-hearted and so interested in the affairs of the African staff and employees. This is not an idle talk, nor do we need to indulge in gaseous flattery but a study of the estimates for 1935-36 approved before your excellency's assumption of duty in Nigeria and the current estimates for 1942-43 will convince the most critical observers that even Angels could not have brought about better wonderful transformations in the status of African staff and employees within a short period.<sup>67</sup>

It is clear from this eulogy, even with elements of exaggeration contained therein, that Aba white collar workers appreciated the improvement in their salaries. We need to point out however that much of the benefits that accrued from the increases were eroded by the high prices of goods.

Another feature of the period which affected Aba's history remarkably was the arrival of large numbers of military personnel in the town in 1942. As already indicated, the problems associated with the quelling of the Aba riots of 1927 had led to the establishment of a large military barracks in Aba. This military presence was further expanded during the Second World War with the quartering in the town of Companies of the General Transport Corps and the West African Army Service Corps. It is significant to note that both of these corps

which were service oriented were located in Aba because it already had a well developed transport sector, being the centre of the motor transport business in the East; and also because of its strategic location which enabled the soldiers not only to serve the whole East, but also part of the Cameroons. The point to note however, is that the large settlement of soldiers, both rank and file, British officers and non-commissioned officers, had far-reaching consequences on the growth of the town. In the first place, the soldiers came with several heavy-duty military vehicles which exerted a lot of pressure on the poorly made laterite roads in the town, causing wide spread potholes especially during the rainy season. This was not without concern to the township authorities who in 1943 directed all military vehicles to use only three roads in the town, namely, Asa, Hundred foot and George Street,<sup>68</sup> and to observe a speed limit of 20 m.p.h. on the roads and 10 m.p.h. on the bridge over the Aba river<sup>69</sup>. These efforts would nevertheless have come to nought had the military authorities not agreed to make the roads all weather ones by constantly filling them with ash collected from the railway station. In this way, what would have been a problem turned into a blessing for the city residents and business community who now enjoyed "ashed" roads.

Apart from this unintended benefit to the town's growth, the coming of the military created the need for a whole range of services in the town. They needed accommodation for themselves and more parking spaces for their numerous vehicles. They needed supplies of goods and other services. These needs positively affected growth in the town. In the first place, commercial bungalows and stores which were abandoned or left idle by failed businesses as a result of the 1929 riots and the slump of the 1930s, were completely taken up by the military personnel while other derelict stores were hired to shelter army lorries and goods, thus injecting new capital also to the delight of the owners of the properties. The presence of the military also

encouraged the growth of certain indigenous business enterprises such as catering, shoe mending etc., provided employment opportunities <sup>for</sup> servants, helpers and concubines. This was the case particularly with British non-commissioned officers who were known to be always in need of women as prostitutes and concubines.<sup>70</sup> Many raised modest capital from those jobs which they used to move into new endeavours. More money came into the town in the form of salaries, separation allowances and allotments. Many families received remittances from their kin serving the British in other parts of the world. When added to the increased amounts realized from the sale of produce as well as increased wages of workers, what resulted was a financially buoyant town, a situation which persisted until 1945. Indeed by 1945, remittances and allowances were being paid out to soldiers and their families at the rate of £2,000 per month.<sup>71</sup> Postal Orders cashed at Aba post office averaged £1,600 per month.<sup>72</sup>

This increased cash flow led to a business boom and prosperity for many, especially European and African traders and artisans. But for the Urban poor and unemployed, it spelt disaster. Housing for accommodation or commercial purposes became very scarce or very expensive. European manufactures such as sewing machines and Raleigh bicycles sold in the market at 178 percent and 89 percent above control prices respectively. This was because many soldiers and their relatives were buying up sewing machines and bicycles for starting or expanding business in tailoring or bicycle transportation. But those not so connected, given the new prices, could neither make a fresh entry nor replace aging machines. There were also strains and conflicts between residents and the military, developing occasionally into riots as was the case in 1943.<sup>73</sup>

For Aba therefore, the Second World War was a period of mixed fortunes. While there was a chronic shortage of European



manufactures which led to scarcity and rationing, the coming of soldiers, the improvement in wages and the increase in produce sales improved the cash flow in the town; and even though this created inflationary pressures, it nevertheless encouraged the growth of commerce and enterprises.

### Christian Missionary Activities and the Growth of Aba

Religion, like other aspects of life, means different things to different people: a way of communing with one's God, a way of achieving spiritual and moral fulfilment, a way of hiding one's real personality; and for some others, it is essentially a business enterprise. For Aba and its growth, religion served all the above ends and more. In particular, it encouraged the growth of Western education with its attendant benefits.

As we saw earlier, before the advent of the Europeans, the people of Aba were traditional religionists. This situation was to change with colonial conquest which saw the beginning of Christian Missionary enterprise in the area. Though with modest beginnings as the Bible had to wait to follow the flag,<sup>74</sup> its growth was nevertheless remarkably rapid, and by 1956, there were no less than 28 different religious orders and denominations in Aba.<sup>75</sup> Such was the extent of the proliferation of religious activities in the town that one commentator, Mr. Tim Goodland, writing in the September 22 edition of West Africa magazine noted:

- - - Some say Aba is the most religious town they know. But the cynics shrug; after all, they say, it is good business. And that is probably the truth of it, If it is good business; whether trade, politics, production, prostitution or crime, it will flourish in Aba. - - 76

It would, however be a great misrepresentation to dismiss religious organizations in Aba before 1960 as mere business outfits. Far from being the case, the missions in Aba, most of which were brought and led by Africans, contributed a great deal to its growth and urbanization process.

This is not to deny that the missions encouraged the growth of trade and commerce in Aba. The truth which is probably not well appreciated, is that some of the early missions in Aba were in fact established by palm oil traders who were in search of better opportunities in the growing town as a result of the decline in commerce in their former bases on the coast. The Niger Delta Pastorate, which was the first mission established in Aba in 1915 through the efforts of Opobo palm oil traders, especially Chief Samuel Oko Epelle is a case in point.<sup>77</sup> His son Chief Tobias Epelle a palm oil trader, having received help from Opobo Christian traders succeeded in establishing the church at Nkpukpu Ebule Waterside on Aba River in 1913.<sup>78</sup> This church was Christened St. Nicholas Church by Rev. J.A. Pratt. The success of the church as measured by the number and contributions of members depended on the palm oil trade: the church booming as long as the palm oil trade boomed. With the rise of Aba as the most important centre for palm oil trading in the area, especially with the completion of the railway in 1915, Nkpukpu Ebule Waterside declined in importance. Members of the congregation who were, mostly palm oil traders moved to Aba where they founded a new church.<sup>79</sup> But getting a good accommodation for the new church became a problem. It was again one of the Epelles, this time Gordon Epelle<sup>80</sup>, son of Tobias Epelle who gave out the sitting-room of his house at Aba Waterside as a place of worship. The church operated on this temporary basis until an Ngwa convert from Obuda village, Mr. Michael Nwaotebe, seeing the difficulties the congregation had,

donated his private land to the church.<sup>81</sup> In appreciation of this gesture, the new congregation became known as St. Michael's church,<sup>82</sup> a name by which the church, still located at the same spot, is known till today.

Yet another example is the Presbyterian mission whose early history in Aba is connected with traders from Igbere in Bende, who at first sojourned at Mbawsi. It was these Bende traders that introduced the mission, which at that time was called Church of Scotland Mission, to Aba.<sup>83</sup> Initially most of the traders travelled from Nbawsi to Aba on bicycles to trade in palm oil and other products. But with the rise in the opportunities for trade in Aba, one convert invited them to settle at Ogbor Hill.<sup>84</sup> They moved to the more central part of Aba after the 1929 riots to take advantage of abandoned properties; but they still had no church. Elders like Mr. Egwuonwu Eme often travelled down to Aba from Mbawsi to teach them how to read the Bible. Not being satisfied with this, one of the members, Mr. James. A. Uche, offered his sitting-room as a place of worship. This temporary arrangement survived until they succeeded in erecting a simple church building at No. 60 Tenant Road in Aba. With the continued growth of the congregation, they eventually built a permanent place of worship at No. 1 Azikiwe Road which was opened for service in March 1959.<sup>85</sup>

Certain observations are clear from the account of the coming of the two missions given above. The first is the tremendous sacrifices pioneers of the faith were willing to make for the growth of the churches. The second and the main point to note was the role Aba's trading and commercial attractions played in the coming of the missions. Nkpukpu Ebule Waterside and Mbawsi were important centres of palm oil production and trading. Thus the migration of many traders and missionaries from these centres to Aba meant

obviously the development of a strong trading relationship between such centres and Aba.

The coming of the Missions also led to the growth of Aba's population. We have seen the two examples cited above. In the case of the immigration from Mbawsi, the Igbere people are now one of the largest non-Ngwa groups in Aba. The role of Presbyterianism in this movement can be appreciated when it is realized that up till today, about 90 percent of the adherents of that faith in Aba are the Igberes and their Abiriba neighbours.

A similar development was also recorded with the coming of the Roman Catholics to Aba. Catholicism which is the largest faith in Aba today was introduced by Irish missionaries. The Mission expanded from Onitsha to Emekuku in Owerri from where it spread to other parts of Owerri Province. It was one Reverend Father Grace that is said to have brought the Mission from Port Harcourt to Aba in 1920.<sup>86</sup> As usual, the greatest problem was that of getting a place for worship. However unlike the others, the Catholic Fathers succeeded in getting land allocated to them at Asa road immediately they came. There they built a thatched house with seats made of mud. It was there that Father Grace with a few Mass servers conducted the service.<sup>87</sup> From a modest following of about 50 persons the congregation became so large in the 1950s as to warrant the establishment of another church, St. Eugene's church, on a piece of land donated by Chief Uzoigwe of the Eziukwu section of the town.

The point to note therefore is that the followers of the religion came mainly from where the religion spread to Aba, that is Onitsha and Owerri areas. It is even plausible to suggest that migrants saw the existence of their own religion in the town as an impetus to move into the town. It is thus not surprising that the earliest Igbo missionaries

who assisted the Irish in propagating the religion in Aba were people from Onitsha and Owerri areas. Among them were Mr. Stephen Orji, Mr. Charles Mooma, Mr. Asianya and Mr. Ugwuzo.<sup>88</sup>

The Missions also helped Aba's growth by the favourable atmosphere for settlement which they provided. Their presence led to a decrease in ritual murders and head-hunting which residents were often subjected to by those seeking among others, to satisfy the entry requirements of the Okonko Society. Their efforts also helped to stop the killing of twins as well as children born with their legs, instead of their heads, first. The missionaries achieved all these through preaching to people in the society and also through the conversion of some already engaged in these practices. They were therefore able to reassure would-be immigrants that Aba was safer than it used to be.

In addition, the missions complemented the efforts of the colonial authorities in the provision of social services. As is well known the colonial government was not always willing to commit large sums to the provision of social services. A good example in the Aba area was the Seventh Day Adventist Mission which was established there in 1924 by an American Evangelist called Pastor Clifford.<sup>89</sup> The Mission provided services such as free medical treatment to those converted to the faith. Apart from health, literacy and education received encouragement at the hands of the missionaries. In this respect, the Catholics and the Anglicans excelled. In fact, the Holy Ghost Fathers under Bishop Shanahan saw education first as the way by which they could catch up with the Anglicans who began spreading the gospel before them, and secondly as the principal way by which the Igbo who came in contact with education late and cherished it, could be easily attracted to Christianity. These facilities attracted residents from surrounding areas and more distant places to flock to Aba to settle.

### The Impact of Western Education

The provision of Western Education needs to be singled out of the missionary activities for further elaboration. Its role in fostering urbanization is well known to the extent that some scholars, as we have indicated earlier believe that urbanization is in fact impossible in a society lacking in literacy. But as we have argued earlier, and have demonstrated thus far, even though literacy is important in the urbanization process, it is not necessarily an engendering factor, but rather a factor of growth. This is clearly demonstrated by the Aba case where the process of urbanization began long before the first school, the Aba government school, was established in 1910. Indeed unlike in some towns in Western Nigeria, for instance Lagos and Abeokuta where western education was introduced by the missionaries, in Aba the initiative was taken by the colonial government. This was because the missions as we noted did not establish in Aba until 1915. But soon thereafter, they took over the initiative from the colonial government.

The first mission school in Aba was established by the Niger Delta Pastorate in the early 1920s through the personal contributions of its members. The school was then called St. Michael's Primary School, but is today known as Hospital Road Primary School.<sup>90</sup> This school was quickly followed by another established by the Roman Catholics in 1924. The school was and is still called Christ the King School after the Mission Church, Christ the King Church. Located inside the Catholic Premises at Asa Road, the school began initially as a Sunday School where aspects of the Catholic faith were taught.<sup>91</sup> A second Catholic Primary School, St. Eugene's Primary School was set up in Eziukwu in the 1950s, while the Presbyterians established the St. Andrews Primary School.

The schools established up to the 1930s were all primary schools. By 1940, only the three largest ones were government-assisted namely, the Government School, St. Michael's School and Christ the King School.<sup>92</sup> The colonial government was interested basically in producing low level manpower for their different programmes and objectives, and they were not prepared to invest in education beyond that level. However, the missionaries and the indigenous peoples needed higher level manpower; the former to train priests and others to advance the faith, the latter to produce people who could compete with and take over from Europeans; hence they began to work beyond the primary school level. The first secondary school in the town was established in 1938 by Irish Catholic missionaries in Eziukwu. It was called Sacred Heart Secondary School, now Boys High School Eziukwu Aba. It was an all boys school which began with a student population of 90.<sup>93</sup> In 1951 the Catholic Mission also established the St. Joseph's Teachers Training College. The Catholic schools were in the main open only to Catholic adherents and this early advantage in access to post primary education increased the number of Catholic adherents, and in fact, explains why it is the largest denomination in Imo State today. It also explains why both during and after the colonial period most of the high level manpower in the town were Catholics<sup>94</sup>.

Indeed it was partly to reverse such a trend and partly to undercut the colonial government's anti-higher education policy that the Ngwa and the Igbo State Union followed the Catholic example in the 1940s. In 1941, the Ngwa Clan Council began moves for the establishment of a Secondary School in the town by pledging the provision of £1,000 for buildings and a yearly grant of £900<sup>95</sup> for its recurrent expenses. This effort led to the approval and eventual establishment of the Ngwa High School at Abayi in 1945. The Igbo State Union followed with the establishment in 1948 of Igbo National College, now National High School, Aba.

In general, the quality of the schools, as well as the regularity of attendance, often gave cause for concern. The Roman Catholics were reputed to have the best mission schools. They were running 14 schools in Owerri Province including the one in Aba town. The 14 schools were manned by 13 teachers of African descent and an unspecified number of Europeans. Of the 13, one was a certificated teacher, another was an assistant teacher, 4 passed Standard V and 7 passed Standard IV. What this meant was that in the Roman Catholic schools in Owerri province, there was only one qualified African teacher. A similar situation existed in other mission schools, the majority of whose teachers had educational qualifications not exceeding Standards IV and V.<sup>96</sup> Adducing reasons for the existence of such low quality teaching staff, the Resident wrote:

All these missions are directly in competition the one with the other, and it is hardly to be wondered at, that the standard maintained by their schools must necessarily be a low one. It is obviously impossible to find qualified teachers for all, even if the funds of the various society will run to it.<sup>97</sup>

The situation was, however, slightly better in the government schools. In the Aba government school for instance, there were as many as seven certified teachers in the school. Figures showing the staff situation in the few secondary schools are not available. But for the Sacred Heart Secondary School Irish Reverend Fathers and other African missionaries constituted the teaching staff.

In addition to the poor quality and inadequate numbers of the teaching staff, there was also the problem of irregular attendance. Many parents could neither afford the school fees nor the time needed by their children to attend schools. Those in school were sometimes



withdrawn without notice. In 1924, for instance, all the mission schools in Aba Division recorded an average daily occurrence of 2,587 absentees. The Aba government school had a daily attendance of 225 boys and 39 girls in 1927. By the 1940s and 1950s, attendance in schools had improved; as nearly all schools faced pressure for placement of children from parents who wanted good education for their children and were willing to ensure regular attendance. The excess of demand over supply even encouraged the establishment of private schools, as we shall see later.

In the meantime, we note that the introduction of western education contributed to Aba's growth. In the first place, it encouraged immigration into the town as many parents, hoping for a better life for their children, took up jobs and residence in Aba where there were schooling opportunities for their children. Even today, this is still one of the factors many parents consider when choosing a place of residence. The children make their own contribution by helping their parents in the farms after school and in other productive and distributive trades. This would not have been possible if the children have had to travel to other places to attend schools.

Secondly, the schools produced manpower needed in the town. Many of the young school graduates were quickly snapped up by European commercial firms who needed them as clerks and trading agents. Others were employed as government clerks while a good many others were employed in the spread of the Christian faith. In whatever position, they contributed their quota to the growth of Aba. For instance, the problem of the quality and quantity of teaching had been reduced drastically by the 1950s as a result of qualified teachers being produced by the school system itself.

More importantly, Western Education increased the general literacy and awareness of the people. Superstitions were watered down as ideas flowed more freely. Many young school children on reaching home often found themselves educating their parents. This in turn helped the parents in the running of their business either as traders or labourers. The increased awareness also led to the introduction of mass-circulating newspapers. It is significant to note that the first daily newspaper published in Aba, the Eastern States Express, owned by Dr. Udo Udoma and edited by Abiodun Aloba appeared in 1949/50,<sup>97</sup> nearly 30 years after the introduction of western education in the town. The success of the newspaper indicated the level and spread of literacy in the town which could sustain such a venture which created jobs, advertised businesses and generally informed the people about events around them.

Western Education also prepared Aba residents for their role in the nationalist struggles and other urban political activities. It is on record that Aba was one of the hotbeds of nationalist agitation in the colonial period and presented one of the most active scenes of politics in the Eastern Region in the immediate post-colonial era. It is doubtful whether all these would have taken place if western education had not come to the town when it did.

Yet in spite of these achievements of western education, it still left much to be desired. Its conception did not take cognisance of the indigenous form of education that was already in existence. For instance, under the indigenous form, young boys were expected to be observant and also listen to whatever instructions that were given by elders. A boy, if he had listened and observed well should be able:

- - - to fetch firewood and water, to climb family trees and harvest them, to take care of the younger ones in terms of feeding, clothing and safety in the absence of the parents; and to stand his ground and kill any snakes that wandered into the family.<sup>99</sup>

In general, under the indigenous system, education was seen and regarded as functional and all embracing "such that misdemeanours like incest were considered abominations and treated as such". Western education was neither all embracing nor was it adequately integrated with the indigenous system. If anything, western education tended to have inhibited the indigenous system. Thus, it was not uncommon to find a young boy who had through the years learnt how to tap wine or make baskets from his father, refuse to do these things soon after he went to school.

Moreover, the percentage of school going children that were admitted into government and mission schools was very low because of the shortage of schools. It was to remedy the shortcoming that some African residents of Aba began to set up a few private schools and vocational centres in the 1940s<sup>100</sup>. However, the majority of pupils who could not get into these schools had to depend on the apprenticeship system in the various trades and crafts.

For those who managed to pass out of the western school system, most were retained by the Mission school system which produced them, as Catechists, teachers and administrators. Some others were taken on as teachers in government and private schools. A few got jobs as shop boys - for both European and African merchants, in other businesses and in the township administration. Some however went on to Secondary, Nursing, Midwifery and Sanitary training schools or went into various trades as apprentices.

### Western Medical Facilities

The availability of western medical facilities is recognised as a major factor of urbanization, attracting rural to urban migration. Yet in Aba, the development of medical facilities was slow. What this means is that medical facilities played no role in attracting people to Aba in the early days. It would seem that commerce remained the greatest attraction. Nevertheless, it would appear that western medical facilities, the prevention and treatment of diseases which ensured good health for the working population and thus increased productivity and wealth, later on played a crucial role not only in attracting people into the town, but also in the creation of employment opportunities.

The first hospital in Aba was the African Hospital built in 1928. Before then, what existed in the form of western medical care was nothing more than skeletal services provided mainly for Europeans. The general state of medical care was, to say the least, appalling.<sup>101</sup> For instance, there were five medical officers for the whole of Owerri Province by 1923. One was stationed at Degema, two in Port Harcourt, one at Bonny and one between Owerri and Okigwe. None was stationed in Aba, even though Aba was, like Port Harcourt at the time, a second class township. This could be explained by the fact that the number of Europeans in the town was still low. Medical care was provided for Aba by way of visits from the medical officer stationed at Ikot Ekpene, in Calabar Province, which at the time had many more European residents, particularly Christian missionaries.

Lamenting this state of affairs in a report in 1923, the Resident of Owerri Province wrote:

I do not consider the medical arrangement for Aba at all satisfactory. The station is dependent on the medical officer at Ikot Ekpene and is usually visited once a week for an hour or so. Aba is now a big and important centre and besides, a large commercial community, there are seven government officials stationed there, a considerable number of clerks, police and a prison of some size. There is no adequate hospital accommodation or any efficient dispensary. A medical officer stationed at Aba could serve (Bende) Umuahia and Imo River, both stations with large commercial interest and considerable populations, European and African. <sup>102</sup>

With pressures such as that, from colonial officials on the spot, and the frustrations of people unattended to whenever the Ikot Ekpene medical officer visited, the number of visits to Aba was increased to twice a week in 1925.<sup>103</sup> But with the European population put at 50 in 1925, in addition to a large and ever-increasing African population, such ad-hoc solution remained unsatisfactory.

It is not surprising, therefore, that many Africans depended largely on indigeneous medical care. Traditional medicine was particularly valued in the treatment of bone fractures, malaria, diarrhoea, snake bites, poisoning, infertility, epilepsy and convulsion. Residents did not just depend on the few practitioners, mainly Ngwa native doctors in the town, but often travelled to their various home towns in search of traditional medical care. Often, this was done with the sick person. But sometimes the medicaments and occasionally the practitioners were brought from the villages to the sick.

It would appear that traditional medicine did not just fill the gap in the provision of western medical care but was in fact preferred to western medicine in the treatment of most of the ailments mentioned

above. Eventually, some traditional doctors became widely reputed for the treatment of particular ailments. For instance, many of my informants from Owerri easily recall the family of Papa Oparacha in Emii near Emekuku as the orthopaedic specialists many of them used to consult. Their practice was preferred because fractures were healed more quickly, the results were usually more satisfactory and the cost of treatment cheaper than in western medicine. Some other traditional doctors like Pa Nwaigwe in Aba town were general practitioners.<sup>104</sup>

Nevertheless, while Africans tried to solve the problem of inadequate medical care through traditional medicine, the colonial government on its part responded to the increasing demand for western medicine by embarking on the construction of an African Hospital in the town in 1926. The hospital, except the drainage, was completed at a cost of £17,859<sup>105</sup> and was subsequently commissioned, by the then Governor of Nigeria, Sir Graeme Thompson, during his visit to Aba between the 9th and 12th of July 1928.<sup>106</sup> Though it was not until the 9th of October, 1929, that all the departments in the hospital became fully functional. At the commissioning, the Resident of Owerri Province described the hospital as "one of the finest hospital buildings in West Africa."<sup>107</sup>

The hospital was adequate by the standards of the time. It provided for 40 in-patients as well as a fully operational out-patients department. It was however not as lucky in the area of staffing. By the time it was opened in 1928, it had only one European Medical Officer called Dr. Hunter. When this is matched against 40 beds, plus an out-patient department, it is not surprising that long queues became a feature of the hospital. It was to alleviate the situation that a European Nursing Sister was posted to the hospital in 1929, but the staffing situation remained inadequate as the statistics of increasing pressure of patients for the period 1932-1934 provided below clearly indicate:

Attendance	1932	1933	1934
Out-Patients	16,718	18,679	24,108
Out-Patient attendances	40,931	72,181	89,133
In-Patients	684	655	1,216
In-Patient days	-	11,471	21,006 <sup>108</sup>

As the figures show, between 1932 and 1933 there was a growth of ~~42.3~~ 42.3% in out patient attendance and between 1933 and 1934, there was a further growth of 19.0%. In general, between 1932 and 1934, there was a 54.1% growth in out-patient attendance in the hospital. In 1934, 45% of out-patients and 37% of in-patients were women.

With regard to the ailments most handled at the hospital, indications are that malaria remained the greatest worry. Next were maternity cases such as pregnancies, deliveries and child welfare. Other areas of concern were chicken pox and small pox among both the urban and the rural populations. In 1930 alone, epidemics of small pox were recorded in the months of April, May, September and October during which 55 of the cases actually seen by the medical staff died.<sup>109</sup>

As for maternity cases, attendances by 1934 had reached the point where a new maternity wing was added to the hospital complete with a Midwifery Training School. As is well known, midwifery was more popular than nursing because its entry requirements were lower and the graduate obtained certificates which licensed them to operate maternity centres on their own or, if they worked in the hospital, to earn the same salary as nurses.

With this addition of the maternity section, the ante-natal clinic of the hospital became very important, with two to three new cases seen daily and an average daily attendance of between five and ten.<sup>110</sup>

In all, 93 women were delivered in 1934 with the majority being normal deliveries.<sup>111</sup>

What the delivery figures clearly indicate is that majority of the female residents of Aba still preferred traditional birth attendants to making use of the hospital. In fact, it appears that the issue of patronage of the hospital during its early years was one that gave the authorities some concern. In explaining the situation, the District Officer wrote in 1940:

It will naturally be some time before this boom is fully appreciated by the people and the prejudices of the less advanced sections of the community against European medicine can be overcome, but already the people are beginning to avail themselves of the facilities provided and the senior medical officer anticipates a steady increase in the number of patients anxious for admission from the outlying villages.<sup>112</sup>

Nevertheless, it would appear that while the number of deliveries at the hospital were low, the same was not quite the case with the attendance of infants. Indeed increased infant attendance was encouraged by the setting up of an Infant Welfare Centre in the hospital. Thus in 1932 for instance, 546 new cases were seen and treated with a weekly average attendance of 100. When compared with yearly maternity attendance of 93, the conclusion which emerges is that infant cases tended to be referred more to the hospital than to the traditional medical practitioners. This situation is probably explained by the fact that infant treatment was free, and in general, the fear of infant mortality under conditions of traditional medical care was considerable.



By the late 1940s through 1950s, a number of changes took place in the operation of the hospital. In the first place, because of the increased number of Europeans resident in the town, numbering 82 including 8 children in 1948, it became necessary for the authorities to increase the number and quality of personnel in the hospital. We now had three medical doctors - two Europeans, including a female, and one African. There were also two European nursing sisters.<sup>113</sup>

Secondly, the growth in the urbanization process ensured that the nature of the ailments frequently seen by the medical staff changed drastically. Instead of the earlier prevalence of malaria and maternity related problems, the commonest ailments were now those arising from urban related violence such as machet cuts, human bites and numerous cases of accident victims. The numerous cases of traffic accidents indicates an increase in the number of cars that existed in the town and suggests that many of the vehicles were either poorly maintained or managed carelessly, often in disregard of traffic rules.

Another feature of the hospital in the period was the remarkable increase in the number of patients using it. For instance, while in 1946, 59,692 new cases were seen in the hospital,<sup>114</sup> this rose to 75,205 in 1947. In like manner, deliveries which were only 93 in 1934 had by 1947 risen to 1,769.<sup>115</sup> By 1948, as many as 12,000 out patients attended the hospital over a period of eight months.<sup>116</sup> Several factors would seem to explain the rising figures, among which were the increase in the population of residents as well as an improved standard of medical care offered as evidenced in the introduction of ambulance services and increase in the number of medical personnel. These in turn raised people's confidence and heightened appreciation of the basic differences between the new western medicine and the traditional practices they were used to. Some strongly held prejudices began to give way to more rational thinking.

In general, the introduction of western medical facilities did not solve the medical problems of Aba. This was because facilities, particularly the number of available medical staff, was never enough for the population they were supposed to serve. This explains why, traditional medicine continued to provide a credible alternative. Nevertheless, western medical facilities created more awareness about issues of health care, allowed for early diagnosis and treatment, helped in controlling epidemics, led to improved health care for infants, and was particularly invaluable in the treatment of ailments where traditional medicine was deficient, particularly surgery. Also, it created employment opportunities for medical and other auxiliary staff and encouraged increased economic activities as patients and their relatives from surrounding towns and villages brought in money and bought goods and services in the town. In general therefore, the introduction of western medicine made a contribution to the urbanization process in Aba.

#### Preventive Medicine

A corollary to the provision of medical services was the issue of preventive medical care. Because of the nature of urban centres especially with regards to high population concentration, high generation of waste and patterns of habitation, sanitation is often a crucial problem in urbanization. The colonial authorities in fact recognised the importance of sanitation and consciously pursued policies to ensure good sanitary conditions. This is a highly commendable aspect of colonialism; even though sceptics will argue that the primary reason for such attention was the good health of resident Europeans, as well as the compelling necessity to keep the African labour force healthy. Whatever the reason, it is noticeable that the great drive for urban sanitation in the colonial era was not

conscentiously pursued by successive Nigerian governments after Independence. Before the recent emphasis on primary health care, this negligence was partly responsible for the high incidence of preventable diseases among the people.

Recognising that Aba was in a mosquito-infested and malaria endemic area because of the high rainfall which often created stagnant pools of water and overgrown bushes, the colonial government organized regular mosquito eradication campaigns in the township. This usually involved the recruitment of labourers to clear bushes and drains under the supervision of European Sanitary Inspectors.<sup>117</sup> The mosquito eradication campaigns had the effect of reducing the incidence of malaria in the town. In addition, the clearing of drains and bushes ensured a good appearance as well as a good hygienic state necessary in an urban setting.

Efforts were also made to improve sanitation and health through the introduction of a system of night soil disposal.<sup>118</sup> The effort was, however, not effective as the problem of night soil disposal remained crucial and unresolved until 1960. The authorities also provided incinerators for the disposal of rubbish as well as slaughter houses and slabs.<sup>119</sup> In addition, house to house sanitary inspections were undertaken and offenders were prosecuted and fined. One such sanitary survey in 1931 provides an indication of what the living conditions in Aba was like:

Permanent dwellings	141
Temporary dwellings	1,186
Total	1,327

For conveniences, it indicated as follows:

Salgas	531
Latrines	86
Burrow pits	1,971
Total	2,588 <sup>120</sup>

Overall, 355 compounds were found in good condition while 279 compounds were found in deplorable condition.

A close observation of the figures indicate that on the average, Aba residents at the time may have lived better than residents in many Nigerian cities today. For instance, while they had an average of nearly two conveniences to a dwelling, so many dwellings in many cities today have none at all, especially in the inner cities of places like Lagos. Moreover, that the compounds in good condition were greater than the deplorable ones is also an indication that the residents maintained a fair level of cleanliness because of the regular sanitary campaigns. Another observation is the fact that as at the date of the survey, Aba was a town largely of temporary buildings. However as a result of commercial prosperity through the years, and using urban renewal methods, temporary buildings had virtually become a thing of the past by 1960, even though as would be seen later, living conditions remained largely unimproved for many residents.

Be that as it may, the point to note is that the sanitary campaigns continued to be a regular feature of the town throughout our period. Indeed it was to sustain the momentum through increased supply in quality and quantity of staff that led to the establishment of a training school for sanitary inspectors in 1948. This school still exists today. Even though in pre-colonial Aba, like in most other places in Africa, good sanitary conditions was maintained, urbanism however created

new sanitary problems which needed constant attention. Thus colonial sanitary programmes generally complemented indigenous efforts; and there is absolutely no doubt that it went a long way in ensuring cleaner habits among Aba's residents. Indeed some of these residents recall how various tenements and landlords made special efforts to avoid the wrath of sanitary inspectors which came in the form of illegal financial extortions or official prosecutions against unsanitary premises. It must nevertheless be acknowledged that the illegal actions of the inspectors in accepting bribes limited the overall achievements of the sanitary efforts and programmes.

#### Urban Infrastructure and Utilities

Urbanization as conceived in the modern sense has much to do with the availability of certain kinds of infrastructure: good roads, water supply facilities and electricity. In the absence of these facilities many urban areas would be no more than glorified villages. In fact, these facilities are the main inducements for rural-urban migration as young people of working age in particular, leave the rural settings in search of a better life in the cities. Yet, there is usually the problem of finding money to finance the provision of utilities.

Aba township funds came from land rents, market stall dues, water rates, motor and bicycle licences, animal pounding<sup>121</sup> and government grants. Of all these, market stall rents contributed the largest amount. This was hardly surprising as the constant provision of market stalls served the dual purpose of providing revenue as well as satisfying the demand for stalls by the commercial community. On the other hand, animal pounding contributed the least to township revenue. For instance, of the revenue of £2,924 in 1938, £1,084 came from market stall rents,<sup>122</sup> while of the revenue of £3,021 in 1939, only about £50 came from animal pounding. With the introduction of a

general rate in 1949, township revenue increased. This source alone is said to have contributed as much as £6,000 in 1951.<sup>123</sup> Despite the increase in revenue, money for large capital outlay on utilities remained a constant problem; and attempts by township authorities to raise this from the government often proved unsuccessful. The result was that public utilities did not keep pace with the town and in fact tended to be a dampening factor in the growth of Aba.

The provision of good roads and drainage is obviously an important factor in the growth of any city, more so when the city began with mere bush tracks. Road development in Aba for most of our period was slow and inadequate. The most important road, the Asa Road, was not gravelled until 1921 and it remained a narrow road until 1948 when it was expanded by three feet.<sup>124</sup> In that year also, the tarring of the whole length of Hospital Road was completed. By 1949, Owerri Road was also tarred. Thus, as late as 1949 only few roads received any worthwhile attention from township authorities and even these, as the District Officer noted, were always in an "appalling state - - - during the wet season".<sup>125</sup>

It was to take care of the problem of the rainy season that various attempts were made to institute a good drainage system. But despite these efforts an effective drainage system was never achieved throughout the period covered by this study. Nevertheless, some temporary schemes were put in place which helped to reduce the problem. For instance, in the early 1930s, about 2,000 "Open sump pits" were used for drainage. These were gradually replaced in the 1940s by deep wells; and by the 1950s, these had further been replaced by "open trenches and a few box drains of trapezoidal nature or rectangular shape, either made of earth or lined with concrete".<sup>126</sup>

inadequate and houses are regularly flooded, a sorry state of affairs in a progressive township. These problems are almost impossible to tackle piecemeal, and a loan is still rather despairingly hoped for.<sup>127</sup>

The lack of good roads and an efficient drainage system affected economic activities in Aba adversely. This was because, as we have noted repeatedly, road transport was a very important factor in Aba's growth. Indeed some regarded it as the "clue to Aba's prosperity."<sup>128</sup> Aba had the largest and most important Motor Park in the Eastern Region at the time. It was the headquarters of the Nigerian Motor Transporters' Union in the Region and even their training school for mechanics and drivers was located there. It was an important road junction between Port Harcourt, Owerri and the Cross River area. Its position in all these respects was affected by the road and drainage situation. Moreover, as the centre of the Eastern Region's produce trade, it was also adversely affected as bad roads prevented quick movement of produce from the railway station to various parts of the town and vice versa. It is in fact note worthy that the major industries built in Aba before 1960 such as the Lever Brothers factory and Nigerian Breweries Ltd were located near the railway line. Indeed it was only in the 1950s when the road and drainage situation in Aba began to improve remarkably that manufacturing enterprises began entering the township area.

Perhaps in the period before 1945 the most important utility in the growth of Aba were markets. This may explain why Professor Elizabeth Isichei described pre-colonial Aba as a market and not a settlement.<sup>129</sup> We have, thus far, tried to show the important and central place of commerce in the growth of the town. As Tim Goodman noted "almost everyman and woman in Aba (even professional and salaried workers) has some interest in trade or commerce."<sup>130</sup> Since

commerce was so central in the life of the town, it follows that the provision and enlargement of markets, the principal revenue for commercial transactions, would inevitably be central to the policy of any serious administration in the town. This was true of the eras of both the Township Advisory Board and the Aba Urban District Council. Indeed this interest was fostered by the fact that markets were the largest source of revenue to the Township Administration and, given the fact that the administration was always short of funds, it is not surprising that markets were the only utility that was in fairly adequate supply.

The first market in Aba town was the Eke Oha market. We have earlier indicated the nature of this market in the pre-colonial era. Very little is known about it in the early colonial era except that it sat on an open space under trees at the present site of the Factory Road branch of Union Bank.<sup>131</sup> By 1925 however, the market was moved to Asa Road near the Roman Catholic Mission.<sup>132</sup> The first group of stalls provided after this movement were temporary stalls. But by 1927, the market was improved by the erection of 24 permanent stalls. In 1930, three new blocks of market stalls were completed and put to use. By 1939, many of the temporary stalls were made permanent and some with bush roofs were replaced with corrugated Iron Sheets. In general, as at December 31, 1940, there were in all 744 permanent stalls and 1,066 temporary stalls in the Eke Oha market.<sup>133</sup>

The market was divided into sections. Among these sections were those for food stuff sellers, bicycle sales and repairs, clothes and clothing materials, shoes, stockfish and hotels. Before 1945, occupation rate of the market stalls never reached 100 per cent for most of the period. Authorities throughout those years continued to report that not all available stalls were taken up. In 1940 for instance, of the 744 permanent stalls, 637 were occupied while 77 were not. In that same



year, of the 1,066 temporary stalls, 18 were unoccupied.<sup>134</sup> This could create the erroneous impression that the authorities provided more stalls than what the traders needed. The fact was that because the authorities saw the market as a major source of revenue they often fixed the rent at prices which several traders could not afford. This explains why there was a higher occupation rate for temporary stalls, which were cheaper but of lesser quality, than for permanent ones. Furthermore, many traders found the market too far from their areas of business interest. This explains why District Officers often reported the "several attempts to set up illegal markets in the urban district and elsewhere close to the township" by traders despite numerous attempts to check them.<sup>135</sup>

After the Second World War, increased immigration and commercial activities led to a 100 per cent occupation rate of the stalls. It also led to increased congestion of the market, made worse by the poor drainage in the market. A combination of these problems made buying and selling in the market fairly difficult. Township authorities sought various ways to solve these problems. First was the introduction of a daily toll in the market in 1947 aimed at controlling unnecessary malingering as well as raising revenue. Unfortunately, we have no figures regarding the revenue from this source. Secondly, a new market was set up in 1947 specifically for selling wood<sup>136</sup> as a way of decongesting the market. Greater decongestion was achieved in 1949 when a large new market still known as New Market till today, was established in the southern extension of the town, on Ngwa Road.<sup>137</sup> Even though the market was meant for all goods, it specialized in the sale of foodstuffs. In particular, it became the most important market for the garri trade which many Aba women actively participated in and which played an important role in the growth of Aba.<sup>138</sup> Another way by which the authorities sought to solve the problem of congestion was through the construction of more market

stalls at the Eke Oha market. It was in fact the question of the fraudulent allocation of 48 new permanent stalls constructed for stockfish sellers in 1954, that led to institution of the P.F. Grant Commission of Inquiry into the affairs of the Aba Urban District Council which will be treated in some detail below.

The important point however, is the fact that the establishment of the various markets played a very crucial role in the growth of Aba. We have already pointed out the fact that it contributed greatly to the commercial growth of the town by providing centres for exchange and other trading transactions. Markets as we have also shown were a very important source of township revenue used for the development of the town's infrastructure. The markets encouraged population growth and fostered the growth of numerous businesses particularly the transportation business - motor, bicycle, and head loading. All these businesses were needed by traders for moving their goods from one point to the other. The markets also encouraged the growth of indigenous enterprises as traders ploughed increasing capital into new enterprises and trades, which in turn created multiplier effects on the economy of the town.

Water and electricity constitute two major inputs necessary to encourage the growth of any human settlement. They are important in the daily life of residents and crucial for commercial and industrial development. They could well serve as an important guide to a city's growth, and certainly the availability of electricity serves as an indication of the level of industrialization.

Water and electricity schemes came to Aba rather late. In the case of water, residents and commercial firms for many years depended on the Aba River for their supply, while a few dug private wells in their premises. This remained the case until 1928. The first

systematic scheme for the provision of potable water to Aba did not start until 1927, that is about 5 years after its declaration as a Second Class Township. The scheme involved the sinking of a well near the Aba River, 15 feet in diameter and 30 feet deep, at a total cost of £10,490 distributed as follows:

Well	£420
Plant and Pump House	£1,360
Tank	£1,750
Rising Main	£350
Distribution	£6,270
Miscellaneous	<u>£340</u>
Total	£10,490 <sup>139</sup>

The water was pumped from the well to a tank from where it was treated and distributed in the town. As to the quality of the water, a government chemist's report once described it as "the best natural water supply in Nigeria."<sup>140</sup>

Two factors would seem to explain the timing of the water scheme. The first was the desire of the authorities to satisfy the needs of numerous European government workers and merchants. It was thus not surprising that they were the first people served when the water was turned on in September 1928. In fact they had a 24 hour service while African residents were supplied between 6.30 a.m. and 6 p.m., only.

A second factor was the need to generate township revenue through water rate, an issue which has remained a bone of contention in Aba politics. At first, Europeans in residential areas were to pay £16 per plot per annum; Europeans on trading sites £10; Africans in locations with standing pipes and one tap paid £5: 4s: while the

Africans in areas with standing pipes but no taps were assessed at 8/- per annum. But barely two years later, the authorities attempted to more than double the rates. This led to controversies and serious tension in Aba. The Daily Times of Lagos captured the spirit when it wrote:

Much unrest and anxiety exist presently in Aba township on account of the sudden rather exorbitant increase in water rate - - it is - - - intended that the ordinary rate per each occupied plot will next year be raised from 8/- to 18/- and many plot owners are contemplating evacuation of the town as they cannot afford to pay this in addition to about 100% increase to be paid for plot next year. These charges are sure to affect adversely the progress of Aba. <sup>141</sup>

It is clear that given the date of its introduction, the provision of water was not one of the factors that engendered urbanization in Aba. Again commerce would seem to have remained the primary attraction, and residents and enterprises would most likely not have pulled out of the town because of an increase in water rate. As it was, therefore, they were probably considering the cost of doing business in Aba vis-à-vis other areas. On the other hand, the fact that the authorities felt able to introduce such an increase is a clear demonstration that in their judgement the town was commercially buoyant enough to take it. It also shows that the water scheme was introduced more to generate revenue than to encourage further and sustained growth in the town.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the introduction of potable water supply contributed significantly to Aba's growth. It improved the living standards of the people and encouraged immigration. It considerably reduced the problem of water-borne diseases, and in this way increased the man-hours available for work. Indeed the fact that

the water had to be rationed for residents in the African location is an indication of its popularity which necessitated restricting consumption to 3,030,651 gallons a month in the 1939-1940 period.<sup>142</sup> Even though restrictions eased up by 1952 when an auxiliary diesel pump capable of delivering 25,000 gallons of water an hour was installed, and additional premises were connected to the water supply,<sup>143</sup> there continued to be a shortage of water stand pipes for the general public. Nevertheless, it was only after the introduction of portable water that manufacturing enterprises began to trickle into the township area in the late 1940s.

If water supply came late to Aba, the case of electricity was even worse; for this all important utility was not introduced into Aba until 20 years later. To think that a town like Aba did not have electricity till as late as 1949 is further proof of the fact that the colonial authorities were only ready to put their money where their mouth was. Aba was not an important regional administrative centre as Port Harcourt was. Aba was only important for produce buying and exploitation. The thinking would appear to have been that you don't need electricity to move produce to England. What you need is a railway hence this was urgently provided. Why give electricity to Aba when such a facility would have encouraged the establishment of industries to compete with the metropolitan state in the use of palm produce, a vital raw material for British industries? Even after the authorities eventually recognised the need for the supply of electricity, for which the town was surveyed in mid-April, 1947, the project did not get off the ground until December 1949. And when it did, the idea was to move to Aba generating sets formerly in use in Port Harcourt, where new sets were being installed. The outrage felt in Aba about this proposal was expressed even by Colonial Authorities in the letter from the Local Authority Aba to the District Engineer, Public Works Department, part of which read:

... Aba is growing fast. It will overtake Port Harcourt in size and population if it had not already done so - - -. To instal such apparatus would be to ensure obsolescence before installation. The old Port Harcourt sets which have been provisionally earmarked for Aba because they are inadequate for Port Harcourt are 2-200 KW and 1 - 75 giving a total of 475 KW - - -. To offer Aba 200 KW is derisory. I most strongly urge reconsideration before it is too late.<sup>144</sup>

Even though the Local Authority who wrote the letter had good intentions, the already frustrated Aba public, represented by its members in the Township Advisory Board, did not see it as such. They could not afford to wait a minute longer after their many years of waiting and pressurizing the government, as they felt that this new delay might be a ploy by the government to abandon the project. In their view "the Port Harcourt Machinery when it became available might speed up the provision of the remaining apparatus",<sup>145</sup> a position obviously borne out of desperation and a clear indication that the non-availability of electricity had already had grave consequences for growth and urbanization in Aba.

The government eventually accepted the view of the Local Authority and after 3 years of construction and insallation by Messrs. Nigeria Electricity Undertakings, the scheme was completed and was officially commissioned for use on December 10, 1952.<sup>146</sup> On commissioning, the current was supplied by two 115 kilowatt diesel driven alternators. It provided electricity to 200 European and African consumers in the town who were initially connected. A further 300 on the waiting list were to be gradually connected. The scheme also provided street lighting to the following roads:

Asa Road joining Ikot Ekpene Road from the East and South boundaries of the township; Hospital Road; Old Court Road; Hundred foot Road (now Azikiwe Road); Park Road; Owerri Road from the junction of Asa and Ikot Ekpene Roads to the Northern limits of the township; and Railway Station Road to the junction of Owerri Road.

In all, 140 street lamps were installed at a cost of £3 per lamp and their upkeep cost 8/- 4d. per lamp per month.<sup>147</sup> In general, the installation was inadequate for the needs of the town hence many residents, particularly Africans did not enjoy the service.

A number of reasons would seem to explain why the government finally introduced electricity in Aba in the early 1950s. In the first place, there was tremendous pressure on the government by members of the public and, given the increased nationalist sentiments of the period and the drive towards self-government, it is not surprising that the government looked into the matter with some seriousness. The point becomes more pertinent when it is realized that Aba was not treated alone, but within a wider context in which several other second class towns, including Ijebu Ode, were surveyed for the purpose of introducing electricity.

A second but related factor was the role played by European enterprises. Many of the commercial firms were no longer willing to accept their fate without question. This was particularly the case with those enterprises such as the U.A.C. which had strong plans for setting up import substituting manufacturing enterprises.

Another probable reason was the conviction on the part of the government that the population as well as commercial situation of Aba at the time could sustain and pay for an electricity scheme. It was

ironic that electricity, instead of being a catalyst for change, became a follower of change. What this means therefore is that it was a facility brought about because of the rapid and sustained rate of Aba's growth occasioned by commerce. What cannot be denied however is that its introduction encouraged more growth as both European and African enterprises took advantage of its presence to expand their activities as well as introduce new ones.

Modern communication facilities and the services they provide mark probably the most important dividing line between the 20th Century and earlier ages. The magic link between modern communication facilities and development is obvious; even the so called developed world, despite the advances already made in communications, still spend fortunes deploying into space new satellites aimed at improving communications. Adequate and functional communication saves time, cuts costs, reduces waste and increases productivity. For Aba and its commercial inclinations therefore, the provision of this infrastructure was crucial. Fortunately, colonial officials also needed it for effective administration. This explains why its provision was pursued much earlier and with greater vigour than such other utilities as electricity.

Soon after its establishment as a government station, postal services were introduced in Aba. It was however not until the 1920s that there was a systematic effort at mail delivery. This was when the government and Messrs. Weeks Transport Company reached an agreement on comprehensive mail delivery between Aba and several other towns in Owerri Province and beyond. The reliance on private transport companies for mail delivery remained the practice until the Second World War when the postal staff had to work extra hours to cope with increased mail delivery during the war years. Even so, nothing much was achieved in terms of physical development until after the



Second World War, besides a few postal agencies and the involvement<sup>of</sup> African transport companies in the transportation of mails. Examples are the Eziukwu Postal Agency and the 'Obiora Transport Services.<sup>148</sup> It was not until in 1950 that the construction of a 'Class A' Post Office commenced in the town.<sup>149</sup> The building located on a small triangular plot between Factory Road and Ikot Ekpene Road was completed and opened for use on 9th August, 1954 by Mazi Mbonu Ojike, the then Honourable Minister of Works of the Eastern Region.<sup>150</sup>

Telephone services was not introduced as early as postal services, but even then, by 1929, the service was already in place. This early facility however, did not possess trunk facilities. But by 1st April 1930, a new exchange with trunk facilities to Port Harcourt was opened.<sup>151</sup> Also completed by that year were telegraph lines between Aba and Enugu - 14th May, and Aba and Opobo - 9th October. These complemented the already existing Aba-Ikot Ekpene line.<sup>152</sup> In order to achieve an enhanced telephone service, a programme for the installation of a new 200 Central Battery was initiated in 1950. By 1st February 1952, the facility was completed and opened for use.<sup>153</sup> Describing the development, the District Officer wrote:

The new telephone exchange was opened on the 1st February and has vastly improved not only the local service but the trunk service as well. To one who for more than ten years suffered the frustration of trying to get numbers in Lagos, it is almost a pleasure to use the telephone in Aba.<sup>154</sup>

The point to note however is that, as is still true today, only the postal services was enjoyed by the average resident of the town; while the telephone and telegraphic services remained the preserve of the rich and of government officials. What this meant was that the average citizen continued to send urgent messages through personal couriers.

Yet this does not diminish the important role which these communication facilities played in the growth and urbanization process in Aba, European and African commercial enterprises found them invaluable in commercial transactions, the effects of which eventually affected the rest of the society. These facilities helped to reduce overhead costs which knocked off expenses that would ultimately have been passed on in the form of marked up prices to the people.

### Crime Control

As already noted, particularly in Chapter II, the existence of a settled and peaceful atmosphere is vital in the urbanization process and Aba is no exception to the rule. The pre-colonial record of Aba as regards insecurity suggests that for it to enjoy constant and uninterrupted growth, the institution of an efficient crime control mechanism was essential. The commonest crimes in the pre-colonial and early colonial periods were kidnapping and sometimes murder. But by the colonial period, urban related ones such as house-breaking, widespread stealing of various things especially bicycles became more usual. There were also numerous cases of fraud, counterfeiting of currency, traffic offences and cases of illegal administration of injections by unqualified persons which in 1938 came under the criminal code and could thus be tried in Aba courts unlike when it came under Section 72 of the Medical Practitioners and Dentist Ordinance where jurisdiction was rested in the Supreme Court.<sup>155</sup>

The authorities sought to control crime in the town largely through the use of the police and prosecutions in the courts. The number of policemen supplied to Aba often fell short of the needs of the town and was thus one of the main problems faced by the authorities in the area of crime control. Exact figures are not available

for the earliest period, but evidence indicates that by 1927, a police detachment made up of one Assistant Commissioner, one Inspector and 25 other ranks were stationed there.<sup>156</sup> The presence of an Assistant Commissioner was obviously an indication of a fairly high rating for Aba. But even then, the services offered by this detachment fell short of what was needed and the commercial firms were compelled to arrange, at their own expense, for two supernumerary constables to complement the police in guarding their factories.<sup>157</sup> Nevertheless, the number of policemen in the town continued to grow. In 1928, there was one Assistant Commissioner, four non-commissioned officers and 30 Rank and File. A further increase in 1929 raised the Rank and File to 36.<sup>158</sup> By 1949 this number had increased to 114 Rank and File.<sup>159</sup> These figures clearly indicate that there was an increasing requirement for policemen which was indicative of an ever increasing crime wave in the town, itself a by-product of rapid growth.

Even though figures of arrests and convictions are not available for most of our period, the little we have for the earlier years supports our claim of a fairly high crime rate in Aba. In 1923 for instance, there were 410 convictions,<sup>160</sup> while of the 554 criminal cases handled in 1924, there were as many as 515 convictions. Convictions for stealing alone rose from 30 in 1928 to 117 in 1929.<sup>161</sup> Alarmed by this situation, the District Officer Mr. John Jackson wrote: "this is not satisfactory and the insufficiency in the number of police stationed at Aba is a fact that must be taken into consideration in viewing this increase in crime."<sup>162</sup> And as the years progressed, especially from the 1940s when there was increased activities in the town, the authorities kept reporting increases in the crime situation. Their inability to cope was clearly stated in this 1950 report by the District Officer:

Aba's need for the posting of a second magistrate has not been met. The congestion of the magistrate calendar has led to increased difficulties for the police in their efforts to combat the ever-increasing amount of crime in the township. The latest menace to property owners come from burglars equipped with special scissors which are able to cut through the corrugated iron sheets of roofs and walls like 'butter' and without noise.<sup>163</sup>

By 1951, efforts were made to deal with the situation by the appointment of temporary magistrates to deal exclusively with traffic offences. This it was hoped would reduce the work load of the Aba magistrate.

Convicts were kept away from the rest of the society, either in Aba prison or any of the other prisons in the province. Very little is known of the Aba prison itself especially in its early years, except the addition of a female wing in 1917. We are also aware that by 1926-27, the prison had accommodation for 200 prisoners<sup>164</sup> with cells largely of a temporary nature. By 1938 however, the process of replacing the temporary cells with permanent ones began and it continued up to the 1950s. In general, the nature of prisoners kept in Aba were usually short term prisoners; and the system under use was the cellward system. Under the system, each class of prisoners **was** kept as far as possible in a separate ward, the wisdom being that the prison remained a reforming institution rather than a breeding place for crime where people could graduate from being small to serious crime practitioners.

Though urbanization in Aba introduced new forms of crime control and management which contributed greatly in creating a peaceful and safe environment necessary for residence and economic growth; it must nevertheless be stressed that this was essentially at the

theoretical level. For in practice, authorities were never able to have the crime situation in Aba under complete control; one of the main reasons being the constant shortage in the numbers of police men supplied to the town. It is thus not surprising that Aba grew and acquired the reputation of having one of the greatest crime rates in the Eastern Region in the period before 1960; a fact noted by commentators such as Mr. Tim Goodman in the 1950s. Writing in September 1956, he noted:

- - - Like so many cities in the United States which were developing fast at the turn of the century, Aba has won this prosperity at a price. Crime statistics are notoriously misleading, but in 1955-56 there were 19 cases of murder and manslaughter reported to the police in Aba, 56 cases of assault, nearly 1,700 cases of theft and burglary and the amount of property stolen was valued at £28,000. One hundred juveniles were brought before and punished by the courts. Making allowances for differences in population, these figures reflected a crime rate comparable to that of Accra.

Two or three years ago crime and hooliganism were such that respectable citizens preferred not to walk in the streets at night. Mercifully Aba was then blessed with an Assistant Superintendent of Police, an Onitsha man, whose joy it was personally to bring the hooligans, prostitutes and thieves to goal - - - a legendary character straight out of American Social history. But like so many who show zeal (whether for good or bad) in government service, he was transferred.<sup>165</sup>

Nevertheless, it is however noteworthy that this crime reputation did not quite succeed in dampening the growth of Aba as commercial

attractions continued to encourage the immigration of new residents and businesses.

### Conclusion

By way of concluding the chapter, we note that a number of remarkable developments in which Africans were important players, took place in Aba between 1924 and 1945. Many of these developments brought far-reaching changes to the society directly. But of greater consequences were other indirect changes which they engendered. For instance, the presence of utilities such as water and electricity encouraged the development of foreign manufacturing enterprises in the town; many of which had begun to flourish by the 1950s.

In like manner, the enlarged opportunities that many Africans had in the produce trade as labourers and porters ferrying produce to and from the railway, as domestic servants to the large number of military personnel resident in the town during the war, as well as the general improvement in their awareness occasioned by the introduction of western education, engendered a great spirit of enterprise among Africans in the town. Many in the process, witnessed a transition in their lives from blacksmiths to tinkers, from carving to carpentry and from being weavers to tailors. The contribution of these indigenous enterprises to the growth of the town will be discussed below.

Yet it must be stressed that in spite of these developments, many traditional ways were not eclipsed. Traditional worship and medicine survived the new forms as both the old and the new complemented each other. The chapter has clearly demonstrated that while changes were taking place, there was also a lot of continuity.

A number of factors militated against the provision of good roads and drainage in the town. The major one, of course, was finance as revenue for these facilities was often not available. Even when they were budgeted for, actual receipts often fell far short of the estimates. In the 1934 financial year for instance, a sum of £350 was provided for roads and drainage in the estimates, but only £50 was actually released when work commenced in the dry season of that year.

A second factor was the heavy rainfall of up to 103 inches annually which posed very serious problems for road construction and maintenance, especially given the poor equipment in use. With regards to the drainage, the location of the town on the coastal plains with soft soils meant that a natural drainage could not be easily fashioned out; and because of the low ridge separating the plain from the river valley, the city could not be easily drained eastwards towards the Aba River.

There was also the problem of competing budgetary demands especially in the earlier years. The authorities gave priority to the provision of revenue-yielding utilities like markets. Despite this, the revenue earned was never large enough to build an elaborate road and drainage scheme. Later the Township Planning Authority approached the Eastern Regional Development Board for a loan to tar and drain the township roads. But the application for £92,000 was turned down by the Board in 1951. It was while lamenting this decision that the District Officer wrote that:

With the heavy traffic and particularly with the unduly prolonged rainy seasons, the roads in the township have, frankly, defeated us, and are in very bad condition indeed. Similarly, the drainage in certain areas has proved entirely

## Notes

1. N.A.I. CSO 26 File No. 11930, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', 1924. P.28
2. Susan, M. Martin, Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980. Cambridge, 1988. PP 157-160.
3. Ibid., P.98
4. Ibid.
5. Up till World War II, gun-powder continued to be in very high demand among Africans, despite the numerous attempts made by colonial officials to restrict its sale because of the obvious security implications of its widespread usage.
6. N.A.E. Abadist 15/1/25, 'Annual Reports, Aba Division', 1926/27. PP.9-10.
7. N.A.E. Abadist 15/1/21, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1924 P.38.
8. N.A.E. Abadist 15/1/25, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1926/27. PP 9-10.
9. N.A.E. CSO 26/2 File No. 11930 Vol VI, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', 1928. P.40.
10. N.A.E. Abadist 15/1/25, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1926/27'. P.7.
11. Susan M. Martin, Op. cit., P.159. A comprehensive list of the various process has been provided by Martin in her appendix section.
12. Ibid., P.92
13. Ibid., P.92
14. G.K. Helleiner, Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic growth in Nigeria Homewood, Illinois, 1966. P.515; also cited in Ibid. P. 95.
15. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/158, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1938'. P.31.



16. Ibid.
17. See for instance, A.E. Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891-1929 London, 1972. Also U.D. Anyanwu, 'Local Government, Its Changing Nature and Role in a Nigerian : Setting A Case Study of the Imo State Area 1930 - 1966' (Ph.D. History, Ibadan, 1984.)
18. S.M. Grier, Report on a Tour in the Eastern Provinces (Government Printer, Lagos), P.4 Cited in U.D. Anyanwu. OP. Cit. P.57.
19. See Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Native Courts in Eastern Region. Cited in Ibid., P.59.
20. N.A.I. CSo 26/2 No. 9258, 'Memorandum on direct taxation in the Eastern Province', 1925. Paras. 21-22, see also S.N. Nwabara, Iboland. A Century of contact with Britain, 1860 - 1960. London, 1977. P.176.
21. For a comprehensive account of these developments see A.E. Afigbo, OP. Cit., PP. 273 - 8.
22. Susan M. Martin, OP. Cit., P. 157.
23. 'Soft' palm oil was one produced through the use of boiling in the process of producing palm oil from palm nuts, as opposed to 'hard' oil that was produced through fermentation instead of boiling.
24. N.A.I. CSo 26 11930/VIII, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', 1930. P. 65.
25. N.A.E. Abadist 2/2/6. 'Aba Patrol'. P15.
26. N.A.E. Abadist 13/14/65. 'Annual Report. Aba Division', 1930. P.28.
27. N.A.I. CSo 26, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province, 1929'. P.49.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.
31. See Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929. (Government Printer Lagos) 1930. P.37. Here in after known as Aba Disturbances Commission Report - - - .
32. Aba Disturbances Commission Report - - - . P.41
33. Ibid. The term factories used here does not mean manufacturing plants. It actually means a merchants wholesale or retail store.
34. Aba Disturbances Commission Report - - - . PP.44-46. See also Elizabeth Isichei, A history of the Igbo People. London, 1973.
35. This was achieved through a merger in early 1929 between the Niger Company and the African.
36. The role the sustained fall in produce prices had in bringing about the riot has been clearly shown in the Report by District Officer Jackson cited above. See note 25.
37. N.A.I. CSo 26. 'Annual Report, Owerri Province, 1929'. P.28. This was the case by the roads existing then. Now however, the distance has been reduced by half by the Port Harcourt-Enugu dual Carriage Expressway which links Aba and Okigwe.
38. This is a trip that will take about 40 minutes to make today. That it took as much 24 hours clearly demonstrates how difficult travelling was during the period.
39. By this time, Aba had the best Motor transport system in the area and was already the Headquarters of the Motor transport industry in the East.
40. N.A.E. Abadist 113/13/27, No. 89/1929 'A' II, 'Women Movement. Aba Division'. P.3.
41. N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/145, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1931'. P. 80.
42. N.A.E. Abadist 13/13/27, No. 89/1929 'A' II, 'Women Movement. Aba Division'. P.3.
43. N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/145, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 193'. P.93.

44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., P.96
47. N.A.I. CSo 26, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province, 1937'. PP.31.
48. Ibid.
49. N.A.I. CSo 26/2, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', 1938 and 39. P.38.
50. N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/145, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1931. P.96.
51. N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/273, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1933. P.9.
52. Ibid., P.10.
53. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1055, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1937. P.18.
54. Ibid.
55. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1158, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1938. P124.
56. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1166, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1939. P.26.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/493, 'Handing Over Notes, P.F. Grant, Local Authority Aba to C.L. Walker Local Authority Aba', August, 1944. P.3.
60. See H.E. Etomi, 'A Biography of Margaret Ekpo', (B.A. Project, History, Ogun State, 1989). PP.18-19. This view was confirmed by the author during his interview with many Aba women.
61. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1202, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1941'. P.18.

62. Gari is a very important cassava derived staple of the Igbo and some other Nigerians. Aba was an important base for the gari trade produced both within the town and its surrounding countryside. During the time, there was a great demand for the product from Northern Nigeria where many Igbo were resident in large numbers as railway staff, mine workers and postal and telegraphic workers. By 1943, 85 percent of all the garri exported to the North came from Aba Division as a whole. In 1944, this amounted to 10,050 tons. The problem however was that the main producers of the product - women were also the main processors of palm produce. The British thus hoped that a ban on the gari export trade would reduce demand for it and thus encourage greater production of palm produce which was in great demand.
63. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1202, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1941'. P.14.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/124, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1942'. P.5.
67. Ibid., P.6.
68. See Handing Over Notes P.L. Trevorrow A.D., Aba to D.R.E. Shute Esq., D.O. Aba, 1943. P.3.
69. Ibid.
70. Interview with Mr. Nwaru already cited.
71. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1280, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1945'. P.7.
72. Ibid.
73. This riot is adequately treated in military civilian relationship in Chapter IV.
74. This situation is different from what happened in Western Nigeria where the missionaries actually cleared the way for colonial intervention. For detailed studies of the Missions in Nigeria, See J.F.A. Ajayi, Christian Missions in Nigeria, the making of a New Elite. London, 1965; E.A. Ayandele, The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842 - 1914. London, 1966. And for Igboland in particular, See F.K. Ekechi: Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857 - 1914. London, 1971.

75. Tim Goodland 'Aba: Potrait of a Town' West Africa, September 22, 1956. P.723. Part of the explanations for this growth, particularly in the earlier period, was the career of Garrick Braide a native of Bakana who founded a Christian religious movement between 1915 and 1918. The hallmarks of Braidism was the destruction of ancestral shrines; and abstinence from alcohol after conversion to christianity. Because of its revivalist nature, Braidism played a significant role in popularising Christianity in Ngwaland. For more details on the career of Garrick Braide, see J.N. Nwaguru: Aba and British Rule, 1896 - 1960. Enugu, 1973. PP.90 - 93; Susan M. Marin: Op. Cit., PP.68 - 70; O.U. Kalu, 'Waves from the Rivers, the Spread of the Garrick Braide Movement in Igboland, 1914 - 1934', Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1977. PP.95 - 100.
76. Ibid.
77. E.A. Ayandele, Op. Cit. P.110.
78. See Presidential Address to the Third Session of the Fifth Synod of the Diocese of Aba. P.1.
79. Ibid.
80. Gordon Epelle it will be remembered was one of the signatories of the Petition by African residents against the forceful acquisition of their residential plots by the colonial government. See Chapter II.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Elder Udo-Igwe, Publication on the 25th Anniversary of the Presbyterian Church Parish Aba. November 1987. P.10.
84. Ogor Hill area at this time was outside the boundaries of Aba town.

85. Interview with Elder J.E. Ugorji, elder in the Church, age: 75 years, October 20, 1988.
86. Interview with Michael Orji, Church Warden, Christ The King Catholic Church Aba, age: 84 years, October 16, 1988.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. I.A. Uleanya, Op. Cit., Based on an interview with Abraham Nzotta, age: 69 years, Ihie July, 1977.
90. See Presidential Address - - - . P.1.
91. Interview with Mr. Michael Orji already cited.
92. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1191, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1940'. P.22.
93. Babara Callaway, Op. Cit., P.226. See also Interview with Mr. J.N. Ugochukwu, Chairman, St. Eugene's Church Parish Council Eziukwu Aba, age 75 years, October 8, 1988.
94. Even though a census of the membership of the various churches is not available and the chances of its being available is remote because this aspect will not be enumerated in the proposed 1991 census, a close observation of the distribution of the various churches and the trend of their membership clearly proves this.
95. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1202, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1941'. P.11-12.
96. N.A.I. CSo 26/2 No. 11930, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', 1924. P.39.
97. Ibid., P.40
98. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1489, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1949 - 50'. P.7.
99. U.D. Anyanwu, 'Western Education and Social Change in Rural Nigeria', the experience of Etiti Local Government area of Imo State, Project Seminar Paper presented to N.I.S.E.R., Ibadan. September, 1988.

100. Typical examples of these schools are the present market road primary school, and Aman Gt. Aim School that was located at Hundred Foot Road. The former is discussed under indigenous enterprises in Chapter **VI**
101. A recent study has clearly demonstrated this opinion. See F.E. Renner 'Women in Health Services in Colonial Nigeria 1880-1959'. Paper presented at the symposium on 'Women Under Colonialism' organized by the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC), Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. October, 1989.
102. N.A.I. CSo 26/2 No. 11930 Vol.I, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', 1923. P.18.
103. N.A.I. CSo 26/2 No. 11930, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province, 1925'. P.27.
104. Interview with Mr. C.A. Obiegbu already cited.
105. N.A.E. Abadist 13/14/65, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1930. P.25.
106. N.A.I. CSo 26/2 No. 11930 Vol VI, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', 1928. PP.15 and 35.
107. Ibid., P.35.
108. N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/344, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1934. P.3.
109. N.A.E. Abadist 13/14/65, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1930'. P.18.
110. N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/344, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1934. P.2.
111. Ibid.
112. N.A.E. Abadist 13/14/65, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1940. P.22.
113. N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/982, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1948. P.40.
114. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1390, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1947. P.19.
115. Ibid.

116. N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/982, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', Jan. Aug. 1948. P.41.
117. Several Sanitary Inspectors served in Aba during this period. One notable one among them was a European called Mr. Ford. Under him for instance, there was a regular house to house anti-mosquito inspection and offenders were prosecuted. A practice such as this could be very helpful in our cities today.
118. Several systems of night soil disposal were adopted in Aba at various times in its history. Labour supply before 1947 was provided by prisoners, but from 1947, labour began to be hired. Up to the early 1930s, the system involved moving night soil, initially by head portorage, but later it was always move with a half ton Ford Lorry to a designated place where it was disposed of in large pits dug for that purpose. But from 1934, instead of just dumping the night soil in a pit, a tank was provided for the purpose. In this process all night soil generated were dumped inside the tank where the non-destructible elements were separated. These were later burnt in a specially designed incinerator. The solid sewage which remained after the washing of the crude night soil was passed through a sludge tank and eventually disposed in a series of sokaway pits. See N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/344, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1934. P.66. It needs be mentioned however that a by-law since the mid-1970s makes it mandatory for every house in Aba to have water closet system.
119. Most of the residents of Aba preferred fish, probably on account of cost, to meat. A reasonable amount of slaughtering nevertheless took place. In 1931 for instance, 1,524 animals, all inspected by the Sanitary Staff were slaughtered. 287 cattle, 542 sheep, 680 goats and 15 pigs. See N.A.E. Abadist 14/145, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1931. P.93.
120. Ibid. P.67.
121. Under the programme of animal pounding, a pound master caught all animals found wandering on the township roads. Thereafter, their owners were required to pay money or fines before they could collect their animals back. One hopes that this neglected source of township revenue should be explored by present day township authorities.



122. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1158, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1938. P.32.
123. N.A.E. 'Annual Report, Aba Township', 1st September, 1950 - 31st October, 1951. Para-12.
124. N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/982, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1948. P.45.
125. Ibid., P.39.
126. E.M. Ezera, 'The Hydrology of an Urban Area: a study on the Impact of Urbanization on the Storm run off in Aba', (B.Sc. Geography, Nsukka 1981). P.37.
127. N.A.E. 'Annual Report, Aba Township', 1st September, 1950-31st October, 1951. Para-7.
128. Tim Goodland, Op. Cit., P.723.
129. Elizabeth Isichei, 'A History of the Igbo People', London, 1976. P.205.
130. Tim Goodland: Op. Cit., P.723.
131. Interview with Mr. Nwaru already cited.
132. Ibid.
133. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1191, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1940'. P.26.
134. Ibid.
135. See Ibid.
136. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1390, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1947. P.20
137. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/982, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1948 - August 1949. P.15.
138. The gari trade and its place in the growth of Aba is discussed in Chapter VI.
139. See Memo from the Senior Executive Engineer, P.W.D. Port Harcourt to Assistant Director of Public Works. P.W.D. Southern Area, Enugu, 17th June 1929, in N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1358, 'Aba water supply'. P.68. This amount was later approximated to £11,000. See N.A.E. Abadist 3/14/16. 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1930. P.25.

140. N.A.I. CSo 26, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', 1939. P.7.
141. See Nigerian Daily Times, Lagos, Monday 2nd September, 1929. P. 83.
142. N.A.I. CSo 26, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', 1939. P.71.
143. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1543, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1952\*- August 1949. P.31.
144. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1145, 'Electricity Scheme Aba', P.1.
145. Ibid. P.15
146. See Telegram dated 2/12/52 in Ibid., P. 28.
147. 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Township Advisory Board in Ibid.', P. 28.
148. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1489, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1948 - 1950. P. 3.
149. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1489, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1948 - 1950. P. 3.
150. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1402, 'Aba Post Office', P. 25.
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## CHAPTER IV

### FACTORS AND STAGES IN THE GROWTH OF ABA, 1945 - 1960

#### Introduction

By 1945, Aba had become a kind of "melting-pot" because of the influx of people of diverse cultures and interests to the town. As already shown in the preceding chapters, immigrants included both the Igbo and the non-Igbo, and even non-Nigerians. The former included those from neighbouring communities in Ngwaland as well as those from Arochukwu, Owerri, Nkwerre and Onitsha (usually called the Ijekebe). The latter included Nigerian groups like the Yoruba, Hausa, Efik, Ijo, Ibibio, Annang and non-Nigerians like the Saro, people from the Gold Coast, agents of European commercial firms and officials of the colonial regime. The population rose rapidly from 12,958 in 1931 to 57,787<sup>1</sup> by 1952/53, a rise of 345 per cent in 20 years. It is hardly necessary to emphasize the need for caution in accepting these population figures especially given the ease with which people, particularly from the immediate countryside moved in and out of the town. They are nevertheless helpful in relative if not absolute terms because they show the ethnic and sex distribution of the population in 1953 as indicated below :

#### Population Statistics of Aba in 1953

Igbo	52,888
Edo, Hausa, Ibibio, Efik	1,947
Yoruba and Ijo	1,411
Others	<u>1,541</u>
Total	57,787

#### Sex Distribution

Males	36,656
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Females	<u>21,131</u>
Total	57,787 <sup>2</sup>

It should be clear from the figures that Aba's population at this time was highly deversified. Equally true is the diversity of interests in the population as the following figures on occupational distribution in the town in the 1950s indicate.

Occupational Distribution of Male Population, 1953

Males under 15 years and thus assumed not working	15,227
Agriculture and Fishing	512
Craftsmen	2,940
Trading and Clerical	9,186
Administrative, Professional and Technical	1,091
Others	7,700
Those over 49 years.	246 <sup>3</sup>

No figures are given for the occupational distribution of the females. Most of them were housewives who engaged in small-scale farming and gardening as well as trading and domestic work. But this does not mean that women were excluded from the trades, professions and other occupations indicated above for males. Far from it, a lot of collaboration took place between males and females, but generally, women dominated small scale activities which kept them close to their families and homes.

The statistics clearly prove the point we have been making in this work that the dominant factor in Aba's growth was commerce and related activities. This explains the great preponderance of people engaged in trading and craftsmanship.

Also worthy of note is the age range of most of the population. The records indicate that only 246 were above the age of 49. This means that well over 95 per cent of the population were less than 50 years old. This, of course, is not surprising since urban migration was usually undertaken by the able bodied and young school leavers who found the rural environment inadequate for their occupational and other interests. This phenomenon is still evident in the nature of urban growth in Nigeria and most parts of Africa. What this implies, therefore, is that the right policies have not yet been put in place even by independent post-colonial governments on the continent. The lesson here is that any policy aimed at checking rural - urban migration must of necessity be targeted at the young and able bodied, and must be capable of fulfilling not only their occupational desires but also their social interests.

#### Economic and Social Conditions

It is clear from the discussion thus far that under the colonial dispensation after overcoming their initial suspicion, the hopes of many Africans, for a new life in which they would earn cash incomes to satisfy their numerous desires had by 1945 remained largely unfulfilled. As we have seen, in those early years, the jobs many found were hardly different from those they were escaping from. This was largely because opportunities for access to western education which would have prepared them for other types of jobs were very limited. While the few who managed to acquire a smattering of education easily got jobs as Mission School teachers, as well as clerks and agents of European trading firms, the vast majority of Aba residents remained labourers.

By the end of the Second World War however, things began to change for the better. Though the number of white-collar jobs available

was still small for the increased number of people leaving schools, a number of indigenous enterprises had begun to emerge through the efforts of returning soldiers, the Saro, and others as well as local people who began to diversify their investments away from produce trading. Many new enterprises which will be discussed later in Chapter VI took up some of the school leavers as employees and apprentices. But the vast majority still looked up to the colonial administration for employment despite the paucity of opportunities available in the township administration, postal services, railways, and the medical field. In 1941 for instance, the following Africans were on the township staff: Mr. F. Wambu - Wadibia - the town Clerk, Mr. J.N. Wamuo - Assistant Clerk, Mr. A.E. Nwankudu - Market Master, Mr. E.I. Ugboma - Assistant Market Master, Mr. J.N. Ogbonna - Township Building Inspector, Mr. N. I. Nwamuo - Water Rate Clerk, Miss M.W. Okezie - Female Health visitor, Miss P.O. Anusien and Mrs. S.N. Wamuo - Midwives.<sup>4</sup> Africans gradually gained more skillful and respectable jobs. By 1950 Mr. O. Asika was the District Engineer, while Dr. R.N. Oyemelukwe was Medical Officer.<sup>5</sup> In 1951, Dr. S.E. Onwu was the Senior Medical Officer in charge of Aba Hospital while Dr. James Femi Pearse was Medical Officer. Mr. J. Ayo A. Brown was the Civil Engineer and Provincial Surveyor, while Mr. Pius N.C. Okigbo was the Development Officer.<sup>6</sup> With the inauguration of the Aba Urban District Council in 1953, a few more Africans were employed in the council as administrators, clerks, technical staff and labourers. Not to be excluded also were many residents who got employment in the new manufacturing enterprises that were being established by Europeans such as Lever Brothers and Nigerian Breweries.

Thus from about 1945, two broad categories of workers had emerged. The white collar workers and those engaged in various forms of private enterprise. As will be seen shortly, under the colonial

dispensation, Africans in both categories operated under circumstances which made their continued growth difficult.

The white collar workers were generally given conditions of service that were different from those of Europeans and employed only if there were no Europeans to do the job. The discrimination was glaring in the case of medical and technical officers with the same professional qualification and doing the same work. Sometimes the discrimination was <sup>so</sup> dehumanising that African officials who could not stand it were frustrated out of service. Mrs. Margaret Ekpo recalls, for instance, how in the 1940s, her husband Dr. John Udo Ekpo, a Yaba trained Medical Officer at Aba African Hospital often complained of the maltreatment and differential payment between him and the European Officers.<sup>7</sup> According to her, what pained Dr. Ekpo most was that some African nurses, who were probably girl friends of influential European Officers, earned higher salaries than the African Yaba-trained male doctors. It was frustration from such experience that made Dr. Ekpo leave the government service to set up a private clinic.

As for the technical fields, African technicians and Engineers were often not given the opportunity to take charge of projects from which they could acquire more advanced skills. Thus in the construction of the Aba electricity scheme for instance, Messrs. Nigerian Electricity Undertakings was contracted to do the job and there was no effort to ensure that African government employees were made to understudy them. The pattern was the same in the activities of the Public Works Department. In nearly all cases, there was a European supervisor who stood around with helmet and white shorts supervising African workers<sup>8</sup>.



As for Africans establishing or expanding their own enterprises, the most significant example of the conditions under which they operated is in the area of banking services and support. As is well known, the introduction of money or cash economy was one of the most important economic consequences of the European presence in Africa. The money economy contributed immensely to the growth of Aba. We have earlier indicated how European merchants experienced great difficulties in using European coins and currency notes for buying produce from Africans, and coastal people as middlemen between Africans and Europeans were able to make brisk business in the exchange market.

It was in that period that European banks came to Aba. This was in 1926 when both the Bank of British West Africa and the Colonial Bank opened up for business in the town.<sup>9</sup> The presence of the banks, however, did not solve the initial problems of cash flow and acceptance of European money in the town. This was because the banks came essentially to service the interest of European trading companies. Even among the European firms, there were cries of favouritism as many firms outside the "Lever Combine" often complained to the District Officer that they were unable to obtain credits and coins from the Banks, especially the Colonial Bank.<sup>10</sup> The banks hardly extended credits to Africans in Aba. Usually, money was moved into the bank's branches during produce buying seasons and extended to the favoured European firms. As soon as produce buying for the season was completed, the profits and proceeds reaped were moved out of Aba to their Headquarters, and probably from there back to Europe.

It was partly in the attempt to address this type of problem that indigenous banks began to be established in Nigeria, the earliest being

the National Bank in 1933. Indeed in the period 1950-51 which came to be referred to as the 'banking boom era', as many as 18 banks were established to serve the interest of Africans.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately we do not have reliable information as to the number which succeeded in establishing branches in Aba. However, a combination of factors led to the failure of nearly all the banks during the period. The major ones were: inadequate capital base, poor staff and thus poor management and, in the absence of banking regulations specifying codes of conduct, all manner of fraudulent practices were prevalent.<sup>12</sup> Only the African Continental bank and the National Bank, it would appear survived in Aba during this period.<sup>13</sup>

As would be expected, this problem of cash flow had negative effect on Aba residents economically. Since Aba was largely a commercial town, it meant that Africans were grossly disadvantaged in transactions involving European money. Thus while Africans participated in the produce trade and made gains and profits which positively affected their lives, none grew large enough to set up a merchantile firm capable of rivaling any of the European firms. A similar fate was also experienced by those engaged in the trading of European goods. Whether it was salt, rice, stock fish, bicycles, enamel ware and so on. None of them succeeded well enough to set up firms or supermarket stores capable of rivaling U.A.C. or John Holt. The vast majority of Africans, faced with these adverse conditions, could only engage in small time trade. For the women, this meant petty trading in such things as crayfish, gari and other food products, while the men engaged mainly in the sale of bicycle spare parts, stockfish, second hand clothing and other enterprises which could be set up from personal savings.

The nature of banking, and commercial relations in the period did not create a capitalist class which could then employ such capital for the overall development of the Aba economy through diversification. Indeed, as will be shown, it was only towards the end of our period when a few manufacturing enterprises came into existence that we began to see the growth of such people as Utuks Brothers of Uyo, Ugorji Eke, Nnanna Kalu, J.N. Nwafor, J.N. Mokwe and a few others who had been contracted by Lever Brothers and Nigerian Breweries as major suppliers of raw materials such as palm oil and kernels as well as distributors of products such as beer. Nearly all these people subsequently grew to become big capitalists and important actors in the Nigerian economy especially after the colonial period. All of them had big transport firms such as Utuks Motors while others in addition to their transport business built industries such as Nnanna Kalu who established the Star Paper Mill and several other firms in Aba.<sup>14</sup> The point being made therefore is that despite the success of a few individuals under the colonial dispensation, the economic conditions prevented the early rise of an African capitalist class in Aba which would probably have played the kind of catalytic role in industrial development that capitalists played in Western Europe.

Moreover, as already noted, the initial suspicion of the people against European money, coupled with the less than fair manner in which it was being circulated, ensured that many people remained attached to traditional currencies especially the manilla which was used simultaneously with European currency until well after the Second World War despite efforts by the colonial authorities to eliminate it. It was, the cash payments made to soldiers and their relatives during and after the war that helped to popularise the cash economy in Aba town. But the damage already done ensured that the people had developed a negative attitude to banking and its facilities, a phenomenon which is

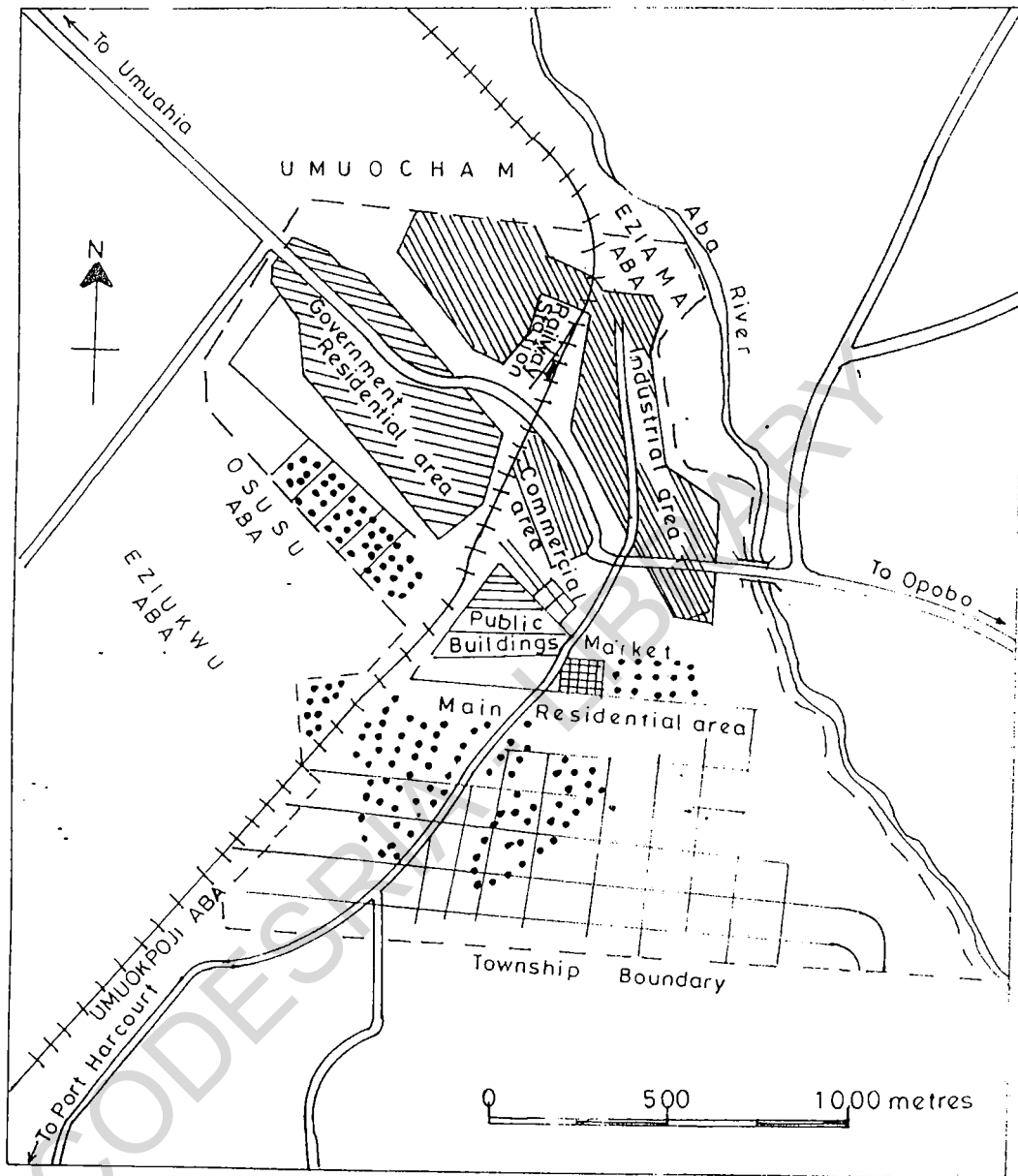
still evident in Aba today where traders keep large sums of money in their homes instead of lodging them in banks.<sup>15</sup> Thus while it is true that the introduction of money and banking had positive effects on the commercial growth of Aba residents and enterprises, it was mainly European enterprises that enjoyed the plum while Africans picked up whatever crumbs were left. Indeed as will be seen later it was from personal savings and support from relatives, not the banks, that many Africans raised the capital to set up their enterprises.

As far as living conditions were concerned, we use the examples of housing, transport and recreation to examine how Aba residents fared under the colonial dispensation. In housing, a well developed class structure existed. There was the high quality residential areas otherwise known as European Reservation. Here we had several bungalows, each isolated from the other with well laid out gardens. This area was occupied exclusively by Europeans and was made up of the left and right sides of the present Aba-Owerri Road.

A second section was that designed for Senior Service Africans. This area was developed mainly from the 1940s when a few Africans began to enter the upper ranges of the service. It was made up of 'fashionable multiple family houses' of medium rent. There was provision for a general children's play ground, but individual compound gardens were not provided. In this area were Asa Triangle, Park Road as well as Milverton and Constitution Crescents.

Below this, in hierarchical terms, were small residential high density houses. These were to be found around the Aba river, the New Market area, the Anglican Church area, Tenant Road, Cameron Road as well as Clifford and School Roads. Included in this category were low-

THE DIFFERENT DISTRICTS IN ABA TOWNSHIP 1960



Source:- Aba Urban LGA Office

income government quarters such as the Police Barracks, Prisons, Hospital and Clerks Quarters. In the main, these were rooms and flatlets with bucket toilet systems and a very high density and occupancy rate.<sup>16</sup>

A fourth group were peripheral residential areas such as Over-Rail in Eziukwu which were largely unplanned with buildings consisting sometimes of as many as 16 rooms. Some had bucket toilets while others had pit latrines. Most of the houses in this area had no electricity or water supply on the premises. They only used stand-pipes provided by the Colonial authorities. Among the occupants of this fourth category were artisans, small time traders who constituted the bulk of Aba traders at the time, as well as labourers and even the unemployed. It was in this area that urban slums developed.

It is clear that apart from the European reservation area in which amenities such as electricity and water were provided on the premises, and to some extent the African Senior Service areas, the vast majority of Aba residents lived under poor housing conditions. It is doubtful whether the best was got out of clerks and teachers who had no electricity in their homes and often had to queue for several hours for water at public stand-pipes.

If the government failed to provide adequate utility services, African landlords had their own part in the poor housing conditions of the period. Many of them kept tenements at standards barely enough to satisfy inquisitive sanitary inspectors. The shortage of housing occasioned by the constant population flow into the town in search of economic opportunities ensured very quick returns to landlords who managed to put up rentable accommodation. This explains why the phenomenon of temporary buildings was still a feature of Aba in

the early 1950s.<sup>17</sup> In fact in those days, those who could afford it, saw the building of a house as one of the best ways of investing their savings, and safeguarding the future.

However, their tenants had a different story to tell. Most of them, between the late 1940s and 1960, earned salaries ranging from 10/- to £2: 5/- monthly when most tenement houses attracted rents in the region of 10/- to £3 per month. When other expenses such as tax, rates, electricity for the few who had access to it, as well as school fees are considered, it is obvious that not much was left for personal expenses on transport, feeding and clothing. The impression given by some informants in Aba that life was markedly better for them during the colonial period than it is now clearly needs review. There has been a revolution in expectations. While many of the urban poor and middle class in the colonial period felt "satisfied" with the barest of living, increased taste in housing, dressing, feeding and transportation has meant that earnings have been under greater pressure since the end of colonialism. For instance while during the colonial era most urban dwellers in Aba could either not afford meals of rice or were able to afford it on the family menu only on Sundays, it has since become, a regular item on the menu of many urban dwellers three or four times a week. Moreover, while many urban dwellers in the colonial period had private farms either within the city or in its peripheral area from which they produced food to supplement their earnings, the rapid rate of urbanization in Aba since independence has used up such farming areas. Indeed the fact that, as earlier shown, many Aba residents kept moving from one trade or occupation to another in the colonial period is a clear indication that all was not well with them.

Even though many of the problems remain, a lot has obviously changed since the end of our period in the living conditions of the people of Aba. A large percentage of the people whether traders or white collar workers now live in flats or flatlets while those who can afford it even live in duplex houses.<sup>18</sup> Even though the class structure still exists, the rigidity has been diffused to the extent that nearly every compound now has electricity, pipe borne water supply and a water closet toilet system. Thus urbanization in Aba created new tastes in feeding and housing. Most of these were improved on after independence, even though the cumulative effects of mismanagement under successive governments now threaten to reverse most of the post-independence gains.

In the areas of transportation, the situation was not markedly different. As we saw earlier, before the introduction of modern transport facilities, all journies were made on foot while head portorage was the norm in the movement of goods, a situation which remained largely the same for many years after the inception of colonial rule. By the end of the Second World War, bicycles had become the major means of transportation. But until the 1950s, the vast majority of Aba residents could still not afford it. Thus while undoubtedly the bicycle brought great improvement in the quality of the peoples lives, it was mostly those who owned one, that felt the effect. There was no conscious effort by the colonial authorities to create an integrated bicycle route network which could adequately serve the people's transport needs within the township. The result was that in many of the areas, people continued to rely on the only means of transport they know before the inception of colonial rule, namely, walking and human portorage. Thus the greatest beneficiaries of the introduction of bicycles in our period were European and African



produce merchants whose trade gained from produce moved to the city from the interior, and to some extent, the urban working elite.

A similar but perhaps even worse situation existed in motor transport. As is well known, up to 1960, very few people owned personal cars in Aba. Therefore, those who needed motor transportation and could not afford their own motor vehicles were left with the option of using commercial vehicles. Unfortunately throughout the colonial period in Aba, the authorities did not set up any urban public transportation system for the people. The business was run by private enterprise. Granted that the British were apostles of the private free enterprise system, the least one would have expected was a well coordinated and integrated route network for the whole township with the necessary access roads provided. But this was not the case. The result was that private transporters concentrated on inter-city routes, particularly to those areas like Itu, Azumini, Owerri, Ikot Ekpene, Omoba and Mbawsi where produce could be bought. Within the city, they radiated mainly between the motor park, the railway station and the markets. Even when a sub-urban train service was introduced in 1928, it also had a similar orientation, that is, it was essentially aimed at serving the needs of European produce buying firms and their African agents.

The point being made therefore is that even though urbanization in the colonial period led to the introduction of modern transport facilities in Aba which no doubt contributed greatly to the growth of the town and increased the opportunities of material achievements by the residents, more could have been achieved if conscious effort had been made to provide an integrated transportation system. The result is that there was no systematic urban transportation system (a necessity for

urban functionality and sustained growth) that was bequeathed to Aba residents by the end of our period in 1960

Before the inception of colonial rule, the people had several forms of recreation such as wrestling competitions, dances and others. While these continued in Aba during our period, new forms of recreation were introduced. Among these were European type clubs, Cinemas and numerous European type sporting activities.

Like most other things in the town during the colonial period there was a class structure in club membership in the town. In the first place, it was the preserve of the elites - European and African. But even within this elite, there was a further division between Europeans and Africans. Needless to state that the Europeans were given priority in selection. This was through the establishment of the Aba European Club which was built between 1925 and 1926 at a cost in excess of £224: 11: 8d.<sup>19</sup> Among its facilities developed through the years were the bar and restaurant, tennis court, a golf course and a swimming pool. Essentially therefore the club was a social one which aimed at satisfying the social interest of Europeans in the town. Its officers at its inception included F. Ferguson, the District Officer, Aba, who was the President; B.F. West, the Manager of the Aba Branch of the Bank of British West Africa who served as treasurer and H.S. Curryer served as its secretary.<sup>20</sup> This club was exclusively for Europeans and it remained so until 1960. However as African nationalist feelings increased through the years, efforts were made to provide similar facilities for the African elites. This was through the building in 1946 of an African Rest House and later a Recreation Club which served the social interest of Senior African Civil Servants.<sup>21</sup> But unlike the European one, there were no such facilities as a golf course or swimming pool in the African Club.

A significant and remarkable advancement in elite recreational activities was achieved in 1951 when a multi-racial club was formed.<sup>22</sup> It is not quite clear what factors engendered the formation of the club. A probable reason might be the realization of European residents that their social needs would be more fulfilling within a free and multi-racial milieu. It may also have been induced by the wind of Independence which was already beginning to gather momentum at the time. Be that as it may, the point to note is that the Niger International Club provided a common ground where the European and African elite: lawyers, doctors, civil servants, merchants and politicians met in a valuable forum for amusing talks, quizzes, brain trusts and debates. It thus served not only relaxation purposes but became an important medium for the exchange of ideas. But, as already stated, all these provisions were essentially for the elite, as the vast majority of residents were unaffected.

Nevertheless, a number of recreational facilities such as sporting clubs, cinemas and sporting facilities provided in the Aba stadium built in the early 1950s provided recreational outlets to some non-elite residents of the town. Mention must be made of two clubs in particular in this respect. These were the Aba Youth Club and the Emy Boxing Club. The Aba Youth Club was founded in about 1950 through the efforts of Assistant District Officer Leach.<sup>23</sup> The club sought the removal of young boys from the streets and the inculcation in them, of the idea of service to the community. By 1952, about 100 young boys had become members of this club which was run on small subscriptions and donations from the public. The boys activities were numerous but they were particularly noted for boxing and football and were even said to have won the Emy Football Cup in 1952.<sup>24</sup>

The Emy Boxing Club was the main rival of the Aba Youth Club and was managed by a former professional boxer after whom the club was probably named. The authorities encouraged these and other smaller boxing clubs in the town by providing gloves and a boxing ring for them. The construction of the stadium in Aba in the early 1950s further boosted these sporting activities. Aba eventually grew to be noted for football and boxing, producing in the process a notable boxer: Mr. Dick Ihe-tu, popularly known as Dick Tiger who later became the World Middle Weight Boxing Champion. Houses built from the proceeds of his illustrious career can still be seen at Okigwe Road Aba.

Cinemas were open to all residents. In the period before 1960, there were two cinema houses in Aba both of which were privately owned. The first of these was the Rex Cinema built in 1944 at Asa Triangle, opposite Aba Motor Park, by a Lebanese called Mr. Farah.<sup>25</sup> This was followed in the early 1950s by the Emy Cinema located at the junction between Hundred Foot (Azikiwe) Road and Asa Road. Both cinema houses are still functioning in Aba today, although a few more have since been built in the town.

Despite the beneficial effects of the new recreational facilities in terms of providing opportunities for social and business interactions, improving the health of the people and the provision of avenues for the development of latent sporting talents in the community, we must nevertheless note that efforts were not made to provide adequate open spaces and parks in Aba as is found in urban centres in Europe. These facilities are not only vital for pleasure but also contribute to enhance the scenic beauty of a town. The only attempt at this was the development of Tris Trans Park by 1939.<sup>26</sup> This was an exception rather than a systematic attempt at the provision of such facilities. Also, segregated recreational

facilities polarized the society into European/non-Europeans, Senior Service/Junior Service; and because most of the facilities were elite-based, the vast majority of the residents had no access to them. In this way, the idea of leisure being essentially an elite affair developed and it has persisted in the town ever since.

### Political Developments

A common phenomenon in urban history in Africa is the effort by residents to form cultural and/or progressive unions to cater for the particular interests of members and also to ensure that policies that constituted obstacles to their objectives were resisted. Under the urban environment, such groups developed to serve the functions, traditionally performed by kinship or community groups. While in traditional society kinship and community institutions provided the individual with economic, social and psychological security to cushion him against misfortune, such security is lacking in the urban setting and hence the need for voluntary associations. Because of the nature of their activities and objectives, the cultural and progressive unions ultimately became political pressure groups. Other scholars have demonstrated that Aba was not alone in this.<sup>27</sup>

The first noticeable of such groups was the Aba Progressive Union which was formed about 1924.<sup>28</sup> Initially, it was an affair of the Saro and other educated Africans; the Igbo and other Nigerian groups, however, joined over time. Amongst its early leaders were the Ghanaian Barrister W.A. Kisseado and Barrister W.R. Awunor-Renner a Saro. It is in this regard similar to the African Community League and the African Progress Union, both of Port Harcourt which in their early years, were dominated by the educated elite, especially the Saro.<sup>29</sup> The aim of the

Union was stated as being the "progress of, and improvement in the condition of life of African residents of the town."<sup>30</sup> In the colonial situation, however, the unstated aim could be said to be the determination to resist economic and social policies that brought hardship on the people. This meant a commitment to the struggle for the self-determination of the members and their supporters. The colonial administration was sensitive to this reality as the then Resident of Owerri Province accurately indicated in a report:

. . . doubtless, in time, public and political questions of wider import will be raised, though as yet, no mention appears to have been made of any extension of the franchise in this direction.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, through the Union's pressures and because of other considerations including the administration's desire to maintain a peaceful atmosphere for its economic enterprise, it allowed for a single African representation when the Township Advisory Board was set up. This was how the Aba Progressive Union came to have Barrister Kisseado on the Board in 1924; and Awunor-Renner in 1930.<sup>32</sup> In the meetings of the Board, these representatives often presented to the authorities, the views of residents of the township on matters affecting them. For instance, on 12 March 1930, Mr. Awunor-Renner proposed that £600 of the estimated surplus balance of the township revenue be set aside for the general improvement of the roads in the township. This proposal was seconded by Mr. Goldie, the District Manager of U.A.C. Ltd., Aba and was duly carried.<sup>33</sup> At another meeting on 10th September, he put forward the views of the Aba Progressive Union on the subject of rents on Crown Land and proposed, among others, that the rent for Asa main road plots be reduced from £5 to £2. The Board rejected the proposal and kept the

rent at £5 a plot ostensibly because the plots were very valuable since there was high demand for them and its value was on the increase.<sup>34</sup>

From the foregoing, it is evident that the Aba Progressive Union was a political force. It sought participation in the ordering of affairs in Aba, thereby seeking to break the monopoly of power and administration by the colonial regime in the area. Inevitably, because of the nature of the colonial regime, it did not achieve much success in its endeavours. Yet it set in motion a tradition which became a challenge to the rest of the society and an example for them as well. This example was to be followed by the people in the formation of other cultural and improvement unions. In this way, the Aba Progressive Union played an important role in the politicisation of Aba.

Internally, the Aba Progressive Union was not seen by the Igbo (particularly the Ngwa) as fully representative of the people since it was inspired by non-Nigerians. This was partly the reason for the formation of the Aba Community Improvement League which had a Chequered Career in the affairs of the town, but ultimately took the lime light from the Aba Progressive Union.

The Aba Community Improvement League was formed in March 1943, with membership open to all residents of Aba township. It included the cream of the Aba elite all the same. Among them were those who attended the League's Second Inaugural Meeting on 20th April, 1943 to wit: Barrister S.B. Rhodes, Barrister J. Coco Bassey, Chiefs of the Hausa and Nupe communities in Aba, Chief Ben Ogbonna of Aba, Mr. F.N. Ajasha Nzeribe, Bishop Kwamin Bresi Ando and Mr. C. Nweze.<sup>35</sup>

Trouble was to rock the League a few weeks after its inauguration when some of its founding and prominent members were found to be behind the formation of a Second Aba Community League. This fact came to light during the second meeting of the League when a speaker on the floor indicated that some members of the league including Bishop Bresi Ando and Mr. C. Nweze were seen holding a meeting in the house of the Chief of the Hausa Community. Indeed, probably unknown to the men at the meeting, this second league had already taken off with Bishop Bresi Ando as President and Mr. C. Nweze as Secretary.

Nevertheless, following this disclosure, Barrister S.B. Rhodes suggested that members of the Second League should be invited to merge with the original League, if indeed the former's aim was the protection and advancement of the interests of the residents of Aba town. Going further, he proposed that the Second League should nominate six men from their rank to join six men from the original group to work out the procedures for the amalgamation of the two.

The Aba Community League did not respond positively to this offer by the Aba Community Improvement League. Bresi Ando and its Secretary Mr. C. Nweze presented themselves to the District Officer for recognition as the authentic representatives of the Aba people. They asked the District Officer to cancel tax assessment already passed in the township, and that they be allowed to represent the Community in the Township Advisory Board instead of those already appointed from the Improvement League. The District Officer rejected their demand and instead advised that the two rival leagues should meet with a view to amalgamation. The Aba Community League refused to accept the suggestion. As a result of this refusal, the District Officer in June 1943, informed its Secretary that he was unable to recognise their Aba



Community League as fully representing all the interest of the various sections of Aba Community.<sup>36</sup> Thus the disunity between the two Leagues was to remain for some time.

The question is, why did the Aba Community League refuse amalgamation with the Aba Community Improvement League if it had the same objectives of promoting the interests of the residents of the township? What in fact was the basis of the disunity between the two leagues? All available evidence indicates that the disunity had to do with elite struggles for position within the colonial state. The 1940s was a period of scarcity and economic hardship for many people in Aba, and the elite were not an exception in this regard. Many of them saw the leadership of the Community League as an avenue which would enable them to have access to the government and therefore the spoils of office. Such gains could come in the form of contracts, rations of scarce commodities such as salt, milk, sugar, and also opportunity to secure jobs and other benefits for their kins. The opportunity also gave one the chance to secure reductions in his income tax assessment; an often contentious issue in Aba during the period. This explains why the very first demands of Bresi Ando and his group was that an already completed income tax assessment should be cancelled and that they be appointed to represent the community in the Advisory Board. Added to this was their demand that the District officer should appoint them to be in charge of the distribution of salt and kerosene.

A remarkable feature of this struggle for power was that it cut across ethnic lines, hence, in a way, it was different from the type of elite struggles witnessed later during the movement for Nigeria's Independence.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless such elite struggle for position in the colonial state often succeeded in diverting attention away from crucial

problems confronting the people. Among such problems in the case of Aba was the question of providing a functional drainage system for the township as well as a good network of all-weather roads. A united African elite carrying the people with them, under the banner of the Community League could have been able to make a strong case to the colonial authorities for the provision of these facilities. Instead they busied themselves with the struggle for power and, therefore, by and large, lost touch with the people they purported to represent.

By the time it became clear to the leadership of both leagues, especially the Bresi Ando group that the government would not recognise it, and because both groups were obviously losing out to the advantage of the colonial authorities, efforts were made at reconciliation. The details and course of this reconciliation are not quite clear; but by 1949, the disagreements in the leagues had been resolved as the two groups emerged under one new leadership viz: Mr. Egbo Nwankwo, President, Mr. J.I.G. Onyia, Vice President, Mr. O. Basse, Secretary while Mr. S.O. Masi was his assistant. Also represented were Chiefs of the non-Igbo groups namely Chief Giwa of the Yoruba Community, Chief Bello of the Hausa Community and Chief Sumonu of the Nupe Community.<sup>38</sup>

The wisdom and benefit derivable from this unity could be seen from the fact that soon after it was achieved, the League began to make demands on the colonial government for the introduction of representative government in Aba. At a mass meeting held on 14th February 1949, the League demanded that:

Immediate steps be taken by the Aba Advisory Board, to implement our request embodied in the welcome address to the Chief Commissioner particularly on the question of a municipality for

Aba which is considered a pressing need and desiring that due notice be taken of our decision that the Aba Community League no longer would tolerate nominated members; that the community be represented at the Township Advisory Board by elected members who, unlike the present members, but one, represent their personal interests.<sup>39</sup>

This was a very clear and forceful demand and, even though it asked for no more than participation in the colonial administration, it was certainly more relevant than the earlier bickerings for salt and kerosene. We should also note that the "but one" member was a reference to the representative of the Community League on the Advisory Board.

The demand for municipal status by the League received a tremendous boost from the need of the government to raise revenue. The Aba Local Authority was planning the introduction of a general rating in the township. Bearing in mind that the town's residents would likely oppose the move in the absence of the declaration of a municipality, the Local Authority joined in imploring the Resident to consider declaring Aba a municipality like Port Harcourt "since the conditions in the towns were virtually the same."

He recommended that a township ordinance similar to that of Port Harcourt be adopted, and that he would invite recommendations from the Township Advisory Board on the number of wards desirable "so that an early step forward on the road to municipal self government could be started."<sup>40</sup>

It seems obvious that this support from the Local Authority came more from his desire to create a conducive atmosphere for collecting

much needed township revenue through a general rating than from a genuine desire for seeing an early road to municipal self government in Aba. It may also have been a way of telling Aba residents that he was on their side hence there was a need for them to cooperate and support his administration by paying their rates. It was often the case that Colonial Administrators on the spot tended to be more sympathetic to local aspirations than those at the centre. Thus predictably, the Resident did not share the Local Authority's views. In reply to the resolution, he instructed the District Officer to inform the Aba Community League that plans for the creation of a municipal government must await the government's broad plan for a new local government system.<sup>41</sup>

It was not only the Aba Progressive Union and the Aba Community League that built up the people's political consciousness in the town. In fact, a much more potent force was the ethnic unions and organizations. At the beginning of the second world war, there were about 50 of such organizations in the town, but by 1960, there were as many as 400.<sup>42</sup> The sheer number involved is an obvious indication of the plurality of interests in the town. The unions were formed in the main by non-*Ngwas*, particularly, other *Igbo* who, finding themselves away from home, decided to get together not only to help themselves in the city, but also to help their different home areas. They settled disputes among their members, and between their members and other groups. They acted as welfare and mutual aid associations and sponsored dances, traditional ceremonies and other rites in the town. They were in effect extensions of local governments away from their homes, settling matters according to custom.

A remarkable feature which has also been noted elsewhere<sup>43</sup> is that their members tended to live or cluster in particular sections of the

town and ... belonged largely to the same religious sects. For instance, the vast majority of residents from Bende, Item, Abiriba and Ohafia, all of whom had similar customs and dialects were clustered around School/Cameroon and Clifford Roads; and they were mainly followers of the Church of Scotland Mission. In the same way, most residents from Owerri area tended to live in the Eziukwu section of the town, in particular around Okigwe and Owerri Roads; and they were mainly followers of the Catholic Faith. People from the Cross River areas, particularly the Ibibios, lived mostly in the Ngwa and Ohafia Roads and were generally followers of the Qua Ibo and Church of Scotland Missions. It is noteworthy also that, within the larger unions, such as the Ngwa Town Union, the Ibibio Town Union, the Igbere Union, the Owerri Town Union, the Aro Union, were also smaller unions for the various towns. For instance, under the umbrella of the Owerri Town Union were unions of residents from various towns such as the Mbieri Town Union, the Aro Town Union and the Uzoagba Town Union.<sup>44</sup> The unions not only supported their kinsmen's economic, political and social activities, they also raised funds for building roads, schools and churches both in Aba and in their home areas as well as in training some of their people in institutions of higher education. Ohafia and Igbere (Bende) people provided most of the money for building the new Presbyterian Church at No. 1 Azikiwe Road in the 1950s.<sup>45</sup> The Aba branch of Uzoagba Town Union was instrumental in the building of Uzoagba Girls Secondary School in Uzoagba, Owerri, in the early 1950s;<sup>46</sup> while the Ngwa Town Union apart from building a Secondary School in Aba sent some of its sons like Jonah Nwachukwu, Leo Uzoigwe, M.N. Onwuma and Paul Ururuka for higher education in the United Kingdom.<sup>47</sup>

These social roles of the unions, however, seem not to have satisfied the overall yearnings of the people for self-assertion. Many,

especially among the educated elite, and other politically conscious and ambitious persons, demanded changes in the political status of the town to enable them play a more active role in its affairs. Their major desire, namely, the declaration of Aba as a municipality, continued to be a subject of agitation by the respective unions as well as the Aba Community League. Partly because of the pressure from the unions, and also in keeping with the then colonial policy of devolving increased responsibilities to Nigerian groups, the colonial authorities approved a municipal status for Aba in 1951. Subsequently, the town was divided into 10 wards, each ward being a constituency. Elections were held on 22 March 1952 and 3 councillors were elected to represent each ward.<sup>48</sup>

This election was not fought on party basis. However nearly all elected councillors were N.C.N.C. members or sympathizers.<sup>49</sup> The election was devoid of violence and the type of ethnic bitterness which characterise present day elections in Nigeria. This was because Aba was a cosmopolitan town where even an Ngwa could only hope to win elections if he was popular with the people. Indeed at the time of the elections, more than 70 per cent of the residents were non-Ngwa. The candidates and the campaigns reflected the multi-ethnic composition of the city. Nevertheless, Arochukwu, Item and Bende contestants tended to dominate the areas where large numbers of their people settled. For instance, it was not surprising that the winner in the Cameroon/School ward was Mr. Dick Igbokwe, a man from Igberere in Bende.<sup>50</sup> Generally, more than 90 per cent of those elected in the various wards were non-Ngwa and, in most of the wards, about 86 per cent of the registered voters actually voted. These returns clearly indicated that Aba was a cosmopolitan town with a high level of political consciousness. The elections of 1952 were held before the re-organizations of the local government system which the colonial authorities were planning at the

time. The old structure of government continued with the Local Authority having the discretion to consult and take or reject advice from a Township Advisory Board. The only change was that the members of the Board were now elected.

#### The First Urban District Council

With the completion of the re-organizations, a full fledged Aba Urban District Council was set up under the Eastern Region Local Government Ordinance. The council was established by an instrument published as Eastern Region Public Notice No. 92 of 1953.<sup>51</sup> This provided for the councillors to hold office for three years and then all retire together, unlike the case in Enugu at the time where one third of the councillors faced the electorate every year. In order to effectively carry out its work, the new Council was required to establish various committees, five permanent standing committees: Staff and Finance, Education, Market, Health and Buildings, and Roads and Works.

The functions of the council included the provision and maintenance of roads, drains, markets, lorry and taxi parks, and water stand-pipes. It was to ensure public health and welfare, public order, decency, street lighting and traffic controls. It was also to manage all public schools and provide them with all necessary facilities. The council had four basic sources of funds. Being an agent of the Regional Government, it received a proportion of the direct taxes collected from all adult males in Aba. In 1953/54, this amounted to about £8,000.<sup>52</sup> The second source was the general rate which yielded about £7,000 in the same year. Thirdly, it received a grant from the Aba Ngwa County Council bicycle licencing authority amounting to £2,500. The most important source of its revenue were various license fees such as market

stall dues which rose from £7,500 in 1953 to an estimated £14,000 in 1955.<sup>53</sup> as well as taxes on hotels, bars, and lorry and taxi parks. In all, its total revenue was in the region of £40,000 to £50,000 per annum, a figure which was well above the average for District Councils in the Region.<sup>54</sup> With a 1956 staff strength of 330 workers made up of 80 administrative and clerical staff and 250 daily paid workers, the council was expected to achieve much.

Unfortunately, such expectations proved too hasty as the Council had little to show in terms of achievements during its tenure. Most of the Council's functions were not seriously addressed. Only a few roads were tarred; and even these were never well maintained. Only small extensions were undertaken in the street lighting scheme as the situation remained largely the same as it was before the inception of the Council. No extension was done to the Aba Water Supply Scheme even though the city's population continued heading upwards. The problem of stand-pumps remained a knotty one as several of them went out of order. The result was that residents either spent long hours queueing for water or in the alternative walked long distances to the Aba river. The only tangible achievements of the council were the provision of some new public latrines in the market, the building of two teachers quarters at the Aba Government School, the completion of 48 market stalls and the financing of a drainage survey. As it were, the council's time and resources which would have been spent profitably serving the people were tied down to the management of one crisis or the other.

As could be expected in any democratic situation, the council faced various problems soon after its inception. The first major problem came from a protest by Ngwa people living on the periphery of the urban area. As soon as the urban council was established, they put up a case



calling on the government to excise the "urban areas" immediately surrounding the township from the jurisdiction of the urban council and have it transferred to the Aba-Ngwa County Council. They adduced historical arguments to support the Ngwa claims to a large part of the "urban" areas of Aba, though their move was obviously aimed at maximizing the revenue of Aba-Ngwa County Council through the addition of high revenue-yielding areas.

The new council thus had to face an Inquiry as the Eastern Regional Government in a letter of 3 July, 1954, appointed the Coatswith Commission of Inquiry with the following terms of reference: to consider and report on the need for any of the following:

- (a) An alteration of the boundaries of the area of Aba-Ngwa County Council or of the Aba Urban District Council or of any other Council.
- (b) A division of the area of the Aba-Ngwa County Council
- (c) The transfer of any part of the area of any council within the Aba Administrative Division to another council.
- (d) The formation of a new council.<sup>55</sup>

The Commission was further asked: "Consequent on the above you should after the necessary consultations and due notice given, also report on the need to (a) change the name of any council, (b) alter the status of any council; add to, take away from or impose any condition upon the exercise of any of the functions of any council; (c) alter the constitution of any council."<sup>56</sup>

After a long inquiry which began on 1st August 1954, District Officer R. Coatswith recommended "that there should be no alteration in

the present status of the Urban District Council." He also recommended that the council should respect the aborigines and also respect their customs so that there will be no friction between the Ngwas and the other residents in the town as such harmony was required for Aba to grow and become the greatest town in the Eastern Region.<sup>57</sup>

This latter recommendation indicates the source of crises which contributed much to the non-performance of the Urban District Council. Unfortunately, despite the commission's admonition for peaceful co-existence among the groups, the bad blood generated during the inquiry continued to be a source of conflict between the 'stranger community' which was running the council and the Ngwa who thought much of Aba was theirs by right.

The second problem arose from various charges of corrupt practices levelled against councillors belonging to the various committees, particularly the Staff and Finance Committee, the Works Committee and the Market Committee. It is hardly surprising that in a town "where almost everyone is in commerce one way or another",<sup>58</sup> it was the allegations of corruption in the Market Committee that eventually became the most notorious. It was partly to satisfy the yearnings of residents that the council concentrated much attention on enlarging or rebuilding markets and providing new market stalls. It was in pursuance of this objective that 48 permanent market stalls meant for allocation to stockfish sellers was completed in early 1954. For the council and Aba residents this was a highly commendable achievement but as events later showed, the council's efforts were not "in the disinterested service of the trading community."<sup>59</sup>

Trouble began when residents, particularly traders, expressed dissatisfaction over the manner in which the market stalls were allocated. The councillors, especially members of the Market Committee were accused of allocating several, and indeed the best stalls to themselves, their wives, members of their families and their girl friends in what was believed to be a big racket and rip off and monumental abuse of public office.<sup>60</sup> Dissatisfaction was voiced in the Aba Community League which mounted a serious campaign for the dissolution of the Council and an investigation into its activities.

To resolve the crisis, the Eastern Regional Government appointed a Commission of Inquiry in February, 1955, headed by District Officer P.F. Grant. According to its terms of reference, the Grant Commission was expected to inquire into (a) the system of allocation and (b) the actual allocations made during the period covered by the inquiry. The Commission sat from 14 to 24 February, 1955. It reported that there had been widespread corruption in the allocation of market stalls and referred a case involving one Philomena Dike to the Police. In the penultimate paragraph of its report, it noted:

In this bleak, dark tale of corruption, greed and irresponsibility, it is difficult to find much light. However, one may take encouragement from the steadfast and determined efforts of the Aba Community League to have the conduct of the committee investigated. The Inquiry showed that the League was more than justified in its agitation against the council and one may take hope that with people like that in Aba willing to protest when they see evil doings, the future may be better than the immediate past. The actions of the Community League have, I submit, been triumphantly vindicated by the findings of this Inquiry.<sup>61</sup>

Despite this optimism by the Commission, later events showed that corruption rather than abating, remained a major constraint on tangible achievements by the council.

### New Elections and Party Politics

Meanwhile in the midst of the crises, the term of office of the councillors expired and new council elections were fixed for 1st November, 1955. This time, the contest was on party basis between the N.C.N.C. the Aba community League and Independent candidates. In the end, 18 N.C.N.C. and 7 Independent candidates were elected. Again, nearly all of them were non-Ngwa.<sup>62</sup> Mr. Dick Oko Igbokwe, who won the highest number of votes, was, as we earlier noted, a non-Ngwa from Bende. He was elected in ward 8. Another remarkable result was that Bishop Bresi-Ando, the President of the break-away Community League who later united with the original League lost in ward 22 to Mr. G.C. Anyanechi who scored 239 votes to his 103, a more than 2:1 margin. This defeat is an obvious indication that his faction of the League must have been the less popular one. Among the Ngwa who contested and lost were prominent people like Jaja A. Wachukwu, Samuel Ubodoaka and Barrister S.W. Ubani Ukoma.<sup>63</sup>

The role of the local N.C.N.C chapter is also noteworthy. Aba the "Enyimba City"<sup>64</sup> was a very important town for the N.C.N.C. in the Eastern Region. Indeed, under the leadership of Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, the party succeeded in mobilising and controlling most of the women in the town. Margaret Ekpo achieved this by organising the women into various unions and market associations through whose leaders messages were passed on to them. In this way, she won recognition and

tremendous influence within the party, even at the Federal level. She was included in the N.C.N.C delegation to the United Kingdom for the Constitution Conference of 1953/54. The N.C.N.C. having by this time become essentially a regional party, <sup>a</sup> majority of Aba residents being 'strangers' from various places, saw the party as one in which their interest would be most adequately protected. Thus, the NCNC had virtual control of Aba during the time.

Because of its leading position in the town, the local branch of the NCNC insisted on complete commitment of those wishing to contest council elections in the town since the results of such elections were seen as crucial to the general fortunes of the NCNC at both the Regional and Federal levels. It was also important to the party that its candidates control the Council since that would guarantee the party 5% of the value of any contract awarded by the council.<sup>65</sup>

The party usually ensured that it picked popular candidates who had the support of relevant ethnic group associations or improvement unions in the town. In fact most of those who got elected as councillors turned out to be those who had headed their improvement unions at one time or another. In general, the local NCNC would never sanction the candidacy of someone who did not have the support of his ethnic group; and because it was mainly the non-Ngwa that supported the NCNC in the town, it was not surprising that they won most of the seats. Indeed, even the Ngwa who were members of the NCNC belonged to the dissident faction which always opposed the leadership of the council,<sup>66</sup> obviously because of its largely non-Ngwa composition. For most of this period, this dissident faction was led by Messrs. Jaja Wachukwu and Ubani Ukoma. This group were later to join the K.O. Mbadiwe faction of the party when there was a split in the NCNC at the national level in 1958. It was the F.J.

Okoronkwo led group which had the support of nearly all the 'stranger Igbo' groups that often won the elections in the town.<sup>67</sup>

Another important feature of the 1955 election was that it was held under a new Eastern Region Local Government law which gave the District Officer, (rather than the Staff and Finance Committee of the Council) the power to appoint the council staff. In general, the District Officer was also responsible for the award of contracts under the new system.<sup>68</sup> On the surface, this move was aimed at checking the exceptional level of corruption within the Council. Yet beneath this hope was the reduction in the level of self government already achieved by residents of the municipality. It also demonstrated how corruption could dampen the growth of democracy while encouraging authoritarianism and dictatorship. There was even a more startling 'punishment', if we may call it that, for the councillors had their sitting allowance cut from £1 to 15 shillings and, to ensure its effectiveness, the frequency of both Council and Committee meetings were restricted.<sup>69</sup>

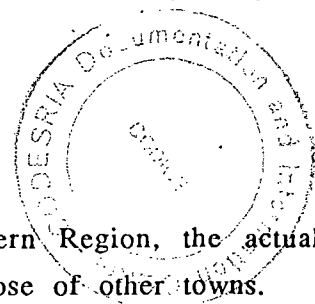
But despite the overriding role of the District Officer in the new council, the records of achievement remained dismal. The one significant achievement was the construction of the largest motor park in the Eastern Region which was opened for use in May 1959. It became a great source of revenue for the Council. The Council also supervised the construction and completion of the Aba Town Hall in 1960, a hall which is still very much in use today and in fact houses some of the offices of the Aba Local Government. It awarded a contract of £4,000 in 1958 to Messrs. African Industrial Enterprises for the tarring of the township roads.<sup>70</sup> and when much was not achieved after two years, the contract was reawarded to Monier Construction Company which achieved some success

in road tarring by 1961. The Council also installed traffic signs in the city.

These achievements were nevertheless dwarfed by the amount of work left undone. The drainage system remained unconstructed. Public facilities such as latrines and stand-pumps remained grossly inadequate. Gratifications were frequently accepted by officials in return for inaction against proprietors of hotels and drinking palours whose establishments were not kept in a proper hygienic state. But by far, it was in the area of education that the council's shortcomings was most glaring because those could not be hidden from the public. Public schools which as we saw earlier, were of good quality degenerated in rating when compared to mission and private schools. Worse still, salaries were low and irregular while physical facilities were often deplorable: teachers wrote on wall instead of blackboards and pupils, because of gross insufficiency of chairs and tables, often sat on bare floors for instruction.<sup>71</sup>

In general, the factors responsible for the inadequate and shoddy performance of the Urban District Council can be summarised. The first and foremost of course was corruption which we have already identified. We only need to add here that this 'cancer' was endemic in all the committees of the council, not just in the market committee, for councillors saw the council as an avenue for enriching themselves instead of serving the people.

A second major problem was shortage of funds. Nearly all committees of the council had inadequate funds for the execution of their programmes. While allocations from the government were very small, revenue from market, motor park dues, fines etc were poorly accounted for. But by far the greatest shortage was on returns from taxation. As can be seen from the figures below, even though Aba had the largest



taxable population of the major towns in the Eastern Region, the actual taxes collected in Aba was often far smaller than those of other towns.

Revenue from Taxes: 1954-1955

Town	Population	Taxable Population	Taxes collected
Enugu	63,000	39,000	£24,000
Calabar	46,000	27,000	£12,000
Port Harcourt	60,000	38,000	£30,000
Aba	63,000	40,000	£7,000 <sup>72</sup>

It is clear that Aba's performance was dismal: for instance, with a comparable size of population, Enugu generated £24,000, while Aba could account for only £7,000. The reason for the poor returns included the fact that tax collectors from Ngwa County taxed Ngwas in the town who in turn refused to pay again to the Aba council. Moreover, rate collectors avoided collecting rates from people from their home areas in the belief that such people should rather pay the money to their home improvement unions. In fact, the Aba public generally did not cooperate with rate collectors.

Added to the above, was the poor quality of both the Council staff and the councillors themselves. It is worth recalling here that from the time of its proclamation as a Second Class township in 1922, up to 1953, Aba was administered by the Local Authority and the Township Advisory Board. By contrast the surrounding Ngwa villages had been administered by the Native Authorities since 1903. Thus the Aba councillors, unlike Ngwa councillors from surrounding areas, lacked the practical experience necessary in local administration.<sup>74</sup> Moreover most



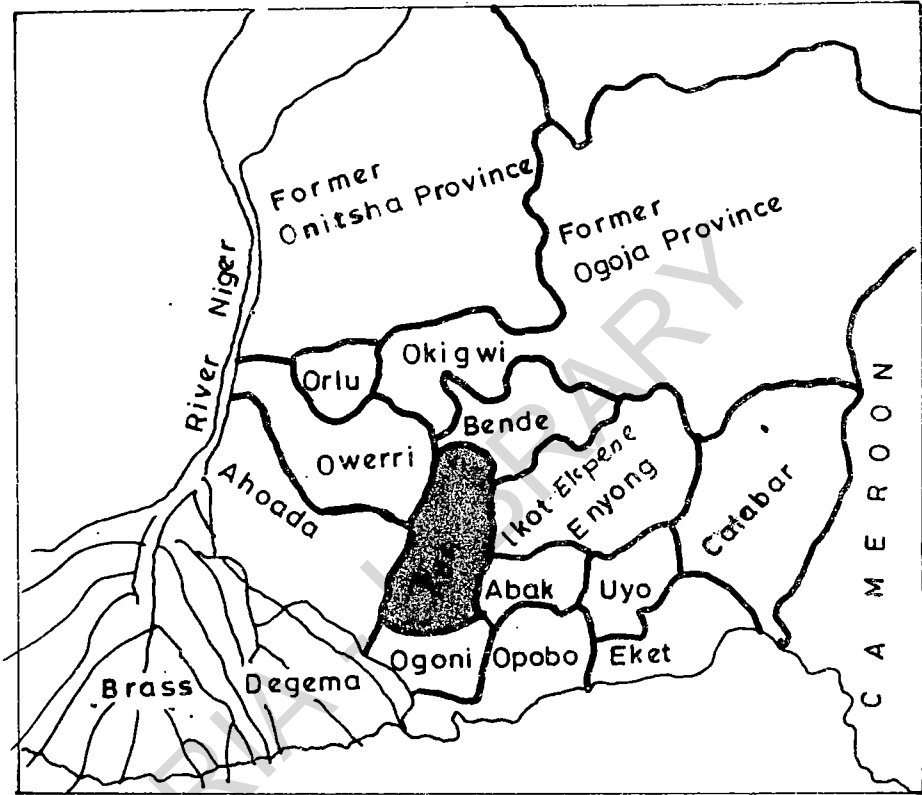
council staff and even the councillors themselves had very little western education, whereas English was the medium of debates. The council secretariat was poorly administered and could therefore not provide the councillors with the best of service, while the councillors because of their own limitations were poorly equipped intellectually to handle the issues involved in local government administration.

There was also the problem of politics. As already indicated, Aba urban area was largely an N.C.N.C. stronghold. Most of those who won the elections were either N.C.N.C. members or the party's sympathizer. The election in 1955, of seven Independents and four Aba Community League candidates made little difference because before the first sitting of the Council, all the successful candidates had declared for the N.C.N.C.<sup>75</sup> The result was a one party council. While to some extent this helped in the smooth running of the council since there were no inter-party squabbles, its negative consequences on council affairs were nevertheless substantial. In the first place, inter-party squabbles was replaced by intra-party ones. Secondly, there were excessive attempts to ensure party welfare through various forms of patronage and diversion of funds meant for execution of contracts. Thirdly, because there was no opposition in the Council, questionable actions by councillors were condoned as no institutionalized effort was made to check them; more so in a situation where public opinion was largely dormant.

#### Aba Town and the Politics of the Eastern Region

Thus far, we have demonstrated that as far as urban politics and local government in Aba town<sup>mere</sup> concerned, the terrain was dominated by 'stranger groups' as Ngwa residents were largely outnumbered and marginalized. This trend remained so throughout the

Former Eastern Region showing Aba and its neighbours



Source: J. N. Nwaguru

period covered. Representations were made to the Resident by influential Ngwas to provide for nominated representatives since otherwise the voice of the original owners of the land would be mute in the Urban Council; but this was rejected.<sup>76</sup> Hence the 'strangers' continued to dominate issues and events in the politics of the town.

The position was however reversed in the case of Regional politics. Here, the Ngwa dominated and in fact won nearly all the seats to the Eastern Region's House of Assembly. And unlike in the urban elections where the N.C.N.C. dominated throughout the period, the Action Group, their rivals, managed to win some seats. This was because the votes of the 'stranger elements' in Aba town were often swamped by votes of the Ngwa in the surrounding countryside who in the Regional context were part of the same constituency. It was not until 1959 when, following repeated minority petitions, 73 single member constituencies were created in the Eastern Region and Aba urban became a separate constituency, did the 'stranger elements' have the chance to get elected.

Thus, in the 1951 elections which followed the promulgation of the Macpherson's Constitution, and which was based on the electoral college system, all those elected to represent Aba Division were Ngwa people. These were Chief M.W. Ubani of the United National Party and Messrs. Jaja Wachukwu and S.W. Ubani Ukoma of the N.C.N.C.<sup>77</sup> Ubani Ukoma was eventually appointed by the government of Eyo Ita as the Minister of Lands and Survey. Following Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's "flight" to the East and the subsequent crisis which it generated in Eastern Region in 1953, the House of Assembly was dissolved. In the ensuing election later that year, Ngwa personalities once again 'stole the show.' Elected to represent the Division were Messrs. P.O. Ururuka, Leo O. Uzoigwe and Wachukwu Abengowe, all of the N.C.N.C. and Chief M.W. Ubani of the

United National Independence Party. This new party <sup>resulted</sup> from the internal crisis within the N.C.N.C. Some of its Ministers, including Jaja Wachukwu had broken away to form the National Independence Party. It was the merger of this breakaway faction with Messrs. M.W. Ubani and Alvan Ikoku's United National Party that resulted in the United National Independence Party under which Mr. Ubani won.<sup>78</sup> In the new dispensation, Mr. Ururuka was appointed Minister of Commerce while Mr. Leo Uzoigwe was made Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Education.

This same pattern was repeated in 1954 when Messrs. Jaja Wachukwu and Ubani Ukoma under U.N.I.P.<sup>79</sup> were elected into the Federal House of Representatives. The trend continued in the 1957 Regional elections which followed the Foster-Sutton Tribunal Report<sup>80</sup> and the dissolution of the house. The elected representatives were Messrs. P. O. Ururuka, Wachukwu Abengowe, Moses N. Onwuma and Mr. Leo Uzoigwe.<sup>81</sup>

The trend changed in the Federal elections of 1959 when the Eastern Region was divided into 73 single member constituencies.<sup>82</sup> Four of these were allocated to Aba Division viz: Aba South, Aba Central, Aba Urban and Aba North. As could be expected, the Aba Urban Constituency was won by a 'Stranger element' Mr. Felix Okoronkwo, while the other 3 Constituencies were won by Ngwas: O.C. Ememe, Aba South; M.W. Ubani, Aba Central; and Jaja Wachukwu, Aba North. Jaja Wachukwu eventually got appointed as Minister of External Affairs and Common-Wealth Relations.

Subsequently, in the 1961 Regional elections which followed the Federal elections, a new Constituency delimitation aimed at protecting

minority rights was adopted.<sup>83</sup> Under it, the 73 federal constituencies were further divided into 146 single member constituencies,<sup>84</sup> that is two regional electoral districts for a federal district. As a result, Aba Division which had 4 federal constituencies was allocated 8 constituencies. The result was that Aba Urban area now had two constituencies namely Aba Urban North with an estimated population of 28,700 and Aba Urban South estimated at 29,087. The six remaining constituencies in the Ngwa country and their estimated population were Aba East - 73,827; Aba West - 67, 616; Aba North - 50,028, Aba North-Central - 65,907; Aba South-West - 34, 264 and Aba South-East - 34,728.<sup>85</sup> In the ensuing election, the two urban constituencies were again won by 'stranger' personalities viz: Nnanna Kalu in Aba Urban North and Mrs. Margaret Ekpo in Aba Urban South. While the remaining six constituencies were won by Ngwas.<sup>86</sup> An interesting feature of this particular election was that the Action Group represented by Mr. S.W. Ubani Ukoma won in one of the Constituencies - Aba East while the N.C.N.C took the remaining seats.

As in the 1959 federal elections, the Ngwa were unable to break the monopoly which stranger groups had on Aba urban politics. But while the 'stranger groups' consistently supported the N.C.N.C. for reasons we have indicated above, Ngwa support was distributed to the N.C.N.C., the various Independent Parties and the Action Group. The Ngwa gave some support for the Action Group and the Independents because of the promise these groups held out for the protection of their minority interests in Aba town. The town was the centre of economic activities and survival of the Ngwas. Yet, try as they did, they could not gain any form of political control over it. Given the close relationship between political power and economic opportunities, it is not surprising that many Ngwa businessmen and professionals did their best to break into Aba Politics.<sup>87</sup> Since the N.C.N.C. was dominated by non-Ngwa Igbo, they

saw the support of political parties opposed to it as the best possible means of achieving their aim. Despite this seeming division, factors such as opposition to official corruption and to the colonial authorities often tended to bring the various groups in the town together.

Thus, <sup>by</sup> 1960, the population of Aba was already in excess of 100,000. It is in fact said to have reached 131,000 by 1963.<sup>88</sup> Approximately 85 per cent of this number represented non-Ngwa Igbo groups,<sup>89</sup> while the remaining 15 per cent was shared between the Ngwa and migrants from other parts of Nigeria and West Africa. Several of these groups charted independent courses of existence and activities, usually in the forms of ethnic unions and associations. Despite this inward or clannish feeling and attachment, interaction between residents from the different areas was inevitable. Sometimes, this interaction was positive tending to improve community spirit, and happiness in the town. At other times, the relations took a negative turn, tending towards tension and violence. These relationships were basically at three levels. The first was that between the various civilian settlers and the various military groups settled in the town at various times. The second was that between the various Igbo and non-Igbo and the Ngwa. The third one was that among the various non-Ngwa residents in the town.

#### Military - Civilian Relationship in Aba

As we have already indicated, during the Second World War, Aba was an important military base from which soldiers were sent on to different parts of the world for military duties. After the war, Aba served as a resettlement centre for the returning soldiers who were being demobilized. It was from here that they were repatriated to the other divisions of Owerri Province. In 1946 for instance, at least 16,000

repatriates passed through the dispersal camp in Aba.<sup>90</sup> Given its military roles over the years, soldiers constituted a significant portion of Aba's population. The question then is what type of relationship did the military have with the other residents of the town? These relations were both positive and negative. On the positive side, many members of the Aba Community rented out their homes, houses and warehouses to the army, particularly in the 1942 - 43 period when the military faced acute accommodation crises in the town. Many residents also sold food and other services to the military people. Some acted as interpreters, servants, and prostitutes in return for which they were paid in what became a mutually beneficial relationship.

Again, during the war years, Aba residents identified with the soldiers' war efforts by carrying out several 'win the war' campaigns. The win the war fund launched in 1940 yielded £633. That of 1941 yielded £2,475 of which £150 of the amount was raised by the Igbo Community.<sup>91</sup> In 1944, the Aba Community organized a War Relief Fund Week between October 28 to November 4. This was by a committee whose Secretary was Mrs. S.B. Rhodes, wife of Barrister S.B. Rhodes. The Committee had a target of £700, but by the end of the activities, it had realized £1,027: 2: 8d.<sup>92</sup> Even though the government's propaganda efforts may have played a significant part in the success of these activities, yet the fact that the target amount was surpassed was a clear demonstration of the good will of the Aba Community to the military and the war efforts.<sup>93</sup>

Unfortunately, the relations were not always that of cooperation. Clashes and riots were known, first between serving soldiers and the citizenry and at other times between ex-service men and the people. Several of such strains and clashes occurred in 1942 to 1943, prompting the Aba District Officer to write:

... the impact on the urban civilian population of military units whose African personnel were almost all a year ago peasant farmers and who as Africans regard uniform as dressing them in more than a little brief authority has resulted in some strains ...<sup>94</sup>

In 1942, there were several individual assaults and one of such cases eventually led to a riot. On that occasion, a drunken soldier knocked down a civilian and when he was questioned and taken to the police charge office by a police constable, what ensued was a soldier-civilian clash which resulted in some disorder.

By far, it was the riot of 1943 that caused the greatest disruption in the town. The occasion was when a new company of soldiers arrived in Aba in October 1943. There are conflicting accounts of what exactly triggered the clash between the soldiers and civilians. One account states that some soldiers did not receive their salaries, on time. As a result, many of them had difficulties in obtaining food while on their train journey to Aba. On their arrival, the soldiers rushed to the Aba market where they tried to obtain articles by force from the traders. In his own account, the District Officer reported that the soldiers salaries were overdue by four days and their feeding was not adequate as a result of large scale corruption in the food supply contract.<sup>95</sup> But what would appear the most plausible and definitely the most detailed of the reports was an independent investigation into the affair by one Mr. M.W. Ubani, the Aba representative of the Nigerian Eastern Mail. In his report, he noted that "the soldiers had not been paid for the three months preceding the riots, that they were not properly fed and they had been asked to take an "army patrol march that morning to Owerri".<sup>96</sup> One



obvious fact was that the soldiers were discontented with their situation hence their recourse to forceful acquisition in the market. Their action which saw about 60 - 200 soldiers seizing plantains, bananas and yams first from the market women, and progressing later to cotton goods, torchlights, cigarettes and other merchandise,<sup>97</sup> took off between 6.20 to 6.30 a.m. on 18 October, 1943. Efforts by the police to stop them proved abortive as the fierce looking soldiers continued carting away various goods belonging to Aba traders. Thus when servants of the traders came early in the morning to spread out their masters' goods, they found soldiers looting the market. They subsequently raised an alarm as a result of which the civilians and the traders gathered to resist the soldiers. This resistance proved very effective as the soldiers in the face of constant stoning ran back to their barracks for fear of their lives. Unlike what one would expect today, the civilians were able to pursue them to their barracks. Meanwhile other soldiers who could not run as fast sought shelter in some civilian houses while a few others pulled off their uniforms to avoid detection as groups of civilians paraded the city looking for them.

The situation later deteriorated to something akin to the 1929 riots as several rogues, touts and hooligans in the midst of the confusion pillaged the different stalls with the whole market becoming strewn with overturned gari, oil, crayfish and pepper.<sup>98</sup> As the District Officer reported, a "mob composed of some hooligan elements which every cosmopolitan town like Aba contained" soon developed. The mob "mainly youths between 12 and 25 years of age," paraded the streets of the town dancing and singing "we are angry".<sup>99</sup> Many marched toward the European facilities while a large group also massed up at the barracks, demanding immediate compensation for looted property and the expulsion of the soldiers from the town.<sup>100</sup> Attempts by the Local

Authority Mr. P.F. Grant and the Assistant Superintendent of Police, Mr. A.P. George to disperse them through persuasion proved abortive and given the insufficient number of policemen in Aba, it took a reinforcement of 30 policemen who arrived from Port Harcourt to augment the Aba force, before the police succeeded in dispersing them with baton charges.<sup>101</sup>

The disturbances left casualties, and disruptions in the life of the town. 29 soldiers were admitted to hospital, while 17 civilians and a police corporal who were slightly wounded<sup>102</sup> also received treatment. These took their toll on manpower and hospital facilities in the town. Moreover, the crisis scared Ngwa people in the countryside on whom the town depended for much of the food supplies, and who did not turn up in the market during the two days of the crisis with attendant consequences for food supply.

A number of observations need to be made about the crisis. The first is that the usual scenarios of the non-payment of salaries leading up to a crisis existed in the colonial period. The second is that corruption in the contract system also existed, though it had not yet become endemic. The third is that as early as 1945, there was already a love-hate relationship between civilians and soldiers. That there were non-traders willing to join the fight is indicative of the extent of those in the city who were "disgruntled". Aba traders deserted the market after the fracas, and it took the efforts of the leaders of the Aba community league to get it reopened.<sup>103</sup> It is also important to note<sup>that</sup> Aba residents and traders clearly demonstrated by their action that civilians can actually successfully check some of the excesses of soldiers in their relation with civilians, a worrisome and recurring problem in many countries of the Third World.

All that is needed is the resolve, courage, unity of purpose and the necessary political and social will.

The Aba Community on many occasions also had to contend with the problem of ex-servicemen. Having been demobilized without employment and without any comprehensive resettlement plan, the ex-servicemen in 1950 refused to pay a flat rate tax charged by the government. They lamented the refusal of the government to pay them a promised 2/- a day arrears of pay for the period in the army, which the government claimed applied only to troops of the High Commission territories. Eventually, they showed their grievances in a public procession. For several days in 1950 the peace of the township was severely disturbed as many people stayed indoors following the various other crises between the police and the ex-servicement. In the end, their leaders prominent of whom was a self styled Dr. O.N. Egesi.<sup>104</sup>, were charged to court. After a highly charged and tension soaked trial, they were convicted and sentenced for taking part in an illegal procession.<sup>105</sup>

#### Non-Ngwa settlers and the Ngwa

The Ngwa included not only those who were resident in the town itself, but also those who lived in the countryside but had economic, political or other reasons which brought them to the city regularly. At the social level, the relationship between the Ngwa and non-Ngwa was good. Many non-Ngwa often went to Uha Udele<sup>106</sup> whenever the Ngwa were engaged in unrestricted ceremonies in the place. During certain kinds of rituals and prayers, however, non-Ngwa people were excluded. There were also numerous title taking ceremonies some of which were open to residents of the town. Also dancing and wrestling ceremonies and competitions were heavily patronized by city residents. Incidentally, these were fairly regular because the Ngwa loved merry making. Nearly

every year wrestling matches were organised between the Ngwa and other residents.

On the economic side, the Ngwa sold and leased land to non-Ngwa in the town. This was done freely to the extent that in the earlier days all one needed to obtain a piece of land was a bottle of gin and some kolanuts.<sup>107</sup> The Ngwa were always willing to give city residents land for farming either in the town or in its peripheral areas. Sometimes, with permission, they allowed city residents to go to their farms to fetch firewood which they used as fuel.

There were also good trading relationships between the two groups. Indeed this could be regarded as the most important of the relationships. The city depended much on the countryside for its food supply. Even within the city, many Ngwa people had fairly large farms. From the countryside, farm products, such as palm oil, gari, vegetables, pepper, fruits and even palm wine were regularly brought to the town by men and women on bicycle. Many city residents had customers with whom they dealt in the Ngwa countryside and from whom they bought produce sometimes directly in their farms. Indeed some city women who engaged in retail trading of foodstuffs, sometimes bought on credit in the countryside and paid later when the goods had been sold.

Usually too, labour relations were good. As noted earlier in this work, Ngwa people in the town generally had little western education, and very few Ngwa people succeeded in entering the government service or setting themselves up in trade and business. Their involvement in the economic life of the township was usually as retailers in local markets or being employed as labourers, farm hands, security guards, gardeners, stewards and other forms of domestic service. In this respect

therefore, they were economically lower than non-Ngwa people who occupied all the positions in government and commercial business open to educated Africans in the town. Yet, despite this obvious disadvantage, the Ngwa maintained peaceful, harmonious and cordial working relations in the town. There were no instances of armed violence against their domination by non-Ngwas. Instead, at every loss of opportunity, the Ngwa would exclaim Umuohuhu Egwere lewe, meaning, 'Stranger elements have taken them up'.

There was also cooperation between the two groups in the area of political activity. A most notable example was during the Enugu coal mines crisis of November 1949.<sup>108</sup> A day of mourning was declared by the leading politicians and elites in Aba in honour of the deceased Enugu miners. The three leading politicians of Aba from both groups namely Mr. Masi, Mr. Jaja Nwachukwu and Mrs. Margaret Ekpo spoke to the people of the town at a rally, urging them to protest against the Enugu killings.<sup>109</sup> What resulted on that 23rd of November 1949 was a ferocious riot supported and carried out by all the sections of the Aba Community. For a whole day, a mob made up of traders, and other categories of workers and settlers, including elements from the neighbouring Ngwa towns of Ogwe and Imo River surged up and down Factory Road, stoned policemen sent to disperse them, and looted many factories, resulting in damages and loss amounting to nearly £8,000.<sup>110</sup>

The riot and looting were directed at all Europeans who were seen by Aba residents as nothing more than agents of oppression and exploitation, representing a colonial government which killed innocent unarmed miners who were striking to better their lot. The riots were so severe that 73 European women and children had to be evacuated from

Aba to Umuahia where they were lodged for four days before being sent on to Enugu.<sup>111</sup>

The reaction of the colonial authorities was typical. The rioters were confronted by the police who initially used batons only to resort to live amunitions as the riots became fiercer. In the end, one rioter was killed while several others were wounded. The Fitzgerald Commission set up to inquire into the riots, instead of condemning the police, condoned and praised the method the authorities adopted in quelling the riots in Aba:

. . . . of the action of the police in opening fire in the circumstances in which they did we can only say that they were fully justified. It was in our opinion done in discharge of their duty to the law abiding inhabitants of the town whose protection was their responsibility . . . .<sup>112</sup>

However far from this thinking of the Commission the Ngwa and non-Ngwa inhabitants of the town united to support the riots which <sup>were</sup> seen as a nationalist protest against colonial rule.<sup>113</sup> When the newly formed National Emergency Committee under the Secretaryship of Prince Akitoye came to Aba, it had much success in organising public donations of money and other materials for the relief of the dependants of the deceased miners in Enugu.<sup>114</sup> It is thus clear that there were areas of cooperation between the Ngwa and the non-Ngwa contrary to the notion that their relationship was filled with "suspicion" and lacking a "sense of unity"<sup>115</sup>

This is not to say that everything was smooth between the two groups. There were in fact several areas of disagreement and conflict.

On the social side, on no account was any non-Ngwa city resident allowed to desecrate Uha Udele.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, during certain rituals, especially those by the Okonko Secret Society, non-Ngwa residents risked their lives if they ventured out of their homes.

Another social area of conflict was the accusation of head hunting and cannibalism which non-Ngwa people often levelled against the Ngwa. Indeed in Aba for most of the period covered by this study, the constant fear of head hunters tended to restrict the movement of many residents as they were warned to take care, or in fact asked to avoid visiting certain areas of the town at particular times. The Ngwa did not like these accusations, hence it was a constant source of tension between the two groups in the town.

On the economic front, the question of fetching firewood for fuel by residents in the city from Ngwa farms was a constant source of quarrel between the two groups leading, on many occasions to the intervention of colonial officials, who tried to establish fuel reserves to supply firewood to the city dwellers. It was hoped that this would discourage residents from entering Ngwa farms in search of firewood. The truth of the matter was that firewood sales to city residents was an important source of income for the Ngwa, hence any attempt by residents to "steal" it was viewed with great concern. This was more so because Ngwa custom viewed with particular seriousness trespassing into other people's farmland. Some young and even adult city residents were known to have disappeared in the process.<sup>117</sup>

There were also occasional disagreements about land leases; land rents and land agreements. This was a constant source of friction especially among the elites of the two groups. Whenever such disputes

occurred, it was felt keenly in the area of food supply to the city. As we noted earlier, the city depended largely on the Ngwa living both within the city as well as in the countryside for its food. What this meant was that any time there was misunderstanding or strained relationship between the Ngwa and other residents, food supply to the city was often disrupted. In this regard, 1950 was a particularly difficult year for the two groups. The first of the crises was in February 1950 when the Ngwa women mainly (and some men) who were local producers of gari complained bitterly about certain practices adopted by the gari traders and their servants in the township market; especially the practice known as "Ogom abala, which literally means "my in-law has become rich" or "my in-law is rich". The practice as the Ngwa women complained, involved city buyers stuffing or ramming the gari too hard into the bag so as to get <sup>the</sup> largest quantity possible, many pounds above the normal measure of the 90lbs. sack. As if that was not enough, the city buyers then requested the sellers to heap an extra cone of gari above the level of the brim. According to the District Officer, this cone resembles a helmet in shape, hence the helmet was nicknamed Ogom abala.<sup>118</sup>

This demand for an extra cone was a major source of annoyance to the Ngwa gari sellers. In their opinion, the non-Ngwa township traders wanted to impoverish and exploit them because they were unsophisticated rural dwellers. They felt that city traders wanted to enrich themselves at their expense. It is obvious that the practice of Ogom abala was very popular among township buyers because of the extra profit it guaranteed them in the gari trade.

In order to protest this cheating attitude of city traders, the Ngwa gari sellers cut off their supply to the township in February 1950. <sup>Further</sup> they succeeded in persuading the vendors of other foodstuffs to do likewise.



The boycott did not wholly succeed, however, because the District Officer and the Local Authority, Aba, persuaded the buyers to desist from most of the practices which had given rise to the sellers' complaints. Thereafter normal conditions returned, albeit temporarily; for, as events later showed, the Ngwa sellers were not satisfied with the settlement. They only took their time, waiting for a better opportunity. The moment came barely five months later as the District Officer noted:

. . . At the end of August (1950), the Ngwa food producers renewed their attempt to pay off old scores against the strangers in the township by cutting off their food supplies. On no less than four occasions it was necessary for substantial police re-inforcement to be brought into Aba to deal with disturbances or the threat of disturbances. Only four months of the year were free from one crisis or another . . . .<sup>119</sup>

It was not quite old scores that the Ngwa wanted to settle. The truth of the matter was that by August, the notorious Ogom abala practice had been revived. So the Ngwa Producers' Union called another "strike". But unlike the first one in which they were not well prepared, this latter one saw them "better organised and for a day or two succeeded in cutting off the flow of every commodity from the countryside to the city, including firewood".<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, they mounted illegal road blocks on the various roads leading to Aba, including Port Harcourt Road. Significantly, the road blocks were mounted by the women producers themselves. At the road blocks, the women stopped all lorries going to Aba with foodstuff and forcibly removed the foodstuffs from the lorries. Towns-women who tried to circumvent the boycott by journeying to the local markets in search of food were assaulted by the women producers. As the District Officer wrote:

. . . It was not anticipated that the strike which was scheduled to last for a complete month would be unduly protracted since the food producers had no other means of selling their wares and are always in need of ready cash to meet their immediate requirements not least, their club dues.<sup>121</sup>

Indeed the District Officer's hopes proved to be the case as the lack of cash took its toll on the strikers. Moreover because of the success and completeness of the boycott, the feelings of the non-Ngwa residents became seriously aroused to the extent that they made bold plans for reprisals against the Ngwa entering the town to buy goods.<sup>122</sup>

The colonial authorities did not fold their arms in the face of the ugly situation. The administrative officers arranged and held several meetings with the principals on both sides and even invited the Aba Community League to help in settling the matter. The League was asked to prevail upon the gari traders to see that the custom of Ogom abala was stopped. The League was further asked to use its influence on 'tribal' improvement unions to call upon their members 'to refrain from acts of petty dishonesty when trading with the less sophisticated people of the countryside.'<sup>123</sup> Thus ended the 1950 dispute which demonstrated how easily urban life and activity could be disrupted by disharmony in relations with their neighbours.

Friction and disagreement existed also between the non-Ngwa and the Ngwa in the sphere of politics. The tendency to support differing political parties by the two groups has been discussed in relation to state and national elections and in the conflict over the municipal status of Aba. What remains to be said is that the Ngwa having realized that as a

minority group, they could never hope to win election in the town showed in the Second Republic that they had learnt their lesson. For during that period, nearly all Ngwa people joined the same party with the non-Ngwa namely, the Nigerian Peoples Party. The result was that they thereby entered the mainstream of Aba Urban politics to the extent that one of their sons, Prince Uzoigwe, an indigenous resident of the town was elected as the Deputy Governor of Imo State in 1979 with a subsequent re-election in 1983. This success was no doubt made possible through the support and encouragement of the non-Ngwa community in Aba.

#### Intergroup Relations among the non-Ngwa

As for the relationship between the various non-Ngwa groups in the town, there were good times and bad times. On the positive side, non-Ngwa people cooperated in various fields. This was facilitated by the fact that different groups tended to have their own specialized areas of focus and hence there was little ground for serious clash of economic interest. For instance among the "stranger Igbo" the Item people constituted the largest group up to the end of 1960. Estimates put them at almost a third of the total population in the town especially in the decade between 1948 and 1958.<sup>124</sup> They, in addition to the Bende and Oha-fia groups<sup>125</sup> dealt mainly with the tailoring and Duwa Duwa business, as well as trade in second hand clothes (Okirika). The Aro, another powerful and large group dealt mainly in rare products and palm oil trade. While the Nkwerre sold mainly tobacco and hot drinks, the Owerri sold mainly food products and local bedding materials such as mattresses. The Hausa were occupied mainly with cattle and kolanut while the Yoruba and Saro were mainly administrators and lawyers, but also engaged in the catering and enamel trades. This is not to say that there was no free movement and participation in other trades and businesses; but that each group tended

to have particular areas of concentration, hence cooperation rather than competition was the norm.

Such cooperation was extended to efforts at daily survival. Informants in Aba today recall how some kind of barter existed among the various non-Ngwa residents especially women. For instance if one had plenty of vegetables, but had no oil she could exchange some of her vegetables for some oil from another resident who may need vegetables.<sup>126</sup> This type of exchange was fairly common, and did not necessarily take place in the markets. Sometimes it was among residents in a particular tenement and a large variety of goods were involved. In this way, residents were able to satisfy some of their wants without necessarily having the cash; and the practice continued and reached its highest level in the 1950s.<sup>127</sup>

In the social sphere, traditional dances were frequently staged by the unions of the various groups. On such occasions, various sections of the Aba Community usually go to watch and even participate in the attendant all-round merriment. Apart from the traditional female dancing troupes of the various unions, there were also male performers for which particular groups were known. The Item, Ohafia and Abiriba people for instance, were known for their war dance which they often paraded in the town during ceremonial occasions. There were also Ojonnu dancers from the various Owerri settlers. Christmas celebrations usually offered the best opportunity for showing off these dancing troupes. A detailed account of social activities in Aba during Christmas in the 1950s has been given by Ola Balogun.<sup>128</sup> According to him, Christmas in those days was very picturesque. "I always think" he said,

back to the early 1950s in Aba with deep

nostalgia: Even now, I only have to shut my eyes to hear the noise

of the drums that accompanied certain masquerades, the hooting call used to tease Ojonnus, and the silvery tone of the Ulagas making

licentious references to each other's mother - - - .129

In the area of politics we have already demonstrated earlier that there was an almost total political unity among the stranger or non-Ngwa residents of the town. There may have been some exceptions to this rule especially among the nonIgbo stranger groups. But given their numbers, such exception was never forceful enough to significantly change the political equation.<sup>130</sup>

Nevertheless, there were occasions when tension threatened peaceful co-existence among the non-Ngwa residents in the town. Even though these were few and far between, one particular occasion is worthy of mention because it involved two of the largest non-Ngwa groups, namely, the Item and the Arochukwu. In February 1948, an Aro man was murdered. The Aro had cause to believe that their kinsman was murdered by the Item and they made efforts to avenge the killing. Between the months of July and August, three separate attacks were made on Item individuals. Many in the town believed it was the Aro who were trying to take revenge on the Item. The result of these clashes was that a tense situation arose which might have led to serious disturbances had it not been for the quick intervention of the authorities.<sup>131</sup>

Other areas of conflict among the non-Ngwa residents included competition for ownership of market stalls, and sometimes struggle for land. The latter situation often arose when two non-Ngwa unknowingly buy the same piece of land from the Ngwa owners. Land speculation was thus a regular source of conflict.

### Conclusion

It is clear from the discussion that the period 1945 - 1960 was one of dynamic changes in Aba. The era saw increased demand/competition for jobs, for better living conditions and for better public utilities. The discussion shows that despite the changes introduced under colonialism, the efforts in many cases did not go far enough in satisfying the hopes and aspirations of residents. Understandably under this circumstance of social disaffection, political agitations were bound to flourish. These agitations found expression in the formation of town and improvement unions, Community Leagues and political parties, all of which sought increased say in the administration of the town. But inspite of the competition among the various groups for position and opportunities, the discussion shows that the people generally coexisted peacefully, a phenomenon which made for general growth and progress of the town.

## Notes

1. These figures were obtained from the 1953 Census statistics as cited in Report of an Inquiry into a proposal to excise the Aba Urban District from Aba Ngwa county Enugu, 1954. P. 2. Hereinafter known as Report of Inquiry to excise Aba Ngwa County from Aba Urban.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. <sup>Abadist. 9/1/443,</sup> N.A.E. 'Handing Over Notes P.F. Grant Local Authority, Aba, to C.L. Walker, Local Authority, Aba, 1941'. P. 266
5. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1402 'Aba Post Office', P. 17
6. Dr. Okigbo was in fact the Secretary of the Aba Township Advisory Board of the period. Other members of the Board as at May 1951 were A.G. Saville - Local Authority; H.E. Newbold, District Engineer, P.W.D. Aba; Dr. S.E. Onwu, Senior Medical Officer; Messrs. M.Egbo Nwankwo, M. Allwell Brown, M.E. Orutu, S.N.A. Jones, and Chief Ogbonna Uruakpa. See Eastern States Express Vol. 2, No.392, July 3, 1951.
7. H.E. Etomi, 'A Biography of Margaret Ekpo', (B.A. History, Ogun State University, 1989). PP. 15 & 16.
8. Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa London, 1972'. P. 237.
9. N.A.E. Abadist 15/1/25, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1926/27.
10. N.A.E. Riv Prof. 16/1/53, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1921'. P. 6. Lever combine here, refers to forms trading under the umbrella of Univer.
11. Ibi S. Ajayi & O. Ojo, Money and Banking George and Urwin, 1981. P. 16
12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., P. 17
14. The Star Paper Mill is one of the major paper companies in the Eastern States presently, producing toilet rolls, exercise books and other products. Nnanna Kalu also had a lot of interest in transportation business and the stockfish trade.
15. This trend was confirmed by many informants in Aba.
16. L.O. Ezutah, The Residential Structure of Aba (B.Sc. Geography, U.N.N. 1978), P. 40
17. The process of Urban renewal was a continuous one throughout our period whereby temporary buildings were converted to permanent ones by their owners.
18. A visitor to Aba can easily observe these developments and this was confirmed by many informants.
19. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1356, Aba European Club, P. 93
20. Ibid., P. 95
21. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1315, 'Erection of African Rest House at Aba'. PP. 6 & P. 24
22. N.A.E. Abadist 15/1/25, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', Sept. 1950 - Oct. 1951. P.10.
23. Ibid., See also N.A.E. Abadist 15/1/1543, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1952. PP.28 & 29.
24. Ibid.
25. <sup>Aba 15/1/1443,</sup> N.A.E. Handing Over Notes from P.L. Trevorrow A.D.O. to C.I. Gavin, 1941. PP-282 - 283. See also N.A.E. Abadist 15/1/25, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1944 P.9.
26. The facilities provided at this part were flower beds, seats of reinforced concrete, a football field and a tennis area.



27. See N.A.I. CSo 26/2 11930/Vol. ~~xij~~. 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', 1939. P.17. See Leonard Plotnicov, Strangers to the City: Urban Man in Jos, Nigeria. Pittsburgh, 1967.
28. N.A.I. CSo 26/2, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', 1924. P. 16.
29. See Mac Dixon-Fyle, 'The Saro in the Political life of Early Port Harcourt', Journal of African History, 30, 1989. PP. 130 - 132.
30. N.A.I. CSo 26/2, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', 1924. P. 16.
31. Ibid.
32. The membership of these two men on the Township Advisory Board has already been referred to in Chapter II.
33. N.A.E. Abadist 8/12/1, 'Aba Township Advisory Board. Minutes of Meeting', 12th March, 1930.
34. N.A.E. Abadist 8/12/1, 'Aba Township Advisory Board. Minutes of Meeting', 10th September, 1930.
35. N.A.E. Abadist 1/7/1253, 'African Community League Aba'. P.1.
36. Ibid.
37. See James S. Coleman, Nigeria, Background to Nationalism. Berkeley, 1958.
38. See a Resolution taken at a mass meeting of the Aba Community League, 14th May, 1949, in N.A.E. Abadist 1/7/1253, 'African Community League Aba'. P. 12.
39. Quoted in a letter from Local Authority, Aba to Resident, Owerri Province in N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1436, 'Constitution for Aba Township'. P. I. The words in parenthesis in the citation are mine.
40. Ibid.
41. See 'Communication from the Resident, Owerri Province, to the Local Authority, Aba', in Ibid.

42. Babara Callaway, Op. Cit., P. 228.
43. This phenomenon has also been shown to have been the case in Jos, Nigeria. See Leonard Plotnicov, Op. Cit., PP. 75-80.
44. The writer's father was one of the leaders of one of the Unions, the Uzoagba Town Union in the late 1950s and the 1960s. Interview with Mr. C.A. Obiegwu already cited.
45. Elder Udo Igwe, Publication - - - Op. Cit.
46. J.N. Obiegwu, 'Community Development in Mbaitoli-Ikeduru Local Government Area of Imo State: 1900 - 1966', (B.A. History, Ibadan, 1982). PP. 36 - 37.
47. Interview with Chief Leo Uzoigwe already cited. See also J.N. Nwaguru: Op. Cit., P. 161 - 162
48. J.N. Nwaguru: Op. Cit., P. 153. See also Babara Callaway, Op.Cit. P. 233
49. Tim Goodland, 'Local Government in Aba' West Africa, December 8, 1956. P. 991
50. See Returns from the election in N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/1633, 'Aba Urban District Council Elections'.
51. See Report of an Inquiry to excise Aba Urban District from Aba Ngwa County - - - P. 2.
52. Tim Goodland: 'Local Government in Aba' Op.Cit. P. 991
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. See Report of an Inquiry to excise Aba Urban District from Aba Ngwa County - - - P. 17.
56. Ibid., P. 18
57. Ibid., P. 14
58. Tim Goodland, 'Local Government in Aba' Op. Cit., P. 991.

59. Ibid.
60. See Report of the Inquiry into the Allocation of Market Stalls at Aba. (Government Printer, Enugu, 1955).
61. Ibid., Para. 112.
62. See Appendix IX for a list of those elected.
63. See Appendix X for a list of unsuccessful candidates.
64. The term which literarily means 'Elephant City' is generally used to refer to Aba by its residents and fans to indicate how important and powerful Aba was and still is.
65. Babara Callaway, Op.Cit., P. 269.
66. They often opposed because the interest of the Ngwa in the town often clashed with those of the non-Ngwa who ran the council.
67. Ibid., P. 266.
68. Tim Goodland, 'Local Government in Aba', Op.Cit., P. 991
69. Ibid., P. 992
70. Minutes, Roads and Works Committees, Aba Urban County Council, 1958. Cited in Babara Callaway: Op.Cit., P. 256.
71. Ibid., P. 253
72. Taxation Report, (Enugu: Government Printer, 1955). Cited in Ibid., P. 246.
73. Minutes, Staff and Finance Committee, Aba Urban County Council 1962 - 63. Cited in Ibid., P. 247.
74. Tim Goodland: 'Local Government in Aba', Op.Cit., P. 991.
75. Ibid., P. 992.

76. J.N. Nwaguru, Op.Cit., P. 154.
77. Ibid., P. 169.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., P. 170.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid., See also Interview with Chief Leo Uzoigwe already cited.
82. Report of the Constituency Delimitation Commission, Lagos, 1958.  
Cited in Ibid., P. 171.
83. The Minorities were in the old Calabar and Rivers Province.
84. Ibid., P. 172.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid.
87. From the discussion it is clear that the personalities in the power game were the Ngwa elit who felt excluded from power and its crumbs.
88. Babara Callaway, Op.Cit., P. 230
89. Ibid.
90. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1316, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1946. P. 3.
91. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1202, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1941. P. 13.  
The implications of this fact is that at this time, the Igbo Community in the town was not yet prosperous.
92. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1264, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1944. P. 3.
93. The fund raising of this period was however not unique to Aba. At a Seminar on Women under Colonialism held at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan in October, 1989, Lady Deborah Jibowu noted that they carried out a similar campaign in Benin.

94. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1240, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1942. P. 17.
95. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1253, 'Report of the Local Authority, Aba, to the Resident, Owerri Province', P. 2. It is clear from the evidence of this Colonial Official, as well as those earlier shown, that large scale corruption was already a feature of the Nigerian government even when the country was under British Rule; no doubt one of the bequeathed legacies.
96. See Report of Mr. M.W. Ubani, Agent and Press Representative of the Nigerian Eastern Mail to his paper. P. 1 in N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1253. 'Incident at Aba between Soldiers and Civilians'. Hereinafter known as Mr. Ubani's Report - - - .
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid
99. 'Report of the Local Authority Aba, to the Resident, Owerri Province' - - - .
100. Ibid.
101. Ubani's Report.
102. 'Report of the Local Authority Aba, to the Resident, Owerri Province' - - - .
103. N.A.E. Abadist 1/7/1253, 'African Community League Aba'. P. 2.
104. It was a case of self styling; for Mr. Egesi was neither a medical practitioner, a Ph.D. holder, nor holder of an honorary doctorate degree.
105. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1489, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1949 - 50. P. 15.
106. This was an important ritual Shrine of the Ngwa in the period. It was located at Hundred Foot Road, now Azikiwe Road.
107. Interviews with Eze Ogbonna, Mazi C.A. Obieghu, Mazi Unwukwe Ukonu and Mr. Nwaru.

108. The Enugu coal miners incident refers to the 18th November, 1949 shooting of 21 miners at the Iva Valley Colliery in Enugu by the colonial police.
109. See excerpts from the Report of the Fitzgerald Commission set up to Inquire into the riots which followed. N.A.I. CSo 26, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', September 1949 - August, 1950. P. 2.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid.
112. Ibid.
113. Among the nationalists who addressed the mob were Mrs Margaret Ekpo, Mr. Jaja Wachukwu and Mr. Masi.
114. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1489, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1949 - 1950' . PP. 6 & 7. .
115. Babara Callaway, Op.Cit., P. 227.
116. Interviews with Madams Janey Igbokwe and Chimezie already cited.
117. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1489, 'Annual Report, Aba Division, 1949 - 1950'. PP. 8 & 9. It would seem as if the name was adopted to show the wealth derived from the business.
118. Ibid., P. 2.
119. Ibid., P. 8.
120. Ibid., P. 9.
121. Ibid.
122. Ibid.
123. N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/982, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', Jan - Aug. 1948. P. 39; Interview with Mazi Onwukwe Ukonu.
124. The three groups are from the same part of Imo State and speak similar dialects.

125. Interview with Madams Chimezie, Obiegbu and Jancy Igbokwe.
126. Ibid. Also Interview with Mr Nwaru already cited.
127. Ola Balogun, 'Christmas in Aba in the Early 1950s' Nigerian Magazine, 1969. PP. 436 - 443.
128. Ibid., P. 443
129. This trend for the whole Nigerian setting has also been noted by Prof. Ade-Ajayi and Dr. A.E. Ekoko when they wrote "During the colonial period, little had been done to promote economic interdependence. There were some migrant labourers and colonies of "Strangers" in several of the large cities. They exerted some influence on policy, but not enough to stem the tide of regionalism". See J.F. Ade-Ajayi and A.E. Ekoko, 'Transfer of Power in Nigeria: Its origins and consequences' in Prosser Gifford and W.M. Roger Louis, Decolonization and African Independence: The Transfers of Power, 1960 - 1980 Yale, 1988. P. 258.
130. N.A.E. Abadist 14/1/982, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', Jan. - Aug., 1948. P. 39.

## CHAPTER V

### FOREIGN FIRMS AND THE GROWTH OF ABA

#### Introduction

In this Chapter, our focus is on the contribution of foreign enterprises to the rise and growth of Aba. In the main, we look at the role of these trading and industrial enterprises in creating jobs, bringing prosperity and enhancing the welfare of the people.

In Aba, the development of foreign companies was not markedly different from that of other places in Africa. The companies, like the metropole were attracted by the exploitation and profit opportunities in Africa. Initially, they focused on the exploitation of slave labour needed in the plantations of their countries through the force of arms. When this labour was no longer required in their countries as a result of the transition from an agricultural stage to an industrial and manufacturing one, the nature of their exploitation changed. They now wanted African raw materials, produced by African labour, on African soil, at little or no costs to them. The huge profits made from the slave trade ensured that there was enough capital for coercing and shifting Africans to produce trading. The little wages paid to labour, and the poor prices paid for produce, enabled African after taxation, to purchase European manufactured goods which they had been encouraged to cherish. Needless to say that in the context of a pricing system determined by the firms, Africans did not get adequate value for their money.

As there developed a proletarian class, it became necessary to set up some industrial concerns to meet the needs of the class. The setting up of such industrial enterprises were, it must be said, not motivated by a genuine desire to contribute to the creation of employment opportunities and the material benefit of the colonized peoples. Rather, the metropolitan firms discovered that it was cheaper to develop small processing industries on African soil, using cheap African labour and raw materials to produce goods subsequently sold to Africans at high profits. The profit margins were high because the cost



of freighting had been eliminated, and taxes where they existed were very small, in addition of course, to the cheap raw materials and labour supply. Be that as it may, it needs be stated all the same that even though it was not intentionally and systematically planned by the metropolitan firms their activities nevertheless contributed to the growth of some of the areas in which they operated. Aba was one of the areas which benefitted from such operations.

#### Attraction of foreign firms to Aba

As is well known, Aba was in competition with other towns in Owerri Province with regards to attracting foreign firms. Yet Aba ended up attracting the largest number of both the trading and manufacturing enterprises which were eventually established in the area; a situation which laid the foundation for the position Aba occupies today as one of the largest industrial centres in the former Eastern Region. The question then is, what attracted these foreign firms to Aba?

Here, one needs to state that some of these factors have been mentioned in earlier parts of the work. Yet, even at the risk of repetition, it is necessary in this section to systematically rearticulate the factors in more detail.

The first consideration of the foreign firms would seem to be the availability of raw materials in Aba and its environs. Aba is located in the Centre of Eastern Nigeria's palm oil belt. Indeed, before the emergence of cassava and its derived products like gari, Aba's economy was based largely on palm produce trade. Since most of the early European firms were engaged in cash crop trading, and Aba was the main centre for palm produce trade, it was not surprising that many firms found it a highly attractive place to locate their business. This was true of the trading firms, as it was for the manufacturing ones. This explains why most of the early manufacturing companies were soap making ones which depended largely on palm produce for their production.

Added to the issue of raw materials, was the availability of adequate and constant labour supply. Labour was not only recruited from the thickly populated Aba region, but also from other Igbo and the neighbouring Ibibio areas. Thus by the 1950s when some manufacturing companies began to establish in Aba, the population of the town had already grown to such an extent that there was no fear of labour supply shortage. Nevertheless, for the manufacturing enterprises, there was an initial shortage of skilled technical manpower. Many of them however solved the problem through labour recruitment in Lagos or secondment from their Lagos branch which often was their headquarters.

Another important attractive factor to the firms was the availability of good and efficient means of transportation. Aba was a centre of the motor transport trade. Also by the 1930s, bicycles had become a fairly common feature in Aba. It was however the railway that seemed to be the main attraction for the foreign firms, both trading and manufacturing ones. As already noted earlier, there were very few European companies in Aba before the coming of the railway. But with the railway, many companies moved into Aba while several others that had earlier taken advantage of the Imo River to settle in Imo River and Owerinta subsequently moved to Aba.

The same railway was also crucial for the manufacturing companies. Even though Aba had no sea port, they found the port at Port Harcourt adequate for transporting their imported inputs since Port Harcourt is only 65 kilometres from Aba. From the Port Harcourt harbour, they railed raw materials to their factories and used the same process to move out any finished or semi-finished products they wanted exported. It is this railway factor that explains why the first generation industries in Aba were all located at Factory Road, close to the railway line. Indeed the Factory Road location of the factories is just behind the Aba railway station. Some of the factories like Lever Brothers even went further in their quest for easy and efficient transportation by having branch-lines of the railway laid right into their factories.

There was also the question of market both for imported goods and those manufactured locally. Aba as already noted is located in a thickly populated area. Added to this fact was the various waves of immigration into the town from 1900 to the end of our period in 1960. Thus, the combined population of the indigenes and the immigrants ensured that there was enough market for the foreign enterprises.

Added to the above was the existence of a fairly reasonable amount of infrastructure, at least when compared to other competing centres. As already shown, Aba from early times had a well attended market which was progressively expanded through the years. As also shown, there was also roads radiating to important centres like Port Harcourt, Owerri and the Cross River area. Water supply, electricity, postal and telegraphic services were also provided to the city at various times. All these were important facilities necessary in business considerations and no doubt, played significant roles in attracting European enterprises to Aba

Above all, there was the almighty and protective colonial administration which guaranteed the firms the necessary security on their investments. Having been upgraded from a consulate to an administrative headquarters very early in its history with the attendant agglomeration of colonial apparatus, both security and others, many firms found Aba ideal for business. This factor is very important because for many of the foreign enterprises, particularly in the earlier years, the most important consideration in their choice of a centre for business operation was security. This explains why there was usually a scramble out of any area where they perceived a breakdown of law and order. This was the fate Aba experienced after the 1929 riots when many European enterprises, finding Aba very unsafe and volatile; and despite the existence of other attractive factors, deserted Aba in large numbers. Nearly all of them however, returned when the situation calmed down. This indicates that security was perhaps the paramount consideration.

A final factor in the coming of foreign firms was that Aba offered the so-called economies of concentration, otherwise known as agglomeration, a factor in which enterprises consider <sup>a</sup> whole range of cost advantages. The idea behind this theory is that it was better to establish in centres that are already thriving businesswise. Aba had such advantages: a well established market, a growing population, good transportation facilities, banks which had become established by 1925, and numerous European firms. Thus the tendency was for new business to flock to Aba. This agglomeration theory explains why other towns in Owerri Province such as Okigwe and Orlu were not able to compete with Aba. Indeed as early as 1922, Chiefs from Okigwe and Orlu in an audience with Lieutenant Governor of Southern Provinces, asked that factories should also be established in Owerri as was the case in Aba. Reporting on what he told the chiefs, he wrote:

I told them that Government could not compel any factory to open at Owerri or anywhere else, that if the trade justified it and the roads were in good condition so that motor traffic could be employed, firms were sure to come to Owerri, and I pointed out to them that they had already extended from Aba as far as Owerrinta<sup>1</sup>.

The point to note however, is that the various factors did not act independent of one another. All of them played important and complementary roles in the coming of foreign enterprises in Aba.

#### Foreign Enterprises before the Second World War

Before the Second World War, nearly all the foreign enterprises in Aba engaged in trading and other financial and commercial activities. Virtually no form of manufacturing existed among them. Among the activities they engaged in were trading, banking and transporting. In the course of the work, we have already identified many of these companies. However given the focus of the

chapter, a recap is obviously necessary. The major trading companies in the period under review were the Niger Company, Miller Brothers, C.F.A.O. African and Eastern Trading Corporation, G.B. Olivant, Paterson Zochonis, M.C. Iver, H.B.W. Russell, John Holt and of course, the U.A.C. which, as would be seen, resulted from the merger of some of the above mentioned companies.

In the area of insurance and banking, only two foreign banks existed in Aba during this period. These were the Bank of British West Africa and Barclays bank. Even so, very little is known of their activities during the period. There were no insurance companies in Aba at this time as this field was completely dominated by British-based companies who only appointed African representatives in the town, like the Aba Motor transporters Union.

As for motor transportation, evidence indicates that foreigners were not particularly interested in running transport companies. European involvement was mainly in the areas of sales and service, and here, the major companies involved in Aba during our period were the U.A.C Motors, Messrs. John Holt, and J. Allens. Nevertheless a few others did venture into conveying passengers and goods. They were Messrs. Weeks Transport Company, Gibbons Transport Company, the U.A.C. and John Holt. By the 1930s, the operating conditions had become so tough that only the first two still had reasonable passenger service. We need to note however that many of the commercial firms had their own motor lorries which they operated for their produce trading. This was the case with the U.A.C. and John Holt. European firms avoided the motor transport business for a number of reasons. In the first place, many of the roads were too narrow for the type of lorries that would permit them to carry their overheads at a reasonable profit. Africans could easily undercut them with lower operating costs.

With regards to shipping companies, these were mainly based in Port Harcourt where wharves began to be developed in November 1926. Among the foreign shipping lines in use during the period were Elder Dempster Lines and

American West African Lines. Elder Dempster was the major line between Nigeria and the United Kingdom and was in fact, the main line that was visiting Port Harcourt. Though none of these companies was based in Aba, they nevertheless provided important services which encouraged growth as firms based in Aba used them through the Port Harcourt Wharf to import raw materials and finished goods as well as export various types of goods.

Over all, therefore, the major areas of the European activity in Aba before the Second World War was in produce trading and general merchandise. In nearly all cases, all the firms engaged in both areas of activity. The firms also had similar organizational structures in Aba namely an European manager, sometimes with an assistant and African clerks. Thus both the smaller and bigger companies had similar activities and organization, the only major difference being their size. Consequently, it is unnecessary to discuss all of them. The United Africa Company will serve as a case study. The U.A.C. is chosen because its activities was typical of the companies even if it was much larger than others. Also unlike the others, some bits and pieces of its activities in our period can still be found. Moreover, the events leading to the founding of the U.A.C. is demonstrative of the prospects and problems of the small companies while its activities after establishment was very typical of the bigger companies. Indeed being the largest of the foreign trading concerns in Aba during our period our interest in it is fairly justified. As has been noted elsewhere, "the U.A.C." has obvious claims to attention - - - as it holds a predominant position among all the extra-territorial non-mining enterprises - - -. On the whole, the U.A.C. may probably be responsible for about 41.3 percent of the total import and export of Nigeria.<sup>2</sup>

#### Background to the United Africa Company

The United Africa Company was the largest company not only in our area of study but also in the whole of Nigeria during our period. The only company that came close to it in terms of activities was John Holt and

Company.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, like most other foreign enterprises of the period, not much record was left behind the trail of these companies.<sup>4</sup> Deliberate efforts were made by the companies to obliterate their activities ostensibly because of the nature and extent of exploitation involved. While this almost complete lack of records reached a ridiculous extent in the case of John Holt,<sup>5</sup> we are nevertheless opportunely to have a few bits and pieces on the U.A.C. even though their extent and value still leave much to be desired.

Modern United African Company was founded in 1929. It was a product of several years of competitive activities among various European firms dating back to 1795. Before its establishment, several European companies had been trading on the West African Coast, first on slaves, and after abolition, on articles of legitimate commerce such as palm oil, palm kernel and timber. On the other hand, they bought European products which they sold in Africa. The important point to note was that things were difficult for many of the companies because they had little capital, were in competition with each other, and also faced tremendous hostility from Delta communities and middlemen.

It was the misfortune of one of these companies in the Oil Rivers - Holland Jacques that changed the commercial terrain of the area. Having lost its cargo in a steamer, and faced with imminent collapse, "the then Secretary of the Company, Captain Grove Ross made an appeal to his son-in-law, Mr. John Goldie Taubman to rescue the company by taking it over. This was in 1876. In order to effect the take over, George Goldie established and registered the Central African Trading Company in which his family subscribed to majority of the shares. But because of the negative effects of competition among British companies, Goldie pushed for the amalgamation of the companies and this took place in 1879. The result of this merger was the foundation of the United Africa Company, a limited liability company with nominal capital of £250,000.<sup>6</sup>

But despite this amalgamation, competition continued, but this time from French companies particularly, the Companie Française de l'Afrique Equatoriale. It was Goldie's fear of this French competition and intervention that made him seek for a Royal Charter. But partly because of the low capital base of the company, the British government was reluctant to grant the charter as it was not ready to incur expenses overseas. It was to address the question of a low capital base that a new company - National African Company was floated by Goldie with a share capital of £1 million in 100,000 shares of £10 each. In 1886, a charter was granted to the company and it subsequently changed its name to Royal Niger Company. But by 1900, owing to some problems faced by the company and the fact that the British government now wanted firm control of the colonies, the charter was withdrawn from the company. The withdrawal of the charter subsequently led to the taking over of its administrative and military assets by the British government. With the withdrawal of the Royal Charter, the company became known and addressed as the 'Niger Company'. Sometime in 1920, the Niger Company was bought over by W.H. Lever the soap entrepreneur.<sup>7</sup> This take-over was partly influenced by the poor economic situation of the Niger Company at the time for it was on the verge of collapse.<sup>8</sup>

In the meantime the African and Eastern Trading Corporation which emerged in 1919 through a three company merger began to face difficulties, and it was to avoid liquidation that it sought a merger with other companies. It achieved this merger when in 1929, it merged and began to trade with the Niger Company under the new name of 'United Africa Company Ltd.'<sup>9</sup> Modern United Africa Company is therefore a product of a merger between the African and Eastern Trading Corporation and the Niger Company in 1929.

The new company was to enjoy a tremendous boost in business as a result of developments in Europe. Lever Brothers which by 1911 had become an important margarine manufacturer was facing stiff competition from the Margarine Union Company of the Netherlands. There was competition for raw



materials as each tried to imitate the other's products. It was in this circumstance that the decision makers of the two companies decided on a merger so as to take advantage of common market and common sourcing of raw materials. The merger which took place in September 1929 led to the founding of 'UniLever'<sup>10</sup> Since William Lever already had an interest in the U.A.C. through his ownership of the Niger Company<sup>11</sup>, the U.A.C. subsequently became an important agent or middle company in West Africa for the supply of raw materials to UniLever in Europe. This development was to influence the U.A.C.'s activities in subsequent years in West Africa.

In Nigeria, the U.A.C. developed an administrative structure which saw the country being divided into areas. Aba branch was one of the branches in the Eastern area branch network of the company.<sup>12</sup> Within the Aba branch itself, the U.A.C. activities were carried out under three main divisions. These were produce/export trade, merchandise import trade and technical/hardware divisions.

#### The U.A.C. and Produce trading in Aba

Aba was the main palm produce buying centre in what later became Eastern Region of Nigeria. Before the 1929 merger that founded the U.A.C., the Niger Company was the main produce buying company in Aba. African and Eastern Trading Corporation was also a major produce buying company in Aba. The merger of the two companies as mentioned earlier in the work led to the merging of their produce buying operations. Consequently the U.A.C. became a colossus in the Aba produce trade, especially with the demand pressure from UniLever. This resulted in an extra-ordinarily aggressive trading style. In the first place, the company quickly moved to notify the produce trading community of their presence by merging all the trading sites of the Niger Company and that of the African and Eastern Trading Corporation and replaced them with the U.A.C. produce buying sites. Secondly in order to maximise the company's returns, it notified produce traders and agents that all produce would thenceforth be bought only

by cash and that all produce must be weighed before payment was made. Given the overwhelming domination of the produce trade by the firm, these rules immediately became the practice in the town. But as noted earlier, this disoriented the local people, many of whom became confused both by the changes in the trading sites and the disappearance of the friendly European agents they were formerly used to.<sup>13</sup>

Having got their machinery in place, especially after the Aba Riots, the company settled down to produce trading on a large scale. It is therefore not surprising that between 1929 and 1949 when the marketing of Nigerian Palm Produce became the preserve of the Nigerian Oil Palm Produce Marketing Board,<sup>14</sup> the U.A.C. dominated the produce trade in Nigeria and Aba in particular where it cornered about 80 percent of all produce bought. This achievement was due to a wide range of buying agents which included traditional chiefs, while the U.A.C. buying sites also bought directly from African traders and middlemen. In 1939 alone, 17,526 tons of palm oil was bought in Aba Division.

The inception of the Produce Board did not alter the pattern of trade: the U.A.C. remained the main agent for the purchase of palm produce in Aba, and the Board availed itself of the U.A.C.'s extensive buying network. Thus of the 20,759 tons of palm oil, 13,273 tons of palm kernel and 805,014 lbs. of rubber that were inspected and passed for export in Aba in the first year of the new system—1950, more than half were purchased through the U.A.C.<sup>15</sup>

The U.A.C. produce trade required a significant amount of labour not only on the buying sites, but also in the final handling of produce for export. It also required a large organization. Over the years, the company had acquired several other companies, inheriting their buying networks and welding these into a complex and efficient system. At the head of this network was the Produce Manager. This position was usually occupied by Europeans. Given the place of the produce trade in Aba's growth,<sup>16</sup> and given the fact that the U.A.C.

was in charge of much of it, it is not surprising that the Produce Manager was a very important personality in Aba. This explains why, in the period when the municipality was administered by the Township Advisory Board, the U.A.C. Produce Manager was a regular member of that Board. This of course was in addition to the Aba District Manager of the U.A.C. who was also a member.<sup>17</sup>

In the main, produce was bought through African middlemen and produce traders at established buying sites. There was of course, a central produce point where all produce bought was collected, treated, weighed and bagged. In Aba, the U.A.C. produce department provided agents with credit advance, drums for the storage of produce and sacks for packing and moving the produce to the central collecting point. The system worked well, but there were occasions of contract failures leading subsequently to litigations. One example was the case which involved an ex-service man called Alexander Ezuma. On his discharge from the army, and unable to find employment, he decided to become a produce trader. He approached the U.A.C. which loaned him cash and materials such as drums and sacks. He thus became indebted to the U.A.C. to the tune of £604: 12s: 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.<sup>18</sup> For some unknown reasons, the business failed and the U.A.C. had to resort to court action in an attempt to recover the debt.<sup>19</sup>

Produce buying centres were of course, open to Ngwa producers from the surrounding areas, as well as Annangs and Ibibios from Cross River. Many of them brought produce to the buying points on bicycles. But as noted elsewhere in this work, it was the chiefs who made the most out of the advantages that the produce trade offered the local people. Some of the chiefs, having obtained credit advances from the Niger Company/U.A.C. set up their own produce buying organizations. Notable examples were Chief Uzoigwe and Chief Ogonna. These chiefs, in addition to the acreage of palm trees they owned and processed, had numerous young men who went round the various villages buying up produce which were subsequently supplied to the U.A.C. All produce bought by the U.A.C. were in turn prepared and exported through Port Harcourt.

## Merchandise Import Trade

Before the attainment of Independence in Nigeria, the merchandise import trade was a very lucrative business for many foreign trading companies. The U.A.C. was not an exception in this regard; for just as it was buying and exporting local produce, it was importing various types of merchandise and selling to Africans. Indeed, to compete effectively, the United Africa Company set up an import department in London. It was this department that coordinated the buying and importation of goods into West Africa on behalf of the U.A.C. and other associated companies. The major areas of the U.A.C.'s import business were motor vehicles, goods/provisions and textiles.

From the early period of the U.A.C., Aba was one of the two main depots of its motor department, the other being located in Lagos. The reasoning behind this location was clear. The company wanted to exploit the Eastern Nigeria Motor Market of which Aba at the time was the most important. That the U.A.C. regarded it as a very important aspect of its business is clearly demonstrated by its appointment of a separate manager to head the department. This act was uncommon with the U.A.C. in those days, the common practice being to appoint managers to head districts and not departments.

The Aba motor department sold such vehicles as Chevrolet cars and trucks, Bedford trucks as well as Vauxhall and Buick cars. It also sold the spare parts of these vehicles and distributed various other vehicle accessories. It was for instance the main distributor of Lucas brand of batteries in the town.

Complementing its sales activities was its service garage which serviced all brands of cars distributed by the U.A.C. The only major competitor to them in this regard was Messrs. J. Allen and Company which however specialized mainly on Ford brands.

There was also the U.A.C. goods/provisions section which dealt with the supply and sales of various imported goods such as flour, milk, sugar, cooking oil, corned beef, tinned fish, whisky/gin and other hard liquor, tobacco and soap. This section of the U.A.C. activity in Aba was not as developed as that in Port Harcourt where a large Kingsway Store was established.

Nevertheless, the Aba branch was significant enough to be mandated the main distributor to the Europeans and Military personnel around by the colonial authorities during the widespread shortages which existed during the Second World War.<sup>20</sup> Indeed because of the shortages of the above mentioned goods distributed by the U.A.C., the goods were placed on ration during the war. The demand was such that the U.A.C. alone could not even cope. The colonial authorities subsequently sought to use the facilities of other stores. As the District officer reported:

Kingsway Stores supply most of the registered customers, but their stocks are limited and cards should be issued on the other firms as well inspite of protests from the applicants who invariably wish to be registered at Kingsway .<sup>21</sup>

The fact was that many customers insisted on Kingsway because they had a wider and more assured range of supplies.

The U.A.C. continued to dominate the foods/provisions trade even after the war. It however gradually withdrew into wholesale activity while leaving the retailing to African merchants, middlemen and traders.

Another imported goods area in which the U.A.C. operated in Aba was textiles. It sold wax prints, block prints, bafts, coloured, woven and so on. Related to the textile trade was that in haberdashery, embroidered blankets and sewing machines. By and large, in Aba, the U.A.C. activities in the textile business was low as the major centres were Lagos and Kano.

There was also the hardware section which supplied a wide variety of equipment, tools and materials needed for household use, farming, construction and other enterprises. Household goods the U.A.C. sold included cooking utensils, cutlery, enamel ware, buckets, furniture and even gun powder. Also sold were farming tools such as hoes, cutlasses, ridgers and other agricultural machines. Construction and building materials sold included hammers, nails, doors, galvanised iron sheets and cement.

We need to note that the U.A.C. hardware section played a very significant role in the growth of Aba, especially after the Second World War when commercial and construction activities rose sharply. Many new indigenous enterprises were able to purchase the hardware needed for a smooth take-off from the U.A.C. and other trading companies. Carpenters needed hammers and nails; farmers needed hoes and cutlasses etc. The supply of these materials by the U.A.C. no doubt contributed greatly to the growth of Aba.

#### Impact of the U.A.C. on the Growth of Aba

A pertinent point to start the discussion is on the U.A.C's contribution in <sup>the</sup> produce trade. This is so because of the very significant role that trade played on the growth of Aba. In the first place the coming of the firms transformed the extent of the trade as the local people felt more confident in dealing with them than with Opobo, Bonny and Aro middlemen. In this way, the local people earned better returns on their produce.

Secondly, the company in order to increase its volume of trade provided credit and material facilities to some African produce traders including traditional chiefs. Other Africans were employed as porters and handlers of produce in the palm oil bulking and kernel sheds. All these people earned income with which they maintained themselves and their families and in

starting up various indigenous enterprises which played crucial roles in the further growth of Aba.

The U.A.C. also helped in increasing the quantity and quality of produce brought into Aba for sale through the introduction of new technologies for the processing of palm nuts. A good example was the pioneer oil mills whose introduction into Aba division revolutionized palm oil production by reducing wastage and the amount of labour and man/hours needed for production. Increased production meant increased income to all those involved in the produce trade.

The U.A.C. also helped in the growth of Aba through the supply and sales of European goods. Having been introduced to these goods through the years, many African residents in Aba became used to them. These included new machines and tools such as bicycles, cars and lorries. Numerous other goods brought into Aba by the U.A.C. and other companies particularly hardware were also crucial in the growth of Aba. Many informants readily point to the fact that the tools and necessary hardware which they used in setting up their indigenous enterprises were bought from the U.A.C. and other trading companies.

Also important was the role the U.A.C. played in the introduction and popularization of the cash economy. This is significant as Aba would have been left behind in this development because of the people's strong attraction to local currencies especially the manilla. By insisting that produce must be traded in cash instead of barter, and by insisting on the use of weights despite significant opposition, the local people were subsequently introduced fully into the new economy. This encouraged commercial growth and enabled the people to take full advantage of the few economic opportunities that were available under the colonial dispensation.

In the social field, the U.A.C. also played a very significant role. It provided opportunities for training and career/professional development of Africans in the service of the company. It introduced service awards and promotions with which it rewarded African workers who distinguished themselves. Given the existence of such opportunities, it is not surprising that a few Africans even before Nigeria's independence, managed to make it to management positions in the company. For instance, by 1951, Chief C.E. Abebe at 32 became U.A.C. labour and staff Manager, the first African to reach that position.<sup>22</sup> The point is that by their actions, the U.A.C. helped in training a crop of Nigerian managers who helped in the development of Aba and Nigeria.

But by far the U.A.C.'s greatest contribution in the area of training was the secondary school scholarships which it awarded to the children of its staff. At a period when educational opportunities were very limited and school fees were unaffordable, it was a commendable way of rewarding staff efforts. The interesting thing about the awards was that its beneficiaries were not bonded to the U.A.C. after their education. Quite a number of parents benefitted from this largesse. In 1951 for instance, four children of employees in the Aba area were awarded scholarships by the company. They were Francis Akosa Mora whose scholarship was tenable at Stella Maris College Port Harcourt; Michael Okpiago who was to attend Kaduna College Kaduna; Emmanuel Macaulay Dior was to go to Hope Waddell Training Institute Calabar, and Mark Charles Nwagwu whose own was teneble at St. Patrick's College Calabar.<sup>23</sup> The number of these awards for the Aba area alone is quite commendable particularly when it is compared to only one scholarship which the U.A.C. is said to have awarded in the whole of Nigeria by the late 1930s.<sup>24</sup> Though we have no evidence as to the employment or placement of these young men after their graduation, there is no doubt that given the role of education in development, their training with the multiplier effects of others they trained must have contributed to the growth of Aba.



The United African Company also contributed albeit indirectly to political developments in Aba town. We need to recall here that U.A.C. Produce and District Managers consistently served on the Aba Township Advisory Board from its inception until the emergence of elected Township administrations from the early 1950s. In this position, these managers not only made inputs into the day-to-day running of the town, but perhaps also made contribution in the eventual evolution of elected township administration in Aba town.

But it was not all gains and benefits from the U.A.C. and other foreign trading companies. This was because the company's main interest in Aba and other parts of Nigeria was to ensure good returns to its foreign shareholders. It is thus not surprising that the U.A.C. often took 'necessary' steps to ensure uninterrupted profits. Naturally, Africans were at the receiving end.

In the produce trade for instance, Africans were <sup>not</sup> intimidated of the merger leading to the formation of the U.A.C. After the merger was completed, new trading sites were opened with new clerks again without taking Africans into confidence. Aba people were also not informed before the U.A.C. introduced the new system of trading produce by weights. But more unfortunate was the fact that the weighing was done by the firm and the price paid for each weight was also determined by it. The result was that Aba people were not able to get the best returns from the produce trade whether they were agents, middlemen or the producers.

Related to the above was the condition under which Aba produce merchants traded with the U.A.C. In the main, they were seen as tools. Many were given financial and material credits only to the extent that enabled them buy an agreed quantity of produce for the company. It is no wonder that only a few exceptional individuals grew large enough in the business to become notable and successful merchants. Also there was no question of forgiving the debts of Nigerians whose produce buying business failed. Often they were taken to court where attempts were made to recover every penny from them.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps it was in the area of merchandise trade that the U.A.C.'s negative attitude to the emergence of a worthwhile Nigerian merchant class became most glaring. The U.A.C. and other foreign trading companies had a virtual monopoly of the merchandise import trade. They possessed the logistics and foreign currency needed for the importation of goods. Nigerians and other Africans had no chance in the business particularly in the period before 1945. They could only engage in the retailing of goods purchased from the U.A.C. and other trading companies.

The U.A.C. did not only exclude Nigerian traders from the provision/food import business but also failed to encourage indigenous entrepreneurs engaged in the local production of some of the goods it sold. This is in spite of a promise by the company to market both imports and the goods produced in Nigeria. This attitude of the U.A.C. could hardly have been unexpected given the fact that to do otherwise would have meant creating unnecessary competition for its agents and parent companies in Europe. This is thus the background under which we can understand properly why the few African entrepreneurs in Aba at the time complained that their products were discriminated against by the U.A.C. and other foreign companies. An excellent example is the case of one Simbi Wellington, a middle-aged ex-service man and freelance journalist who set up in Aba a small fruit manufacturing enterprise called 'Ideal Fruit Syrup' which engaged in the manufacturing of pineapple and orange squash.<sup>26</sup> The U.A.C. in Aba refused to distribute these products on <sup>the</sup> grounds of low quality; whereas in fact, it did not want the product to compete with the British made brands it imported from its associated companies.

Indeed, the lack of encouragement of indigenous enterprises which the U.A.C. had all along practised quietly became completely exposed by this case. Mr. Wellington, probably in the course of establishing his enterprise was indebted to the tune of £5: 3s: 2d to the U.A.C. He refused to pay the debt claiming that he had no money to do so since the U.A.C. refused to distribute his goods. The U.A.C. subsequently sued him at the Aba magistrate court. In his defense at the court presided over by his Worship, Mr. J.N. Odogwu, Mr. Wellington noted:

'I am not ashamed of my products. This debt could have been finished long ago if Messrs U.A.C. had agreed to my terms. In accordance with their facets of Enterprise N<sup>o</sup> 6 appearing in the Guardian of November 24, 1951, they give the understanding that they help to distribute articles produced by African industrialists, why they refuse to distribute mine, I fail to understand.<sup>27</sup>

As part of the process of adjudication, the Magistrate and Barrister O. Balogun, who was representing Mr. Wellington, inspected the pineapple squash tendered by Mr. Wellington and both remarked on "how tempting the product was".<sup>28</sup> Even though a judgement was eventually entered for a repayment of the debt in two equal monthly instalments, the remark by the two men particularly the magistrate indicates that the products may have been good. But more importantly, the case further demonstrated the extent to which the U.A.C. was willing to go to squeeze out whatever they considered their 'due' from Africans.

We must hasten to add also that during the period covered by the study, the U.A.C. did not act as a good corporate citizen in Aba. There are no records or oral information regarding roads, water

supply or any other public facility supplied by the U.A.C. This was despite the huge profits it made from the Aba produce trade which it virtually monopolized.

In general, it is clear that the U.A.C. and other foreign trading companies played a significant role in the growth of Aba in particular and Nigeria in general. While some of the trading and other activities were beneficial to Aba people even if not intended, the vast majority were negative. This double-faced nature of their roles has been well summarized in an Eastern States Express Editorial Opinion of June 1, 1951 on the U.A.C.:

The United Africa Company (the paper writes) is an octopus, a combine, a pool - is anything we may choose to call it. It does not pay its workers in accordance with the profits it makes. It even does not have mercy on or adequate consideration for the men and women who sell its wares. All these things we criticize, but the United Africa Company is not altogether evil or absolutely condemnable - - - .

In recent years it has awarded scholarships, it has endowed the University College Ibadan, it has built centres of relaxation for its workers and encouraged sports in different ways.

Early this week again it donated £1,000 to the Emir of Kano's Relief Fund in respect of the victims of El-Dumia Cinema. All we need to say is a hearty Thank you.<sup>29</sup>

I have quoted this editorial copiously because it fully reflects the dilemma of what place we ought to reserve for companies like the U.A.C. in the history of our country. In the case of Aba, the U.A.C. certainly does not deserve the type of hearty thank you the editorial

accorded it. It nevertheless made some contribution to the growth of Aba.

### Foreign Enterprises after the Second World War

As we have already seen, most foreign companies in Aba before the second world war were engaged in one form of trading or the other. By the end of that war however, a combination of factors made some of the companies to begin the process of setting up import substituting industries in Nigeria. Aba was no exception to this development. Among the many factors which informed this change of policy were rising incomes and tastes, population growth in the urban areas, the need to remain competitive in the face of increasing competition from non-British companies and of course, the desire to enter into new ventures in the face of almost complete take over of the produce trade by the Marketing Boards.

The end of the war as noted saw increased demand for imported items and this is reflected in the post-war import figures of Nigeria. From a relatively low figure of £20 million in 1946, imports reached a staggering £166 million in 1958.<sup>30</sup> As would be expected, this development attracted tremendous competition as people from all parts of the world struggled for a piece of the trade. This strong competition with British companies was provided by Indian merchants viz: K. Chelleram and Sons, J.T. Chanrai and Company, Bhojson and Inlaks; Greeks and Lebanese [Levantine] among whom were Mandilas, Arab Brothers, S. Raccah and A.G. Leventis.<sup>31</sup> Competition also came from overseas-based manufacturing British, other European and U.S. companies who were keen on carving out an important share of the market for themselves. Among them were Nestle's, Tate and Lyle, Imperial Chemical Industries, Philips, National Cash Register and British Paints.<sup>32</sup> A third but nevertheless important

group were Nigerian traders whose encroachment into the traditional preserve of the expatriate trading companies moved from 5% in 1949 to 20% in 1963 through a combination of increased skills, increased capital, improved credit facilities and the gradual withdrawal of the major firms from import trade because of increased competition.<sup>33</sup> Indeed as a result of the competition, the import distribution business of the three leading importing firms slumped from 49% in 1949 to 16% in 1963.<sup>34</sup>

No other company felt concerned about these challenges like the United Africa Company. The reasons for this are not far fetched. Its interests were the most affected as its control over the distributive trade was four times the size of its nearest rival, John Holt. The concern of the company is adequately reflected in a 1963 position paper entitled 'Redeployment, An Aspect of Development in Tropical Africa' in which the company noted:

- - - As produce buying, general retailing and many staples of general merchandise pass into the hands of a multiplicity of new competitors, two broad yet interconnected avenues of development open up. These are:

- (a) the specialized distribution and marketing of a selected range of merchandise on behalf of, or in conjunction with both overseas and local manufacturers; and
- (b) the setting up and operation of local industries, sometimes on a wholly-owned basis and sometimes in collaboration with technical partners, to manufacture and process a widening and progressively sophisticated range of goods, many of which hitherto have had to be imported.<sup>35</sup>

In tangible terms, the above two options adopted in getting rid of the competition involved a shift from generalized merchandising to specialized ones requiring special skills and considerable capital. Among such specialised areas were the running of large departmental stores, sales of technical and engineering equipment and dealing in pharmaceuticals.

The second was the establishment of manufacturing companies which also required considerable capital, and involved tremendous risks which many of their competitors could hardly afford. It was in this circumstance that there emerged a transition from produce and merchandise trading to manufacturing enterprises aimed in the main at import substitution. Essentially, the companies saw the drive as an important way of maintaining their position under the new competitive business climate. They also saw the effort as a way of diversifying their operations, which would in turn ensure continued good returns to their overseas shareholders and parent companies some of which were even involved in the planning.

In Aba, the two main areas of manufacturing into which the firms ventured during this period were soap making and brewing. This explains our choice of companies in these two fields as case studies, in our attempt to show the role of foreign manufacturing companies to Aba's growth. Soap manufacturing was the particular area of interest of many of the companies. This is hardly surprising since the major raw material for the production of soap - palm oil - was produced in large quantities in the Aba area.

The first of these factories - Nicholas factory - was established in the 1940s on the initiative of one Mr. P.B. Nicholas, a Greek. The factory was however taken over by Paterson Zochonis sometime in the 1950s and subsequently became known as Alagbon Soap Industry.

Other soap factories established between then and 1960 were the Associated Industries, the International Equitable Association and Lever Brothers<sup>which</sup>, was the largest of these soap factories during the period, hence our choice of it as a case study.

With regards to brewing, Nigerian Breweries was the only foreign brewing concern during the period. We have chosen it as the second case study because it was a larger organization than the soap factories and also provides an alternative area of discussion.

#### Lever Brothers Nigeria Limited, Aba

The Lever Brothers factory at Aba was one of two established in Nigeria before 1960. Lever Brothers Company was the brain child of William Lever,<sup>36</sup> but, as the name indicates, he was later joined in his business by his brother called John. Both had earlier served some apprenticeship under their father who owned and operated a grocery. William later established his own grocery shop in 1884. By 1890, John teamed up with William in the grocery business. Soon after, they became attracted to soap manufacturing which was thriving in the 1880s. With their successful formulation of sunlight soap, and the cheap availability of raw materials, the two brothers switched over completely to the soap business. By 1911, Lever Brothers added the Production of Margarine to its business. It was this development that brought the company into direct and very stiff competition for markets. A particular feature of the competition was that Lever Brothers and the Dutch Company, Margarine Union, began to imitate each other's products.

As the company's popularity and expansion continued in Britain, and as demand for its products grew in Europe, William Lever embarked on an extensive tour of the world during which he visited



Nigeria.<sup>37</sup> His aim was to examine the possibilities of further expansion of the company. The merger of Lever Brothers and the Margarine Union of the Netherlands in 1929, a move aimed at avoiding wasteful competition, led to the emergence of "UniLever", a formidable company with vast potentials for further overseas expansion. With this development, the world was ready for exploration and exploitation.

Lever Brothers Nigeria was thus a product of the drive by William Lever for outside expansion. It was established between 1922 and 1924<sup>38</sup> and after the 1929 merger, it became a member of the famous UniLever group. On inception, the company was known as the West African Soap company, and its first factory was located at Apapa. In 1955, the company adopted the name 'Lever Brothers' to reflect the name of its founders,<sup>39</sup> but soap remained its main product. The Apapa factory which was commissioned in 1924,<sup>40</sup> initially served as a depot where soap produced in the United Kingdom was packaged and distributed. Local production started in 1925 with the making of bar soaps from local palm oil and palm kernel oil, as well as imported soda ash, perfume and colouring. By 1947, the company began to produce pepsodent tooth paste. Tree-Top Squash drink joined the production line in 1950.<sup>41</sup>

As Production and demand for Lever Brothers products increased, the company's management began to think of a factory outside Lagos. The idea was mooted by one Mr. H. Overgoor, a Dutch who served as Chairman and Deputy Managing Director of the company in the period 1950-1963.<sup>42</sup> Aba was chosen as the location for the second Lever factory after exhaustive discussion.<sup>43</sup>

A number of factors were responsible for the choice of Aba. The first was the availability in the Aba area of the main raw

materials for the production of soap namely palm oil and kernels. Secondly, market research showed that Aba could serve not only the large Eastern market, but also be a very important link between the South, and the North Eastern market. By 1966 when the Nigerian Civil war broke out, over 50% of the company's sales was accounted for by the former Eastern Region.<sup>44</sup> It was the loss of these sales that explains the huge loss Lever Brothers suffered during the Nigerian Civil war.<sup>45</sup>

The development of the Aba factory dates back to 1953. Land for the project was acquired from both individual land owners and the Aba Urban District Council at a cost which some sources put at £1,250.<sup>46</sup> The initial land area was 6 acres. But today, the factory site covers a land area of about 48 acres.<sup>47</sup> Initially the site was developed as a depot, and by 1954, it had become fully operational in that capacity. In 1956, contract for the construction of a full production factory was awarded to Messrs. Solel Boneh—an International Israeli Construction Company at the cost of £98,240: 8s:<sup>48</sup> Construction was completed in 1957, and formal opening took place in 1958.<sup>49</sup>

The first product was Kippel Bar Soap. This was followed by the production of Lifebouy and Sunlight soaps. During the same period, the company produced glycerin—an oil extracted from palm oil and palm kernels after soap making.<sup>50</sup> Palm oil and palm kernel oil were obtained locally mainly from Aba, Owerri, Ikot Ekpene and Uyo areas. Other raw materials such as cashew oil, magnesium sulphate, caustic soda, colouring and perfume were imported from UniLever factories all over the world.

The production process involved pouring oil in a large pan that is in fact as large as a hall. The oil is boiled in this pan for a long time. Caustic soda, and salt - magnesium sulphate - are added. This mixture

is then boiled, sometimes for as long as three days. When the boiling and straining is considered satisfactory, the product is then sent to a neutralizing machine where it is made into moulders so that soap comes out in the required shapes. They are subsequently coloured, and named with stamping machines.

Power for production was provided by the then Electricity Corporation of Nigeria. The company also had a standby generating set which supplied power whenever public power supply failed. Initially water for production was pumped from the Aba River close to which the factory was located. In the 1970s however, the company sunk a bore-hole for its water supply.

With regards to labour, most of the workers who started off production were recruited, trained and sent down to Aba from the Apapa factory.<sup>51</sup> This was the case particularly with senior and skilled workers. For instance at the inception of production in 1957/58, some 15 supervisors and over 40 skilled workers were sent down to Aba from Apapa.<sup>52</sup> Most of the lower income workers and labourers were recruited from among the lot that worked on the factory's construction. Informants pointed out that it was one of the ways the company compensated the workers. Of about 70 foundation staff, four were whites while the rest were Africans.<sup>53</sup> Among the whites were the General Manager, Mr. H.O. Davies and the Production Manager, Mr. Broodie. The other whites were the Chief Engineer, and the Accountant. Later on however, Mr. Broodie became the Assistant General Manager while an African, Mr. Arunwosu became the Production Manager. It was during the same period also that another African Mr. Ikenze served as Soap Making Manager.<sup>54</sup>

In general, Africans did all the jobs in the company. They were the craftsmen in the Engineering Department, the production

workers, the clerks, the messengers and the labourers. Africans were also the supervisors in the various sections of the company. All the Europeans did was the general management and supervision of the company. The workers usually operated on three shifts. The morning shift which ran from 6 am to 2 p.m.; the afternoon shift which operated from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. and the night shift which lasted from 10 p.m to 6 a.m. Management staff and the engineering section had a steady daily working schedule of 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Weekend and public holidays were considered overtime in which one quarter of the workers salary was added to the main salary.

Talking of salaries, at inception labourers were paid about £5 per month, skilled operators were paid between £8 and £21 - £23 per month.<sup>55</sup> By 1960, there was a significant increase on the salary paid to workers ostensibly because of the improving fortunes of the company as well as the changing political situation in the country. By that time for instance, supervisors and other senior workers earned between £23 - £30 per month, which was about £276 - £360 per annum.<sup>56</sup> It is also important to note that during the period, all categories of staff enjoyed annual increment on their salaries.

In the area of staff welfare, the company made reasonable efforts from the onset to make its staff comfortable and productive. For instance, from the very beginning, facilities were provided for the workers' health care. A small clinic with dispensary was established and nurses were employed by the company to run it. Throughout the period covered by this study, the clinic had a visiting doctor. We need to note however that this service was not extended to the families of members of staff.

In addition to health care, the company provided canteen facilities to its staff. Staff were recruited to run the canteen instead of

hiring contractors for the purpose. In the canteen, workers bought at subsidized prices, a phenomenon which saved money for the workers and saved man/hours which could have been wasted searching for food, for the company. The only problem however was that the company's canteen was segregated into senior and junior staff sections.

#### Impact of Lever Brothers on the Growth of Aba

"Aba was bush at the onset. Due to the factories: Lever Brothers, Nigerian Breweries and Alagbon soap factory, Aba grew and developed."<sup>57</sup> The above statement may well be an exaggeration since we are already aware that Aba was not a bush before the coming of these foreign manufacturing companies. The statement nevertheless demonstrates the important place the companies occupy in any study of the growth of Aba. This is hardly surprising since industrialization is an important factor in the rapid growth of a particular centre. This in fact, explains the clamour by many communities in Nigeria for industries, particularly Federal industries to be sited in their areas.

The first contribution of the Lever Brothers to the growth of Aba lies in the opening up of the areas it acquired from the government and the local chiefs for its factory, a situation which provided new economic opportunities not only for the local people but also for immigrants. The money paid to the chiefs and the Urban District Council for the land acquisitions no doubt introduced new capital and wealth needed for growth in the town. Since we have no evidence of the amounts paid out, we cannot quite say whether it justifiably compensated the people for their land acquired. But even so, the opening up of the area was a positive factor in Aba's growth.

Another positive impact of the coming of Lever Brothers was in the area of population growth. As we noted earlier, by the early 1960s, as many as 200 people were employed by the Aba Lever Brothers. This number looks small. But it must be remembered that many came with their wives, children and members of their extended family. More important however were the numerous people attracted by the company as food vendors, provision sellers, cobblers, vulcanizers, casual labourers and suppliers of various kinds of goods and services. Many of these people also brought nuclear and extended families to Aba.

The employment opportunities provided to both the local people and new immigrants reduced the numbers of the unemployed in the town. It created wealth with which many of the workers improved their lives and those of members of their families. This was especially the case with people who were able to manage their earnings well. A good example is one Mr. James Njoku who started his career in Lever Brothers in Lagos in 1931 and retired from the Aba factory in 1963. He succeeded, through good management of his earnings, in training his children through secondary schools. A few went further to tertiary institutions. Among these is his only son Mr. Damian Njoku who is today a management staff of the Aba Lever Brothers. In addition to training his children, Mr. James Njoku also succeeded in putting up a building at Cemetery Road, in the Over Rail area of Aba.<sup>58</sup>

The writer's father provides another good testimony of the impact Lever Brothers had on the growth of some of its workers and hence Aba town. Having been recruited as a labourer in Lagos, C.A. Obiegbu through hard work and some education acquired through night schools rose up to the rank of production supervisor, retiring after 35 years of service in 1977. Obiegbu through good management of his earnings and some luck, succeeded in training all his seven

children through the secondary school and six through the university as the 7th preferred a life in business. In addition, he was able to build three houses in Aba, one of which provided accommodation for him and his family while the other two were rented out to tenants.<sup>59</sup> The point therefore is that in contributing to the growth of its individual workers and residents in Aba, Lever Brothers also contributed to the growth of the town.

Perhaps the greatest impact Lever Brothers made to the growth of Aba was in the area of business opportunities it created and of course the physical and financial benefits which the town gained from such business. The first major area of business growth was in the palm produce trade. This is hardly surprising since the presence of palm produce was one of the main reasons why the factory was sited in Aba. We already saw the important role palm oil trade had played prior to the establishment of the factory. The coming of the company brought new opportunities because of its large demand for palm produce and the good prices it offered to the traders and agents. It engaged several agents and suppliers. Among these, the most notable ones were Mr. M.U. Ekpo from Abak, Utuk Brothers from Uyo, Ugorji Eke from Aba and Nnana Kalu also from Aba.<sup>60</sup> These men employed labourers and workers who went into remote villages and bought palm produce from local producers. Arrangements were also reached with producers whereby many brought their produce to the buying depots of Lever Brothers' agents. After buying large quantities, these major agents subsequently supplied them to the company. The prices at which the company bought palm oil ranged from £150 to £250 per ton.<sup>61</sup> The first thing to note therefore is that the company provided employment and wealth to many through increased activity in the produce trade, earnings which helped those involved in particular and the general growth of the town in general.

More important however was the fact that in the process of produce buying, the company helped in creating a few capitalists and entrepreneurs in Aba.<sup>62</sup> Chiefs Ugorji Eke and Nnana Kalu earned enough money to diversify into other fields. Chief Nnana Kalu in particular put in a lot of his earnings into the stockfish and "Okirika" trades both of which boomed in Aba in the 1950s. He was in fact the main merchant that had the capital needed to import large bales for smaller traders to buy for retail. Given the roles these two traders played in the growth of Aba as would be seen later, the impact of Lever Brothers which played a significant role in creating these entrepreneur can best be appreciated.

Also, both Nnana Kalu and Ugorji Eke developed transport companies that helped in the transportation of goods, services and persons in Aba. Ugorji Eke in particular would seem to have devoted his earnings more to transport service than to trade. Indeed even after the Nigerian Civil War, motor vehicles of Ugorji Eke transport could still be seen on Aba roads.

Significant also was the investment of the men in Real Estate development in Aba. Both men and other agents of Lever Brothers bought and developed land in the urban area. Ugorji Eke for instance, developed so many houses along the Ngwa road section of the town from which he earned income and provided accommodation for the people. Nnana Kalu bought land and built houses in several parts of the town including over-rail section of the town.<sup>63</sup> This is not to mention the houses that may have been built by numerous workers of Lever Brothers. All these contributed not only in the physical development of the town, but also in providing accommodation to people.



The products from Lever Brothers factory were also important. They provided trading goods for both distributors and retailers in Aba. A notable example is one Mr. E. Ogbonna who succeeded in training his children and building a house through the selling of Lever Brothers products.<sup>64</sup> Also many residents because of their proximity to the company had regular supplies of the various products of the company on sale in the market. Many of these products helped in ensuring their good health through their constant bathing with the soaps and the consumption of others like margarine.

Another impact of Lever Brothers on the growth of Aba is in the area of provision of utilities for Aba residents, particularly water supply. In the process of its development, Lever Brothers pumped its water supply initially from Aba River and later from boreholes it sunk on its premises. During serious periods of water shortage in Aba, the company often brought out pipes with which it supplied water to residents and businesses located around its premises. In this way, it contributed to business growth and the welfare of the residents.

Yet it must be added that despite these contributions, Lever Brothers, given its potentials, certainly ought to have done more towards the growth of Aba. It could have made itself a better corporate citizen through a number of efforts. In the first place, it could have contributed to the general housing situation in the town if it had built houses for the accommodation of its own staff. Such an effort would have helped in improving the physical outlook of the town as well as in reducing accommodation problems. It would have also set a good example for in-coming companies to follow.

Secondly, Aba for much of the period covered by this study had problems of road and drainage development. A company such as Lever Brothers could have made itself a better corporate citizen by

helping the Regional government and the Urban District Council in the provision of roads and drainage, even if it were only in the Factory Road location of its premises. Available evidence however indicates that this was not done by Lever Brothers.

Furthermore, the Aba Lever Brothers did not in our period make any effort to modernize the production of palm produce, its main raw material, through the introduction of improved oil palm seedlings. Even though the government refused to license the establishment of oil palm estates then, one would have expected a company like that to establish palm nurseries which would have introduced improved palm seedlings to the local people, as well as help in educating them on modern farming practices. Similarly, the company did not see the wisdom of establishing a palm nut processing mill which would have drastically reduced drugery and increased the local people's production, and hence wealth from palm produce. No doubt if Lever Brothers had engaged in these efforts, its contribution to the growth of Aba would have been greater.

#### Nigerian Breweries Limited, Aba

The Aba factory of Nigerian Breweries was one of the two the company set up in Nigeria by 1960.<sup>65</sup> The idea for the establishment of the company was that of a former Managing Director of the U.A.C., the late Sir Franz Samuel,<sup>66</sup> who was attracted to the idea by the potentials of huge profits for his company. Before 1946 when beer brewing began in Nigeria, all the beer that was consumed in the country was imported by the U.A.C., John Holt, Paterson Zochonis, G.B. Olivant, S.C.O.A. and C.F.A.O. Originally, they imported their stock from the United Kingdom. But a combination of shipping space problems and distance, which subsequently affected their cost margin negatively even in the face of increasing demand, forced the

companies to begin a search for cheaper sources from which they could import their stock. By 1941, this search had led to a recourse to importation from the Congo. This source was both nearer and cheaper. But the problem with this source was one of limited production capacity and shortage of raw materials,<sup>67</sup> particularly, empty bottles and packaging materials. But despite these problems, the Congo was said to be supplying 20,000 cases of beer to Nigeria by December 1941. Yet the problem of cost margins and profit remained, this time caused mainly by the high level of breakages caused by poor packaging materials. It was this problem that saw the price of beer rising from 1s: 0 1/2d to 2s: 6d per bottle by the end of December 1942.<sup>68</sup> Given this problem of poor supply and high cost of beer, it was no surprise that concerned interests began to call for the establishment of a brewery in Nigeria, a concern which was voiced by the February 11, 1943 editorial opinion of the West African Pilot.<sup>69</sup>

But in the end, it was economic and profit realities rather than nationalistic sentiments that moved the United Africa Company, the largest importer of beer into taking steps towards establishing a brewery in Nigeria. War time difficulties meant that importation of beer regularly became more difficult. Also the U.A.C. feared that other interests might begin brewing in Nigeria, a development which would cut off their market. This fear was justified especially when one considers the fact that the Belgians were already producing beer in Ghana and the Congo.

Thus moved by the increasing demand for beer, aware of the increasing problems of supply and conscious of the profit opportunities the industry presented if developed, the U.A.C. initiated a drive for partnership towards establishing a brewery in Nigeria. In this regard, it got the support of several other foreign trading companies: G.B. Olivant, John Holt, S.C.O.A., C.F.A.O., U.T.C., P.Z. and

Messrs. Heineken.<sup>70</sup> The Company was subsequently incorporated in Lagos in 1946 with an initial capital of £300,000.<sup>71</sup> With the incorporation completed, the U.A.C. through its subsidiary Millers Swanzy became the managing agents while the Dutch Company Heineken's Brewery became technical advisers. With the necessary material and equipment ordered from Europe, especially the United Kingdom, construction work by the British company Taylor Woodrow began in May 1947 and by 1949, all installations had been completed.<sup>72</sup>

The initial output of the company on take off in 1949 was 6,000 cases of 4 dozen bottles of lager beer a month.<sup>73</sup> This production figure was very low when compared to the quantity hitherto imported and the company made slow progress in the first two years because of consumer attachment to imported brands of beer. But by 1953, it had overcome this problem as increasing demand began to expose the need for expansion. The production figure was unable to serve the entire country, and the company also found out that several inland areas where demand was growing were not receiving supplies, partly because of logistical and transport problems. Thus while expansion began in 1953 on the Iganmu factory, the company also initiated plans for building another factory outside Lagos.

The place chosen by Nigerian Breweries for this expansion outside Lagos was Aba. This choice was informed more by the commercial viability of the area than the presence of raw materials. Another important reason for the choice was Aba's geographical location. It was located in a thickly populated centre where there was wealth from produce trade and other businesses; where there existed a good transportation system and where it would serve the Igbo heartland as well as peoples of the Rivers and Cross River areas. More importantly, Aba was seen by the Company as an important link

between the South and the North-Eastern Regions of the country both commercially and demographically.<sup>74</sup>

The Aba factory was built at Factory Road which was originally a palm belt of the Ngwa. The land was said to have been acquired from Chief Ogbonna of Eziukwu by the U.A.C. and its partners,<sup>75</sup> though obviously with the approval of the Urban District Council. Actual construction of the factory began in 1955.<sup>76</sup> While the British company Taylor Woodrow built the administrative section of the factory, the plant room was undertaken by Messrs. Richard Costain Ltd.<sup>77</sup> During the construction, large amount of labour was used. There were about 15 expatriates and numerous Africans from various places. Many of the labourers were later absorbed as pioneer staff of the factory. While the exact amount paid to the expatriate construction workers was unknown, most African workers on the construction site were paid daily wages of between 1/- and 3/-6d.<sup>78</sup> After about 3 years of construction and installation, the factory was ready for production in 1959.<sup>79</sup>

Production started with about 500 employees.<sup>80</sup> As already noted, many of them were part of the construction crew and were already trained on the job. Several others particularly, the skilled staff were recruited in Lagos, trained and sent down to Aba at the inception of production. For instance one of my informants, Mr. Herbert Ndulagu, said that he and three others: Joshua Onwumere, Bernard Oleru and Fidelis Mba, were employed in Lagos and trained there as Brew-House operators for six months.<sup>81</sup> After their training, they were sent to Aba while the new Aba Brewery was being constructed. At first, they were attached to the spare parts store. When the brewery was completed, they were moved to the Brew-House as operators under one Mr. Paff, the Brew-House Manager who served until 1960 and Mr. Copmans who worked till 1966.

Brewing began in the factory on March 18, 1957<sup>82</sup> while bottling began a month later. This was because bottling was usually done 28 days after brewing. The Only beer produced in Aba at that time was Star Beer. The factory however produced a range of mineral waters also. These were Tango, Corolla, Tonic water and Soda water. In general, the quantity of drinks produced then was small. For instance, only about 1,000 hectolitres of beer was produced in the early days of the company.<sup>83</sup>

With regards to the materials used in the production process, we have already noted that these were largely procured from outside Aba. Indeed nearly all the raw materials with the exception of water and bottles were imported. The main raw material malt was imported from Holland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and in smaller quantities from Britain. Hops, another important raw material was imported mainly from Austria, but also from the United Kingdom and the United States. It was usually baled and carried in ships' cold rooms. Sugar was imported from the United Kingdom while yeast cultures were imported from Holland. For the mineral water, the main raw materials were sugar and syrup which were also imported. Sugar was of course, imported from the United Kingdom while syrup was imported from Holland. Water of course was got from the Aba River. All the imported materials came into Aba through the Port Harcourt Harbour and the Eastern Railway line.

As for the bottles used in bottling the drinks, the original ones were imported. But in the course of time, a return bottle policy was introduced by the company. This policy became necessary because unlike the situation today, those who bought drinks then usually bought it with the bottles as most people had no bottles to exchange for drinks. After drinking, the empty bottles were either kept by the

customer or sold to bottle agents or men who went around the town buying them.<sup>84</sup> The agents subsequently re-sold the bottles to the company which then used them to bottle new drinks. In the period covered by the study, all the drinks were packed in wooden cases.<sup>85</sup>

Two main methods were used for selling or distributing the drinks produced by the Aba factory of the Nigerian Breweries during the period. The first was through the foreign trading companies such as U.A.C., John Holt, G.B. Olivant and Paterson Zochonis. The second was through individuals who acted as major distributors. Eight distributors were appointed in the former Eastern Region. These were Messrs. John Mokwe and J. Nwafor, both of which were based in Aba, Messrs. U.U. Etuk who was based in Uyo, Mr. C.C. Akpanudo who was based in Ikot Ekpene, Ngumoha in Owerri, Mr. R.U. Okafor in Enugu, Mr. C.U. Dappa in Port Harcourt and Mr. Jude U. Oparah who was based in Umuahia.<sup>86</sup> These were the major distributors of the products of the Aba factory from 1957 when production started to the end of our period in 1960.

With regards to the conditions of service of the workers, we had earlier referred to their working schedule as well as the fact that they also enjoyed overtime allowances. In addition, the company provided subsidized feeding to the workers in the company canteen. The company also took charge of the health of its workers but this was not extended to members of the workers' families. Rather than run its own clinic, the company up to 1960, made use of the Aba General Hospital, paying for the full treatment of its workers. The company staff also enjoyed paid leave during which they had time for their private businesses or farming. The company always gave end of year parties to its staff and their children during which food was lavishly served. It also paid end of year bonus or 13th month salary to its staff.

### Impact of Nigerian Breweries on the Growth of Aba

The first major impact the Nigerian Breweries had on the growth of Aba was in population growth and the creation of employment opportunities. As noted earlier, the construction of the factory began in 1954 and did not end until April, 1957. Informants point out that more than 400 people migrated into the town to work at the construction site. Some workers who had earlier been recruited in Lagos for training as skilled workers in the Engineering, Brew-House and other sections were moved to Aba during and on completion of the construction. Nearly all the construction workers were also converted to permanent staff. In all about 500 workers were available in the early years of production.

The point to note is that these workers did not just increase the population through their presence and that of their extended families. But more importantly, they created a market for the flourishing of small businesses around the factory. Thus, we had female residents who brought oranges, bananas, groundnuts, akara, rice, beans, gari and other foods. The men on the other hand, brought palm wine and local gin which they sold also to the workers. All these provided the sellers cash with which they bought their requirements and thus improved standard of living.

More important was the contribution of the company to the growth of indigenous enterprises in the town. This was achieved through two main areas - supplying of materials to the company as well as the sale and distribution of the company's products. A good example was the supply of empty bottles for the company's production. As we noted earlier, bottles and water were the only items that were not imported.<sup>87</sup> Bottles were bought on second hand basis through a series of bottle agents and this was a significant area of



business for many young men in Aba before the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War.<sup>88</sup> The arrangement worked out this way: About seven bottle agents were appointed as the main suppliers. These people employed sub-agents who in turn employed numerous young men who went about the town buying up bottles of other imported brands. Usually, "an agent receives a fixed sum per dozen bottles plus a commission which varies not only with his own deliveries but also with those of all agents taken together."<sup>89</sup> This formula encouraged agents to compete and collaborate. Only 65 centilitre standard shoulder-neck bottles were accepted. Through this means, the Aba Breweries acquired the bottles it needed for its production. It is in fact, said that, Nigerian Breweries as a whole bought in excess of 50,000 bottles a day through this process.<sup>90</sup>

Africans were also agents in the buying of other second hand goods on which the Brewery depended for its packaging. These were packing cases which in the earlier stages of production cost as less as 6 shillings per case than new cases; straw also used for packing which was bought at a quarter of the price of new straw.<sup>91</sup> All these supply needs of the company created business opportunities for the people of Aba.

In addition, the ingenious use of second hand materials enabled the Brewery to produce at prices less than those of imported brands of beer. This explains why in the 1950s, a case of Star Beer could be bought for 72 shillings as against 100 shillings for imported brands.<sup>92</sup> This made for increased patronage of the company's products and hence increased productivity. Indeed, it was this increasingly high production during the period that explains why there was always a shortage of packaging materials for the company's production which in turn created jobs for suppliers. The increased production of course, continued to create employment opportunities for the people.

The Brewery also provided business opportunities to other Aba residents who were engaged as suppliers of various non-production process items needed by the company. For instance, in the company's food canteen, some Aba residents were given the contract of supplying raw foodstuffs. The major supplier was one Mr. Theophilus U. Ogoji. In the case of factory dresses for workers, the major supplier was one Mr. Efanga a native of Eket in the present Akwa Ibom State who was based in Aba. From 1959, the company usually supplied him with clothing materials which he sewed on contract for the production and technical staff. It is significant to note that as recent as 1979 when this writer was a staff of Nigerian Breweries Aba, Mr. Efanga was still performing this task for the company. It was from this contract work with Nigerian Breweries that Mr. Efanga trained all his children and built houses including one located at Hospital Road, Aba.

It was perhaps in the distribution of the company's products that Aba gained most from the company. This was because the business contributed in creating the first entrepreneurial class in Aba. The distributors were provided with capital and logistical support with which they started their own businesses. In the course of time, many of them emerged from the business with enough capital to diversify into other businesses particularly public transportation. We have already identified the major distributors. Messrs. John Mokwe and John Nwafor employed numerous residents in their beer and transportation business. Indeed, these men became prosperous enough to build numerous houses in Aba particularly at Milverton Avenue and Hospital Road. Even today, Messrs. John Mokwe and John Nwafor are still the major distributors of Nigerian Breweries in Aba.<sup>93</sup>

Also significant was the impact of Nigerian Breweries in the training of manpower that later played important roles in the growth

of Aba. This training involved not only the company's staff but also their children. The company had a policy whereby selective scholarship was given to company staff's children. Through this opportunity, many parents were able to train their children through the secondary school. Also trained were staff members either on their jobs, or overseas for specialized skills. In the area of junior and intermediate staff training, the author knows some of the technicians who worked for the company either during construction or in the engineering department that later successfully set up private businesses in Aba. A good example is one Mr. Hyginus Anozie aka. Ogbearige who for about 10 years now, has been managing a small engineering firm which specializes in the making of iron gates, window burglar proofing, hospital beds and stands and small agricultural equipment, employing both full time workers and apprentices.

In the senior cadre, the company trained some of its workers, a few of them benefiting from overseas training. For example, Messrs. Chigbo and C.O. Njemanze, two brewers were sent to Edinburgh Scotland in 1964. Many of these skilled personnel made, and are still making significant contributions, not only in the growth of Aba, but also Nigeria. A good example is Mr. Njemanze who set up a Brewery in Arondizogu after his retirement from Nigerian Breweries.

It was however not all positive stories from Nigerian Breweries. The company certainly could have done more. In the first place, like Lever Brothers, it did not make efforts to be a good corporate citizen in Aba during the period.

It did not develop housing estates complete with utilities for its workers. An effort in this direction would have helped the housing needs of the town. Secondly, the company did not support the urban

administration in the development of roads. An action in this direction, even if it affected only the access roads to the factory would have helped the general road situation in the town. Thirdly, in restricting health care only to their workers but not their families, the company practicalized what is already well known about foreign concerns: "invest the much that would allow you reap the most". The company would certainly have been a better corporate citizen if it had provided health care to the families of its workers as this would have reduced pressure on other public health facilities.

More importantly, the company did not encourage backward linkages through the production of some of its raw materials in the Aba area, a phenomenon which would have created new jobs in addition to having numerous economic effects.

### Conclusion

By way of concluding the entire chapter, we need to note that foreign companies, both trading and manufacturing, played very stimulating roles in the growth of Aba, roles that cannot easily be ignored even by their worst critics. They brought in some capital, European goods, equipment and services and most importantly ideas and expertise. They encouraged the growth of many indigenous trades particularly those that served their interest. Yet in so doing, they inadvertently contributed to growth. They created and provided employment in various forms. In so doing they created wealth, opened up opportunities and increased population. All these fostered the growth of Aba.

Yet it must be said that all foreign companies that operated in Aba could certainly have done more if they had wished to. Unfortunately, they were not interested in creating competitors or

rivals out of the local people. Their main interest was profit and it was that word that dictated their activities. In order to achieve adequate profit margins, many engaged in activities that were unbecoming of a corporate concern. Very few Africans were given opportunities to rise to challenging positions. Very few were given adequate training and even fewer were supported enough to rise to the position of big merchants and entrepreneurs. Thus, their overall role in the growth of Aba was dual—the positive and the negative. As in other places, the debate continues as to which one should be accorded a higher status. One thing is however clear,\* Aba could not have grown in the way it did and as fast as it did were it not for the contribution<sup>s</sup> of foreign companies, and any meaningful study of Aba's growth must accord their contribution<sup>s</sup> a significant place.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

## Notes

1. N.A.I. CSO 26 03906, 'Quarterly Reports, Owerri Province', 1921—22. P.3
2. J. Mars, 'Extra-Territorial Enterprises' in Margery Perham (ed.), Mining, Commerce, and Finance in Nigeria, London, n.d. PP. 58-59
3. U.A.C. engaged in plantation manufacture shipping and trading while John Holt engaged only in shipping and trading. See Ibid. P.51
4. Dating back to the period of the Royal Niger Company, Taubman Goldie introduced the Policy of non-keeping of records. This was obviously informed by the nature of exploitative activities the U.A.C. was engaged in. Other writers such as John Mars who wrote in the 1940s also noted the problem. See Ibid.
5. The peculiar case of John Holt was lamented by Mars in his write up. John Holt was a family business which by 1940s was in the third generation of its existence and had been established in West Africa for over 90 years. In the period, all the directors and all the shares of the company were held by the Holt family. See Ibid.
6. J.E. Flint, Goddie and the Making of Nigeria, London, 1960
7. A.M. Osineye, 'A History of the United Africa Company Nigeria Limited, 1929—1960', (B.A. History, Ogun State University) 1989. P.16
8. See Robert Shenton, 'The London and Kano Papers—An Introduction' in Bawuro M. Barkindo (ed.) Studies in the History of Kano, Kano, 1983. P.192
9. An Extensive Story of the events leading to the merger of U.A.C. has been told by Mas. See J. Mas, Op. cit. PP.60-63. See also West Africa Magazine, Vol. 29, January 13, 1945.
10. W.J. Reader, The Early Years, London, 1980. P.1 Cited in O.K. Odunjo, A History of Lever Brothers Nigeria Limited, 1923 - 1987. B.A. History, Ogun State University, 1989. P.3.11. In 1920, Lever Brothers bought the Niger Company at a cost of £8,500,000 the shares being bought at 6.5 times their normal value - See J. Mars, Op. Cit., P.61.

11. In 1920, Lever Brothers bought the Niger Company at a cost of £8,500,000, the shares being bought at 6.5 times their normal value - See J. Mars, Op. Cit., P61.
12. Other Eastern branches of the company included Oguta, Onitsha, Port Harcourt, Abonema, Akassa, Imo River, Mbawsi, Umuahia, Enugu, Ikot Ekpene, Eket, Opobo, Itu, Calabar, Ozubulu, Mamfe, Victoria, JoinKrama and Kreigani. As the names would indicate some of these towns are now in Cameroon. See Eastern States Express, Vol. 2, Aba April 26, 1951. P.4.
13. N.A.I. CSO 26, 'Annual Report, Owerri Province', 1929. P.49.
14. The U.A.C. had in fact stopped buying produce directly from African traders since 1942 when it (U.A.C.) became an agent of the West African Produce Board.
15. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/152, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', September 1950 - October 1951. Para. 4.
16. See the early part of Chapter III for discussion on produce trade.
17. See Membership of the Township Advisory Board in 'Minutes of its meeting', Abadist 8/12/1 17th February 1930.
18. See the lead report 'Man in £604 debt wants to pay £1 monthly instalment' in Eastern States Express Vol. 2, Aba April 11, 1951. P.1.
19. Ibid.
20. The effects of the Second World War, particularly as regards the shortage of essential items such as salt has been discussed in Chapter III.
21. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/493, 'Handing-Over Notes P.F. Grant, Local Authority, Aba to C.L. Walker, Local Authority Aba 1944'. P.268.
22. Eastern States Express Vol. 2, Aba April 9, 1951. P.1.
23. Eastern States Express Vol. 1, Aba March 6, 1951. P.4.
24. Elizabeth Isichei, A History of Nigeria, London, 1983. P.430.

25. There were numerous examples of this during our period some involving even Other companies like John Holt. The best example of course, was the case of Mr. Ezuma whom U.A.C. sued to recoup £604: 12s... 5d. The example of Mr. Simbi Wellington is also cited later as it is a good demonstration of the point.
26. Eastern States Express Vol. 2, Aba July 27, , 1951. P.3.
27. Eastern States Express Vol. 2, Aba August 9, 1951. P.1.
28. Ibid.
29. Eastern States Express Vol. 2, Aba June 1, 1951. P.2.
30. Peter Kilby, Industrialization in an Open Economy, Nigeria 1945 - 1966. Cambridge, 1966. P.61.
31. Ibid. Many of these companies eventually grew to become large companies. A very good example is A.G. Leventis. For more on the company, see M.O. Adeyeye, 'A History of A.G. Leventis and Company (Nigeria) Limited 1943 - 1988', B.A. History Ogun State University, 1989.
32. Peter Kilby, Op.cit., P.62.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., P.63
35. The United Africa Company, Statistical and Economic Review, N<sup>o</sup> 28. April 1963. PP.3., 15. and 16. Cited in Ibid., P.57
36. H.S. Harteg, UniLever in Today's Society. London, 1970. P.15  
William Lever was later Knighted and became known as Lord Leverhelm.
37. W.J. Reader, Fifty years of UniLever, 1930 - 1980. London, 1980. P.7. Cited in O.K. Odunjo, Op. Cit., P.3.
38. There is some confusion as to the exact date when Lever Brother began operations in Apapa. Oral sources in Aba put the date at 1922. Odunjo puts it at 1923 while J. Mars puts it at 1924. See O.K. Odunjo, Op. Cit., P.3; J. Mars, Op. Cit., P.60, footnote 2. These dates are however



not irreconcilable considering the time it takes between the initiation of a company and the actual starting off of operations. It is probable that the initiative began in 1922/23 but actual operations took off in 1924 when the factory was commissioned.

39. See O.K. Odunjo Op. Cit., P.4.
40. J. Mars Op. Cit., P.60, footnote 2. See also D. Orr and H.F. Hoven, UniLever Management in a Changing World. London, 1979. P.31.
41. O.K. Odunjo, Op.Cit., P.12.
42. L.B.N. Progress File Report, 1980. P.4
43. O.K. Odunjo, Op. Cit., P.14.
44. C.Wilson, The History of UniLever, London, 1970. P.18. Cited in Ibid., P.16.
45. The effects the Civil War had on Lever Brothers is treated in Chapter VII.
46. W. Ernest, UniLever and World Development, London, 1973. P.20.
47. L.B.N. Progress File Report, 1960. P.14.
48. O.K. Odunjo, Op. Cit., P.15.
49. Ibid., Interview with Mazi C.A. Obiegbu, 68 years, Uzoagba Ikeduru October 21, 1989.
50. Interview with Mazi Obiegbu October 21, 1989
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. O.K. Odunjo, Op. Cit., P.16. Also Interview with Mazi Obiegbu, October 21, 1989.
54. Interview with Mazi Obiegbu, October 21, 1989.
55. Ibid.

56. Ibid
57. Ibid. Also interview with Mr. Celestine Ndulagu, 60 years, Uzoagba, Ikeduru, December 18, 1988.
58. Interview with Mazi C.A. Obiegbu, October 21, 1989.
59. These houses are still being occupied by tenants. The author is in fact an eyewitness.
60. Nnana Kalu is one of the biggest merchants/industrialists in Aba today.
61. Ibid.
62. A good example is Chief Nnana Kalu who established the largest paper mill in the former Eastern Region—the Star Paper Mill which has factories in Aba and Owerrinta.
63. As a secondary school student in the early/mid 1970s, the author was one of the many in Aba who used to admire some of his houses at Ekenna Avenue/Okigwe Road in the Over-Rail Section of Aba.
64. Interview with Mazi E. Ogonna, 65 years, Aba, December 24, 1987.
65. The Nigerian Breweries now has 4 factories in Nigeria the first two are mentioned in the essay, the remaining two being located at Kaduna and Ibadan. Its Ibadan Brewery opened in 1982 is in fact the largest Brewery in West Africa.
66. B. Cole, The Brewing Industry in Nigeria, 'A Case Study of Guinness Nigeria Limited'. (B.A. Essay, University of Lagos) June 1988.
67. The Congo Brewery reached an agreement with the U.A.C. whereby the U.A.C. supplied it empty bottles while the U.A.C. in return bought bottled supplies for the Nigerian market.
68. N.A.I. DCI 1/1 4041/514 Vol. II, 'Internal Supply and distribution of beer.'
69. West African Pilot, 'Local Brewery', 11/2/1943 cited in K. Banjo, 'A History of Nigerian Breweries Limited 1949 - 1989' (B.A. History, Ogun State University 1990). P.4.

70. T. Denne, 'History of Nigerian Breweries, 1949 - 1984', Also interview with Mr. Herbert Ndulagu, 50 years, Uzoagba, Ikeduru, August, 1987. See also West Africa Magazine, 'Using Four million Second-Hand Bottles', January 24, 1953. P.67; hereinafter: Using Four million Second-Hand Bottles.
71. West Africa Magazine, 'Nigerian Breweries Success', September 10, 1960. P.1033; hereinafter: Nigerian Breweries Success - - -
72. Using Four Million Second-Hand Bottles - - - P.67.
73. Ibid.
74. K. Banjo, Op. Cit., P.17. Lever Brothers and a similar reason for siting their factory in Aba. Oral interviews also support the position.
75. Interview with Mr. Herbert Ndulagu already cited. Evidence is unavailable as regards the amount the company paid to the Chiefs and the Urban District Council for the land.
76. As was the case with Lever Brothers, there is some disagreement as to the exact time construction started. Some sources say 1954, others say 1955. Both sources however agree that the factory started production in 1957.
77. Interview with Mr. Herbert Ndulagu already cited.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid. This date was also confirmed by all the other sources I used.
80. Babara Callaway: 'Confusion and Diffusion in Local Government, A Case Study of Aba' (Ph.D. Thesis Boston, 1970). P.231.
81. Interview with Mr. Herbert Ndulagu already cited.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. As a young boy in Aba in the early 1960s, the author often saw men who went around shouting 'bottles' apparently a call for people to bring out their bottles for sale. We often used to make fun of the men whenever we saw them by shouting back at them 'bottles.

- 85: Wooden cases were replaced in the 1960s when supplies of fibre board cartons became available in Nigeria.
86. Interview with Mr. Herbert Ndulagu already cited.
87. Using Four Million Second-Hand Bottles - - - P.67.
88. The experience of the author with regards to this business has already been referred to see note 84.
89. Using Four Million Second-Hand Bottles - - -. P.67.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. The author is personally aware of this, having worked in Nigerian Breweries Aba between 1977 - 1979 and still frequently visits Aba.

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## CHAPTER VI

### INDIGENOUS ENTERPRISES AND THE GROWTH OF ABA

#### Introduction

In the preceding Chapter, we have been able to show the changing demographic situation as Aba continued to grow. Thus, over time, Aba became a town of people with various professional and cultural backgrounds notably: (i) Service personnel - soldiers, policemen and prison warders; (ii) Civilians - Ngwa and non-Ngwa Igbo, Saro, Yoruba, Hausa and peoples from the Cross River area among others. The aim of this chapter is to show the contribution of the different populations in meeting the needs of Aba residents, and thus attracting more population into the town, expanding prosperity and more opportunities for trade and services. It is the various businesses, including manufacturing and the provision of services, by this African population that is referred to here as 'indigenous enterprise'.

It is necessary to examine the role of local enterprises for two main reasons. First it helps to correct a certain imbalance in the literature on urbanization which when cities have grown, has tended to emphasize the role of certain major factors like the railways, roads and large multinational companies which are external, to the neglect of the role of indigenous enterprises.

Secondly, the Aba situation shows that such neglect leads to an incomplete, if not a distorted picture of the various elements that made for the growth of the town. Indeed in the opinion of many local people, Aba grew to become "Eyimba City" mainly because of the role played by

various small indigenous enterprises several of which reached the booming stage in the late 1940s through the 1950s. Such enterprises are still the backbone of Aba's economy at the time of writing (1991) and indeed responsible for manufactures popularly referred to in Nigeria and the rest of West Africa as "Aba made". In fact, it is in recognition of their significant roles that Aba was recently referred to by an influential West African Business Magazine as "Africa's emerging Japan".<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, in the growth of Aba, the African population has not been dormant and unresponsive. The various enterprises in which they engaged helped to bring many more people to the city, created employment, created wealth, introduced skills and, above all, changed the physical outlook of the town. To facilitate our appreciation of how this happened, it is necessary to examine sequentially the different categories of enterprises, namely agriculture/food production, manufacturing enterprises, trading enterprises and provision of various services.

#### Agriculture/food Production:1900-1945

It is common knowledge that food is one of the necessities of life and without it, humanity cannot meaningfully engage in other life endeavours. This is why agriculture occupies a very important place in Nigeria; it is in fact the mainstay of the economy, accounting for 55 per cent of the Gross National Product in 1966.<sup>2</sup>

During the colonial period, many residents in Aba were interested in agriculture for various reasons. First was the desire of some residents to produce their own food. This was particularly the case with low income workers and the unemployed residents especially house-wives

who saw farming as an important way of helping to provide food for the family. The involvement of the unemployed in agriculture and food production in Aba was significant. Before 1945, the problem of unemployment was restricted mainly to the numerous immigrants who flocked to the town in search of jobs. From 1945, this group was joined by many ex-servicemen who returned with great hopes for employment that, the colonial government would find them jobs. Agriculture was often their only available life-line.

One important factor was the availability in the Aba area of good fertile land for agriculture. Even though agriculture was not a priority of the early planners, Aba town residents were able to engage in gardening in the open spaces and undeveloped areas in the immediate vicinity of their residential houses and compounds. Those interested in farming on a large scale usually went to the neighbouring Ngwa to request for land outside the urban area in return for token cash or such other gifts as hot drinks. A few residents were able to buy land outright. Such residents saw farming not just as a way of providing food for the family, but as a business enterprise from which they could make profit.

The ready availability of labour needed for gardening and other forms of agricultural practice was an added factor. While family labour was usually available for gardening, there were numerous unemployed hands, particularly those from the Cross River area who were available for hire as casual labourers or otherwise in the larger agricultural enterprises.

Agricultural enterprises in Aba were during the period of study organized in various ways. The determining factor was often the nature and scope of the particular enterprise. In the case of gardening which

was the predominant type within the township, women and their adolescent children were the principal producers. This was so because it was the women who had the time to devote to farming since the vast majority were not in formal employment (public or private), being in the main house-wives or petty traders or both. Even so, men did participate especially in the evening by which time they would have returned from their usual places of work. Though there was division of labour along sex lines, yet there was considerable overlap in roles. Thus while women, their house-helpers and children were in charge of the cropping and weeding, the men were responsible for tending the shoots of yams by mounting them on appropriate stakes or trees. The harvesting aspect was more generalized. However, men were usually in charge of the harvesting of yams, while the women concentrated more on cocoyam, maize, cassava, melon, okra, pepper and different types of vegetables.

When we come to the larger farming enterprises done in the neighbouring Ngwa areas, the organization was different. It did not depend on family labour though this was often very useful in the business. The enterprise was usually headed by the man floating it. It was he who negotiated for the land, labour and capital necessary for the business to take off. Capital was either from his personal savings or advanced by relatives. Labour as noted earlier was hired from among the several unemployed who frequently drifted into the town in search of jobs. In most cases too, it was hired labourers who did the harvesting and processing of the yields.

In both examples given above, no formal apprenticeship developed. However as would be expected, the younger members of the family, in the case of gardening, learnt the basics of farming which naturally helped them in subsequent years. As for the hired labourers in



the second case, their main interest was the wage they earned from their labour. This was also the case with their employers whose main concern was the amount of work done by the labourers on his farm. Thus even though the workers must have gained some experience in the aspects of farming they worked on, there was no laid out plan for apprenticeship. In spite of the absence of a formalized apprenticeship however, there is no doubt that the experience of the workers helped them in their future endeavours.

Agricultural activities especially gardening were fairly widespread in Aba town in the period up to about 1950. This fact was testified to by informants. Thus even though a 1953 occupational survey in Aba listed only 572 persons as those engaged in agriculture and fishing, we believe the figure refers only to those who were professional farmers and fishermen. We can assume that most Aba households engaged in gardening.

Perhaps to be added here are some aspects of animal husbandry, such as poultry keeping. Many residents kept chickens in their houses. Similarly, residents who lived on the banks of the Aza River, particularly Bonny and Opobo settlers, as well as some Ngwa, engaged in fishing on the River. Though many were professional fishermen, we do not have evidence of any of them who ran a large scale fishing business. What seemed to have happened was that after taking the portion needed for subsistence, the excess was sold to fish traders who ended up having reasonable quantities for sale since they bought from many fishermen.

An example of large scale farming is provided by a man called D.D. Onyemelukwe, a native of Onitsha. He was said to have acquired a large plot of land in the rural Ngwa area specifically for large scale cassava

farming. Every farming season, he hired several labourers in the town, gave them farming implements and deployed them to farm for him. At the end of every harvest, the harvested cassava was taken to the Ngwa Road section of the town (Ama Mmogho) where it was made into gari by Annang and Ibibio people contracted for that purpose.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Onyemelukwe made a fortune from this enterprise which he used to subsequently diversify into building contract work and motor transportation business. He became one of the richest men in colonial Aba with buildings in different parts of the town.

The second example concerns an effort at large scale animal husbandry which involved a World War II ex-serviceman called Mr. F.K. Ockiya whose efforts are well documented. After his discharge, Mr. Ockiya sought in vain for public or private employment. He "decided to embark on self-help - - - in order to provide himself employment as well as employ his fellow ex-servicemen". To achieve this goal, he started a small piggery relying on funds saved from his benefits after demobilization.<sup>4</sup> But this sum was inadequate for the business which nearly collapsed by the late 1940s on this account. To overcome this problem, he applied to the Nigerian Ex-servicemen Welfare Association (N.E.W.A) in 1948 for financial support. The application was successful. He was given a loan of £100 with which he saved his piggery from collapse and even expanded its scope; raising mainly imported English pigs. Within two years, he had paid 50 per cent of the loan, but he was in dire need of additional financial support to keep the business at a level that would meet the increasing demand for pork supplies by Aba residents (both Africans and Europeans) and others elsewhere in the Eastern Region.

Consequently, on 6 February 1950, Ockiya applied to the Eastern Nigeria Development Corporation for a loan of £1,000 for the expansion of his piggery to which he now proposed to add poultry and extensive gardening. Details of the estimate of the application are shown below:

Item	Estimated Cost (in £)
Building of a solid pig's sty	£600
Two poultry buildings	£60
Incubator	£40
Workmen Assistants per annum	£36
Watchnight (Night Guards)	£24
Labourers at 1/- 6d per day per annum	£162
Running expenditure (Overhead expenses)	<u>£78</u>
Total estimates	<u>£1000<sup>5</sup></u>

The application had two sureties namely: Mr. Allwell Brown (Member of the Aba Township Advisory Board) and Mr. Alagoa (an Assistant Master at the famous Government College Umuahia). It was also supported by the Aba District Officer through the Resident for Owerri Province to which Aba belonged.<sup>6</sup> All things considered, it was no surprise when the E.N.D.C through its Board resolved favourably in response to Ockiya's application. Indeed it resolved "to make a loan of £1000 to Mr. F.K. Ockiya, Aba for the purpose of establishing a piggery, the loan to bear interest at the rate of 3 per cent and to be repayable over a period of 10 years - - -."<sup>7</sup>

Though statistics on the increased production from Ockiya's piggery in the subsequent years are not available, it can be said that the loan was effectively utilised and the expansion of the farm for increased

productivity was achieved. As a result, Ockiya was able to satisfy most of his customers and also employed more people on the farm.

The first major contribution of agricultural enterprises to the growth of Aba was in the provision of food for the residents. Although it is not possible to state the exact percentage of the town's food needs which was supplied by the urban-based farmers, there is no doubt that this must have been fairly considerable, perhaps not less than 40 per cent. This is taking into account both the extensive practice of gardening in the town and the supplies from the neighbourhood. The importance of this humble effort at food production by Aba residents can best be appreciated when we recall what happened when food supplies by the rural Ngwa neighbourhood was cut off in 1952 during the inter-group crisis in the town (see Chapter IV above).

Another major contribution of the agriculture/food production enterprises to the growth of Aba was in the area of employment generation. It is fairly clear from the discussion thus far that a lot of hands were employed in agricultural activities either on personal or family basis or as workers in other people's farms. It is estimated that up to 20 per cent of the people and about 80 per cent many have been engaged in full and part time farming respectively. In providing such employment opportunities, agricultural enterprises contributed to the growth of Aba.

They also helped in creating an African entrepreneurial class in Aba town. We have pointed out the case of Mr. D.D. Onyemelukwe who made a fortune from his cassava/gari business. It was the capital he accumulated from the business that he used to diversify into building contract work and motor transportation business. There was also the case

of one Mr. A.I. Okoronkwo who used the proceeds of his farming enterprise to enter into the textile trade. The example of Mr. F. Ockiya who became an employer of labour has also been mentioned.

Agricultural enterprises provided important service to other enterprises and occupations. In so doing, they helped to foster economic growth by generating a multiplier effect. For instance some of the products of Mr. Ockiya's farm must have been bought up by meat traders who subsequently sold them at a profit. Similarly the efforts of people like Mr. D.D. Onyemelukwe in the gari production business provided gari traders and merchants with their commodity of trade. Also although we do not have evidence of large scale harvesting and production of palm produce in the urban area, there is evidence that many Ngwa residents of the town did produce palm oil and kernel which was also a major item of trade. It is therefore safe to conclude that agricultural enterprises were a major factor that helped to foster the growth of trading in Aba.

#### Manufacturing Enterprises: 1945-1960

Reference has already been made to the expression "Aba Made" symbolising indigenous efforts in manufacturing. The fact was that even under colonial or foreign influences, the Igbo and other African residents of Aba in various stages of development showed remarkable initiative. While European finished products were highly valued, it did not lead to the peoples' surrender of their own initiative in the area of manufacturing. Rather, they continued with their indigenous traditions of craft and manufacturing, relying on local raw materials and at other times "adapting" foreign introduced products.

A number of factors influenced African residents of Aba to go into manufacturing. The first was the desire for economic success. In other words, the individual enterprise and initiative of Aba people was a very important factor. Supplies of imported products into Aba were inadequate, particularly during and immediately after the Second World War. Many Aba residents braced up to the challenge by engaging in manufacturing enterprises to fill the gap.

There was also the question of raw materials needed for the manufactures. As is well known, informal enterprises<sup>8</sup> thrive best in an environment in which their raw materials exist. Thus the availability of various raw materials such as raffia, coconuts, palm produce etc encouraged the establishment of manufacturing enterprises by Africans in Aba. Because of the highly commercial and trading nature of Aba, sponsors of indigenous manufacturing enterprises were able to get raw materials such as leather which was not produced in the Aba area.

Another important factor was the availability of land and labour. As indicated above, acquisition of land for personal or business activities in Aba was fairly easy in those days. All that was required was goodwill negotiation and the payment of small amounts of money and the offering of gifts such as gin. In fact most of the manufacturing activities did not require large areas of land, particularly those that were a carry-over of pre-colonial crafts such as mat weaving from raffia or basket making. Similarly, as earlier indicated, labour was in adequate supply for various activities and since it was relatively easy to learn on the job in the enterprises concerned, there was no problem of labour shortage.

Perhaps the most important factor in the establishment of indigenous manufacturing enterprises was the availability of a large

market for the goods produced. The existence of the Ekeoha market as well as the rising population of Aba ensured that this was so.

There was no single generally accepted structure for manufacturing enterprises in Aba during our period. The structure adopted by particular enterprises was usually determined by the type of ownership, the size of the enterprise and the nature of production the enterprise was engaged in. Most of the enterprises were one-man ventures. Indeed it is estimated that more than 80 per cent belonged to this category. The remaining were in the main partnerships between individuals or groups. Similarly, most of the enterprises were also single product concerns engaged in the processing of agricultural raw materials to finished products.

Given the nature of their operations, no formal apprenticeship/training system developed in the enterprises. This did not mean however that the enterprises did not transfer skills to Aba residents. In fact, they did. This was possible because many of the enterprises being processing ones employed many casual hands during the peak processing season. These workers in the process of doing the jobs assigned to them learnt various skills.

As for the sources of their capital, evidence indicates that in nearly all cases, promoters of the enterprises sourced their funds privately. In this regard, over 80 per cent of informants indicated that they sourced their funds from their private savings and from contributions from some members of their family and friends. In the case of partnerships, each partner contributed according to his agreed stake in the business. It was along the same lines that profits accruing to the enterprise was shared. All through the interviews, I did not come across

any informant who established his business with a loan either from the money lenders, the banks or even the government. This is surprising because there appears to have been ready market<sup>d</sup> for most of the goods they produced; and entrepreneurs could have expanded their businesses with increased capital. But informants however told me that the banks needed collaterals which they did not have; that government support was rarely available even when one managed to pull through their numerous conditionalities, and that the interest charged by money lenders was so prohibitive that they felt it would eat unduly into their meagre profits. Worse still, there was the fear that money lenders would confiscate their properties should their enterprises fail. In spite of all these, some still managed to move from one man craft ventures into small scale manufacturing enterprises.

A number of the small processing/manufacturing enterprises that existed in Aba during the period were in the area of transforming agricultural produce to finished goods. One of the most widespread was coconut processing. Many informants, including Eze J.G.N. Ogbonna testified to the fact that many Aba residents engaged in the business in the 1950s.

A celebrated example was the partnership established by Messrs. Christopher Chimezie, Joseph Duru and Amos Nwaiwu at 15 Ikot Ekpene Road, Aba<sup>in</sup> about 1948. The immediate reason for the partnership was the visit of a Hausa trader who was introduced to the men by an Igbo. The Hausa trader was an agent of a vegetable oil company in Northern Nigeria and the company needed the processed coconuts for their production of vegetable oil.



The enterprise was labour intensive and labour supply was of two kinds. There were seasonal and unestablished employees made up of men and women whose duty was to bring coconuts from their places of production to the factory. The coconuts were then purchased at various prices according to their sizes. The largest size cost 1/2d each in the 1940s. Later, it cost 1d. each. There was steady increase in the price such that in the mid and late 1950s, the price was 3d per coconut. It is however important to note that coconuts were not bought singly, but in basket loads evaluated according to the prices already stated. Because the coconut had to be brought from various places, the intensity of labour required helped in providing employment to many people.

The second stage took place in the processing factory and involved the preparation of the coconut for export. Here, large numbers of workers both men and women were engaged, but nearly all of them were daily paid who earned salary according to the amount of work done. On the average, the wage was 20d. per day. The processing involved the removal of the outer shell of the coconut after which it was broken up. These two jobs were done mostly by men. The women then proceeded, using knives to extract the coconut from its inner shell. These were then dried to the agreed and required levels after which they were packed in large sacks. The sacks were then collected by the Hausa men who ordered the consignment and subsequently exported them to the North. We must emphasize that the buyers usually paid for the coconut in advance and often, also paid for its shell. While a sack of coconut was sold for £50, that of its shell was sold for £20. While the coconut was used for making vegetable oil, the shell was ground and used in the manufacture of plates. These processes were carried out in the North of Nigeria from where the demand for the coconut came.<sup>9</sup>

Another important manufacturing enterprise in Aba during the period was the mattress and bed making industry whose era of boom was from the late 1940s to the 1960s. This enterprise was dominated mainly by the Mbieri people of Owerri. It is possible that the first successful participants were of Mbieri origin. Their success must have become a challenge to their kith and kin who over time joined in the business, receiving advice and support from those who joined earlier. This was perhaps how the Mbieri became initiators of the enterprise in Aba, enjoying pioneering advantages. This also explains their dominant role in the industry. Prominent among those who took part in it were Mr. A.A. Osuji, Mr. U.J. Oparah and Mr. O.B. Njoku.

The mattress industry was important at the time, when foam mattresses and iron furniture and beds were not common.<sup>10</sup> The majority of the people in the town slept either on mats or on wooden beds without mattresses. Only the well-to-do families could afford the beds and mattresses. Here was an enterprise which depended on cooperation between the rural people and the urban artisans. This is because the major raw materials used for the manufacture, bamboo and dried grass, were brought into the town by rural Ngwa traders. It was from them that the Mbieri and other artisans bought them. Some of the producers also gathered some of their raw materials from bushes around the town.

The manufacture itself involved knocking various sections of bamboo to make the bed while the dried leaves were stuffed into mattresses made from sacks. Later, from the late 1950s, cloth and fluffy cotton began to be used in place of grass. Beds and mattresses were sometimes bought together by clients for about 1/- 6d. each.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the most ambitious indigenous effort in the manufacturing sector in Aba during this period was that of one ex-serviceman, Mr. S. Simbi Wellington, who set up a fruit juice manufacturing company in the late 1940s/early 1950s. The company using local raw materials, engaged in the production of pine apple and orange squash under the brand name "Ideal Fruit Syrup".<sup>12</sup> It is not quite clear how Mr. Wellington got the knowledge he used in his production or even how he raised the necessary capital for such a project. He probably raised part of it from his discharge benefits. It is also possible that he bought some of his equipment from the United Africa Company probably on credit as an indebtedness of £5: 3s: 2d. saw the company dragging him to court in 1952.<sup>13</sup>

As for labour, evidence indicates that Mr. Wellington employed some skilled labourers for his enterprise, in the main casual labourers whom he trained in the production of fruit juice.

Though the prices at which he sold his produce is not known, it appears that he had problems disposing of his products despite its good quality as testified to by Magistrate J.N. Odogwu and Barrister O. Balogun.<sup>14</sup> Being essentially an elite product, his hopes were to have it distributed through departmental stores such as that of the U.A.C.. These hopes were however completely dashed as Europeans who ran such stores shunned his products because they were in competition with the ones they imported from their home countries. His disdain and displeasure at this attitude of European companies was clearly demonstrated in his plea to the Presiding Magistrate in the case brought against him by the U.A.C.

He noted:

I am not ashamed of my products. This debt would have been finished long ago if Messrs U.A.C. had agreed to my terms. In accordance with their Facets of Enterprise No. 6 appearing in the Guardian of November 24, 1951, they make the world to understand that they help to distribute articles produced by African industrialists. Why they refuse to distribute mine, I fail to understand.<sup>15</sup>

The point to note however is that Africans were imaginative and courageous enough to engage in ventures and enterprises which at the time was still the preserve of Europeans. It was thus hardly surprising that European firms engaged in actions aimed at discouraging such efforts. Though evidence of the fate of Mr. Wellington's enterprise in Aba is unavailable to this writer, there is hardly any doubt that if it had received support from the firms, it probably would have engendered the growth of a strong fruit and other crops processing base, and thus prevent some of the wastage seen in Nigeria after the harvest of fruits and vegetables.

It is clear from the discussion thus far that manufacturing enterprises played an important role in the growth of Aba. In the first place, the enterprises helped in fostering a commercial and business climate in the town. Though statistics about the number and spread of the factories are not available, information from the field indicates not only a high number, but also an extensive spread. For instance, estimates put the coconut processing enterprises at over 30<sup>16</sup> while that of mattress making exceeded 15. The large number of the enterprises helped no doubt in propping up commercial activities in the town.

Secondly, the enterprises created employment opportunities for Aba residents. This was particularly true of the coconut processing industry at peak season. It is estimated that during such periods, over 1,000 hands were usually employed.<sup>17</sup> The other enterprises also provided worthwhile employment even though this was on a modest scale. The employment opportunities engendered increased population, created wealth in the hands of the employees and transferred skills, all essential ingredients for growth.

Also as would be expected, the enterprises created an economic multiplier effect. This is because the demand for their raw materials, whether it is coconut or raffia palm leaves or fruits, generated the drive for the increased production of these goods. This in turn created more employment opportunities and wealth for the people.

A major contribution of manufacturing enterprises was that they encouraged the growth of entrepreneurial spirit in Aba. This was because of the sponsors of the projects, having made some success in them diversified into other businesses. For instance, Mrs. Chimezie, despite losing her husband earned enough to enter into the gravel and sand supply business in the more lucrative construction industry.

More importantly, their activities proved to other indigenous businessmen who did not have the courage to dare into some form of manufacturing that it was indeed possible. As is well known, even today, African investors find it very difficult to take the decision to invest in manufacturing activities of any sort. Many prefer to engage in retail/wholesale trading which gives quicker turnover and profits.

In general therefore their activities helped to lay the foundation for whatever indigenous industrial manufacturing going on in Aba today. Indeed it is plausible to argue that had their efforts been completely successful as in the case of Mr. Wellington's fruit processing enterprise, the wastages being experienced even in the Aba region today in fruits like oranges and pine apples would not have been there. Nevertheless, their pioneering efforts have rubbed off on future residents.

#### Trading Enterprises: 1900-1960

Trading is perhaps the most important contributor among indigenous enterprises in Aba's growth. This is hardly surprising since, even from pre-colonial times, commerce was the main vehicle of growth in Aba.<sup>18</sup> From this pre-colonial tendency, Aba grew to become one of the most important commercial centres not only in the former Eastern Nigeria but in the country in general.

A number of factors encouraged the growth of trading enterprises in Aba. The first was the existence of a large and well attended market—the Ekeoha market in Aba. As noted already elsewhere, the market was so important that some scholars equated early Aba to it. The existence of the market from the pre-colonial days therefore introduced from the very beginning, the push and drive for buying and selling which subsequently became one of the hallmarks of Aba.

Another factor that encouraged the growth of trading in Aba was its strategic location at a road junction between various Igbo communities, the Cross River and the Rivers areas. This location enabled Aba to

attract a lot of traders from these areas as they saw the town as an important meeting point for persons, goods and services.

Added to the above factor was the presence of many European trading/commercial firms. These firms just like the local ones, had been attracted to Aba because of the commercial opportunities it provided particularly with regards to produce trading. The need to service these firms both in terms of supplying produce as well as in buying European goods from them also became an important factor in the emergence and growth of trading enterprises in the town.

An ever-rising population with reasonable purchasing power was another factor that encouraged the growth of trading in Aba. We have already referred to the growth pattern of Aba's population in several sections of this work. For instance while in 1943 the town's population was 20,000 person rising to 57,787 in 1953, by 1963, this had reached 131,000 persons.<sup>19</sup> Trading flourishes where there are people to buy the goods traded. Being a major palm producing area, produce trading became a source of wealth with which people were able to buy goods. This wealth and buying capacity spread to the Ngwa of the neighbouring countryside.

The growth of trading enterprises was also fostered by the availability of good transportation facilities in Aba. Aba was a major centre of motor transportation in the former Eastern Region of Nigeria. It was linked by motorable roads with the Cross River area, the Rivers area and many parts of Igboland. It was served by a railway-line and goods were readily brought in and exported through the Port Harcourt Wharf. An average trader is usually concerned by the question of how he could move his goods from place to place. Many competing towns such

as Owerri, Owerinta, Ikot Ekpene etc., did not have such facilities. It is not surprising therefore that trading grew at a faster pace in Aba.

There were two broad categories of traders in Aba. These were traders who did not operate from market stalls and those who did. Certain factors determined to which of the two broad groups a trader belonged. The first factor was capital. Young men who entered trading with little amounts of money as well as some house wives began with street trading. This was because they did not have the necessary capital for the acquisition of large stock of goods or for leasing market stalls. It is estimated that more than 40 per cent of traders in Aba during our period were street traders without stalls.

On the other hand, traders who sold non-portable goods usually made strenuous efforts to acquire market stalls. Traders in this category included those who sold timber and other building materials, textiles, stockfish and so on. These were the larger-scale traders who usually had the necessary funds and connections required for the acquisition of market stalls. It is estimated that about 50 - 60 per cent of the traders in Aba during this period sold their goods in market stalls.

It is important to point out however, that there was upward and downward movement of traders in both categories. A lot depended on one's fortunes in business. Many successful young men who engaged in street trading moved up the ladder to acquire market stalls, and in some cases, even took on apprentice traders. Similarly, some stall traders whose business encountered difficulties quite often slipped back into the street trading category. Upward mobility was however more common than the latter.



With regards to employment opportunities and apprenticeship, it is clear from the discussion that street traders did not keep apprentices. Nearly all street traders learnt on the job, learning as it were from their older colleagues who began street trading before them. Stall traders on the other hand kept apprentices who served them during the period of apprenticeship. At the end of the period, depending on the agreement earlier reached, the master either employed the new graduate to continue to trade for him or set him up with capital, goods and other things to start his own business. On the average, successful Aba traders during the period kept between one and five apprentices.

When we come to the question of finance or capital with which traders entered their business, evidence from oral interviews indicate that over 80 per cent of the street traders started and carried out their trading with amounts that ranged from £1 to £10. Such monies were usually got through working as labourers or through advances or outright gifts by friends and particularly relatives. On the other hand, traders with stalls used larger amounts of money which they accumulated over time while doing small trading or other business activities. About 90 per cent of the traders with stalls got their capital in this way. The remainder were mainly those who had husbands, parents or relatives who rented stalls for them, and helped to start them off in trading. The amount each trader employed depended on his sources of funds as well as the type of goods he dealt in. But in our period, traders in this category employed funds that ranged from about £20 upwards.

### Trade in food products

Traders in food products belonged to the two broad categories we identified above, namely, street traders and stall traders. The street traders usually sold fruits such as oranges, pineapples, guava, coconuts etc and other perishable food items such as vegetables, but also maize, yams and gari. Some street traders hawked their goods from place to place often harassing travellers whether pedestrians or those in motorized vehicles. Other street traders displayed their goods in front of their residences, either on tables or in temporary or makeshift stalls. It is important to stress that this form of trading continued to gain in strength as the century drew on despite official regulations which generally disallowed it. By the 1950s and since then, this form of street trading in residential areas grew to the point where, in nearly every street, residents could get the goods they need from their street markets at virtually the same prices as in the market centres, thus taking the place of street corner stores in other urban areas. By this time of course, imported foods such as milk, sugar, beverages, sweets and rice had become important also in street trading. Increasingly however, these imported products came to be dominated by male street traders. This was presumably because the purchase of such products involved levels of endeavour and risks which most Igbo residents barred their women from undertaking. Nevertheless women dominated the trade in locally produced staples.

Moving from street trading, we can now direct our attention to the traders who had stalls. These were the better organized traders and majority of them were men. We begin with the gari trade.

As earlier indicated, the processing of cassava into gari was a very viable local industry in Aba and it was dominated by the Annang/Ibibio people. This gari which was processed largely in the Ngwa road area and those brought in from the Ngwa farms were usually taken to Ekoha<sup>e</sup> and New Markets for sale. Here, wealthy Aba gari merchants bought up large quantities of the product and took them partly to Enugu, and even more to Northern Nigeria where the demand was very high. The gari merchants were not always there to buy the gari themselves. Indeed many had a well arranged system whereby they advanced money to women (especially those in the New Market) to buy gari for them. Assuming a merchant advanced £3, a woman could buy gari worth £3 for £2: 5/- for the merchant and thus make a personal profit of about 3/- in the transaction after deducting her expenses. Others who did not buy enough would return the excess money to the merchant while those who bought at a cost more than the money advanced to them were reimbursed. The women were also rewarded for their efforts by the gari merchants. For instance from the late 1940s to the end of our period, 3/- to 5/- gratification was usually given for about £12 worth of gari bought by the women. The women usually bought a big bag of gari for anything between £2 and £2: 5/- from the rural producers. From the Ngwa road producers most of whom packed their gari in boxes, prices ranged from 3/- 6d to 8/- depending on the size of the boxes.<sup>20</sup> The merchants then hired porters and truck pushers to take the gari to the railway station from where it was sent by rail to the North. Many gari merchants made a fortune from this trade. Among them were Messrs. Beni Oparaocha<sup>21</sup> and one Mr. P.I. Chukwu.<sup>22</sup>

Apart from the wholesale merchants, there were traders who retailed gari in the market. Indeed evidence indicates that some traders, particularly women, in the 1950s, moved from various trades to the gari

trade. A good example was one Mrs. Janey Igbokwe who moved from the crayfish trade to the gari trade. According to her, she effected the move because the profit from the crayfish trade was much smaller than that of gari trade.<sup>23</sup> For instance while she made 6d from a crayfish heap bought for 1/- which often took a longer time to sell, from a transaction of £3 in the gari trade one could make a profit of 5/-. But the main advantage lay in the quick turnover and the quantities of gari (not included in the declared profit) taken by the women for their family's feeding.<sup>24</sup>

Another very important food trade which made Aba popular then, and even till now, and which contributed substantially to its growth was the stockfish trade. Stockfish which is produced mainly in Norway and Iceland usually came in bales. The bales contained either the main body of the fish or just the head. In either case, they were also in grades according to the size and preferred quality, the best grades being the cod from Norway. Its nutritional value is always a subject of controversy. While some believe it has no protein at all, others point to the fact that because of the method of drying it, it has abundant concentrated protein. Our intention here is not to join this debate; but to state that for certain unexplained reasons, stockfish came to be loved by the Igbo probably more than any other source of animal protein. It was loved not only as a regular food item; it became a very important part of the menu during such ceremonial occasions as marriage, funeral and other community gatherings. Thus from the very early part of its modern history, stockfish was an important trade item in Aba.

The early period of the stockfish trade in the town was dominated by European firms who imported stockfish and sold to African residents of the town. In fact Europeans virtually had a monopoly of the stockfish

trade up to the 1920s. Things changed by the 1930s when many Igbo began to participate in the trade. It was however from the 1940s and early 1950s that Africans began to engage seriously and, in fact, came to dominate the stockfish trade.

The stockfish trade was organized in a stratified form. At the apex of the structure were wealthy Africans who had the necessary capital to import the bales (before the mid 1940s, bale importation was largely the preserve of European firms). These wealthy traders then proceeded to sell the stockfish wholesale to other smaller merchants. It was from these small merchants that the smaller traders in the market eventually received supplies for retail. Sometimes, many of the traders combined to buy a bale. This was later distributed among them in proportion to the amount of money each person contributed.<sup>25</sup>

Among the many notable traders who made a fortune from the trade, two are worthy of special mention. We have Chief Igwe Ogba of Aribra who is said to have been the first major indigenous dealer in stockfish.<sup>26</sup> He was based in Calabar but had major outlets in Aba. In fact it was from him that Aba traders were initially getting their stockfish supplies from the Cross River. We had Chief Nnanna Kalu also from Aribra who became the major dealer and importer of stockfish bales during the period particularly from the 1950s when his imports grossly reduced the need for continued supplies from the Cross River. Ultimately Chief Kalu became so important in the trade that his name became virtually synonymous with the stockfish trade.<sup>27</sup>

### Trade in non-food products

Another important aspect of trade in Aba was in non-food products. A fairly large variety of such goods were sold in Aba and some of these have already been referred to earlier. But as mentioned before, the most important of these that greatly contributed to the growth of Aba was the trade in second-hand clothings, otherwise called "Okirika". The trade is said to have started in 1953<sup>28</sup> by an Ariba man called Mma who was living in Port Harcourt at the time. He was said to have placed an order for some bales of used clothes. When the consignment arrived, he opened it up for sale where he was trading at Aggrey Road, Port Harcourt. These dresses were mainly blouses. When it was opened up for sale, women residents in Port Harcourt, especially Okirika women came struggling for the clothes because they were very cheap. As they struggled for them, people were shouting, "Okirika wake up, Okirika wake up." It was in this circumstance that the name "Okirika wake up" or "Okirika", for short, became the name used to refer to second-hand clothes.<sup>29</sup>

When Nnanna Kalu, the Aba businessman from Ariba, mentioned in connection with the stockfish trade heard of this event, he placed an order for some bales in 1954. He was not alone. Several others including people from Item, Owerri and the Anambra country who also heard of the Port Harcourt incident soon became interested. Among these were men like Mr. Onwuchekwa (Chekwas) from Ariba, Chief Okoronkwo from Alayi, Chief John Okam, Chief Chika (Chika International) and Chief Peter (of Piko International) all from Ariba.<sup>30</sup> The bales were imported mainly from Holland and America, but it required substantial capital hence it was not everyone that could afford to participate. For instance, in 1956 a bale of some 200 Okirika shirts cost £7. The same price went for

a bale of 200 trousers. There were also giant bales which cost as much as £30 in this period.<sup>31</sup> The vast majority of traders (both street and stall) in the Okirika trade who could not afford to import bales had to buy for retailing from the big merchants who imported the bales.

Thus depending on his capital base, a trader could buy one or two bales from the big merchants for reselling. Other traders who could not afford to buy bales individually came together and bought one or two bales which they subsequently shared. For retailing, the bales were first sorted out and the dresses arranged according to their grades. There were grades one, two and sometimes three; the best ones of course, being the grade one. The grade one dresses were sold at prices of about 2/- 6d each while the others were sold for about 1/- 3d. There was an element of chance in the trade as some unlucky people got bales in which highly favoured types and quantity of dresses were scarce.

Okirika trade was very significant in Aba's growth and development. This was because one could move into the trade with very little capital. Indeed, it was regarded as a lucrative trade in which a poor man could rapidly become rich. It is not surprising that many people flocked into Aba from various parts of the then Eastern Nigeria as a result of the rise in importance of Okirika trade. It was in this way that people from Ngwa, Owerri, Onitsha, Orlu, Okigwe among others entered the trade. However it was the Aribi, Bende and Item who became the chief merchants and traders in Okirika.

As already noted, Okirika trade was most significant in the rapidity with which it transformed entrepreneurs from poor people to wealthy merchants. This was its most important contribution to the development of Aba. An example of a poor man who became rich

through Okirika trade was a man called Onwukwe Ukonu. Mr. Ukonu who arrived Aba in 1937 was for a long time in the Duwa Duwa<sup>32</sup> (Litt. continue sewing) business. With the emergence and rise of Okirika trade in 1953, he made up his mind to participate. Unfortunately for him, he had no capital to do so. However, having seen the profits accumulating to those involved in the trade, he sold his gramophone for £1: 10/-, and with this entered into Okirika trade.<sup>33</sup>

The trade was good for small time traders who made profits in varying scales. For instance, a small trader could buy a grade one blouse for about 6d and those of grades two and three for between 2d and 3d. After washing them very well and ironing, the ones bought for 3d could be retailed for as much as 2/-. Indeed some superior ones were sold for as much as 5/- while some poor ones ended up being sold for no more than the price at which they were bought. Thus traders made profits of anything from 0-400% in the Okirika trade.<sup>34</sup>

It was not only through direct trading that Okirika traders got their wealth in Aba during the period. Many retail Okirika traders got a lot of money and other valuables through searching of the pockets of all the dresses in the bales. Monies got in this way ranged from one dollar to 100 dollars. But there was one particular case in 1957-58 in which the man involved got 5,000 dollars from a piece of "tight belly cloth" which was commonly used by women.<sup>35</sup> The tight belly cloth was originally bought by a woman Okirika trader for 2½<sup>d</sup>. She later resold it to another Okirika seller called Oko Nkumeh. It was while Mr. Oko Nkumeh was cleaning it that he found the 5,000 dollars. At first, he was surprised by his find and, of course, did not quite know what type of money it was, nor its value. So he contacted some of his colleagues in the trade. Eventually they took the money to one American Missionary with the



Assemblies of God Mission called Mr. H<sup>?</sup>agreaves. It was Mr. H<sup>v</sup>agreaves who eventually explained to the traders the value of what they had found. He also helped Mr. Nkumeh to change the money at Standard Bank, now First Bank. The interesting thing to note is that Mr. Nkumeh used the money to buy a house at No. 20 Onitsha Road Aba in 1958. In fact the house is still there at the time of writing in 1991.<sup>36</sup>

### Trade in Raw Materials

Here, our focus is on the trade in palm oil and palm kernel with a view to seeing how Africans contributed through it to the growth and development of Aba. Palm oil and palm kernel were and still are the main cash crops/raw materials in the Aba area.

In general, Aba residents engaged in palm oil and palm kernel trade with the multinational companies. Though we also had street and stall traders in the palm oil trade, this compartmentalization was mainly applicable to the palm oil sold for food. But for the palm produce used as raw materials which is the subject of this discussion, Aba traders served mainly as porters, agents, and contractors.

From the early days of Aba's growth, many residents served as agents of the Niger Company, Miller Brothers and later the United Africa Company. The Ubani and Aro traders (former agents of the Arochukwu Oracle - Ubini Ukpabi) were the forerunners in this role. Indeed by the first decade of this century, Aro palm oil traders had established a base at Omoba, near Aba, where they purchased palm oil from rural producers at "good prices" and carried the oil to Aba for sale to the European firms. Major Arochukwu traders who served as company agents in the palm oil trade included Jeremiah Okoronkwo and one Mr. Obioha. But the

pioneering role of the Aro traders as company agents was soon emulated by many traders of other cultural groups, particularly the Igbere and Abriba as well as others from the then Bende Division. These later agents of Bende origin were based at Mbawsi, close to Aba divisional boundary with Bende. Using their capital, they bought oil from various parts of Bende division. They also bought oil from their agents stationed in territories beyond Bende division, notably, Obowo, Uturu and Isiukwuato, all in the then Okigwe division. The produce was brought to their depots at Mbawsi from where they took it to Aba to supply to the European firms. With time, in addition to selling oil to European firms at Aba they embarked on sales at far away Port Harcourt because of the larger profit that accrued thereon.<sup>37</sup> Memories are still fresh of the more enterprising of these palm oil merchants such as Egwuonwu Eme, James A. Uche, Agwu Obike, Egesi Akwara and Chima Nwanná.

In general, this situation continued until the 1950s when soap manufacturing companies began to establish in Aba. Among these companies were Nicolas Soap Factory, International Equitable Association and Lever Brothers. With this development, many Africans were contracted for the supply of raw material i.e. palm oil and palm kernel. The best known of these contract arrangements were those between Lever Brothers and Messrs. J.N. Nwafor, Ugorji Eke and Nnana Kalu, all Igbos, Mr. M.U. Ekpo an Ibibio from Abak, and Utuks Brothers from Uyo, both in present Akwa Ibom State.<sup>38</sup> While the Igbo elements had their base in Aba, the Ibibios with bases in Cross River also had offices in Aba. These men constituted the main suppliers of raw palm oil to Lever Brothers. To get the palm produce, they traversed the palm belt of Owerri division, Aba division, Bende division and the Cross River. Through their agents and employees, they bought large quantities of palm oil from local producers and then sold to Lever Brothers by the ton. The price of each

ton varied according to the season and the price at which it was bought from the local producers. Between 1957 and 1960, prices ranged from £150 to £200 per ton. On some rare occasions, prices could go as high as £250.<sup>39</sup>

### The Contribution of Trading Enterprises to the Growth of Aba

Traders and trading as an enterprise contributed immensely to the growth of Aba and it is no surprise that today, Aba is noted more as a major trading/commercial centre than anything else. Indeed an occupational census of the African population taken in 1953 clearly demonstrated that the pre-colonial pre-eminence of trade in the town was maintained through the colonial period and it remains so up till today. Of the 21,329 working age people sampled, 9,186 people were listed under "trading and clerical" which we presume means Africans working as trading clerks. This represents nearly half of the working population. The fact that nearly half were in the trading field clearly shows that trading created a lot of employment and therefore contributed much to the growth of the town. Moreover, since it was mainly Africans who dominated trading (Europeans mainly owned merchant and departmental stores and their per centage vis-à-vis the entire trading activity was low), it means Africans through trading played a very significant role in the growth of Aba.

Trading also contributed immensely to population growth in Aba. Many of the immigrants at various stages in the town's growth were attracted by trading opportunities particularly gari, Okirika and the produce trade. By engendering population growth, trading thus helped in the growth of Aba.

Trading enterprises also provided the necessary goods needed by Aba residents both Africans and Europeans. Whether it was gari, stockfish, provisions, Okirika or palm produce, Aba traders helped in moving the goods from where they were produced or where they were available to where they were needed in Aba. This no doubt was a most worthwhile contribution to the growth of the town.

Trading enterprises also created wealth in the hands of many Africans with which they used not only in satisfying their personal needs but also in diversifying into other businesses. These businesses in turn contributed their own quota in the growth of the town. In fact one hallmark of Aba traders in our period was the tendency to move, sometimes fairly often, from one trade to another. Thus some moved from crayfish to gari trade while others moved from gari to stockfish or Okirika trade and so on. From the evidence from informants it is clear that the produce trade played the most significant role in giving people wealth with which they diversified into other businesses. This was particularly the case with many small time produce traders, porters and handlers who saved enough to enter various trades as will be seen shortly.

Trading also contributed to the growth of other enterprises in Aba town. This was particularly the case with manufacturing ones, for it was through trade that their various raw material was supplied to them. It is doubtful whether a company like Lever Brothers could have operated well and easily, were it not for the efforts of African merchants and middlemen. They not only ensured that local raw material were made readily available, but they also saved the company the logistic problems it would have gone through to get raw material directly from producers, thus reducing their overall cost of production. Besides, by supplying raw

material regularly, the Africans ensured that the companies concerned maintained full and profitable production which in turn led to regular and increased employment for Aba residents. The prospects for employment in the companies also encouraged immigration and hence population growth in the town.

As for the African suppliers, the supply of raw material to the companies brought them wealth which enabled them to create further employment for others. Besides, nearly all of them used the opportunity of transporting their palm oil to develop flourishing transport businesses. Nnanna Kalu and Utuks Brothers, J.N. Nwafor and Ugorji Eke<sup>40</sup> were all prominent not only in the palm oil trade but also in the transporting business. In fact Utuks Motors, as it is called today, now operates luxury bus services between Uyo and different points in the country. Nnanna Kalu on the other hand has so diversified that he now owns one of the few Paper Mills in Nigeria, the Star Paper Mill based in Owerinta with a second branch in Aba.

#### Service Enterprises: 1945-1960

Service enterprises provided great opportunity for African contribution to the rise of Aba. This was particularly so because Africans engaged in a wide variety of them which provided extremely needed services to the people. Some in fact filled gaps that were not touched at all by European enterprises. The major services Africans provided included human portage (head loading/truck pushing), bicycle repairing, carpentry, brick laying, barbing, shoe making/mending, watch repairing, goldsmithing, blacksmithing, tailoring, washerman (dry cleaning), prostitution, bakery, 'bukateria' (restaurant), transportation, medical and educational services. Given the fact that the

services provided by Africans were many, we shall only use a few of them to illustrate the tremendous contribution these enterprises made to the growth of Aba. In doing this, we shall endeavour to choose those that made the greatest impact on the town's growth.

A number of factors encouraged the growth of service enterprises in our period of study, particularly after 1945. The first was the rapid growth of Aba into a major urban area. This rapid urbanization with its attendant increase in population, created an urgent need for social and economic services. As already noted many of the services demanded by the people were neither planned for nor provided by either the colonial state or Europeans. Europeans avoided the services because they were often small in nature, and given their overheads, often yielded profits Europeans found unattractive. Africans thus had to establish enterprises to meet these needs.

Another major factor that encouraged the growth of the enterprises was the personal desire of immigrants to make a success of their lives in an increasingly competitive cosmopolitan setting. Some immigrants unable to find jobs tried to establish one service or the other. Several others, who on entering the town had no skill or money, and who became labourers either on the railway, in the market, or with produce merchants, soon moved to establish personal service businesses as soon as they saved enough. Other cases involved apprentices on the particular service graduating and proceeding to establish their own businesses. In all these cases, the desire of the promoters for personal success in life was an important factor.

Another factor that encouraged the growth of service enterprises was the Second World War. This was because after the war, many Africans

who had served in that war in various capacities returned to Nigeria with a lot of skills. Aba was a resettlement centre from which many ex-service men returned to their homes in Eastern Region. As would be expected, many of those from Aba division and other areas decided to remain and settle in Aba ostensibly because as at that time, Aba provided them better opportunities for survival than other competing centres. On discharge, the ex-service men hoped that the colonial government would provide them employment as a way of smoothly re-integrating them into the society. Unfortunately, the government thought differently. In order to survive therefore, some of the ex-service men fell back on the skills they had acquired in various fields during their stay abroad, as well as on their discharge benefits, to set up some service enterprises.

Related to the above was the fact that ex-service men, other service personnel and the emergent proletarian class of government and company workers increasingly began to demand certain specialized services. This had become necessary because many were without their wives who could provide some of the services, or had increasingly become capable of paying for them. It was this development that particularly fostered the growth of such services as prostitution, shoe mending, bakery, watch repairing, barbing and restaurant businesses among others.

Service enterprises that operated in Aba during our period were basically one-man enterprises. In fact over 95 per cent of the enterprises belonged to this group. The remaining were either partnership of brothers or that of friends.

The sources of the initial capital of the sponsors of the enterprises varied in scope. But certain features were common to nearly all the

enterprises with regards to fund raising. The first is that almost all sponsors of the enterprises shied away from money lenders, as none of my informants mentioned them as a source of his initial capital. The second is that none of the sponsors got financial support from the government either in terms of loans or matching grants. Maybe a few sponsors I could not reach managed to do. But even if that were so, in the opinion of this writer, they must have been under one per cent. The majority of initiators of service enterprises raised their initial capital either from personal sources or savings or from funds raised from their relatives and friends. About 70 per cent of those interviewed claimed this as the source of their initial capital. About 20 per cent involved re-investment of capital made in other businesses in new enterprises. A few, about 2 to 5 per cent got their funds from co-operative societies. None of my informants utilized loans from a bank for his enterprise. In general therefore, nearly all the businesses took off without debt burdens.

Another important feature of the enterprises is that nearly all of them, with a few exceptions like prostitution, kept apprentices. However, there was no uniform standard or procedure adopted by them with regards to apprenticeship. Each owner of a business in whatever service decided the number of apprentices he or she needed. He or she decided also on what the apprentice paid or brought before being accepted. Depending on his relationship with the apprentice or his parents or relative, the apprentice may end up not paying anything. However, one thing was common to nearly all the service enterprises: they did not pay any salary or stipend to their apprentices.



To illustrate these general points, we should examine a selection of these services in some more detail.

**Human Porterage:** One of the earliest service enterprises in Aba history was human porterage under which we had head loading and truck pushing. The service was essential in the distributive trade. It was also essential in the day to day life of retailers as well as in the interaction between wholesalers and retailers. Even some wholesalers used them in collecting goods from depots and in the transshipment of such goods between road and rail transport. In general, human porterage was crucial in Aba's early days when roads were very narrow and vehicles and bicycles were few.

Head loading and truck pushing were organized along individual lines. Both services required no apprentices and informants indicated they did not keep any during our period. But while head loading required no initial capital for entry, truck pushing did. This is why it is generally believed that truck pushing perhaps grew out of head loading. The reasoning behind this thinking is that young men and women unable to find jobs on immigration into the town drifted into one type of casual labour or another including head loading. From the money made from head loading, they were able to save enough to enter truck pushing, a higher stage of porterage. The funds were needed to buy planks for making the truck and to pay for the services of a carpenter.

It is not exactly certain when head loading and truck pushing began in Aba, but it is generally believed that by the 1920s and 1930s respectively, both services had become well developed.<sup>41</sup> They were required by many residents particularly traders. Though essentially a labourers' job, human porterage required a lot of strength, endurance

and discipline. Also, since the Igbo, who were the main practitioners in the business carried their goods on their head<sup>s</sup> traditionally, it meant that entrants to the trade already had some skill and experience in portage. Employers tended to prefer people with such experience because they were very useful in handling perishable goods and in ensuring adequate care for their goods. In fact most employers because of this fact, preferred porters they knew or those recommended by people able to guarantee their good behaviour. Such referees could be relatives or town's people with whom the porter on his arrival in the town went to live, and who provided him initial accommodation and feeding usually on humanitarian grounds. Messrs. Arisa and Aka are thought to be among the first to have engaged in truck pushing.<sup>42</sup>

Head loaders and truck pushers usually operated in the same locations: markets, the railway station, motor parks, among other places. Their services often complemented each other as truck pushers sometimes needed head loaders to load goods into their trucks. Sometimes too, they operated on their own. In terms of charges, we do not have information on the earlier period when manillas were in use. But by the late 1940s and early 1950s, head loaders charged 1/2 farthing for a trip. By 1954, they charged 1/2d, by 1956, it was 1d and by 1960, the charge was 2d.<sup>43</sup> For truck pushers, between the 1930s and 1940s, prices were between 1 1/2d and 2d per trip. Between 1950 and 1960, the price ranged between 5d to 6d.<sup>44</sup>

From the above, it would appear as if prices grew at a faster rate in the 1950s for hiring truck pushers than for hiring head loaders. This may imply that it was during that period that the services of truck pushers were most sought after. Indeed unlike head loading, the truck pushing business did not decline in our period. As Aba grew commer-

cially, truck pushers were increasingly needed by traders who had to move their wares from the motor park and the railway station to the market and vice versa.

In general, human portage played a significant role in the growth of Aba. It provided a cheap, effective and popular means of moving goods from one point to another. It was labour intensive and thus provided employment opportunities for Aba residents. This was particularly significant because it provided a guarantee that a fresh immigrant who was not lazy or disabled could come in, confident that he would not starve. Indeed, for many, it was the stepping stone to other more lucrative enterprises they eventually engaged in. It is in fact significant to note that human portage which was a feature of the pre-colonial economy, outlived colonialism, and is still important in Aba today, particularly in moving goods like cement from lorries to warehouses.

**Bicycle Repairing:** Bicycle repairing was another very important service in Aba. Most informants could not state the exact date when this service began to be provided in Aba. But they were generally agreed that it was in the early 1920s. They are also not sure of how the service started, but they readily point to Messrs. Alphonsus Nwaigwe and Alexander Agu as two of the first people who began the service in Aba.<sup>46</sup>

That may well be so; but since bicycle repairing is a business which requires technical expertise, it is fairly certain that they must have acquired their expertise from somewhere else. The most probable source of their knowledge were the European merchants who sold the bicycles. Perhaps they worked for the European agents before establishing their bicycle repair outfits. They might also have acquired

the knowledge from Saro and Yoruba settlers who had earlier come in contact with the Europeans. The Yoruba elements were the most likely source because informants also mention a few Yoruba participants in the bicycle repairing business. Whatever the source of the knowledge, one certain fact is that by the 1920s and 1930s bicycle repairing business had been well established in Aba.

The bicycle repair enterprise was organized on individual basis. Some initial capital was required for one to start the business. While some practitioners did some other jobs to get this capital, some others borrowed the money from friends and relatives which they later paid back instalmentally.<sup>47</sup> The capital so acquired was then used to buy the necessary tools with which the business was started.

Even though the business was organized on individual basis, the repairers kept apprentices during the period under various conditions. Some paid in advance for their training while others paid while under training. Similarly, the fees varied, often determined by the number of years the training or apprenticeship lasted. Generally, the longer one stayed under apprenticeship, the lesser the fees because such trainees or apprentices were also seen by their trainers or masters as cheap sources of labour. But there were exceptional cases where those whose apprenticeship lasted longer paid more fees. Apprentices who were also relatives and/or friends of the trainer were usually charged at reduced rates. This is not surprising because a cardinal feature of Igbo view of success in life was that those endowed with such success were to share same with their kith and kin.

Unlike head loaders and truck pushers, bicycle repairers located their business in various sections of the town. Some stayed near the market while others had their workshops in different nooks and corners. Their services included assembling, complete overhauling, patching of the tires, mending of the spinwheel, changing of spindle and spokes and wiring of light on the bicycles.<sup>48</sup> These services attracted different charges, but there was the tendency to charge a standard price for most types of jobs done. For instance, the price for overhauling ranged from 1/- to 1/- 6d. in the late 1930s and early 1940s to 3/- in the 1950s. This was to increase further to 4/- by 1960.<sup>49</sup>

Those who patronized them were the well-to-do Europeans and Africans because, in our period, bicycles were what motor cars are today, and most people did not have the means to acquire them. It was mainly produce traders, white-collar workers and other business people in the society that could afford to own them.

The bicycle repair business contributed significantly to the growth of Aba. It created employment and wealth for residents and introduced new skills badly needed in a fast developing economy. Given the importance of bicycles in moving human beings and goods, particularly palm produce which we noted above, it obviously contributed greatly to the growth of the town.

**Carpentry:** This was another service which contributed its own quota to the growth of Aba. Its origin in Aba is not clear, but some informants claimed that it came into Aba in the 1920s when there was a need to build the house of Chief Ogbonna, the Chief of Ama Ogbonna Community of Eziukwu Aba.<sup>50</sup> Other informants point out that they were taught carpentry by Ghanaians and Saro elements who came into the town.<sup>51</sup>

This might suggest that carpentry must have been introduced before the construction of Chief Ogbonna's house, because the Saro and people from the Gold Coast were among the earliest settlers in the town. Thus carpentry may have been introduced into Aba by the first decade of this century and was probably well established by the 1920s when Chief Ogbonna's house was built. Carpenters must have played a role in the temporary buildings colonial authorities erected during the first decade of this century. Indeed the Saro and Ghanaians referred to, might have acquired the knowledge of carpentry from European carpenters who worked in Aba during the period. Among the first successful Aba carpenters were Messrs. Nwachiri, Nwahu Kaladu and Ekeocha.<sup>52</sup>

In terms of organization, it would seem that the enterprise had a difficult beginning in Aba during the early part of its history. It was organized on individual basis and the only tools available to early practitioners were knives/carvers.<sup>53</sup> Even so, finding money to buy the knives was not easy. Many early practitioners first engaged in trading in palm oil to raise the initial capital for buying the needed tools. The carpenters also kept apprentices who were retained on conditions similar to those of bicycle repairers.

The services rendered by carpenters widened as Aba grew over time. In the earlier period, there were few carpenters available and they produced mostly doors. As one informant put, they did not make windows because "civilization has not reached that stage".<sup>54</sup>

The doors were made by using knives to shapen out the wood used in making them. A look at some of the dilapidated houses of the colonial era shows that windows were not in vogue. But as time went on, from the 1940s onwards, the carpenters began to make other things such as

windows, benches, tables and desks. By that time, better carpentry tools such as various kinds of saw, chisels and hammers had become available. These tools improved the finishing of the products made. The trade received a further boost with the spread of the use of corrugated iron sheets for roofing probably in the late 1920s/early 1930s. This increased the tempo of activities in the building industry generally and thus increased the need for carpenters, joiners, turners and furniture making services.

It would appear as if prices for their products were high by the standards of the time. That may probably explain why temporary bush buildings continued to be a feature of Aba up till the late 1940s. To make a door in the 1920s for instance, one needed as much as between £1 and £2. From the mid-1930s to the 1940s, it cost £3: 5/- to make a door. This was to rise further to £5 between 1950 and 1960,<sup>55</sup> and of course, by then, there were many people in the business.

The clientele varied from individuals to companies, from the rich to the not so rich, provided the person had money to pay. Quite often, it was the Europeans and rich Africans that could afford them. For instance, one of my informants said he was one of the carpenters who took part in the construction of the U.A.C. House along Factory Road.<sup>56</sup> Others helped in building houses, offices or schools for individuals or government. In helping to build the houses and other infrastructure in the town carpenters contributed to the growth of the town.

**Shoe Mending/Making:** Another important service which contributed to Aba's growth was shoe mending/making. The details of its introduction in Aba are sketchy. While some say it was introduced by foreigners, i.e. Europeans, Saro or Yorubas, others indicate that it was

one Samuel Nwokocha, an ex-service man who first practised the trade in Aba after the Second World War. He learnt the art during his service as a soldier in that war. But it is improbable that there was no shoe mending in the town before the 1940s. What seems more likely is that shoe mending was introduced by European, Saro or Yoruba elements earlier in the town. But the art was not widespread and well established until the 1940s when Samuel Nwokocha popularized it. Apart from Mr. Nwokocha, other early practitioners of the trade in Aba included one Samuel Obiji and one Silas from Umuahia.<sup>57</sup>

Informants claim that they got the initial capital from personal savings and by borrowing from friends and relatives. The establishments were mainly one-man businesses, but some apprentices were kept who paid between 10/- in the earlier period and £1: 5/- for the later period, for their training.

The Shoe makers provided a wide range of services. Initially, their major activity was the mending of old shoes. But as time went on, they added the making of new shoes to their schedule. They also engaged in the making of other leather goods such as bags. Their major raw material—Sokoto leather, was brought in regularly by Hausa traders. For the sole of slippers and shoes, practitioners depended on disused car tyres. Informants also stated that they bought some imported shoe soles and upper leather. Charges for making shoes ranged from £1: 2/- in 1948 to £1: 10/- in 1960. Patching and stitching cost very little.<sup>58</sup>

With regards to those needing their services, we need to note that the wearing of shoes was not widespread in Aba until the late 1940s. Shoes were costly and only few people could afford them. The majority of those who needed their services in the earlier period were thus European



residents and government workers. It was therefore not until the 1950s when many Africans, in particular Igbo, began to be employed in government service that shoe mending/making experienced a boom. That was the period when the transition to larger scale production of shoes in Aba began. It is not clear why Aba instead of Owerri or Port Harcourt became prominent in shoe production. The most likely explanation is that the business developed earlier in Aba and reached a status where other towns could no longer provide effective competition. The important point to note is that from the 1950s, the Aba shoe makers had begun to copy and reproduce some of the imported shoes. Some of the imitated versions were sold to residents of the city while a good quantity were sold in Port Harcourt and the Cross River area.<sup>59</sup>

The shoe making/mending business is very significant in Aba's history because it provided not only employment and wealth but also more importantly, re-investable capital as a result of the export business that came with the shoes made in Aba. In other words, that Aba is well known today as a centre of the shoe making industry in Nigeria had its antecedents in the period before 1960, and could be partly explained by the self-generating growth, and the extra-ordinary spirit of imitating which the shoe menders/makers of the pre-1960 period introduced. The hand bag making aspect of the trade also served as a forerunner to the prominent place Aba occupies today in the business of making hand bag and other leather goods.

**Dress Making:** Dress making is another major service enterprise that contributed to the growth of Aba. The man said to have pioneered this enterprise in Aba in the first decade of this century was called Jonah Okorie.<sup>60</sup> Jonah was said initially to have learnt how to sew face caps<sup>61</sup> from a relative called James. The story has it that after Jonah Okorie had

sewn face caps for sometime, and probably because of the increasing demand for dresses, he decided to learn how to sew them. Some sources indicate that he in fact did not learn the art from anybody. He bought some ready-made clothes brought into Aba by the Europeans. He opened them up and through imitation and study, he learnt how they were made. He then started making dresses beginning with shirts. He eventually progressed to the making of suits. Jonah Okorie's expertise in tailoring became established and popular among the European residents in the town.

However, it was not in making dresses for other people that Jonah Okorie became well known, but rather in making tailoring a widespread business in Aba. Being an Item man by birth, he introduced the art of tailoring to many other Item and Abriba people resident in the town. Among these were Mr. Onaniwu, Mr. Eke Ije and Mr. John Emeh who were early practitioners of tailoring in Aba. There was also Sylvester Njoku who was a master-tailor at No. 130 Jubilee Road Aba. All these were resident tailors who had shops where they did their job and also trained apprentices. They also became known not only for satisfying the needs of Europeans but also those of prominent Africans. We say prominent Africans because it would appear that a vast majority of people in Aba during our period could not afford the cost of making high quality dresses and suits. They were satisfied by another group of tailors, also off-shoots of, and products of Jonah Okorie's pioneering efforts.

The group of tailors who satisfied the dressing as well as mending needs of the vast majority of the poor and low income group in Aba were those who came to be known and addressed as duwa duwa (lit.: continue sewing).<sup>62</sup> The duwa duwa were (and still are) mobile tailors who carried their sewing machines about, sewing for people who needed their

services. The duwa duwa operators were usually on their own having learnt sewing sometimes from established tailors. They were neither other tailor's journeyman nor apprentices, nor did they keep any apprentice. Often, they owned their machines, bought from personal savings or funds from friends and relatives. A few sometimes rented their machines from other tailors for a fee.

The core of the people who engaged in the duwa duwa business were again the people of Item and Abriba, partly because they catered for the low income group, and partly because they did not have permanent sheds and thus no rents and taxes to pay, they were generally cheaper than the first group of tailors discussed. As a result, the duwa duwa became very popular in the town as even some people with high income relied on them so as to save money. Indeed, in the period after the second world war, it was one of the most widespread of the indigenous businesses in Aba. Among those who participated in the business were Messrs. Onwukwe Ukonu and Andrew Ogbuagu. Mr. Ukonu for instance, had such rich clients as Mr. Mbanefo, one of the produce inspectors in the 1940s and one lawyer called Balogun.<sup>63</sup> We need to note that some duwa duwa operators who made a success of their business progressed to setting up their own workshops with apprentices. Many however preferred to remain in the trade even when they could afford a workshop because of personal likeness, good returns and ease of operation.

With regards to prices, the first group of tailors, that is those who had permanent sheds, catered mostly for those who bought their own trousers and shirting materials from the market. As already noted, their charges were higher than those of the duwa duwa. From 1939 up till the 1940s, they charged about 1/- for sewing a shirt and 1/- 6d for a pair of

trousers. They sometimes could charge up to 1/- 6d for a shirt. The cost of making European type suits was much higher. On the average, it cost 10/- 6d. By the 1950s, prices had begun to head skywards, costing as much as £1: 10/- to make a suit. During the same period, the cost of shirts and trousers only increased marginally. But the ultimate price depended on the quality of the tailor handling the job and the type of material. By the end of 1960 and slightly after, the price of making a suit had increased to between £5 and £7 while those of shirts and trousers had increased to 2/- 6d.<sup>64</sup>

It would appear that in general, this category of tailors charged partly according to one's ability to pay. For instance, Jonah Okorie, the pioneer tailor with his workshop at Kent Street was said to have often charged Europeans higher than what he charged Africans. Among the prominent clients he catered for was Mr. Gibbon, a transport magnate and Director of Gibbon Transport Limited.

We need to note here that although women did not participate in the duwa duwa business, many had dress making shops which in many instances doubled as training places for young women in the art of baking and home management. In Aba during our period these ventures, some of which were called domestic science centres or institutes, were strictly private enterprises without any government involvement. They emerged from the 1940s through the 1950s. Some notable ones among these enterprises are worthy of mention.

There was Mrs. J.N. Egbutche who owned and operated the "Niger Sewing Institute" which was located at No. 20 Asa Road Aba. The exact date of its establishment is not clear but the institute which its owner described as "the model house of ladies fashion and domestic science"

engaged in all forms of fashion designing, dress making and teaching in domestic science. The establishment had facilities not only for day students, but also for boarders.<sup>65</sup>

There was Mrs. C. Chimezie who established her own dress making/domestic science outfit in the early 1950s at Ikot Ekpene Road. Her specialization according to her, was in children and female dresses. She also engaged in baking cakes and making pan-cakes which were sold mostly to school children. One interesting thing about Mrs. Chimezie is that she did not have the benefit of any formal western education.<sup>66</sup>

But perhaps the best known of these efforts, and arguably one of the largest of the centres, was Margaret Ekpo's "Windsor Sewing and Domestic Institute" founded in 1940s and located at various times at 21A Park Road, 132 Hundred-Foot Road and eventually at Windsor House, 162/164 Hundred-Foot Road Aba.<sup>67</sup> Mrs. Ekpo who trained and earned a Diploma in Domestic Economy from the United Kingdom made dresses for small girls and women who were her main clients at the time, but she also sewed for men.

In general, dress making was a very important enterprise in the growth of Aba. The enterprise provided employment to many. But more importantly, it trained many Aba people in the art of dress making. Because Aba dress makers were essentially copying European styles, Aba is today a major centre for the mass production of European style dresses in Nigeria.<sup>68</sup> In fact dress making is one of the major corner stones of Aba economy today and this is traceable to the good foundation laid through training and investment in the dress making industry in the period before 1960.

**Transportation Services:** Another important service Africans provided which contributed significantly to Aba's growth was the provision of bicycle and motor transport services. In this regard, bicycle transport would seem to have played the most crucial role. This was so particularly when motor vehicles were still scarce in Aba. At that time, bicycles filled a very important gap in the city's transportation system. Like in any other economic environment, transport was crucial for Aba's development. Transport was needed to move the major trading commodities—palm oil and gari as well as the numerous foods brought from the rural countryside into Aba, and people, from one place to another.

Unlike motor transportation, the bicycle transport business was completely in the hands of Africans. It was organized by individuals as there was no group or communal ownership. The business was run mostly by young men as any one who could earn or borrow £2: 10/- could own a bicycle. The bicycles were usually purchased in completely dismantled form, packed in six cases. It was purchased by traders or cycle repairers who subsequently assembled and sold them. Many bicycle repairers owned three or four bicycles which they hired out to members of their families or selected strangers. However because of the difficulties encountered in the hire business, most of them preferred outright sale.

With regards to the operation of the business, it is important to note that not every participant was a full time operator or transporter. Some were involved in various other callings, but employed their bicycles on part-time basis in order to earn extra cash. Though statistics are not available, it is believed that less than 50 per cent of those engaged in the provision of this service in Aba town participated on a full-time

basis. For such full-time operators, the largest number of bicycles an individual was said to have owned before world war II was four.<sup>69</sup>

Within the city, the main traffic was between residential areas, markets, oil buying centres, trading posts, watersides and the railway station. Because bicycle transport was less burdensome and more rapid than walking, the service was very popular and considerable distances were covered with peoples and goods. In addition to city journeys, there were also bicycle transport services up to 1960 from Aba to other economic centres such as Abala, Azumini, Ikot Ekpene, Owerri and Opobo.

With regards to the scale of fares within the city, this depended on one's destination and the quantity of the goods to be carried. But in general 3 tins of palm oil was charged the same rate as one passenger. With this type of calculation, a trip in the late 1930s and early 1940s from Aba to Abala (11 miles) cost 3 manillas; Azumini (15 miles) 4 manillas; Ikot Ekpene (25 miles) 8 manillas; Owerri (40 miles) 12 manillas and Opobo (67 miles) 15 manillas.<sup>70</sup>

Among some of the full-time transporters remembered by informants were Mr. A. Nwakanma and Mr. C. Onwukabia both Ngwa people. Many informants also readily attested to the crucial role bicycle transportation played in the growth of Aba. It was the major means of transporting persons, goods and services for most of our period. It was cheap and more readily available, and more importantly, it cut down man-hours that would have been wasted in energy and time, spent in walking. The most significant thing about it of course, was the fact that the service was provided exclusively by Africans.

Related to bicycle transportation was of course, the motor transport service. But unlike the bicycle transport service, motor transportation, at least in the earlier period, was dominated by European transporters—Messrs. Weeks, Gibbons transport, the U.A.C and John Holt, nearly all of which operated regular transport services within, and between Aba and several other economic centres in the area. In fact, before the 1930s, there were hardly Africans in the motor transport business. Even when they began to enter the trade, they found the terrain very difficult. This was because the trade was capital-intensive and required substantial managerial ability and logistical support.

By the 1930s, a number of Africans began to break into the motor transport business. The two persons frequently mentioned as the pioneers of the African motor transport service in Aba were Messrs. Rotibi and D.D. Onyemelukwe. Unfortunately not much is known of the efforts of Mr. Rotibi in the business. But informants readily recall how Mr. D.D. Onyemelukwe was able to raise enough capital from his cassava farm and gari processing business to enter the transport service business. Other Africans who entered the transport business in the 1950s were Messrs. Ugorji Eke, J.U. Nwafor, M.C. Obiora, and J.N. Mokwe.<sup>71</sup> In general, it appears that initially these Africans developed their transport facilities to help them in their business. While D.D. Onyemelukwe established his to help his cassava business, the four others mentioned established theirs to help them out in their contract supply business to Lever Brothers, Nigerian Breweries and even the government.

Some Africans however set up transport companies strictly as a business venture. A good example was a company called "Greater Tomorrow Transport Company" which was founded in 1950. The company which operated as a limited liability company had the following Directors



by February 1951: Messrs. T.O.C. Ojiako, C.C. Nkemena, K.O. Mbadiwe, C.N. Obioha, F.O. Ezeani, M.A. Okereke, S.A. Okóli, B.O. Ezeonyebuchi, Mazi Mbonu Ojike, and Barister G.C.M. Onyuike. The Chairman of the Board was Mr. K.O. Mbadiwe. Between May 1950 when it was founded and February 1951, the company had a fleet of 5 buses.<sup>72</sup>

By the 1950s, many of the transport companies were well established and they operated transport services between Aba and Owerri, Port Harcourt, Ikot Ekpene, Onitsha, Omoba, Mbawsi among others; and also within the township. Unlike the bicycle transport service in which there were relatively stable prices, the same was not the case with the motor transport service. Here, because of the intensive competition among the various transport owners, there was constant under-cutting of fares in an attempt to attract more of the passengers and goods. European transport companies found it difficult to compete favourably with African operators who could do with less overheads and narrower profit margins. Lamenting this state of affairs to the District Officer in 1935, the Manager of Gibbons Transport Company wrote:

Owing to the change in method of buying produce the question for carrying now rests with the middlemen. Whilst the previous years all this work was in the hands of European firms, therefore a great deal of the transport was done by Native Lorry Owners as middlemen had to make their own arrangements. Coming with this change there was a heavy decrease in transport charges as Native Lorry Owners were prepared to go down to any figure in order to keep their lorries on the road. Rates fall far below an economic level so far as recognized business was concerned and I found that it was not worth entering into competition.<sup>73</sup>

In terms of tangible figures, it cost 1/- 6d. for a trip from Aba to Oron in 1935; while on the Aba-Onitsha route, a distance of 102 miles, charges at some point reached as low as 9d. because of the increased competition among lorry owners for passengers.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, despite the low fares, many African operators, as attested<sup>to</sup> by the citation above, were able to adapt to the changing circumstances and were thus able to earn enough to keep their business going until the 1950s when it was possible to earn as much as between 3/- and 5/- 6d for trips between Onitsha and Enugu. Indeed except for the pioneer operators such as D.D. Onymelukwe and Rotibi, many of the other transport businesses not only survived the colonial period but, in fact, exist today.<sup>75</sup>

In general, the motor transport service provided by Africans played a crucial role in the growth of Aba. The success of African transporters enabled African businesses to thrive and compete with Europeans in other sectors of the economy. It was of course easier for ordinary folks to seek the services of African transport operators than the European ones. As indicated above, their charges were considerably less. Their greatest contribution was in the transportation of those goods and services which European transport companies were not particularly interested in, especially foodstuffs such as gari. But they also played an important role in the produce trade and in carrying mails for the government as was the case with M.C. Obiora transport service.

**Medical and Educational Services:** Africans also provided service<sup>s</sup> in the areas of education and health, a carry-over of a pre-colonial tendency. As noted in Chapter III above, for instance, despite the introduction of western medicine, traditional medicine continued to be widely patronized by Africans, especially in the areas of child delivery,

bone fracture treatment, malaria, psychiatry, snake bites and illnesses associated with evil spirits. There were many ailments which the people believed were caused by "poison" or evil spirits or spells which could be treated only by traditional practitioners. The attraction of traditional medicine included the charge, which were considerably lower than what was demanded in the area of western medicine. Charges depended on the bargaining power and the ability of the patient to pay. Sometimes the practitioners demanded only the objects that were intended for sacrifice and atonement, such as chickens and goats.

Traditional medical practice was not widespread in Aba. It was an art restricted to certain families, and apprentices from outside the family circles were rarely accepted. The knowledge passed from father to one of his children or brothers and so on. Among the well known traditional medical practitioners of our period were Pa Nwaigwe and Mr. Ogu.

It was not only in traditional medicine that Africans contributed to the health needs of Aba residents. Their role in the area of western medicine was also important. Some of them worked for the colonial government as medical officers. Among these were Drs. S.E. Onwu, R.N. Onyemelukwe and James Femi Pearse. There were midwives like P.O. Anusien and S.N. Wamuo. A few African doctors established successful private medical practices in Aba within the last two decades of colonial rule. Margaret Ekpo for instance informs us that after she and her husband returned from Ireland, her husband Dr. John Udo-Ekpo set up a medical clinic named "Windsor Clinic" around Park Road in 1948.<sup>76</sup> Another well known and popular doctor who ran a private medical outfit in Aba during this period was Dr. Onyejiaka who unfortunately was killed in Aba during an air raid in the early years of the Nigerian Civil War.

As in the area of health, the contribution of Africans to western education was supplementary to the contribution of traditional education as discussed in Chapter III above. Even so, African efforts in this respect were hampered by stringent conditions laid down by the colonial authorities indicating a restrictive attitude to private schools. Despite such constraints, some Africans succeeded in establishing private schools because of the acute shortage of school places in the Government and Mission schools. Among the residents who took this bold step was one Mr. L. Ikpeme who in 1939 established the Market Road Primary school.<sup>77</sup> Mr. Ikpeme was motivated to establish the school because he discovered that between the schools operated by the government and those of the Missions, a gap remained to be filled both in the number of school places and in the quality of education.<sup>78</sup> Considerations of profit was also, no doubt, a major factor.

Mr. Ikpeme planned to provide classes for standards 1 to 6; but the government only allowed him to establish a standards 1 to 4 school. The school began with 8 members of staff, teaching about 200 children divided into 8 classes in three buildings. Even though the number of pupils in the school continued to increase, the staff strength remained the same until 1960. Among the teachers who taught in the school were Mr. Ekanor and Mr. Isara both of whom have since died.<sup>79</sup>

The efforts of Mr. Ikpeme and many others who succeeded in establishing about 10 private schools in Aba by 1960, clearly demonstrates that Africans went to significant length in their contribution to the growth of Aba. That an African could set up such a school within the limitations of a colonial setting is obviously a commendable testimony to this effort. Unfortunately such African efforts were hardly recorded in the existing literature of the period.

Even in the schools established by the colonial government and the Missions, African contribution was also very significant. For instance, by 1930, an African Superintendent of Education had been appointed in Aba. The Aba government school established in 1910 also had some African teachers among its staff. The same was the case with the Township Primary School established by the colonial government in 1946.

But it was in the Mission schools that Africans made the greatest contribution. Because of the large number of the Missions, they were often in competition with one another for converts. Education was seen as an important means for attracting converts as well as for producing preachers. Yet, often, the Missions did not possess the necessary funds to prosecute their educational programmes. In nearly all cases, it was Africans that came to the rescue by providing land as well as the labour and resources for putting up church and school buildings. For instance, the first Mission school in Aba was established in the early 1920s by the Niger Delta Pastorate through the personal contribution of its members. In fact, the name of the school and church—"St. Michael's" was from Mr. Michael Nwaotebe, a member who donated his personal land to the Mission. The same was the case with "St. Eugene's Church and Primary School" as well as "Sacred Heart College" both established in the Eziukwu area of the town largely through the resources and labour of Africans, especially members of the Uzoigwe family. Thus Africans made very significant contributions to the growth of Aba in the areas of health and educational services.

### The Contribution of Service Enterprises to the Growth of Aba

Like trading, service enterprises played a very significant role in the growth of Aba. Whether it was washermen, blacksmiths, watch repairers, goldsmiths, bukas, bakeries or those already discussed in the work, Africans through these services made several contributions to the town's growth.

The first was the employment opportunities the services created for both residents and new immigrants. Services such as bakeries needed both skilled and unskilled labour at various stages of production such as kneading of the dough and firing of the oven with firewood. Bukas similarly needed hands for their cooking, serving and cleaning up work. All these including the provision of firewood provided employment opportunities. Indeed additional employment was created for the many hands through which bread and other baked products were distributed. For instance, it is estimated that for every job created in the bread production process, additional 3 to 5 jobs were created in the distribution process. In providing employment to the people, services thus played a crucial role in Aba's growth.

Another important contribution of service enterprises was in the training of manpower which is very essential in growth and development. This impact is particularly significant because of the tremendous economic successes being recorded by indigenous enterprises in Aba today. To a large extent, such success is owed to the pioneering and training activities of indigenous enterprises during the period covered by this study. For instance the great welding and fabrication work that is going on in Aba today has its roots in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Though the idea of blacksmithing as earlier noted was

introduced by Awka smiths among the Ngwa in the pre-colonial period, evidence indicates that the knowledge was retained and even developed further in colonial Aba. In fact during the colonial period, tinsmithing was added to it. Thus, we had such varied goods as cutlasses, hoes, buckets, pans, diggers, shovels, door hinges, bolts and nuts, spanners, and even guns. With the development of welding by the 1950s, goods such as iron beds were added. These goods as is well known are basic goods; many of them are very useful not only on their own but in the production of other goods. Thus the transfer of the knowledge of the production of such basic goods from one set of apprentices to another led to the development of a large pool of local manpower in iron and steel fabrication. Needless to note that this transfer of skills was not peculiar to blacksmithing but was also applicable to the other services.

Service enterprises also provided essential services whose absence would have negatively affected urban life in Aba. Among such important services were bukas/restaurants, washerman services and prostitution. Many men came to the city without their nuclear families i.e. their wives and children. Depending on the nature of their work, such men sometimes found themselves too busy to either cook their food or wash their clothes. In fact some worked either in the motor park or the railway station all day. It was thus imperative that for such people, others should provide catering services. This is in fact in line with the theory of urbanization that talks of the specialization of functions. Similarly, some middle and upper-class workers and service personnel such as policemen and soldiers as well as Europeans needed specialized washerman services. In the same way prostitutes came to fill an important gap in a city inhabited mostly by immigrants. Because most Igbo and non-Igbo settlers including whites, particularly in the earlier period, came without their wives, the service became widely patronized in

Aba despite frequent police raids on them. Prominent prostitutes of our period of study easily remembered are Madam Blockwell and Oyibo Uka.

We can easily imagine what life would have been like for a section of the residents if these services were not provided. Even now in Aba, more than 80 percent of the white-collar workers, traders, motor park and railway workers etc, eat at least one meal or snack refreshment outside their homes. The figure for the period before 1960 is thought to be even higher. It is because of the large demand that bukas/restaurants as well as palm wine bars succeeded so well as businesses. Notable proprietors include one Mr. Onwumodo from Mbaise who sold a variety of prepared foods at Ekeoha market. With proceeds from the business, he was able to train his children up to university level and even erected buildings in the town, one of which is at Owerri Road Over Rail.<sup>80</sup>

Service enterprises also helped many Africans to grow from a situation of subsistence to one of being major investors and employers, a fact which in turn helped the overall growth of Aba. A number of good examples in Aba before 1960 exist. One of the best is the case of a widow by the name Mrs. Epelle who managed to progress from a small buka business to a bigger establishment called "Chiyere Hotel." The hotel was opened in May 1951 at a ceremony attended by a significant number of the Aba elite including the Aba Local Authority, Mr. A.G. Saville.<sup>81</sup> Located at 128 Jubilee Road, the hotel was run as a modern enterprise with a manager called Mr. S.E. Ukanwanta. A Hotel which was up to the standard of attracting the Aba Local Authority at its opening and which had a hotelier as manager must have been a fairly large investment.



Service enterprises also helped the growth of Aba through the service they gave to other occupations and enterprises. Many Africans for instance used their motor vehicles to supply palm produce to European firms which they subsequently prepared and exported. Others used their own vehicles to supply raw materials to European manufacturing enterprises such as Lever Brothers, Nigerian Breweries and P.Z. We also have instances of Africans such as Mr. Efanga who was appointed the industrial tailor of factory workers of Nigerian Breweries Limited in the early 1960s. In that capacity, Mr. Efanga sewed the khaki factory trousers, shirts and over-coats of the workers. It is significant that because of the success of Mr. Efanga and the way Nigerian Breweries perceived his contribution to their growth, Mr. Efanga was retained to continue sewing for Nigerian Breweries after the Nigerian Civil War.<sup>82</sup> Indeed between 1977 and 1979 when this writer was a staff of that company, he was still on the job, with the monthly contract value running into thousands of naira. Mr. Efanga however died in the early 1980s. To think that a company such as Nigerian Breweries Aba could retain an African on such a contract service for such a long time is a testimony to the skill, and ability of Africans to deliver.

### Conclusion

It is clear from the discussion that, overall, indigenous enterprises played crucial roles not only in the growth of Aba in the period up to 1960, but also in the continuing importance of that town in this potentially great country.

Notes

1. See Business in ECOWAS Vol. 3, No. 18, September, 1989.
2. Federal Republic of Nigeria, Second National Development Plan 1970-74 (Lagos Federal Ministry of Information, 1970), P.103; Cited in Siyambola Tomori; 'Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing' in F.A. Olaloku, F.O. Fajana, S. Tomori and I.I. Ukpong Eds.), Structure of the Nigerian Economy. London, 1982. P.11
3. Interview with Madam Janey Igbokwe, housewife (61 years), December 22, 1987.
4. N.A.E. Abadist 9/1/1447, Ockiya F.K. (Mr.), Application for Loan P.1.
5. Ibid., P.8.
6. Ibid
7. Ibid
8. On informal Enterprises which some refer to also as indigenous enterprises, see O.J. Fapohunda, The Informal Sector of Lagos: An Inquiry into Urban Poverty and Employment, Ibadan, 1985.
9. Interview with Madam Chimezie, retired business woman (60 years), December 16, 1987.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. See Eastern States Express, July 27, 1951. P.3.
13. Ibid.
14. During the court proceedings, both men had to test the drinks in an attempt to assess its quality.

15. Ibid.
16. Interview with His Royal Highness, Eze J.G.N. Ógbonna (75 years).  
December 24 1987.
17. Interview with Mrs. Chimezie already cited.
18. It is this commercial importance of the town in the pre-colonial period that made Professor Elizabeth Isichei to describe pre-colonial Aba as a market but not a settlement. See E. Ishichei, A History of the Igbo People, London, 1971. P.205.
19. Census of Nigeria, 1963 (Lagos: Government printer, 1963).
20. Interview with Mrs. Janey Igbokwe already cited.
21. Interview with Mr. Nwaru.
22. Interview with Mrs. Janey Igbokwe already cited.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Interview with Mr. Uwakwe Eke, trader (60 years), December 23, 1987.
26. Interview with Dr. I.J. Uke, University Lecturer (35 years) February 2, 1992.
27. As a growing young boy in Aba, we the children used to have a song common to nearly all the young in Aba at the time to the effect that Nnana Kalu was the controller of stockfish.
28. Interview with Mazi Onwukwe Ukonu, trader (62 years), December 19, 1987.
29. Ibid.
30. Interview with Dr. Uke already cited. Some of these people are said to have trained people like Chief Onwuka Kalu of Onwuka Interbiz.
31. Interview with Mr. Onukwe Ukonu already cited.

32. The Duwa Duwa which is a form of the tailoring trade is discussed extensively in the latter sections of this chapter.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. 'Tight belly cloth' is a type of underwear which women, especially those with big belly use to hold their bellies down.
36. Ibid.
37. Interview with Mazi Onwukwe Ukonu already cited. Reference to the palm oil trading activities of the Igbere, Aro and Abriba has already been made in Chapter III.
38. Ibid. See also interview with Mazi C.A. Obiegbu, retired production supervisor, Lever Brothers Ltd. Aba. (66 years), February 10, 1987.
39. Interview with Mazi Obiegbu already cited.
40. Chief Ugorji Eke has just recently died (February 1992) in Aba.
41. Interview with Mr. N. Ejere, retired truck pusher, (68 years), October 14, 1988.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid. See also Interview with Livinus Amaechi, bicycle repairer (60 years), October 10, 1988.
44. Interview with Mr. N. Ejere already cited.
45. Interview with Mr. Livinus Amaechi already cited.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid. See also Interview with Mr. John Aka, bicycle repairer, (55 years), October 12, 1988.
48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.
50. Interview with Mr. Michael Asigbu, retired carpenter, (84 years) 1988.
51. Ibid. See also Interview with Mr. A. Nwafor, a carpenter, (58 years), October 9, 1988.
52. Interview with Mr. Michael Asigbu already cited.
53. Ibid. See also Interview with Mr. A. Nwafor already cited.
54. Ibid. See also Interview with Godfrey Ayim, a bricklayer, (65 years), October 15, 1988.
55. Interview with Mr. Michael Asigbu already cited.
56. Ibid.
57. Interview with Mr. A. Nkwocha, Cobbler, (60 years), October 11, 1988.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid. See also Interview with Mr. F.A. Nwaigwe, Shoe mender (cobbler), October 16, 1988.
60. Interview with Mr. Onwukwe Ukonu already cited.
61. Ibid. See also Interview with Mr. Lambert Amamasi, tailor, (61 years), October 1988.
62. Interview with Mr. Onwukwe Ukonu, already cited.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. See Eastern States Express, Vol.II, Aba, June 18, 1951.
66. Interview with Mrs. Chimezie already cited.
67. See H.E. Etomi, 'A Biography of Margaret Ekpo', B.A. Long Essay, Ogun State University, 1988. See also Eastern States Express, Vol.II, Aba, June 4, 1951.

68. A walk through Aba roads (both major and minor ones) today would demonstrate the widespread nature of dress making in the town. Women and children are not left out in the extra-ordinary imitation of European styles which are subsequently branded on completion 'made in Britain', 'made in Spain', 'made in Hongkong'. When one asks them why they are using such tags instead of made in Aba or 'Nigeria?', they reply that Nigerians would neither not buy at all, nor pay poor prices for them. Because of these reasons, and since the dresses look almost like the foreign ones, they give them such brand names and charge sometimes the same or a bit less than the foreign ones. In recent times however, because of the low exchange rate of the Nigerian naira vis-à-vis other currencies which has made the cost of buying foreign ones expensive, they are more willing and more confident to tell a buyer—this is made in Aba and it is cheaper sometimes by up to 50-100 percent. In most cases economic sense makes the buyer buy 'Aba made'.
69. N.A.E. ~~Abadist~~ 14/1/563, 'Bicycle Transport Industry', July 1938. P.7.
70. Ibid.
71. Interview with Mazi C.A. Obieghu already cited.
72. See Eastern States Express Vol.I, Aba, February 13, 1951. P.1.
73. N.A.E. Abadist. 14/216/344, 'Annual Report, Aba Division', 1934. P.73
74. This was testified to by the Transport Manager of Gibbons Transport Company. See Ibid. P.74.
75. Both Mr. Mokwe and Nwafor are still operating lorries and are in fact, major distributors of the products of Nigerian Breweries now.
76. Interview with Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, (74 years), Calabar, March 1989 in H.E. Etomi, Op. Cit., Appendix I. The Manuscript of this interview was kindly given to this author by Miss Etomi.

77. Interview with Mr. U.I. Ikot, retired teacher (65 years),  
November 20, 1988.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Interview with Mr. Nwaru already cited.
81. For a comprehensive list of those at the ceremony, see Eastern States Express, Aba, June 6, 1951. P.4.
82. The author was a witness to this development, and knows some of Mr. Efanga's children, one of them a female, obtained a law degree from the University of Ibadan in 1988.

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## CHAPTER VII

### EPILOGUE: DECLINE AND RECOVERY, THE ROLE OF THE INDIGENOUS FACTOR

By 1960, Aba had from modest beginnings grown into a major urban and commercial centre. A number of facts easily attest to this growth. The first is population. From a modest population figure of 833 persons in 1911, Aba's population reached 131,000 in 1963. Also as is evident in the work, this population was highly cosmopolitan. From diameter of less than half a kilometre in 1900 Aba town's diameter rose to an estimated 6 to 7 kilometres by 1960.<sup>1</sup> With no industrial establishment in 1900, Aba grew to have 4 industries in 1960. From one market in 1900, Aba grew to have 3 major markets and several smaller ones by 1960. From no paved road in 1900 to about 20 kilometres of paved and surfaced roads in 1960. It also grew from having no postal or telephone services, electricity, or pipe-borne water to having all these by 1960. From having no hospital in 1900, Aba grew to have one major General Hospital and a number of dispensaries in 1960. From having no schools in 1900, Aba had one Teacher Training College, 3 Secondary Schools, 3 Government Primary Schools and about 10 private ones by 1960. An from being a largely unimpressive but important market town in 1900, it has become the major centre for commercial transaction for residents of more than 20 minor towns and about 6 major ones including Owerri, Uyo, Calabar, Umuahia and Port Harcourt.

The list of facts attesting to Aba's growth is by no means exhausted. Looking at the list however, one tends to get the impression that Aba grew to prominence between 1900-1960 exclusively because of external influences. It is perhaps from this kind of evidence that some scholars



like Elizabeth Isichei have chosen to describe Aba as a colonial creation. But, contrary to such claims, this study has shown that this view that Aba is a colonial creation cannot be sustained. The work has demonstrated that before the inception of colonialism, Aba was already in existence, albeit a small but significant village. This significance was bestowed on Aba mainly by its market called Ekeoha.

From our definition of an urban area as a centre of industry, increasing population, commerce and entrepreneurship, it can be seen that, because of the needs of long distance traders, Aba was already tending towards urbanization before the inception of the colonial era. The increasing importance of Aba in the long distance palm produce trade had engendered immigration into Aba by people from Bonny, Opobo, Bende, Aro and other places. It was in fact the commercial importance of the settlement at the head of the Aba (Aza) river that helped to attract the attention of invading British Colonial Officials.

Soon it became clear that not only was Aba commercially important in terms of the the produce trade, but it was also strategically located at a road junction between the Igbo, Cross River and Rivers areas. For a nascent administration that was in a hurry to establish its authority over recalcitrant peoples, this was a most important fact that they could hardly ignore. It was thus not surprising that the British quickly moved their district headquarters in the area from Akwete to Aba. This development, in addition to the coming of the railway and motor transport services gave a fillip to the immigration of both Europeans and Africans into the area as they sought to take advantage of the economic opportunities the settlement offered. It is these development that made colonial authorities to think of classifying Aba as an urban area.

Subsequently Aba was classified as a Third Class township in 1919, only to be re-classified as a Second Class town by December, 1922.

Thus even in the early period of its urban growth, internal factors were crucial even if they were not easily discernible. Africans made up the bulk of the population, produced the local goods needed by both Africans and Europeans. Their labour was also crucial in all the developmental activities that took place. Thus the urban status Aba acquired in the early 1920s, though bestowed on it by colonial authorities, was in fact a product of the efforts of both Africans and Europeans. Colonialism would not have created urbanization out of Aba in a vacuum.

Decline: 1929 - 1945

The increased activities which Aba witnessed following its re-classification when it attracted many European firms and Africans were disrupted by the 1929 riots during which many business were devastated. The riots were in fact a culmination of an era in which the people faced difficult economic circumstances. Produce prices had fallen very sharply in some cases twice in one single year. From a high price of £24 per ton in December 1928, the buying price of palm oil in Aba fell to an average of £20: 5/- between April and June of 1929 only to further decline to £19: 5/- by December of the same year. Indeed the situation was so bad that many Africans refused to bring out their produce for sale.

Arising from the fall in produce prices was a decline in the exchange value of the manilla - from an old rate of 7 or 8 manillas to a shilling, it fell to 9 or 10 manillas. What this meant was that the people now had to pay more to purchase the same or even lesser quantity of goods than they hitherto did.

It was in the midst of these economic difficulties that rumours came from Oloko that women were to be taxed in the new system of direct taxation that had been introduced in 1928. Given the fact that they already nursed a lot of bitterness against the colonial authorities because of the taxation of their men as well as the economic difficulties they faced, it was not surprising that the women reacted violently to the rumour. The result was the Aba riots which as already noted, devastated many businesses in the town.

Though some compensation was paid for the damages particularly to European interests, the renewed tempo in economic activities was short-lived. This was because soon after many businesses reopened, and new ones and new immigrants came in, the town entered a period of serious economic depression. This time it was not only the produce trade that was affected but also other business. For instance, many European commercial firms reduced their operations drastically because of lack of patronage by Africans as the main commercial road—Owerri Road metamorphosed from a place of bustling economic activities into an area remarkable for its "sabbatical calm". Also transportation became seriously affected as the cost of new bicycles, motor vehicles and spare parts became prohibitive. Indeed, even property owners were not left out as many could not find tenants to rent their accommodations. Matters came to a head with the inception of the Second World War in 1939, a

situation which introduced war time shortages and rationing which remained acute until 1941.

It is clear from the discussion that even in the period of decline, the role of Africans was an important factor in the ability of the town to cope and adapt. Having noticed a price structure that was not commensurate with their input into production, they refused to bring out their goods for sale. Having noticed the introduction of a taxation system they considered out of tune with the times and their general way of life, they resisted and in so doing negatively affected growth. Not having as much cash as they used to have, they reduced the quantity of European goods they purchased and in some cases struck many out completely from their shopping list. The result: many European firms reduced their operations. To the extent that when Africans sneezed, the Aba economy caught cold, to that extent the importance of their general contributions must of necessity be acknowledged. If they were this important even in the period of decline, then they certainly required to be noted in the text instead of just the footnote.

Recovery: 1945 - 1960

From about 1942, the Aba economy began to experience some recovery. Greater demand for palm produce occasioned by the disruptions of the supplies from the other parts of the world by the war, meant that Aba producers and middlemen earned more income. There were also increases in wages by the colonial authorities. Also the quartering of soldiers in the town and the "end of war benefits" paid out to African service personnel generated increased economic activity. In general therefore, the end of the war in 1945 saw increased activities in Aba. The significant point to note however, is that it was internal factors

that seem to have generated the most changes during the period. Though external elements such as water supply, electricity, western education and health facilities had been introduced, they did not wipe out traditional ones which continued to play functional roles.

With regards to enterprises, foreigners kept faith with Aba as they began to establish manufacturing enterprises instead of engaging only in wholesale and retail trading. Such manufacturing enterprises were however concentrated on the production of such consumer products as soap, beer and soft drinks. Though these helped in creating jobs and encouraging immigration into the town, such production was however incapable of transforming the society by engendering self sustained development. They nevertheless succeeded in creating some entrepreneurs who made important contributions to the town's growth.

But this contribution of foreign enterprises cannot in my opinion compare with those of indigenous ones during the period. With some savings from the 'increased' income from produce trading, wages, and discharge benefits many Africans set up indigenous enterprises which were far more numerous than the foreign ones. What they lacked in capital outlay, they compensated for in the large variety of activities they engaged in, ranging from blacksmithing through manufacturing to trading. Because they were much larger in number, they created more jobs, reached more people, performed more services and created more wealth in the hands of the people. Here again, Africans made as much, if not more contribution to the growth of Aba. *than non-Africans.*

Of course it is a well known fact that Africans were also an important part of the colonial services. Even though they worked mainly in the intermediate and lower cadres, they nevertheless made their own contributions to the growth of the town. However this African contribution was not matched by Europeans in political developments in Aba. This was hardly surprising since colonialism could not be expected to plot its own downfall. Similarly, foreign contribution was also low in the provision of housing for accommodation. Indeed apart from the few structures put up by European commercial firms along Aba-Owerri road to house their various businesses, nearly all other rentable accommodation and houses in the town were provided by Africans.

Overall therefore, it is clear that Aba is not and could not have been a creation of external factors alone, or, to put it differently, a colonial creation. As we have tried to demonstrate, Aba grew to prominence as a result of the interaction of internal and external factors. Neither factor acting alone would have produced the type of growth Aba witnessed in the period studied. Indeed if external factors were the only ones that made for Aba's growth, Aba would probably not have recovered from the setbacks caused by the Nigerian Civil War.

#### Civil War and Devastation: 1967 - 1970

1960 the end of our period saw the achievement of political independence by Nigeria. Hopes were raised by this development as people looked forward to a better life in all fields. But this expectation turned out to be misplaced. For soon after independence, specifically by 1966, the problems of ethnicism and corruption<sup>2</sup> among others had eaten deep into the Nigerian State as to provide an excuse for the first military

coup d'état in Commonwealth West Africa carried out by a group of young majors on January 15, 1966.<sup>3</sup>

Ordinarily one would have agreed with the cry of the officers that

Our enemies are the political profiteers, swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand 10 percent, those that seek to keep the country permanently divided so that they can remain in office as Ministers and VIPs of waste, the tribalists, the nepotists<sup>4</sup>

as these were genuine issues Nigerians felt strongly about during the time. The problem however was that the coup became perceived soon after as a sectional, in particular, an Igbo coup. Six of the seven majors involved were Igbo. While senior Federal and Regional leaders, as well as army officers from both the North and the West were killed, those who held similar positions in the East survived. Northerners in particular could not accept Nzeogwu's explanation that the lopsided nature of the killings were a result of operational deficiencies of some of the coup plotters. Having killed many of the political leaders and sent others into hiding, a leadership vacuum was subsequently created. In the midst of the confusion, General Ironsi, the Army Commander at the time, again an Igbo, took over power.

While the nation was still trying to assimilate these series of events involving the Igbo, General Ironsi who appeared to have seen the country's problems as one emanating from the Regions, issued a decree in May 1966 abolishing all political parties and the Regions and unifying the civil service. Ironsi may have meant well. But the sectional sentiments already built up in the country at the time made sections of

the Nigerian nation, especially the North to see the decree as an attempt by the south, particularly the Igbo, to dominate the whole country. Riots broke out in several northern cities against the decree in the process of which many Igbo were killed. In July of the same year - 1966, a counter coup was staged in which 245 army personnel particularly Eastern army officers were killed.

The second coup saw the coming to power of the then Colonel Yakubu Gowon. It however did not put an end to the political problems. Crisis and killings continued as the Igbo were hunted down in the North. Between September 28 and October 1, there were terrible massacres of the Igbo in Kaduna, Zaria, Jos and Kano. Nearly 1½ million Igbo refugees subsequently fled south to the Igbo areas. Anti-national sentiments grew among the Igbo as the cry for secession became louder. The last straw was the division of Nigeria into 12 states by General Gowon on May 27, 1967, which gave the minorities a place in the Nigerian nation. Three days after - May 30, the then Colonel Ojukwu declared the secession of the Republic of Biafra.<sup>5</sup> Civil war consequently broke out between the new state of Biafra and the rest of Federal Republic of Nigeria.

As would be expected the war had far reaching consequences for life and general socio-economic and political activities in Aba. In the first place, the war made it difficult for Aba to take advantage of new immigrants fleeing from the north who found the town a most ideal place to settle and invest their repatriated capital. But more important was the disruptions caused by the war. In the early stages of the war, Nigerian planes often came for bombing raids in Aba. Aba was obviously seen as one of the major economic centres of Biafra, hence early attempts were made to disrupt commercial activities there. In this regard, the Nigerian Government was largely successful. In the early days of the bombings,



residents of the town thought they could cope with the bombings through the various tactics they had been taught by civil defence authorities. As a young school boy in 1967, this writer with others were taught to run in the direction opposite to that of the attacking aircrafts. Soon however, it became clear that with the frequency of the bombings, most families risked losing some members if they remained in the town.

Consequently, there began a massive exodus of Aba residents from late 1967 to their various villages. The practice initially was for the male traders and workers to take their wives and children back to the villages and then return to Aba to continue their business. By 1968 however, increased military activity both from the air and on land through Port Harcourt necessitated the closure or movement away from Aba to other inner centres, of most government, company and individual businesses. Most of my informants who were traders told me that they were using bicycles to salvage as much of their property and goods as they could, particularly the light weight ones from 1967 until 1968 when they finally left Aba.<sup>6</sup> The European companies did not fare any better. Lever Brothers for instance was closed down in 1968 and skeletal operations of the factory were moved to Awomama where soap continued to be produced by crude means "with a handful of workers".<sup>7</sup>

The point being made therefore is that the coming of the Nigerian civil war reversed the largely uninterrupted growth Aba had enjoyed since the disruptions caused by the 1929 women riots. Businesses closed, schools closed, government offices closed, to the extent that by 1968, virtually all its residents also left. Thus, inspite of the fact that the physical structures of the town remained almost intact as no serious battles were fought there, in real terms however, Aba was virtually back to the situation it was in the first decade of this century—a place that was

largely unpopulated, without transport, no infrastructure, no industries and so on.

### Post Civil War Recovery

The end of the war in 1970 opened a new chapter in Aba's history. The town became faced with challenges of growth similar to those it experienced in the first decade of the century. The question then is how did Aba cope with the new challenges? Was its re-emergence to prominence a function of external factors or internal ones or both? If it is both, what was the relative contribution of each factor?

At the end of the war, individual business men began returning to the town. Companies such as Lever Brothers and Nigerian Breweries also started returning to the town. Lever Brothers for instance called back all its surviving staff between January and February 1970. Returning residents however met different experiences in Aba. The best would seem to be those of company residents most of whom re-entered their jobs with their former service intact. In addition, financial bonuses were paid out to them so that they could use it in rehabilitating themselves. Lever Brothers for instance paid one month's salary to its returning workers for that purpose.<sup>8</sup>

But for returning Aba traders and individual business men, the experience was terrible; similar to that of initial immigrants into the town between 1900 and the 1930s. Many trekked long distances, sometimes up to 100 kilometres to get back to Aba with practically nothing on them. The first set of visits were mainly exploratory. By 1971 however, many of the traders had fully returned, to face numerous problems. Most had little or no capital to use in re-establishing

themselves in their former businesses.<sup>9</sup> In addition most of their market stalls needed to be rebuilt and refurbished. Perhaps more problematic was the fact that itinerant Hausa, Yoruba and Midwest traders<sup>10</sup> some of whom were wives and brothers of occupying Federal troops, had taken over their lines of business. Many were thus in for a fresh start both in terms of capital and in the form of business they engaged in.

The problem of occupying soldiers was the most acute for many returning residents. In the first place, many good houses in the town were taken over by Federal soldiers. Returning owners and tenants had to make do with various make-shift accommodations. Secondly, there was a general atmosphere of insecurity in the town as people lived in fear of soldiers, particularly in the Over Rail (Eziukwu) and Ogbor Hill areas of the town. In broad daylight, soldiers would suddenly mount road blocks and confiscate various properties belonging to people, especially bicycles.<sup>11</sup> Bicycles were important because there was hardly any motor transport service at the time. So people either used their old bicycles or trekked. Soldiers also seized and molested women, and at check points, people were subjected to corporal punishments for the slightest offence. All these acts delayed the early resumption of normalcy in the town.

Things however began to change in early 1971. By that time, soldiers began to be gradually withdrawn to the barracks while others were camped in some schools.<sup>12</sup> More people began to return to their various jobs. For the Igbo traders, renewed efforts were made at raising capital. These efforts were partly helped by the £20 worth of Biafran money that the Federal Government changed for everybody.<sup>13</sup> Others were able to retrieve some money they had in banks before the crisis. A number of others got money from their friends among Yoruba and Hausa traders. One of my informants Mr. Christopher Manukaji recalls the help

he received in money that was given to him by one Alhaji Ahmadu, a Hausa trader from Yola who dealt in onions and beans. Many residents were also able to raise money through scavenging for cassava from which they made piassava, and palm nuts from which they got palm kernels. Some of these were eaten as food while others were sold for cash. Also gathered and sold for money were firewood, mushroom, oil beans and vegetables. All these were sold to government or company workers and soldiers; for these were the people who had cash to spend at the time.

Another major way by which money was raised by returning residents especially traders was through the selling of their precious and valuable properties. Mr. Manukaji for instance told me that he sold some of his wife's trinkets, some of their china (breakable) wares as well as dresses. As he noted:

I sold one of my wife's necklaces to a Hausa trader for £20 and through the various sources including gifts, I raised £100 with which I returned to my former trade in early 1971. Progress was slow, but by 1972, I had enough ground to enable my family to rejoin me.<sup>14</sup>

But it was not all traders that could afford to return to their former businesses. Some big time merchants in capital intensive businesses who lost all their capital during the war could not go back. Many only raised enough funds to enter such businesses as the groundnut and gari trades. A very good example is one Mr. Livinus Ayozie. Before the war, he was trading in vono iron and wooden beds. But because the beds (particularly the vono ones) were heavy, he was not able to salvage them during the war. When he returned after the war, and lacking the necessary capital

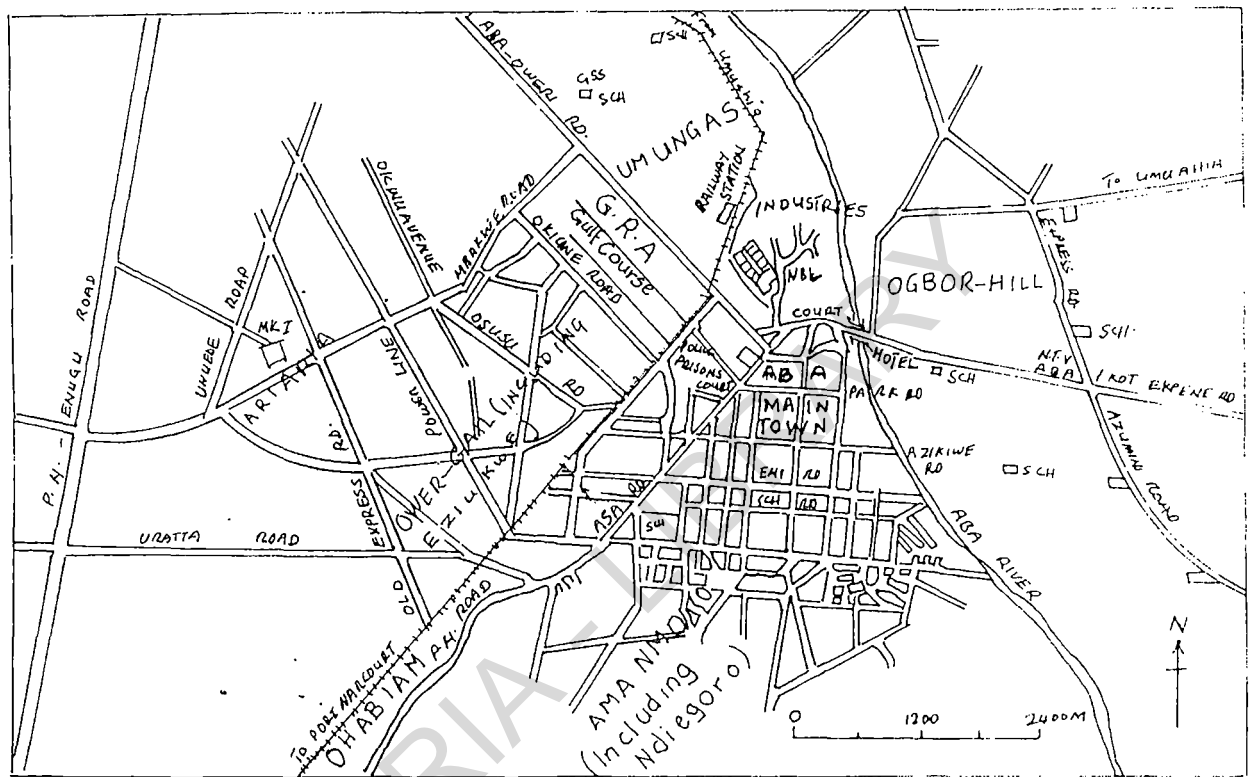
to return to his former trade, he began hawking groundnuts as a way of starting a new life. He did this between 1970 and 1975. Eventually after raising enough capital, he entered a new trade, namely, the sewing of hand bags and traveling bags. He made such success of his new business that by 1985, he had enough money to put up a 3 storey building at Faulks Road Aba.<sup>15</sup>

In general, we need to note that the war did not produce only negative effects for Aba. Some positive legacies were left behind which also contributed to the re-emergence of Aba to prominence. Firstly, Aba gained from the quartering of soldiers in the town. The soldiers brought a lot of money into the town and being big spenders contributed greatly to the early recovery of the town. Related to this was the fact that many of their relatives and other persons who followed them as "win the war" traders brought in a lot of goods and cash also. This situation was similar to what happened after the Second World War in 1945.

Secondly, Aba gained from the psychological effects of the war on the Igbo. Many Igbo merchants and traders who came back to the East before and during the war decided to remain in the East ostensibly because of fear for the safety of their investments. Many found Aba the ideal place to settle, bringing in the process new ideas and capital.

Also, after the war, the spirit of indigenous enterprise which had manifested in the numerous businesses set up by African residents before 1960 and which was the hallmark of the Biafran experience (in terms of the many goods and weapons improvised in Biafra) found practical expression in Aba. People began to invest and manufacture small machines which were useful in the industrialization process. Even some of the machines that were formerly imported began to be designed

# ABA AND ENVIRONS, 1980



- ROAD
- - - RAILWAY
- ~ RIVER

Source: Adapted From Federal Survey Dept. Lagos

and fabricated in Aba. It is said, for instance, that one Mr. Lawrence Onwuegbuchulam who was formerly working with the Aba Star Paper Mill got the design specifications of a toilet roll machine and subsequently gave it to his brother, a welder based at No. 35 Azikiwe Road Aba.<sup>16</sup> His brother manufactured the machine and it was successfully tested. Mr. Onwuegbuchulam used the machine to establish a factory at Omuma Road in Aba where toilet roll is still being produced today.<sup>17</sup>

In general, by 1981, Aba residents of all walks of life had almost completely recovered from the devastating effects of the Nigerian Civil War. The only major setback in the process, was a gigantic fire that destroyed both goods and infrastructure in Ekeoha main market in 1976. Consequent upon that disaster, the Imo State Government moved the market to Ariaria on Faulks Road.<sup>18</sup> The Ariaria market having been set up as a relief market for the traders has since become the major hob of business activities not only in Aba but also in the whole of the former Eastern Region. It is probably the largest market in the area, second only perhaps to the Onitsha main market.

One other noteworthy setback in the town was the national economic down-turn of 1982 to 1983. As noted earlier, by 1981 most Aba residents had fully recovered from the civil war and even from the fire disaster of 1976. Many had become very rich from merchandizing and manufacturing from local resources. But a large number were also engaged in importing and exporting. For this large group, the foreign exchange crisis occasioned by the economic down-turn devastated their businesses.<sup>19</sup> Many in Aba learnt a serious lesson from their experiences during that period to the extent that virtually everywhere in Aba today many people talk of machines, local manufacture and local technology. No one talks of import business alone any more.

The question then is what is the state of Aba today? What are the prospects for the future? Today, March 1991, Aba stands out as a good example of a city which has made tremendous advances in all fields of human endeavour. Figures from the latest Imo State Industrial directory<sup>20</sup> prepared in 1988 clearly testifies to this. Thus in the area of trade for instance, while historically important trades like Okirika and stockfish remains very important and in fact Aba remains the major centre for them, small time merchandizing has since been replaced by big time general merchandizing. Though this transformation is not peculiar to Aba, Aba has made the best progress when compared with other towns in the former Imo State. Thus while the directory cited above listed 30 supermarkets for Aba; Okigwe and Orlu had 3 each while Owerri and Umuahia had 26 and 11 respectively. For the big merchants, Aba has 277 listed, Okigwe 50, Umuahia 48 while Owerri the capital city has 201.

It is significant to note that Aba has as many as 30 supermarkets listed—a business in which indigenous participation was very negligible by 1960. Also worthy of note is the number of merchant businesses. Though Ekepha (now Ariaria) market retains its prominent position as the major centre of commercial activities for the peoples of Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River and former Imo States, large merchant stores of highly successful merchants can now be seen on most roads in Aba. Indeed, unlike before, when Aba traders and merchants clustered only in Aba and Nigeria, many are now venturing out to other countries in a modern form of long distance trading. Many Aba merchants today carry made in Nigeria and made in Aba goods to places like Equatorial Guinea, Benin Republic, Togo, Gabon, Burkina Faso and Liberia. These goods include textiles, various types of bags, shoes and motor spare parts. In most cases,



Aba merchants open up branch shops in these countries, and put in some of their boys to run them. One of my informants told me that his second son called Keneth is presently in Burkina Faso selling motor spare parts.<sup>21</sup>

In the area of local manufacturing Aba has now become more than ever before the centre of indigenous manufacturing in Nigeria to the extent that most Nigerians would readily refer to any home made item as "Aba made." Aba producers are today particularly noted for the manufacturing of various types of male, female and children shoes. They are also well noted for the production of various types of bags especially female hand bags. For instance of the 23 footwear manufacturers listed in the latest Imo State Industrial Directory, 15 are based in Aba while Owerri and Umuahia had 5 and 3 respectively.<sup>22</sup> We should however not be deceived by the low figures quoted for, as a matter of fact, shoe and bag manufacturing outfits are found on nearly every street or road in Aba.

It is not only bags and shoes that Aba manufacturers are excelling in. Indigenous manufacturers in Aba have in fact ventured into spheres many of which were formally the exclusive preserve of foreign enterprises. Among such areas are the production of industrial equipment, machine tools and lorry and tanker bodies. As many as 30 fairly well established companies are engaged in the manufacturing of these items. A notable example is Onwuka HI-Tech PLC which is located at Owerri Road on the dual carriage express-way between Port Harcourt and Enugu. The company founded by Chief Onwuka Kalu engages in precision engineering, producing all manner of machine tools, spare parts, nails and other materials. As one of its advert goes, "say what you want and Onwuka will make it for you." Even brewing is not left out in

this indigenous assault on enterprises formerly controlled by foreigners. Typical examples are Interland Resources Ltd and Dubic Breweries Ltd. Both companies are located in the Ogbor Hill section of Aba. The former specializes in the production of soft drinks while the latter produces "Dubic beer."

The significant point to note here is that once again, these projects were not initiated or financed by foreigners. The fact that Africans could risk their funds in such capital-intensive projects is a testimony to their entrepreneurial spirit and is demonstrative of their continued contribution to Aba's growth. It is doubtful whether this type of risk would have been taken by foreigners after the Nigerian Civil War.

This is however not to exclude the contribution of foreign interests. Indeed Aba has continued to attract new enterprises even though most are interested in areas that would make for quick returns to the neglect of enterprises that would ensure self sustained growth. Thus we have such firms as Vitafoam, Aba Textile Mills and Seven Up Bottling Company. Even older ones like Lever Brothers, Nigerian Breweries and P.Z. have undertaken some expansion projects since the end of the Civil War. Two such expansions in Lever Brothers in 1980 and 1986 respectively led to the production in Aba of Omo, Surf and Rim detergents. Detergent production used to be confined to the Apapa factory.

In general, through the efforts of its residents and business men, Aba has won respect from the Nigerian investing public and business community to the extent that today, economic institutions which for political reasons would not have been sited in Aba are being increasingly located there. It is this importance and strategic location that explains why the Eastern Regional Headquarters of the Nigerian Industrial

Development Bank was set up there. It also explains why we now have such institutions as the Bank of the North, a bank owned by the northern states. Even private commercial banks are not left out. Typical of these is commerce bank. Indeed any serious minded investor that has the ambition of exploiting the Eastern market must find Aba a most strategic place to locate his business.

In the area of public utilities there has been a very significant growth. From a few major tarred roads just before and after the war, Aba now has a network of well tarred roads,<sup>23</sup> complete with a fairly reasonable drainage which thus far has helped in keeping the town fairly dry whenever it rains. This effort was achieved by the government of Chief Samuel Mbakwe (1979-1983) in Imo State. New markets and stores have also been set up by both the Aba Local Government and the Imo state government. For instance a new lock-up market was built at Cemetery Road while a large model supermarket has been built at the site on Asa Road where Ekepha market was destroyed by fire. Also, Aba now has a modern telephone system. Unlike the situation before the civil war, it is now possible to get most cities in Nigeria by telephone from Aba. One can also dial foreign countries directly from Aba. There are two main post offices and over 40 postal agencies in the town. There is a functional fire station. There has not been much growth in the health facilities provided by the government as there is still only one general hospital in the town. However, the shortfall in government service is compensated by the over 100 private clinics and hospitals<sup>24</sup> which are located all over the town.<sup>25</sup> The town has over 20 secondary and more than 50 elementary schools. This compares with 8 secondary and 33 elementary schools the town had in 1976.<sup>26</sup> There is only one Teacher Training College in the town and one Federal School of Arts and Science. Aba Water Supply Project which was completed

between 1982 and 1984 now provides constant and well treated water to the town. Also nearly all the houses are now served by the public power supply system provided by the National Electric Power Authority. Aba has remained notorious in crime, but there are now many more policemen and police formations in the town. This has helped to keep crime at a tolerable level. The work of the police is now complemented by the Federal Road Safety Corps which has recently established a zonal headquarters in Aba.

In sports and recreation, Aba has been making progress. There are now many sports clubs, playing pitches and cinema houses. Companies such as N.E.P.A. and Lever Brothers maintain standing football teams. The largest of the teams is the Enyimba Football Club which plays in the Nigerian Professional League.<sup>27</sup> There are also many hotels and guest houses in the town. The 1988 directory lists 49. This certainly is an underlisting as there are well over 100 hotels in the town. Notable ones are Crystal Palace Hotel on Port Harcourt Road, Emitona Hotel at Margaret Avenue and Imo Hotels Ltd at Owerri Road. A government built Enyimba Hotel at Ogbor Hill is awaiting commissioning or privatization.

In the area of politics, Aba has remained a hot bed of political activities in the former Eastern Region. Any serious political party must make sure that Aba is made an important base for its activities. Aba has the population currently estimated at 1.56 million people,<sup>28</sup> and the money; two important factors necessary in swaying political opinion. It is thus not surprising that in the Second Republic dispensation, both the governor and the deputy governor of Imo State were residents of Aba. Chief Samuel Mbakwe, the governor, though from Obowo in Etiti had lived and worked in Aba for many years and still has a home there.

Prince Isaac Uzoigwe, the deputy governor is an Ngwa from Aba and was living and still lives in Aba. In fact his family is a ruling house in Eziukwu Aba. The Aba trading/commercial community especially traders at Ariaria market are a very important political force. Competing parties always try their best to get their support. Thus as the Third Republic political activity gets underway, politicians have resumed courting the all-important Aba town. And like in the pre-1960 political dispensation, non-Ngwaw continue to play dominant roles as exemplified in Chief Sam Mbakwe who became the Governor of the State in the Second Republic.

Conclusion: The Indigenous Factor

It is clear from the discussion that when the present trend in Aba is judged or examined within the background of its history, certain conclusions become obvious. The first is that even though a lot of changes took place in the period studied and are still taking place, there were however a number of continuous trends. This continuity is seen, as we have shown, not only in the whole process of Aba's growth and development or in the survival of such issues as Okirika trade or traditional medicine, but also in the spirit of enterprise and survival of Aba people.

It is also clear from the work that colonialism did not create Aba town. Though the British presence introduced major changes in the process of Aba's growth, it was not within the context of an unresponsive African population. Thus whereas external influences may have provided a great stimulus for growth, it does not on its own explain Aba's growth to prominence. If external factors were the only ones that made for Aba's growth in the period studied, Aba as we have

shown would probably not have recovered easily from the setbacks caused by the Nigerian civil war. It was neither Europeans nor foreign capital that saw to its recovery. For as we have seen, Aba's recovery was a function of hardwork, resilience, imagination, initiative, industry and extra ordinary commercial and productive ability of its residents. Interestingly, these were the same factors that acted on external ones to produce the noteworthy growth Aba enjoyed in the period studied. That they outlived the Nigerian civil war and played crucial roles in its recovery probably indicates that they were the more important factors in Aba's growth in the period studied.

Also significant is the fact that Aba has continued its relentless growth despite the fact that very little, if any, new foreign enterprises are entering the town. Strategic location, indigenous entrepreneurship and a vibrant commercial life has ensured continued immigration of people into the town in search of opportunities. As would be expected, such growth has not been without problems. The most notable of the problems that currently worry Aba people are those of unemployment, shortage of housing and market stalls and road rehabilitation/development.

In spite of these and other problems however, Aba's future continues to look bright. Commerce will continue to occupy the most prominent position in that future as more and more people from various parts of Nigeria and West Africa become aware of the potentials of commercial activities in the town, especially the Ariaria market. Increasingly how-ever, the dominance of commerce is likely to be threatened by indigenous manufacturing and fabrication. More and more companies would continue to look towards Aba for the supply of tools, spare parts and machines for their factories. For Aba, this is

potentially a vast area of growth. Continued growth and bright future for Aba will also be fostered by demand pressures for housing and other needs from Port Harcourt. This would arise because of the inability of Port Harcourt to meet those needs as it affects new entrants into the oil industry—exploration, drilling, exploitation, refineries, petrochemicals, liquified natural gas and even fertilizer projects. Because Aba residents produce more and develop properties more than residents of Port Harcourt,<sup>29</sup> there will continue to be demand pressure from there. In fact presently, many government and company workers in Port Harcourt are resident in Aba from where they commute to and from their places of work daily. For Aba therefore, the challenges ahead are great. One only hopes that there will always be good leadership that would possess the competence needed to constantly harness the vast potentials of Aba towards meeting those challenges.

Notes

1. This estimation is based on the fact that Aba's diameter was estimated in 1976 to be 9 kilometres. See Rowland A. Uwa, 'Growth Propensity of Aba and its Influence Area', (Project Essay in Town Planning) Ibadan Polytechnic, 1977.
2. The contribution of these and other issues to events leading to the Nigerian Civil War has been discussed by B.J. Dudley. We need to note however that in Nigeria, the problem of corruption in particular was not a post-independence peculiarity. Our study of the pre-1960 politics of the Aba Urban District Council has clearly demonstrated this. However it is generally believed that corruption reached unprecedented levels in the period 1960 - 1966. For a general discussion of the situation in Nigeria of the time. See B.J. Dudley, Instability and Political Order, Politics and Crisis in Nigeria, Ibadan, 1973.
3. A lot of literature exist on this coup and the counter-coup of July 1966 and the subsequent events that led to the war. For more details see A. Ademoyega, Why we struck, Ibadan, 1981; John De St. Jorre, The Nigerian Civil War, London, 1972; O. Obasanjo, My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1969-70, London, 1980; Frederick Forsyth, The Biafra Story, Harmondworth, 1969; Oyeleye Oyediran, Nigerian Government and Politics under Military Rule, London, 1979; W. Schwarz, Nigeria, London, 1968.
4. Cited in W. Schwarz, Nigeria, London, 1968. P.196.
5. Elizabeth Isichei, A History of Nigeria, London, 1983. P.473.
6. Interview with Mr. Christopher Manukaji, (45 years), Uzoagba Ikeduru, April 18, 1990.
7. Interview with Mazi C.A. Obiegbu, (69 years), Uzoagba Ikeduru, April 18, 1990.



8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. This group of traders who were following Federal troops were called "win the war traders" by Aba traders and residents.
11. Interview with Mazi Obiegbu already cited.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid. See also interview with Mr. Christopher Manukaji already cited.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. The author was an eye-witness to this development.
19. The author had many friends among the businessmen who suffered losses at the time. A few were so ruined that they left the city entirely for their villages.
20. See Imo State Industrial Directory, (maiden edition) Industries Division, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Owerri, 1988.
21. Interview with Mr. Christopher Manukaji already cited.
22. Imo State Industrial Directory.
23. The roads are however beginning to deteriorate now (1992) because of poor maintenance.

24. Though the Imo State directory records 44, that is however a gross under-estimation. The problem is that many of the clinics are unregistered or are not properly registered hence, they cannot afford to make returns for their publication in the directory.
25. One of the first things a first time visitor notices in Aba is the existence of hospitals and clinics, sometimes as many as 3 on nearly every road and street.
26. Rowland A. Uwa. Op. Cit., P.22.
27. The club played in Division I in the 1991 football season. But because of poor performance, it was demoted to Division II where it is campaigning for honours in 1992.
28. This figure is obtained from the Chairman of Aba Local Government, 1990.
29. Any constant visitor to the two cities can easily notice the higher rate of property development in Aba; and many residents of Port Harcourt constantly call at Aba to buy various needs ranging from food items to fabricated items/building materials.

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Agim, C.C.	Goldsmithing	61 years	Aba	14/10/99
Aka, John	Bicycle Repairing	55 years	Aba	12/10/88
Amaechi, Livinus	Bicycle repairing	60 years	Aba	10/10/88
Amamasi, Lambert	Tailoring	61 years	Aba	16/10/988
Asigbu, michael	Retired Carpenter	84 years	Aba	9/10/988
Ayim Godfrey	Bricklayer	65 years	Aba	15/10/88
Chimezie, A. (Madam)	Retired Business woman	60 years	Aba	16/12/87
Chukwu, James	Barbing	58 yeas	Aba	10/8/87
Efere Efam	Truck Pushing	68 years	Aba	12/10/88
Ejere, N.	Retired Truck Pusher	68 years	Aba	14/1088
Eke, Uwakwe	Trading	60 years	Aba	23/12/87

Ekpo, Essien D.	Civil Servant	60 years	Uyo	27/12/87
Ekpo, Margaret (Mrs)	Retired Women header, Politician & Businesswoman	74 years	Calabar	1989, Courtesy of Helen Etomi
Ekpo, U.E. (Mrs.)	Retired Teacher	54 years	Uyo	18/10/89
Igbokwe, Janey (Madam)	Housewife	61 years	Aba	22/12/87
Ikot, U.T.	Retired Teacher	65 years	Ibotio	20/11/88
Inyana, Godwin I.	Photography	55 years	Aba	20/10/88
Iwuji, L	Porter	58 years	Aba	9/10/88
Koki, V.I.	Retired Teacher	60 years	Aba	20/10/88
Manukaji, Christopher	Business	45 years	Uzoagba-Ikeduru	18/4/90
Ndulagu, Herbert	Retired Employee of Nigeria Brewery Limited	50 years	Uzoagba-Ikeduru	9/8/87
Ndulagu, C.	Retired employee of Lever Brother Nig Limited	60 years	Uzoagba-Ikeduru	18/12/88
Nkwocha, A.	Cobbler	60 years	Aba	11/10/88

Nwachukwu, Christopher	Brick Laying	60 years	Aba	10/8/87
Nwafor, A.	Carpentry	58 years	Aba	9/10/88
Nwaigwe, F.A.	Cobbler	58 years	Aba	16/10/88
Nwogu, Nwadike	Retired Trader	82 years	Aba	28/12/87
Nwaru, A.	Retired Washer- man	90 years	Aba	20/12/87
Nwauzo, Theophilus (Chief)	Retired Business- man	-	Aba	18/12/87
Obiegbu, C.A. (Mazi)	Retired Production Supervisor of Lever Brother Nigeria Ltd.	66 years	Uzoagba- Ikeduru	Five inter- views 1987, 88, 89 & 90:10/2/87, 27/12/87, 11/10/88, 21/10/89 and 18/4/90
Obiegbu, L.O.A. (Dr)	Public Servant	48 years	Aba	11/8/87
Obiegbu, T. (Madam)	Housewife	65 years	Uzoagba- Ikeduru	Two Interviews: 27/12/87 & 21/12/88
Ogbonna, J.G.N. (H.R.H; Eze)	Traditional Ruler	75 years	Aba	24/12/87
Okoye, Charles	Watch Repairing	68 years	Aba	15/10/88

Otuonye, E. (Mrs)	Housewife	60 years	Aba	10/8/87
Onyechekwa, Oliver	Banking	36 years	Ibadan	10/11/91
Orji, Michael	Barber/Church Warder	84 years	Aba	16/10/88
Subair, S. (Alhaji)	Retired Officer of John Holt Limited	70 years	Ibadan	10/5/89
Ugochukwu, J.N.	Chairman, Parish Council, St. Eu- gene's Church, Aba	75 years	Aba	8/10/88
Ugorji, J.E. (Elder)	Church Elder	75 years	Aba	20/10/88
Uke, I.I. (Dr.)	University Lecturer	35 years	Abuja	2/2/92
Ukonu, Onwukwe	Trading	62 years	Aba	19/12/87
Uzoigwe, Leo (Chief)	Traditional Ruler	63 years	Aba	3/5/87

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APPENDIX IOFFICERS IN-CHARGE OF ABA DISTRICT  
LATER DIVISION (1903-1960)\*

1904	Mr. H.B. Mansfield	District Commissioner
1905	Mr. H.B. Mansfield	District Commissioner
1906	Mr. H.B. Mansfield	District Commissioner
-	Lt. A.H. de Kantsow	Ag. District Commissioner
1907	Mr. H.B. Mansfield	District Commissioner
-	E.P. Uniacke	Ag. District Commissioner
1908	Mr. J.H.M. Whitehead	District Commissioner
-	Mr. E.B. Dawson	Ag. District Commissioner
1909	Mr. E.B. Dawson	Ag. District Commissioner
-	Mr. R.C. Layton	District Commissioner
1910	Mr. R.C. Layton	District Commissioner
1911	Mr. R.C. Layton	District Commissioner
1912	Mr. R.C. Layton	District Commissioner
-	Mr. H.S. Burrough	Ag. District Commissioner
1913	Mr. R.W.M. Dundas	Asst. " "
1914	Mr. R.W.M. Dundas	- do -
-	Mr. A.R. Whitemann	" " Officer
1915	Mr. R.W.M. Dundas	- do -
-	Mr. M. Macgregor	"
1916	Mr. M. Macgregor	"
-	Mr. R.W.M. Dundas	"
1917	Mr. R.W.M. Dundas	"
-	Mr. O.W. Firth	- do -
1918	Mr. F.L. Tabor	District Officer

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\* J.N. Nwaguru: Op. Cit., PP. 227-233

-	Mr. O.W. Firth	- do -
-	Mr. M. Macgregor	- do -
1919	Mr. F.L. Tabor	- do -
-	Mr. F.P. Lynch	- do -
-	Mr. A. Ewing	Asst. District Officer
1920	Mr. H.S. Burrough	District Officer
-	Mr. E.M. Falk	- do -
-	Mr. R.W.M. Dundas	Asst. District Officer
-	Mr. A.A. Des A. Ewing	- do -
-	Mr. J.H. Sunpson	- do -
-	Mr. N.C. Denton	- do -
1921	Mr. F.L. Tabor	District Officer
-	Mr. H.S. Burrough	- do -
-	Mr. F.P. Lynch	Asst. District Officer
-	Mr. N.C. Denton	- do -
-	Mr. A.J. Conan	- do -
1922	Mr. H.S. Burrough	District Officer
-	Mr. F.L. Tabor	- do -
-	Mr. A.R. Whitemann	- do -
-	Mr. N.C. Denton	Asst. District Officer
-	Mr. A.J. Conan	- do -
1923	Mr. H.S. Burrough	District Officer
-	Mr. E.M. Falk	- do -
-	Mr. N.C. Denton	Asst. District Officer
1924	Mr. E.M. Falk	District Officer
-	Mr. A.R. Whitemann	- do -
1925	Mr. A.R. Whitemann	- do -
-	Mr. O.W. Firth	- do -



1926	Mr. O.W. Firth	- do -
-	Mr. F.Ferguson	District Officer
1927	Mr. O.W. Firth	- do -
-	Mr. J. Jackson	Asst. District Officer
-	Capt. A. Leeming	- do -
-	Mr. C.J. Pleass	- do -
-	Mr. E.N.C. Dickinson	Cadet
1928	Mr. J. Jackson	Asst. District Officer i/c
-	Mr. P.J. Cardiner	District Officer
-	Mr. A. Leeming	Asst. District Officer
-	Mr. C.J. Pleass	- do -
-	Mr. G.E.W. Ward	- do -
-	Mr. A.T.E. Marsh	- do -
-	Mr. E.N.C. Dickinson	Cadet
-	Mr. J.F. Oliver	Cadet
1929	Mr. P.J. Gardiner	District Officer
-	Mr. J. Jackson	- do -
-	Mr. G.E.W. Ward	Asst. District Officer
-	Mr. A.T.E. Marsh	- do -
-	Mr. E.V.H. Toovey	- do -
-	Mr. C.J. Mayne	- do -
-	Mr. N.A.P.G. Mackenzie	- do -
1930	Mr. J. Jackson	District Officer
-	Mr. E.J.G. Kelly	- do -
-	Mr. J.M. Homfray	- do -
-	Mr. E.V.H. Toovey	Asst. District Officer
-	Mr. W.F.H. Navington	- do -
-	Mr. R.G. Percival	- do -
-	Mr. N.A.P.G. Mackenzie	- do -
-	Mr. K.A. Sinker	- do -

1931	Mr. E.J.G. Kelly	District Officer
1932	Mr. E.J.G. Kelly	- do -
-	Mr. C.J. Pleass	- do -
1933	Mr. Mr. E.J.G. Kelly	District Officer
-	Mr. H.P. James	- do -
-	Mr. J.G.C. Allen	Asst. District Officer
1934	Mr. H.P. James	- do -
-	Mr. H.H. Marshall	- do -
-	Mr. J.G.C. Allen	- do -
-	Mr. C.J. Pleass	District Officer
-	Mr. C.I. Ennals	Asst. District Officer
1935	Mr. C.J. Pleass	District Officer
-	Mr. C.J. Mayne	Asst. District Officer
1936	Mr. C.J. Pleass	District Officer
-	Mr. C.J. Mayne	Asst. District Officer
1937	Mr. C.J. Pleass	District Officer
1938	Mr. C.J. Pleass	- do -
-	Mr.C.H.S.R. Palmer	- do -
1939	Mr. C.J. Pleass	- do -
-	Mr. N.A.P.G. Mackenzie	- do -
-	Capt. H.B. Shepherd	- do -
-	Mr. E.R. Chadwick	- do -
-	Mr. F.A. Evans	Asst. District Officer
1940	Capt. H.B. Shepherd	District Officer
-	Mr. E.R. Chadwick	- do -
-	Mr. C.I. Gravin	- do -
-	Mr. R.F.A. Gray	Asst. District Officer
1941	Capt. H.B. Shepherd	District Officer
-	Mr. C.I. Gravin	- do -
-	Mr. H.M. Marshall	- do -
1942	Mr. D.A.F. Shute	- do -

-	Mr. C.I. Gravin	- do -
1943	Mr. D.A.F. Shute	- do -
-	Mr. J.V. Dewhurst	- do -
-	Mr. P.L. Trevorrow	Asst. District Officer
-	Mr. P.F. Grant	Cadet
1944	Mr. H.L.M. Butcher	District Officer
1945	Mr. H.L.M. Butcher	- do -
-	Mr. G.I. Jones	- do -
-	Mr. C.L. Walker	- do -
-	Mr. Jones Lloyd	- do -
-	Mr. P.L. Allpress	Asst. District Officer
1946	Mr. H.L.M. Butcher	Senior Divisional Officer
-	Mr. G.I. Jones	District Officer
1947	Mr. H.L.M. Butcher	Senior Divisional Officer
-	Mr. E.J. Gibbons	- do -
-	Mr. S.P.L. Beaumont	- do -
-	Mr. E.V.H. Toovey	District Officer
1948	Mr. S.P.L. Beaumont	Senior Divisional Officer
-	Mr. P.L. Allpress	Acting District Officer
-	Mr. Horn	District Officer
1949	Mr. C.P. Thompson	Senior Divisional Officer
-	Mr. F.R. Kay	District Officer
1950	Mr. B.G. Smith	- do -
1951	Mr. R.B. Cardale	- do -
1952	Mr. R.B. Cardale	- do -
-	Mr. J.W. Leach	Asst. District Officer
1953	Mr. N. Barwick	District Officer
-	Mr. J.W. Leach	Asst. District Officer

1954	Mr. G.W. Thom	District Officer
-	Mr. N. Barwick	- do -
1955	Mr. G.W. Thom	Senior Divisional Officer
1956	Mr. G.W. Thom	- do -
-	Mr. S.W.C. Holland	District Officer
-	Mr. C. Ojukwu	Asst. District Officer
1957	Mr. S.W.C. Holland	District Officer
-	Mr. N.C. Perkins	Senior Divisional Officer
-	Mr. R.W. Harding	District Officer
1958	Mr. J.W. Leach	- do -
-	Mr. R.W. Harding	- do -
1959	Mr. R.W. Harding	- do -
-	Mr. D.R. Dickson	Senior Divisional Officer
1960	Mr. D.R. Dickson	- do -

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

APPENDIX IILIST OF SOME OF THE OLD WARRANT CHIEFS  
IN THE ABA NATIVE COURT (1904-1929)\*

Owuala of Aba	Njoku of Umuocham
Ugoji of Aba	Wosu of Umuocham
Nosike of Itu	Adiele of Oberete
Egba of Ossa	Ananaba of Ohanze
Ogidi of Ihicoji	Anyatanwu of Mgboko
Amanze of Ovan	Aharango of Umunkere
Adindu of Umesigbe	Ozurumba of Umuaja
Osundu of Umuire	Adogu of Umuduru
Okoro of Osusu	Ochoogu of Ekwercasu
Woko of Osusu	Wom of Amajironwu
Ogbonna-Aru of Nnetu	Akwara of Ohabiam
Wejighi of Akanu	Uzoaru of Ohabiam
Ugboaja of Umuedo	Wosuagwu of Abayi
Wufor of Amapu-Ukebe	Wogu of Ndiakata
Wuku of Abayi	Ugbo of Ariaria
Wadibia of Akanu	Ahuruonye of Umuokpa
Achagbuo of Obeaja	
Woko Adiele of Umuakwa	Ugwuala of Osusu
Obuka of Abayinchokoro	Oji of Umuelele
Ozurumba of Umuaja	Wegu Dibugu of Osusu
Woko Wakacze of Umungbede	Wosu Agwu of Abayi Ohanze

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\* J.N. Nwaguru, Op.Cit., PP.221-222

Adiele of Okporoata  
 Ohuru  
 Onuoha of Amapu  
 Ojionyike of Ohanze  
 Wogu-Oriaku of Umuakpara  
 Onwukwe of Okpuala  
 Agbakuru of Umuanunu  
 Wogwugwu of Umuokruku  
 Enyiany (Eguioyi) of Abayi-  
 Uguala  
 Wosu of Abayi  
 Anuaha of Umueke  
 Wogu of Aba  
 Nkoro of Umuochan  
 Ugwuzor of Aba  
 Megida Ali of Yoruba  
 Mohamed Bello of Hausa  
 Ndu of Ndewolumbe  
 Abara of Ndewolumbe  
 Ogonna of Amavo  
 Obuihe of Umumbede  
 Ejugu of Ohuru (or Umuagu)  
 Enwereji of Aba

Wasu Otekerè of Abayi-Owuala  
 of Ohanze  
 Anyatonwu of Umuobi-  
 akwa  
 Worwor of Owor  
 Uzoukwa of Owor  
 Azu of Umudosi  
 Wasuka of Umuokpo  
 Agbaghigba of Umueke  
 Ochieke of Onicha  
 Wachuku of Abnike  
 Isingu  
 Wakama of Unuaro  
 Obonna of Isikor  
 Weke of Arongwa  
 Ajiwe of Akpa  
 Ihediwa of umuagbai  
 Achubiri of Umuobiakwa  
 Wogu of Umuire  
 Wankpa of Abayi  
 Chigbu of Umuobo  
 Wangwa of Umuobo  
 Ogonna of Aba

APPENDIX IIIABA DIVISION: POPULATION CENSUS 1911-1963\*

Year	Area in sq. mile	P o p u l a t i o n			Average per sq. mile
		Males	Females	Total	
1911	827	-	-	157,641	190.61
1921	869	-	-	139,380	160.00
1931	827	71,533	74,775	146,308	176.9
1953	960	200,316	195,795	396,111	412.6
1963	915	-	-	541,968	592.3

\* J.N. Nwaguru: Op. Cit., P.225

APPENDIX IVABA DIVISION: POPULATION FIGURES BASED ON  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS (1953\*

Year	Local Government Area	Population		
		Total	Male	Female
1953	Aba Urban District Council	57,787	36,656	21,131
	Northern Ngwa District Council	115,935	55,408	60,527
	Eastern Ngwa District Council	73,821	34,835	38,986
	Southern Ngwa District Council	67,616	33,139	34,477
	Asa Native Authority	34,264	17,325	16,939
	Ndoki Native Authority	36,728	17,072	17,656
	Etche Native Authority	11,594	5,613	5,981
	Unspecified	366	268	98
	Total Aba Division	396,111	209,316	195,795

\* J.N. Nwaguru: Op. Cit., P.226



APPENDIX VOPOBO PRICES OF PALM OIL, 1914-1929 (£.S.d. per ton)\*

1914	£21 10s. 9d. to £24 6s. 0d. or £18 - £22 10s. 0d.
1915	£13 17s. 0d. to £15 7s. 8d.
1916	£16 18s. 6d. to £18 9s. 3d. or £13 10s. 0d.
1917	£18 9s. 3d. to £20.
1918	£20 to £21 10s. 9d.
1919	£23 1s. 6d. (February).
1920	£73 17s 0d. (January - April)
	£58 9s. 0d. (April - October)
	£15 7s. 0d. (December)
1921	£9 4s 6d. to £25 7s. 6d. or £11 4s. 0d. to £26 8s. 0d
1922	£13 to £23 5s. 0d.
1923	£20 10s. 6d. to £27 4s. 0d.
1924	Over £30.

1925	-	-
1926	£23 8s. 6d.	
1927	£21 4s. 3d.	or £19 4s. 0d to £24.
1928	£24 2s. 3d.	or £25.
1929	£21 15s. 3d.	or £20 5s. 8d.

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\* -Susan Martin: Op. Cit., P.157

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APPENDIX VIABA AND UMUAHIA PRICES OF PALM OIL, 1914-1929(£.S. d. per ton)\*

1916	£14	
1921	£10 18s. 0d. to £14.	
1924	£24 5s. 0d. to £28 or £25 5s 0d.	or £28.
1925	£20 9s. 6d. to £26 5s 6d.	or £25
1926	£24 2s. 0d.	or £25
1927	£21	or £23
1928	Umuahia: November - December	Aba: £24.
	£24 10s. 0d. average	
	£24 6s. 6d. 'mixed' oil.	
	£25 4s. 0d. 'edible' oil	
1929	Umuahia: May	Aba: April-June
	£20 13s. 0d. average	£20 5s. 0d. average.
	£18 12s. 0d. 'mixed' oil	
	£21 7s. 0d. 'edible' oil	
	Umuahia: October	Aba: October-December.
	£19 4s. 0d. average	£19 12s 6d. average.
	£18 'mixed' oil	
	£20 2s. 6d. 'edible' oil	
1929	Umuahia December	
	£19 19s. 0d. average	
	£19 1s. 6d. 'mixed' oil	
	£20 16s. 6d. 'edible' oil	

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\* Susan Martin: Op. Cit., P.159

APPENDIX VIIABA AND UMUAHIA PRICES OF PALM KERNELS, 1916-1929  
(£.S.d. per ton)\*

1916	£3 17s. 6d.	
1921	£9 13s. 0d.	
1924	£12 10s. 0d. to £16 16s. 0d. or £15 9s. 0d or £14 10s.0d	
1925	£13 16s. 0d. to £17 10s. 9d	or £15 10s. 0d
1926	£14 5s. 0d.	or £14 10s. 0d
1927	£13 2s. 0d. Umuahia: £12	Aba: £13
1928	Umuahia: November	Aba: £14 10s. 0d.
	£13 2s. 6d.	
1929	Umuahia: May	Aba April-June.
	£10 4s. 4d.	£10 17s. 6d.
	Umuahia: October	Aba: Oct. - Dec.
	£10 2s. 6d.	£10 6s. 3d.
	Umuahia: December	
	£10.	

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\* Susan Martin: Op.Cit., P.160

APPENDIX VIIIMANILLA EXCHANGE RATES 1919 - 1932\*CALABAR

1919 - 1920 - 4 Manilla per shilling

ABA

1924 - 6 or 7 Manilla per shilling

1926 - 5 Manilla per shilling

1929 - 7 or 8 Manilla per shilling

1930 - 9 or 10 Manilla per shilling

1931 - 12 Manilla per shilling

1932 - 13 Manilla per shilling

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\* Author's Compilation from various archival and other sources.

APPENDIX IXABA URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL ELECTIONS: 1955SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES\*

Ward 1.	Mr. Anyanwu Boniface Omeogu	74 votes
Ward 2.	Mr. Gabriel Ozuzu	30 votes
Ward 3.	Mrs. Jessie Nwachukwu Egbutchay	32 votes
Ward 4.	Mr. R.O. Ikenna	Unopposed
Ward 5.	Mr. Okoli Amobi	Unopposed
Ward 6.	Mr. Levi Onyekwum	141 votes
Ward 7.	Mr. Mark Agu Okorie	Unopposed
Ward 8.	Mr. Dick Oko Igbokwe	402 votes
Ward 9.	Mr. Francis Dike	131 votes
Ward 10.	Mr. Christopher Okoli Onuoka	116 votes
Ward 11.	Mr. John N. Nwanne	160 votes
Ward 12.	Mr. Godfrey Nwankwo Okereke	155 votes
Ward 13.	Mr. Thomas Uwakwe	183 votes
Ward 14.	Mr. R.N. Egwekwe	Unopposed
Ward 15.	Mr. Christopher Chuku Ileka	191 votes
Ward 16.	Mr. L.N. Okeke	155 votes
Ward 17.	Mr. M.N. Agira	198 votes

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\* N.A.E. Abadist. 14/11033: Aba Urban District Council Elections, 1955.

Ward 18.	Mr. Nwachukwu Abengowe	50 votes
Ward 19.	Mr. Olle Kalu	166 votes
Ward 20.	Mr. C.N. Obioha	279 votes
Ward 21.	Mr. S.M. Odoh	207 votes
Ward 22.	Mr. G.C. Anyanechi	239 votes
Ward 23.	Mr. E.C. Uzoigwe	174 votes
Ward 24.	Mr. J. Igbokwe	Unopposed
Ward 25.	Mr. Stephen Orji	390 votes
Ward 26.	Mr. E.H. Ekong	130 votes
Ward 27.	Mr. J.N. Abiah	359 votes
Ward 28.	Mr. M.N. Onyebuchi	313 votes
Ward 29.	Mr. Amos Ndukwe Ogwo	111 votes.

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APPENDIX XABA URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL ELECTIONS: 1955UNSUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES\*

Ward 1.	Mr. E.P.A. Ekanem (Forfeits deposit)	2 votes
Ward 2.	Mr. Jaja A. Wachukwu	15 votes
Ward 3.	Mr. Benson O. Ezeonyebuchi	24 votes
	Mr. Victor J. Iwuanyanwu	20 votes
Ward 6.	Mr. S.R.C. Muoma	103 votes
	Mr. Solomon E. Oke (Forfeits deposit)	20 votes
Ward 8.	Godfrey Emeagwara	189 votes
	Nelson N. Agina	176 votes
Ward 9.	Mr. M.O. Agba	88 votes
	Mr. Stephen Eke Atukosi	75 votes
Ward 10.	Mr. Michael Ihekwoazu	107 votes
	Mr. Theophilus E. Amakihen	82 votes
	Mr. Albert U. Chukwuka	46 votes
Ward 11.	Mr. Christopher O. Chukwura	73 votes
	Mr. E.A. Oke	98 votes
	Mr. Uchemefuna Ono (Forfeits deposit)	39 votes
Ward 12.	Mr. Dennis Osumuo	150 votes
Ward 13.	Mr. Francis F.B.C. Nwankwo	118 votes
	Mr. Ekwueme F.N. Nwokocha	46 votes
Ward 15.	Mr. Isaac Ezeani	145 votes
Ward 16.	Mr. J. Onyekwena	139 votes
	Mr. Igwilo	95 votes
	Mr. T.W. Dike (Forfeits deposit)	34 votes

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\* N.A.E. Abadist. 14/1/1033: Aba Urban District Council Elections, 1955



Ward 17.	Mr. Ishmael Egwuonwu	56 votes
Ward 18.	Mr. John C. Anyasi	45 votes
	Mr. Stephen R. Okoko (Forfeits deposit)	13 votes
Ward 19.	Mr. Stanislaus Egbuna Nwabuzor	34 votes
	Mr. S.W. Ubani-Ukoma (Fofeits deposit)	17 votes
Ward 20.	Mr. Johnson Okpara Abaeze	171 votes
Ward 21.	Mr. Robert B. Dappa	164 votes
Ward 22.	Bishop K.N. Bresi-Ando	103 votes
	Mr. B.O. Chuku	97 votes
Ward 24.	Mr. Ositadima Ozims	152 votes
	Mr. Amos Chimezie Orajiaku	52 votes
Ward 26.	Mr. Robert Adonye Cookey	219 votes
	Mr. Ezekiel Nwaigwe	212 votes
Ward 27.	Mr. Maclean George Jaja	89 votes
Ward 28.	Mr. Samuel Obodoako	180 votes
Ward 29.	Mr. Uka Kalu Uka	288 votes
	Mr. Richard Enu	260 votes
	Mr. Alphonsus Olisa Mbaazue	166 votes
	Mr. D.A. Duru (Forfeits deposit)	143 votes
	Mr. C.O. Monye (Forfeits deposit)	23 votes
Ward 30.	Mr. Anthony E. Agonsi	103 votes

In Ward 23 Messrs O.N. Egesi and Samuel, O. Ndupu had equality of votes of 202 votes each.

APPENDIX XILIST OF HON. MEMBERS REPRESENTING ABA DIVISION IN THE FEDERAL AND EASTERN REGIONAL HOUSE, 1951 - 1966\*1. House of Representatives (Federal Parliament) Lagos

1951 - 1954	Mr. Jaja Wachukwu Mr. S.W. Ubani-Ukoma Mr. P.O. Ururuka (1954)	Multiple member Constituency through the E.H.
1954 - 1959	Mr. Jaja Wachukwu Mr. S.W. Ubani-Ukoma	Multiple member Constituency.
1959 - 1964	Dr. Jaja Wachukwu Chief M.W. Ubani Mr. O.C. Emene Mr. Felix Okoronkwo	Aba-North Aba-Central Aba-South Aba-Urban.
1965 - 1966	Dr. Jaja Wachukwu Mr. F.I. Okoronkwo Mr. O.C. Emene	Aba-North Aba-Central Aba-South

2. Eastern House of Assembly

1951 - 1953	Mr. Jaja Wachukwu Mr. S.W. Ubani-Ukoma Chief M.W. Ubani	Multiple Member Constituency
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\* J.N. Nwaguru: Op. Cit., PP.243-244.

1953 - 1957	Mr. P.O. Ururuka Mr. Wachukwu Abengowe Chief M.W. Ubani Mr. L.O. Uzoigwe	Multiple member Constituency
1957 - 1961	Mr. P.O. Ururuka Mr. Wachukwu Abengowe Mr. M.N. Onwuma Mr. L.O. Uzoigwe	Multiple member Constituency
1961 - 1966	Mr. P.O. Ururuka Mr. A.O. Arungwa Mr. M.N. Onwuma Chief S.W. Ubani-Ukoma Mr. J.E. Adiele Mr. I.O. Nwauche Mr. Nana Kalu Mrs. Margaret Ekpo Chief Elijah Okezie	Aba-North-Central Aba-North Aba-West Aba-East (1961-64) Aba-South-West Aba-South-East Aba-Urban-North Aba-Urban-South Aba-East (1965-66)

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APPENDIX XIILIST OF CHAIRMEN AND PRESIDENT OF ABA URBAN DISTRICT (LATER COUNTY) COUNCIL\*Chairmen

Mr. C.N. Obioha	1953 - 1955
Mr. D.C. Osadebe	1955 - 1956
Mr. C.N. Obioha	1956 - 1957
Mr. E.H. Ekong	1957 - 1958
Mr. E.C.I. Onuigbo	1958 - 1960
Mr. C.N. Obioha	1961 - 1962
Mr. E.H. Ekong	1963 - 66

President

Chief L.O. Uzoigwe	1964 - 1966.
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\* J.N. Nwaguru: Op. Cit., P.246