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URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN EASTERN NIGERIA - TO 1952

by

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CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
ABBREVIATIONS	ii
MAPS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I The Evolution of Urban Settlements	12
Pre-Colonial Settlements and Nodes	
Urban Crystallisation in the Colonial Period	
CHAPTER II Urban Land: Policies and Problems	45
Customary Tenure	
Government Land Acquisition	
Urban Land Control and Development	
CHAPTER III Urban Administration and Finance	87
General Policy	
Application to the Towns of Eastern Nigeria	
CHAPTER IV Town Planning: Policies and Problems	134
Background to Colonial Planning	
Development of Planning Policies and	
Institutions	
Application to the Towns of Eastern Nigeria	
CHAPTER V Internal Characteristics of Towns	172
The Population of Towns	
Some Urban Social Problems	
Urban Economic Growth	
CHAPTER VI The Development of Aba to 1944	211
CHAPTER VII Aspects of Post War Development in Aba - to 1952	269
CONCLUSION	296
APPENDICES	301
BIBLIOGRAPHY	307

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ABBREVIATIONS

A.D.O.	Assistant District Officer
C.O.	Colonial Office
C.S.E.	Chief Secretary, Enugu
C.S.O.	Chief Secretary's Office, Lagos
D.O.	District Officer
E.P.	Eastern Provinces
J.H.S.N.	Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria
L.A.	Local Authority
S.E.P.	Secretary, Eastern Provinces
S.S.P.	Secretary, Southern Provinces
Resmin.	Office of the Resident Minister for West Africa, Accra
T.A.B.	Township Advisory Board
OW.	Owerri Province
OP.	Onitsha Province

MAPS

	Page
1. Eastern Nigeria - showing the location of major towns	44
2. Enugu c. 1945	149
3. Onitsha Waterside c. 1946	157
4. Port Harcourt, 1946	162
5. Umuahia c. 1945	165
6. Aba in 1911	222
7. Railway Land, Aba, 1914	228
8. Aba in 1920	233
9. Aba in 1954	295

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the problem of modernisation in a colonial context. It is not a critique of colonialism as such. It seeks rather to analyse the irony of a colonial situation in which change and modernisation were encouraged by colonial presence and vitiated at the same time by the adherence of the colonial government to a conservative administrative policy. It focuses on urbanisation in Eastern Nigeria as an important aspect of modernisation and tries to assess the effects of government policy on urban development.

The study is divided into three related parts. The first does not merely try to sketch the pre-colonial 'background' to urbanisation in the colonial period. It questions the conventional distinction which is made between 'indigenous' and 'colonial' urbanisation and seeks instead the continuities and contrasts in the development of settlement nodes in both the pre-colonial and colonial periods. In this way it would be possible to establish the unity and autonomy of the region's urban history. The second part, in which the emphasis of the study lies, examines different facets of government urban policy in relation to the general colonial policy of indirect rule and Native Administration. It covers the period from the establishment of British colonial rule to about 1952 when urban local government began to be introduced in the region and argues that in the periods when indirect rule was at its most doctrinaire, urban policy was most restrictive and its impact on urban development most adverse. By contrast, in a period such as the Governorship of Hugh Clifford when the official attitude to that policy was least

enthusiastic, urban policy was more liberal and more conducive to effective urban development. In the same way, the towns in the region which were suited and adhered most closely to the system of Native Administration were the least developed in terms of modern urban institutions while those which suited indirect rule least were much better developed. Five towns in the region are used comparatively to illustrate the development of government policy and its consequences for urban growth. The final section of the study focuses on one town--Aba--and uses it to illustrate the trends and themes examined on a broad regional level in the preceding sections.

The experience of Eastern Nigeria cannot be said to be typical of the African urban experience but it has a special significance first because the region is often referred to as a classic example of the success of colonial urban creation and second because it helps to explain the general concern that many African towns show marked signs of stunted growth and have not played the creative role which is historically associated with cities.

A study of this nature faces many problems. The historian has not been as prominent as the social scientists in African urban studies. This is not surprising because Africa is still the least urbanised of all the continents in spite of its very high rate of urbanisation. Only about nine per cent of the total population of the continent resides in large towns. It is therefore often assumed that African urban history, particularly for the crucial colonial period, is merely a study in urban failure which holds little interest. It is recognised nonetheless that cities play a role far out of proportion to their size. Indeed, some existing studies have pointed, for instance, to the relationship between

urbanisation and decolonisation in Africa. There are even suggestions that it is possible to reinterpret African national histories in the light of their urban experience. Such an endeavour would require more detailed historical studies of the urban experience of different regions of the continent especially with reference to the colonial period which left a permanent, albeit largely negative, influence on most African towns. This study is in part an attempt towards that goal.

There are in addition many unresolved problems regarding the scope and methods of urban history in general.¹ Critics and practitioners disagree widely on whether urban history should deal with the history of cities, the history of urbanisation or the history of anything that takes place in an urban setting. Some insist ritually on the 'purely historical approach' which focuses on individual towns while others advocate a broader, less antiquarian and more interdisciplinary approach as the urban historian is also interested in issues which are traditionally examined by the social scientists.

It is clear that there is no one valid approach to writing urban history but the existing studies pertaining to urbanisation in Eastern Nigeria can illustrate the problems of method and interpretation which arise in this study and the missing dimension in the region's urban history with which this study is concerned. First, there are a number of town histories which, despite their individual merits, are too localised to be of much regional significance. After a labour unrest in Enugu in 1949, P.E.H. Hair did "The Study of Enugu" (Unpublished Mss., 1954, Enugu Archives). He paid special attention to the labour problem of the town

1. These problems have been discussed in more detail by the author elsewhere. See "Urban Development in Eastern Nigeria: Some Problems of Concepts and Method in African Urban History", African Urban Notes, Ser. B, No. 2, Spring 1975.

and also examined the social, economic and administrative aspects of the life of Enugu. Clement Anyanwu has also done an informative study-- "Port Harcourt: The Rise and Development of a Nigerian Municipality," (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Ibadan, 1971) which examines much the same issues as "The Study of Enugu" and surveys Port Harcourt from a purely historical perspective, tracing its rise and development from 1912 to 1955. Simon Ottenberg's important anthropological study of the social and administrative history of Abakaliki is also in the urban biography style.

These studies provide detailed information which helps to understand the region's urban experience. Indeed, there is a sense in which each town can be said to have its own history and to pose its own peculiar set of problems. It is also conceivable that the history of an era can be built around the history of a town as is often done in political biographies. The researcher may decide to 'take a town' in the region and examine the details of its life in chronological detail. But there are obvious limits to which such an approach can achieve a synthesis. It is not always possible to assess what is unique or significant about a town unless its history is examined in relation to the process of urbanisation which creates cities in a given area and in relation to other towns in the area. Cities do not grow in isolation. The growth of one may be complementary or antagonistic to the growth of another. To illustrate this point, it is known for instance that Port Harcourt was the only town in Eastern Nigeria to become a First Class Township; that it had serious land problems and that in 1955 it attained municipal status. But the significance of these cannot be fully appreciated unless it is also known what government urban policy was, in what respects it affected Port

Harcourt differently from other towns and why. The multiplication of urban biographies cannot fully reveal the urban experience of the region nor the policies that influenced different local experiences. The problems created by a multiplicity of encapsulated town histories for the development of urban history is already causing concern in Britain, North America and Australia where numerous such studies--each using its own definition and periodisation--have tended to make towns less and less comparable. A case study of one town can add useful depth to a larger study of the trends and policies in urban development in the region but to devote an entire study to it would be like ignoring the forest for a single tree.

There are other studies in the region which deal with selected themes related to the subject of this study. Howard Wolpe's study--Urban Politics in Nigeria: A Study of Port Harcourt (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1974)--analyses aptly the stages in the political development of Port Harcourt from its early days of alien control to the development of ethnic politics among the Igbo 'stranger' population and shows that ethnicity in the Igbo context was not, as is often assumed, incompatible with the development of modern political institutions. Barbara Callaway's informative study--"Confusion and Diffusion in Local Government" (Unpublished political science Ph.D. thesis, Boston University, 1970)--has also examined critically the introduction of the British model of Local Government to a different culture in Eastern Nigeria and has illustrated the problems of this experiment with reference to the political experience of Aba after 1952. Other studies which deal with such other themes as urban social life, trade in towns and so on can be found in the bibliography.

It seems that the unifying theme in all these studies, which is not fully developed in any, was the attitude of the British colonial government to urban development. Whether one examines urban administration, urban social and economic development, the size and structure of towns, indeed any aspect of urban development in the region in the colonial period, the influence of the system of indirect rule and Native Administration dominates. Variations in the development of individual towns or in the different stages of colonial rule can be explained in the context of government's emphasis on the rural based, anti-urban system of administration. This study explores this missing link in the urban development of the region.

Finally there are some more broadly based studies of urbanisation in Nigeria, two of which are particularly important. Professor Mabogunje's authoritative study--Urbanisation in Nigeria (London, University of London Press, 1968)--distinguishes sharply between traditional and modern (colonial) cities and analyzes the factors in the development of each of the two 'urban systems'. In both cases he stresses the role of external political and economic forces and tries to show how the influence of 'traditional' towns have continued anachronistically to hinder modern urban development. He is favourably disposed to colonial urban creation as the contrast between Ibadan and Lagos in his study shows. He does not concede urban status to the towns of Eastern Nigeria before the colonial period except a few of them at the coast and along the Niger banks but he argues that the towns that developed in the region in the colonial period have all the ideal features of modern urban development. Dr. Eze's valuable study, "The Towns of Biafra" (Unpublished geography Ph.D. thesis, University of Nottingham, 1969), has shown that the model of urbanisation

in Nigeria which Mabogunje has adopted can also be applied to Eastern Nigeria. He analyzes urbanisation in the region in terms of change from one urban system, the traditional, to another, the colonial. He demonstrates that in terms both of size and function, many towns in Eastern Nigeria in the pre-colonial period were in fact 'urban'. The indigenous urban system, he argues, was upset by the superimposition of a highly centralized and undemocratic political system, a new system of transportation and a colonial economic structure. Like Mabogunje, he shows also how political change and 'decentralisation' in the post-colonial period led to a partial revitalisation of some 'indigenous towns' and how other towns were left stranded. Both geographers concentrate more on the spatial aspects of urbanisation than on the administrative aspects which interest the historian more. The emphasis which Dr. Eze rightly places on the function of traditional towns is a further development of the arguments of Dr. Ukwu in his useful study of markets in Igboland-- (B.W. Hodder and U.I. Ukwu, Markets in West Africa, University of Ibadan Press, 1969, Part II). Anam Ntukidem is also currently examining the application of the 'central place theory' in relation to urbanisation in the Ibibio area of Eastern Nigeria.

It can be said that the urban history of Eastern Nigeria involves not only the study of townspeople but even more an explanation of the changes which occurred in the region over time and how these changes influenced the organisation of space, the distribution of population and the concentration of special services and functions at certain points in the region. In this sense it is not possible to identify the point at which 'urbanisation' began. This study is therefore concerned with the process of change associated with urbanisation in the region, with themes in urban growth as well as with the history of individual towns.

Briefly, it tries to show in the first chapter that in the pre-colonial period, settlements in Eastern Nigeria were generally dispersed. Compared with the large agglomerations that developed in other parts of West Africa in the pre-colonial period, the towns of the region were very small in size. This difference cannot be explained by any universally valid laws of why some settlements are nucleated and others are not. The massive literature on urban genesis had laid varying emphasis on the roles of kingship institutions, trade, agricultural surplus, craft specialisation and so on in explaining the origins of towns. It is even believed by some that the 'urban concept' was diffused from a few areas of primary urbanism after the Neolithic Revolution. It seems possible however to explain the dispersal of settlements in Eastern Nigeria in terms of very high population pressure on agricultural land. Social and political fragmentation in the region also reinforced the dispersed settlement pattern. But contrary to the assumption that the region had no large pre-colonial towns because it lacked the 'prerequisites' of urbanisation such as agricultural surplus, trade and craft, there is abundant evidence--archaeological and documentary--to show that these were present in the region before the establishment of British colonial rule.

Local and sub-regional specialisation in agricultural productivity and craft encouraged the concentration of trade and other special functions on different grades of periodic markets and trading towns. Although most of these centres did not always develop mature urban forms in demographic and morphological terms, they performed functions and services which are analagous to those performed by modern urban centres for the regional hinterland. Further development of these pre-colonial centres was limited by the constraints imposed by the pre-industrial nature of the technology, by limited local demand and by the nature of external trade.

The establishment of British colonial rule altered many aspects of the preexisting organisation of space and accelerated the forces which had sustained the small preexisting nodes of social and economic interaction. Greater political integration, improved transportation and the expansion of local and external trade in the colonial period encouraged the process of urbanisation. This is not to suggest that urbanisation in the colonial period was a radically new phenomenon. The structure of the economy was not altered radically and the same hinterland sustained the larger towns that emerged just as it supported the ones that preceded them. It can in fact be argued that the British colonial government positively retarded urban development in the region. The policy of indirect rule through indigenous rural based institutions had many features which were antithetical to modern urban development. The economic interests of the colonial government lay in the diffusely located resources of the rural hinterland and there is a sense in which it can be said that colonial policy was geared to maintaining the status quo of rural dominance. Towns were officially conceived as serving a limited purpose for the metropolitan economy and the commercial and administrative needs of the 'colonial hinterland.' The growth of towns and the "detrribalisation" process it encouraged were not allowed to threaten the whole basis of colonial rule. A very limited, non-permanent African population was envisaged--mainly those whose services were considered absolutely necessary in towns.

To support this argument, the study discusses the development of colonial urban policy from the early days of indirect rule under the Governorship of Lugard through the reforms and modifications of that policy in the inter war years to the introduction of Local Government

in the period after the Second World War. It analyses the relationship between general government policy and its urban policy. Chapters II, III, IV and V examine the development of selected aspects of government urban policy to test the hypothesis that official obsession with indirect rule and the strict economy which that policy entailed, retarded urban development. Chapter II discusses government's urban land policy and tries to show how the administration flirted with tradition in the face of rapid change and thereby weakened urban finance, obstructed town planning and restricted urban immigration. Chapter III is concerned with the crucial question of urban administration. It argues that the machinery which was set up for urban administration by the Townships Ordinance of 1917 was bound to fail because of the rigid control which the Provincial, Divisional and Native Administrations exercised over townships. In a sense it is a study in rural-urban conflict and of the failure of towns to attain the degree of autonomy which they required to function effectively. The introduction of Local Government in the region did not reverse the situation. Chapter IV shows that because towns had very low priority in the official scheme of things, town planning was grossly neglected. The chapter examines four stages in the development of planning institutions and assesses their merits, weakness and continuing significance for the urban development of the region. Chapter V examines the internal social and economic life of the towns, the growth and composition of the populations of towns and how these were influenced by government policy. The final part of the study examines Aba in two chapters, one dealing with the period before 1945 and the other with the period up to 1952. It tries to see the experience of Aba in the light of the trends and policies examined in the first and second parts of the study.

The research for this thesis was carried out during 1973/4 in Nigeria and England. The study depends heavily on the holdings of the Enugu branch of the Nigerian National Archives. The sources which were found particularly useful include the records of the office of the Chief Secretary Enugu, classified as "C.S.E.;" the Ministry of Local Government papers--"MINLOC;" Provincial and District office records, notably the Owerri Provincial papers--"OW series," Umuahia/Owerri Provincial papers--"UMPROF," Onitsha Provincial Papers, "ONPROF," and the Onitsha, Aba, Bende, Okigwi, Udi, Degema Divisional Office papers filed under the Archives Codes ONDIST, ABADIST, UDDISIT and so on. The records of the Aba Urban District Council Office (A.U.D.C.) Archives were used to supplement the Enugu holdings on Aba. Official correspondence between the Nigerian government and the Colonial Office, government reports and the records of different government departments were consulted at the Ibadan branch of the Nigerian National Archives. Most of these are classified under "C.S.O."--Chief Secretary's Office, Lagos. A limited number of "C.O." sources were consulted at the Public Records Office in London. Some official and semi-official records and private papers which are kept at Rhodes House Library, Oxford--the Mss. Afr. series--were also found useful. Information on pre-colonial Eastern Nigeria in secondary sources and contemporary records was supplemented by oral tradition. All the other sources used for this study can be found in the bibliography.

CHAPTER I

THE EVOLUTION OF URBAN SETTLEMENTS

Towns developed in Eastern Nigeria in response to the changing needs and means of the region. This chapter seeks to describe and explain how settlements were organized in the pre-colonial period. It then examines the major changes which encouraged or retarded the concentration of people and specialized functions at certain points in the region. It is common in the existing literature to contrast the general dispersal of settlements in the region with the large, nucleated settlements which developed in some parts of West Africa in the pre-colonial period and to imply that "urbanisation was completely alien to this part of Nigeria before the establishment of British rule."¹ It is assumed that the region lacked the pre-requisites of urbanisation before city forming forces were introduced by an external colonial power.

It seems that to attribute urban growth in the region as some writers have done to "an all powerful authority moving individuals and equipment about in an entirely arbitrary way"² overdramatises what was in fact a slow process of change and underemphasizes the role of local factors in that process. On the other hand, to argue that the colonial government in Nigeria "de-urbanized" the

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1. See R. Mansel Prothero, "The Population of Eastern Nigeria," Geographical Review, Vol. LXXI, 1955, p. 168.
 2. Akin L. Mabogunje, Urbanisation in Nigeria, London, University of London Press, 1968, p. 108.

region and created a new, qualitatively different kind of city³ obscures some elements of continuity in the development of nodes performing special functions for and sustained by the same hinterland. It can rightly be said that,

large enough to have a character of its own, the modern city is inextricably linked to, dependent upon the society outside it. The growth in size has increased rather than diminished the force of that dependence. Out of that relationship springs the central problem of urban history.⁴

It is intended here to outline the changes which affected the different aspects of the life of the region (its environment, population, technology and political, social and economic organisation) and how these changes influenced the organisation of space and the development of towns of varying sizes and forms.

Pre-colonial Settlements and Nodes

Eastern Nigeria covers a large area of over 46,000 square miles. It has numerous sub-regional variations in vegetation, ethnic composition and settlement patterns. The land surface slopes gradually in a south-westerly direction from the Cameroon Mountains and Oban Hills in the extreme north-east to the mangrove swamps of the Niger Delta and can be divided roughly into three broad geographic environments, three distinct zones of varying population densities and three areas of varying

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3. John O.N. Eze, "The Towns of Biafra," Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Nottingham, 1969.
 4. Oscar Handlin, "The Modern City as a Field of Historical Study," in Handlin and John Bunchard, eds. The Historian and the City, M.I.T., Cambridge Mass., 1963, p.3. Cf. Eric Lampard, "Urbanisation and Social Change: On Broadening the Scope and Relevance of Urban History" in Handlin and Bunchard (eds.) op. cit., p. 232 ff.; O.D. Duncan and L.F. Schnore, "Cultural, Behavioural and Ecological Perspectives in the Study of Social Organization," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. LXV, 1959, pp. 132-49.

settlement patterns. The relationship between these is in some respects obscure.⁵ It is also not clear how far back in time the patterns described in late 19th and early 20th century accounts can be extrapolated nor is it yet possible to document the stage by stage development of these patterns.

Most of northern Iboland and the Cross River Basin lies in the sub-Guinean environment which has more in common with the savanna than with the Guinean forest to the south. In this zone, the forest has gradually been replaced by secondary cover of grass and shrubs. It has long dry seasons and the soil is for the most part acid and leached, though parts of Abakaliki and Ogoja have rich agricultural land. An irregular chain of hills and plateaux intersects this zone from the Nsukka area south through Udi and Okigwi to Afikpo and Arochukwu on the Cross River. Except in parts of Nsukka and Abakaliki, population density is generally low. South of this zone lies the vast sandy coastal plain which is drained by a number of navigable rivers linking it to the coast. Rainfall decreases the further north from the coast. The vegetation is tropical rain forest, displaced in many areas by thick palm groves.⁶ Although the land is sandy and relatively infertile, this zone supports the highest concentration of the region's population. South of the

5. For detailed geographical studies of the region, see Barry Floyd, Eastern Nigeria: A Geographical Review, London, Macmillan, 1969; Yehunda Karmon, A Geography of Settlement in E. Nigeria, Jerusalem, Magnas Press, 1969.

6. See W.B. Morgan, "Settlement Patterns of the Eastern Region of Nigeria," Nigerian Geographical Journal, Vol. 1, 1959. pp. 23-30. Cf. David Grossman, "Iboland's Population Distribution: A Geographical-Historical Approach to an Explanation and Application," The Journal of Developing Areas, Vol. IX, No. 2, 1975. pp. 253-270.

coastal plains lie the mangrove swamps and the labyrinth of creeks, islands and sand bars of the Delta. Because of environmental restriction and limited agricultural land, this area is sparsely populated and heavily dependent on the hinterland.

It is important to note that the region had both the savanna and the Guinean environments. Suggestions that the Savanna was more conducive to the development of large population concentrations and kingdoms than the Guinean forest⁷ do not help to explain the Eastern Nigerian situation. In any case, large settlements developed in both the Savanna and the Forest zones, in Kano and Gao as well as in Benin and Oyo. Furthermore, environmental differences and the sub-regional specialisation these entailed, encouraged the development of inter-regional trade which was focused on a number of periodic markets and trading towns in the region.

Although the environment favoured the cultivation of staple root crops and the growth of palm trees--with palm oil and kernels forming the region's major cash crop--it does not explain the unusually high population density of the region nor does it fully explain differences in sub-regional densities. It has been suggested that in West Africa, population densities are closely related to the incidence of large towns so that "the areas with larger total and rural populations are also those with large numbers of city dwellers."⁸ This does not seem to apply

7. See Daryll Forde, "The Cultural Map of West Africa: Successive Adaptation to Tropical Forest and Grassland," in Simon and Phoebe Ottenberg (eds.) Cultures and Societies of Africa, N.Y., Random House, 1963, pp. 116-

8. G. Trewartha and W. Zelinsky, "Population Pattern in Tropical Africa," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. XLV, 1954, p. 114.

to Eastern Nigeria where high population densities pre-date the establishment of British Colonial rule. The records of early 19th century traders suggest that the Igbo hinterland was "of great extent and very populous."⁹ Commenting on a late 19th century missionary map of the region, P.A. Bennett observed in 1894 that

no one from the study of the map could form any idea of the dense population of the Ibo country.... From a point of vantage near the town of Obotsi, it is possible to count five large towns all of which touch the circle with a diameter on its inner border...with an average population of probably not less than ten thousand people.¹⁰

In a clearly exaggerated but significant estimate, Major Leonard, one of the first British officers to penetrate the Igbo heartland, put the total Igbo population at the turn of the century at about six million. The 1952-3 census, the first which actually counted the people, showed that the region's total population was nearly eight million with an average density per square mile of more than double the national average. Local densities in the region varied considerably. Over twenty per cent of the people were shown to live on less than five per cent of the total land area while about half the total land area was occupied by only ten per cent of the population. The heavier densities lay along a belt running southeastwards from Onitsha as far as Ikot Ekpene and Uyo, particularly, in Awka, Okigwi, Orlu and parts of Owerri Divisions. From this belt, densities thin off gradually northwards through areas of medium densities to the sparsely populated Cross River Basin and southwards to the

9. Capt. John Adams, Remarks on the Country Extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo, London, 1823, (New Impression, Frank Cass, London, 1966) pp. 129-31.
10. P.A. Bennett, "A Visit to Opopo," Niger and Yoruba Notes, Vol.1.1, No.2, 1894, p. 24. Cf. A.G. Leonard, The Lower Niger and its Tribes, London, MacMillan, 1906, p. 31.

ineffectively occupied deltas and plains of the Niger and Cross Rivers.¹¹

This pattern of distribution probably predates the colonial period.

In most of the sparsely populated areas of the northern sub-Guinean environment, settlements were relatively compact. The same was true of the small but well-nucleated settlements of the Delta. But in the central coastal plains, particularly in the high density belt, settlement dispersal was the norm. This was related to the decentralized social and political organization and it probably also reflects "the gradual disintegration of nucleated settlements" resulting from population pressure on land.¹² In very early days when the population of the region was much smaller, settlements were much more compact. Land was abundant in relation to agricultural needs and was communally owned and worked. Fallow periods were long enough to meet the requirements of the agricultural system of rotational cultivation. With population increase, fallow periods became shorter and yields poorer. The natural and most sensible reaction of an essentially agricultural people was to break up large settlements and colonize new areas. This process, notably the southward expansion of the Igbo into Ibibioland was going on when the British entered the area at the turn of the century.

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11. See J.M. Jennings, "A Population Distribution Map of the Eastern Region of Nigeria", Geographical Journal, Vol. CXXIII, 1957, pp. 416-7; R.K. Udo, "Patterns of Population Distribution and Settlement in Eastern Nigeria", Nigerian Geographical Journal, Vol. IV, No. 2, pp. 73-88. Cf. Mss. Afr. S. 1068, R.A. Steven, "Stories of a D.O.", n.d.
 12. See R.K. Udo, "Disintegration of Nucleated Settlements in Eastern Nigeria", Geographical Review, Vol. LV, 1965, pp. 53-67. Cf. Robert Netting, "Ecosystem in Process: A Comparative Study of Change in Two African Societies", in David Damas, ed. Contributions to Anthropology: Ecological Essays, National Museum of Man, Ottawa, 1969, pp. 102-111.

Eighteenth to early 20th century accounts of the region described the size and organisation of some settlements and noted the difference between subregions. The basic unit of settlement was the compound of the extended family. In a typical compound, the

master of the family has a large square piece of ground, surrounded with a moat or a fence, or enclosed with a wall made of red earth tempered, which, when dry, is as hard as brick. Within this are his houses to accommodate his family.... In the middle stands the principal building, appropriated to the sole use of the master. On each side are the apartments of his wives....¹³

A group of such compounds made up a village, and a group of such villages formed the village group or town. Villages were usually grouped around a central meeting place which was a social and ritual centre and almost always a local periodic market. "Paths from all the compounds converge on a market place or playground, a big open space cleared of bush but with plenty of huge shady trees...a common centre for all functions such as palavars and dances."¹⁴ Settlements and their 'central places' varied in size and importance. Col. Trenchard observed at the turn of the century that "some of them are rather large but it changes in different parts tremendously; in some parts you find quite large towns and in others there are only small hamlets dotted about in different parts."¹⁵ In areas of northern Igboland, settlements were so large that they constituted what some geographers have recognized as a

13. Olaudah Equiano, The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vasa, the African, London, 1789, p. 10.

14. Mss. Afr. S. 375(3) Col. Adams, "The Resurrection of the Long Juju", n.d.

15. Great Britain, Cd. 4906, "Southern Nigeria: Committee of Enquiry into the Liquor Trade", 1909, p. 2578.

"peculiar form of urbanisation." Uburu, a salt mining and trading town in this zone was described in 1879 as

a large town of about 10,000. The streets and roads are well paved and laid out as if under the supervision of a civilized surveyor..., a good criterion of a purely native town that has not the slightest touch of European or Asian civilisation.¹⁶

In the central high density belt, the towns appeared to some European observers "as different from the ordinary idea of a town as anything can be", consisting largely of a "collection of affiliated villages or compounds scattered over an area of as much as five thousand acres of bush. They may be from five to six to as many as 14 compounds each with its own chief and the home of from a hundred to a thousand people."¹⁷

In the Delta region, "the city or big town" was distinguished from the village or small town, the former being "the seat of government and the official residence of the king or chief." Between such city states there were "several villages with average distances of three quarters of a mile from each other, with intervening bushes, thick and high." Each of these units "counts from 100 to upwards of about 1,000, all of one house or family."¹⁸

The pattern and form of settlements described above differed in many respects from those described by Arab and European travellers who

16. Julius Spencer, "A Visit to Uburu", Church Missionary Intelligencer, 1879, pp. 241-2.

17. Mss. Afr. S. 375, Col. Adams, op cit.

18. Rev. D. Pratt, "African Town and Village Life in the Niger Delta", West Equatorial Diocesan Magazine, 1905, p. 147.

visited parts of West Africa in the pre-colonial period. Such towns as Timbucto, Gao and Kano in the Savanna were large capitals of centralised states and important centres on the Trans-Sahara trade routes. Benin, Ife and Ibadan west of the Niger and the Dahomian towns of Whydah and Allada in the forest had populations varying from twenty to as many as 100,000. Many of them were centres of political and religious authority to which large numbers of people were drawn by choice or compulsion. In some cases the political organisation encouraged the growth of trade and craft, in others it was detrimental to many forms of development.¹⁹ The question often asked is "why, despite the high population density, Eastern Nigeria remained one of the least urbanised areas of Africa until the colonial period."²⁰

There are different views as to what constitutes urbanism. Whatever criteria are adopted, the towns that developed in Eastern Nigeria in the colonial period would qualify as urban. But their pre-colonial precursors raise many problems of classification. Different countries and disciplines adopt varied and often arbitrary concepts and definitions of urbanisation. The most popular definition which holds that a city is "a relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals,"²¹ can be extended to include the specialised,

19. See William Bascom, "Urbanism as a Traditional African Pattern," The Sociological Review, Vol. VII, 1959, pp. 29-42; cf. Bolanle Awe, "Militarism and Economic Development in the 19th Century Yoruba Country: The Case of Ibadan", Journal of African History, XIV, 1, 1973, pp. 65-77.

20. Bascom, op cit p. 31-2.

21. Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life", The American Journal of Sociology, Vol. XLIV, 1968, p. 8.

non-agricultural functions which cities perform. Even then there is still the problems of how large, how dense a city must be before it qualifies as one; in what context and in what time period. Sociologists emphasize the behaviour of townspeople which develops from the interaction of people of diverse backgrounds. Some other disciplines stress the size of towns and their physical forms. But these vary widely in different periods and in different countries. There seems to be a consensus that "whatever else towns may be, they are settlements that offer a variety of certain characteristic functions" for the wider hinterland.²²

Numerous problems arise from some of the explanations which have been offered for the supposed absence of urban centres in Eastern Nigeria in the pre-colonial period. Desmond Clerk has attributed this "lack of innovation centres" and progression to full urbanisation mainly to the nature of the climate which, according to him, did not require special exertion for survival, "hence the incentive to develop any cultural form more elaborate than the simple village farming community was for the most part absent."²³ This 'Merrie Africa' approach may be compared with the hypothesis that the savanna was more conducive to the development of large states and towns than the forest. It also fails to explain regional differences in settlement forms in the same climatic zone. Wheatley has rightly observed that "even a cursory review of environmental conditions in areas of primary urbanism shows that physiographically these environments run the whole gamut of variations from relatively undiff-

22. See David Grove, "The Function and Future of Urban Centres", in P.J. Ucho and R. Tringham (eds.) Man, Settlements and Urbanism, Duckworth and Co., Hertfordshire, 1972, p. 560.

23. Desmond Clerk, "Africa South of the Sahara", in R.J. Braidwood and G.R. Willey, Courses Towards Urban Life, Chicago, Aldine Publishing Company, 1962, p. 29.

erentiated potemic plains...to dissected mountain slopes exceeding 10,000 feet in elevation with all that that implies as to climate, drainage pattern, natural vegetation, soil types and cropping pattern."²⁴ In any case, large towns developed in Eastern Nigeria in the twentieth century without any significant changes in the environment.

The rise of "a tribute collecting chief" has also been seen as the central factor in urban development. Writers like Lewis Mumford argue that "the most important agent in effecting the change from decentralised village economies to a highly organized urban economy was the king or rather the institution of kingship."²⁵ Pre-colonial urbanisation in West Africa was very closely associated with centralized political organisation. Although there are many civilisations which had centralised political institutions but did not develop large cities, social and political fragmentation in pre-colonial Eastern Nigeria encouraged the proliferation of small centres of social and economic interaction rather than the development of large ones. The Igbo like their Ibibio neighbours were "broken up into hundreds of small, more or less independent, social units, the largest being in many cases...the village group. Anything of the nature of the sovereign state which has so long dominated the political consciousness of Europe since the Reformation was in concept and in fact absent."²⁶

The leading Houses of the Delta 'city-states', even when their powers increased with the expansion of European trade, did not expand their political influence much beyond the confines of their markets.

24. Paul Wheatley, The Pivot of the Four Quarters, Edinburgh University Press, 1962, p. 29.

25. Lewis Mumford, The City in History, London, Macmillan, 1961, p. 46-7.

26. M.M. Green, Ibo Village Affairs, N.Y., Frederick A. Praeger, 1947, pp. 3-5.

The institution of monarchy which developed among the Igbo, Ijaw and Efik of the riverain areas had very limited political influence. The power of the Obi (king) of Onitsha for instance did not appear to have extended much beyond the confines of their towns. Warfare between rival communities in the region was common but was not fought on a large enough scale to compel massive population movement for defense purposes. "Their fights go on for quite a long time, some of them go on for 14 years and they kill perhaps two or three men."²⁷

There were therefore no political or military pressures for large scale population concentration. If anything, political decentralisation in some respects had adverse effects on the concentration of trade and special functions. Insecurity for long distance traders and unilateral closure of trade routes blocked the flow of trade. Late 19th century missionaries found great reluctance even among Awka traders and craftsmen to move long distances. Some "dared not go to Ontisha."²⁸ For some Ibibio traders, "there were no proper trade routes.... Ten miles travel was a long journey. Before a man could go on such a task, he had to be well armed.... He also had to have friends in all the villages through which he walked. If not, he would be caught and sold or killed."²⁹

Indeed one of the ostensible reasons why the British expedition at the turn of the century was mounted was to open trade routes which were

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27. Col. Trenchard, "Minurew of Evidence", Cd 4906, *op cit*, p. 2578.
28. Rev. Tuqwell, "Visit to Oka", *Niger and Yoruba Notes*, Vol. 1, No. 8, 1895, p. 10.
29. Udo Akpabio, "The Story of Udo Akpabio of the Anang Tribe", in M. Perham (ed.), *Ten Africans*, Northwestern University Press, 1936, p. 46. These links were often established by marriages and agreements of mutual protection referred to in official documents as 'chopping mbiam'.

frequently blocked by rival communities. The problems of insecurity, though real, can be exaggerated. After all the Oil Rivers more than any other part of the West African coast showed remarkable efficiency in the trade with Europeans during the slave trade period and more so in the era of legitimate commerce. In spite of these constraints, which were common features of most pre-colonial West Africa, local and sub-regional specialisation in agricultural productivity and craft encouraged the development of local, interregional and external trade. These activities were focused on different grades of markets and trading towns which had many of the features of the larger towns that developed in the colonial period. The latter developed from the accelerated forces that sustained the former.

The association of relative dispersal of settlements in Eastern Nigeria with the absence of agricultural surpluses, craft and specialized traders can be disputed on general and empirical grounds. In the first place it is difficult to conceive of a society which does not possess a potential or deployable wealth of surpluses. The realisation of such a surplus and the extent to which it is exchanged depend on the nature of demand--in the form of incentives or coercion. Besides, an agricultural surplus does not by itself create large cities nor does it "engender the ideologies and institutional contexts that are required to mobilize the surpluses."³⁰ There is clear evidence that pre-colonial Eastern Nigeria produced and traded surpluses in agriculture and craft. The high population density of the region presupposes a reasonably stable

30. Robert McAdams, The Evolution of Urban Society, Chicago, 1966, pp. 45-6.

agricultural economy. Numerous metal, copper and bronze objects and pieces of pottery and cloth "of marvelous wealth of form and decoration", recently excavated at Igbo Ukwu, point to the existence of long established local industries and craft specialisation dating back to the 15th and possibly the 9th century B.C.³¹ The probable external origin of the beads and copper used for the bronze objects may also point to the antiquity of trade contact with the region across the Sahara, perhaps through intermediaries.³² Within the region itself, sub-regional specialisation encouraged trade. The people of the Delta made and exported different kinds of canoes to other parts of West Africa in addition to their traditional speciality in fishing and salt manufacturing. They traded their surpluses for the agricultural produce and livestock of the hinterland. Some towns in the Igbo hinterland, notably Awka, Nkwerre and Abiriba specialised in smithing and woodwork. In the 19th century, Abiriba for instance was thought to "consist of nothing but blacksmiths who do all the work in brass and iron for a great distance around."³³ The Awka, whose fame is perhaps associated with Igbo Ukwu finds, combined metal and woodwork with such special functions as traditional 'medicine making' and long distance

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31. See Thurstan Shaw, Igbo Ukwu: An Account of Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria, Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1970, pp. 209, 260-1 cf. Babatunde Lawal, "Igbo Ukwu Bronze: A Search for Economic Evidence", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol. VI, No. 3, Dec. 1972, pp. 313-321.
 32. Cf. David Northrup, "The Growth of Trade Among the Igbo before 1800", Journal of African History, Vol. VIII, 1972, pp. 217-221.
 33. Major Leonard, "Notes on a Journey to Bende", Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society, Vol XIV, 1898, p. 196. Craft Specialisation in the region is discussed in more detail in J.O.N. Eze, "Pre-Colonial Urbanisation in Southeastern Nigeria", Paper presented at the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1972.

trade. Some Ibibio communities specialized in wood work and made household furniture, doors, religious objects and masks. There were small scale industries in the region such as salt mining at Uburu and cloth weaving in parts of Enugu, Onitsha and Ndoki. Some locally made cloth was known to be of much better quality than those imported by Europeans.³⁴ The quantities produced in these crafts and industries were necessarily small because demand was restricted and production methods poorly developed. In the absence of wheeled traffic, transportation was invariably by canoe along natural waterways and by head portage on narrow bush paths. These restrictions on production and trade limited the volume of trade in the major trading towns and the frequency of marketing sessions.

Every village had at least one local market in which "Lilliputian transactions"³⁵ in local foodstuffs were conducted. These markets also served various social functions. During their sessions, "traders were never surprised to see joyful bands of people dancing merrily around the market...firing guns for they knew these to be a sign either that a baby had been born or that a chief had died." People guilty of crime were also brought "before the elders who sat together in Agbanwu day to settle disputes. Fines were used for wine and meat later in the market."³⁶

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34. John Whitford, Trading Life in West and Central Africa, London, Frank Cass, 2nd edition, 1967, cf. W.B. Baikie, Narrative of an Exploring Voyage, London, Frank Cass, 2nd edition, 1966, p. 297.
35. EP 3561 MINLOC, Memo on "Cowries" in the region describes the grotesquely small scale of some local transactions--"a few pinches of snuff, a tiny role of tobacco,...a few handfuls of pepper" and so on.
36. A.J. Fox, Uzoakoli: A Short Story, London, OUP 1964, p. 17 referring to the early days of Agbangwu market.

Above the local markets were the larger interregional markets, held less frequently but attracting more specialised traders and goods from a much wider area. Obegu market, one of such regional markets was described by British officials in the late 19th century as " a large and important market held every four days and people coming from immense distances to it. Palm oil, kernels, yams, goats,... metal works ... are sold there."³⁷ The market was said to be attended by "thousands of people." Naturally the more important of these markets were located along the major river routes--the Niger, Cross River and the smaller creeks of the Delta. There were also large regional markets on the more important land routes controlled by the Aro and associated long distance traders. On the Niger, coastal traders carried coastal products and imported European goods in canoe loads upstream to the large trading town of Aboh. From there, a hierarchy of middlemen supplied the markets of the Lower Niger up to Idah. Igala traders who controlled the northern end of this trade brought southwards such northern products as horses, livestock, natron, kolanuts and often slaves. Between Idah and Aboh, there were smaller markets such as Onitsha to which the producers of the eastern and western hinterlands of the Niger brought their produce to exchange with special trade goods handled by Niger traders.³⁸

As early as the 16th century, Pereira was impressed by the volume of trade at Rio Real (Bonny and New Calabar) to which large canoe loads were brought from "a hundred leagues and more...conveying many yams... many slaves, cows" and so on all of which were sold to the coastal

37. Calprof 8/2, G. B. Harcourt, "Report on the Akwette Expedition," 1896.

38. See William Allen and T. R. H. Thompson, Narrative of the Expedition on the Niger, Vol. 1, London, 1966, pp. 236-7, 268-271; cf, David Northrup, "The Growth of Trade."

communities.³⁹ On the Cross River, a number of important regional markets developed also, notably the Eke Mohan to which many people came from long distances and Umon and Itu "to which the surrounding tribes resort...being the furthestmost place which the Calabar traders reach."⁴⁰

Trade on the major river routes and on the coast was closely linked by land routes to important hinterland markets. Itinerant traders, notably the Aro, Nkwerre and Awka, coordinated the far flung system of markets in the hinterland, arranging periodic fairs in different markets in such a way that traders could move from one market to another. Thus they remained continually in business and served widely distant areas. Early colonial reports recorded the routes and flow of trade to these trading centres. The major caravan routes which they noted include the Awka to Bende and Arochukwu route, the Awka to Degema, Nkwerre to Azumini, Nkwerre to Okigwi, Nkwerre through Owerri to Aboh waterside, Arochukwu to Onitsha⁴¹ and so on. These were in addition to the routes linking Aro settlements to Uburu and further northwards to Idah regional markets.

External trade before the early 20th century did not appreciably alter the economic structure or the organisation of settlements. European traders were confined to the coast and "trouble began immediately there was any attempt to proceed further inland."⁴²

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39. Pacheco Pereira, quoted in P.A. Talbot, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, Vol 1, London, O.U.P., 1926, p. 185.
40. Rev. Hugh Goldie, "Notes on a Voyage up the Cross River in Nov. 1881, The Scottish Geographical Journal, Vol. 1, 1885, p. 275.
41. CONF E. 2006/6 Calprof, "Intelligence Reports," 1908 and 1909, cf F. I. Ekejuba, "The Aro Trade System in the 19th Century," Ikenga, Vol 1, No. 1, 1972, pp. 11-26.
42. Alex A. Cowan, "Early Trading Conditions in the Bight of Biafra," Journal of the Royal African Society, Vol. XXXIV, 1935, p. 396.

The middlemen of the coast and hinterland supplied European traders with ivory, slaves and later palm produce and received, often on credit, a large variety of imported European trade goods which they distributed to the local and regional markets of the interior. The major coastal and Delta trading towns of Brass, Bonny, Akassa, New Calabar, Old Calabar and later Opobo, strengthened their political and economic institutions to defend and entrench their positions. There was little lateral connection between them. The Aro commercial oligarchy and their subsidiaries established close relationship with their coastal counterparts.

Up to the mid-19th century, slaves formed the major export staple. Apart from the destabilising effects and exploitative nature of the trade, neither the procurement of slaves nor their transportation exerted any pressure for improved transportation or improved techniques of production. The growth of legitimate commerce involved wider participation in the economy but it affected the structure and nodes of trade but little. African middlemen like their European counterparts quickly adjusted the old structure to suit new developments. Imports remained basically of the same character consisting mainly of luxury and cheap consumer goods which did not help to transform the domestic economy.⁴³ These imports in fact discouraged the development and concentration of local industries and crafts. "There would appear to have been no great change in the custom and method of trade down to 1887. What changes there were had come about gradually and these had not been any of a revolutionary character...In fact there continued to be little change until after 1900."⁴⁴

43. See J. E. Flint, "Economic Change in West Africa in the Nineteenth Century," in J. E. Ajayi and Michael Crowther, eds. History of West Africa, Vol. 11, London, Longman, 1974, pp. 390-9.

44. Cowan, op cit., p. 397.

The markets and towns on which local, interregional and external trade were focussed did not always develop all the characteristics of a modern city. The periodicity of trading sessions in them was arranged to suit the limited nature of supply and demand. Nevertheless these nodes serving special social and economic functions had many of the essential features of the larger towns that developed in the region in the colonial period. The form and function of Uzoakoli market at the turn of the century shows the very thin line between a pre-colonial regional market and a 20th century urban centre. Uzoakoli replaced Bende as the second largest market in Igboland after Uburu. Rev. Dodd described the Uzoakoli market in the early 20th century thus:

Thither came great bands of traders from several days journey ...From the northwest ivory workers from Onitsha, and stool makers from Awka; from the south came Bonny men with huge loads of European goods; from the east came Aro men in companies of hundred or more via Bende...carrying heavy head loads of iron bars to sell to blacksmiths...The town has several industries and those engaged in them had sheds and booths in and around the market place where they plied their trade. Blacksmiths hammered out hoes, nails, door fasteners, hinges, gongs and other things. Wood workers made household furnishing by means of very poor tools...Copper and brass workers took the brass and copper rods which like manillas were used as currency and beat them up in heavy anklets and bangles for village beauties working on them quite choice designs... There are in Uzoakoli now Nkwerre, Hausa and Lagos and Abiriba quarters which were started by people who originally came to trade and who settled down permanently near the market.⁴⁵

The emphasis which scholars often place on the physical form, numerical size and the internal population characteristics of cities distracts attention from peculiar forms of nodes serving special functions in their own cultural contexts. Whatever else a city may be, it is a unit of settlement which performs specialized functions in relation to

45. Rev. R. W. Dodds, "Notes on the Early Days in Uzoakoli," in Fox, op cit., Appendix 1, p. 94.

a wider hinterland.⁴⁶ In the circumstances of pre-colonial Eastern Nigeria, the nodes that developed in that region performed "services appropriate to the modes and mores of its cultural setting... It seems not unreasonable at the level of generalisation required for historical analysis to designate each of them a city."⁴⁷ In this sense, even a small hamlet has urban characteristics in as much as it serves to integrate a surrounding territory.

Urban Crystallisation in the Colonial Period

The pattern described in the preceding section was a dynamic one which was continually responsive to internal and external pressures of change. The growth of a number of large towns in the region in the colonial period did not radically transform the settlement pattern in the region but reflects greater political integration, improved transport system and the expansion of local and external trade. By the 1880s the relationship between Europeans and Africans in the Oil Rivers had deteriorated. Beneath the conflict that ensued lay "a search for authority which transcended the search for trade."⁴⁸ British official hesitation to intervene more directly weakened with the appearance of the 'scramble' atmosphere that was developing among rival European

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46. See David Grove, "The Function and Future of Urban Centres" in P. J. Ucko, R. Tringham and G. W. Dimbleby, eds, Man, Settlement and Urbanism, Duckworth and Co. Ltd, Hertfordshire, 1972, pp. 559-65.
47. Paul Wheatley, "What the Greatness of the City is Said to Be," Pacific Viewpoint, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1963, pp. 167-8.
48. Colin Newbury, "Trade and Authority in West Africa from 1850-1880" in Gann and Duignan (eds) Colonialism in Africa, Vol. 1, Cambridge, University of Cambridge Press, 1969, p. 84. This period is examined in great detail by K. O. Dike, Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, London, O.U.P., 1956.

powers in the late 19th century.⁴⁹ By 1896 British military and civil personnel had moved to the immediate hinterland of the coast. The trading ports at the coast and the trade that sustained them began also to migrate inland. Subsequently the economic power of the Aro in the hinterland and the 'baneful' spiritual influence believed to be associated with them were broken in 1902.⁵⁰ Punitive expeditions continued intermittently until the whole of the region was brought under British control. Similar thrusts established British presence in the Western Delta, Benin and the Lagos hinterland. Goldie's Company administration became redundant in the circumstance of the late 19th century and was taken over in 1900 by the colonial government. Eastern Nigeria thus came under the same political authority as an extended area with which it hitherto had but a limited relationship. Although proposals for an early amalgamation of all the areas under British control were found impracticable before 1914, a new form of political integration had begun to replace the loose and often unstable political relations which prevailed within and between the regions of what later became Nigeria.

As indicated earlier, political fragmentation and commercial rivalries had led to the proliferation of ports and trading centres at the coast and in the hinterland. The colonial government, limited in funds and personnel, focused its administration on a small number of hierarchically arranged stations. A series of amalgamations and reclassifications

49. The course of the 'Partition' and the issues that led to it have been extensively discussed. See R. Robinson and John Gallagher with Alice Denny, Africa and the Victorians, London, MacMillan, 1961, J. E. Flint, "Britain and the Partition of West Africa, in John E. Flint and G. Williams, Perspectives of Empire: Essays Presented to Gerald Graham, London, Longmans, 1973, pp. 93-111; A. G. Hopkins, "Economic Imperialism in West Africa," Economic History Review, Vol. 21, 1968, pp. 580 ff.

50. C.O. 520/14, Moor to C.O. 27/6/02.

led to the creation in 1906 of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. It was divided into three Provinces. What is now the Eastern Region formed the Eastern and part of the Central Province. Each of the Provinces was divided into Districts and placed in charge of District Commissioners who supervised the work of the Native Court Areas and the warrant chiefs appointed to do judicial and civil work for the new administration. Owerri, Calabar, Ogoja and Onitsha were later created Provinces and placed under Residents who supervised the work of District and Assistant District officers placed in charge of Districts.

The location of colonial administrative centres was initially influenced more by military and sanitary considerations than by a wish to expand pre-existing nodes. Aba for instance was selected by the officer commanding the Aro Field Force as "a site for a combined fort and barracks" because it admitted of good defense and was more centrally located in relation to the area to be subdued.⁵¹ Such other centres as Umuduru from where the Okigwi area was administered just happened to be a "predetermined imaginary point Z" where troops operating in Bende and Awka areas were to meet beforeproceeding against the Ahiara and Obowo communities to the south.⁵² These initial sites of military and civil administration remained fluid and were gradually adjusted to the administrative needs of the hinterland and development in the orientation of trade and transport. The site chosen for the administrative headquarters of the Owerri Province was considered "the most suitable" because it would "render it possible to reach the headquarters of the local areas in which the Province is divided in a day" thus having them "within easy reach of supervision."⁵³

51. C.S.O. 1/13 Moor to C.O. 7/3/02.

52. A. E. Steel. "Explorations in Southern Nigeria," Geographical Journal, Vol. XXXIV, 1908, p. 8.

53. OW 480 in Abadist 1/4/11 "Owerri Province: Headquarters for," 1916.

For urban growth, the effects of the colonial presence in the rural area was perhaps more important than the location and development of an administrative station. Law and Order was more rigorously enforced in the region. Recurrent hostilities between communities over land and trade were checked. The arbitrary closure of roads and the ubiquity of tolls which hampered the flow of trade were controlled. This had the effect first of stabilising the population and then of encouraging greater mobility. The traditional method of adjusting population pressure to land need by colonizing new area and not infrequently displacing the original inhabitants was stopped. Although the government had no success in its population redistribution and resettlement programme,⁵⁴ a more favourable atmosphere prevailed for seasonal and permanent migration to underpopulated and underutilised areas,⁵⁵ as well as to the new trading and administrative centres themselves. Hausa and Yoruba troops and carriers who had accompanied the British during the expedition, were quartered in barracks and within the government stations. The colonial administration required literate and skilled personnel, many of whom had to be recruited from the coast and other parts of Nigeria which had been in longer contact with Europeans. Being strangers, many of them were housed in government buildings at the station. Government offices and other installations began to give some of these stations a quasi-urban character. Trade in foodstuffs gravitated to them. Those of them that coincided with pre-existing periodic markets developed daily sectors.

54. See H. J. M. Harding, "A Short History of the Bamenda Cross River Calabar Scheme," Farm and Forest, 1952, pp. 44-50.

55. R. K. Udo, "Migrant Tenant Farmers of Eastern Nigeria," Africa Vol. XXXIV, 1964, pp. 320-339.

When the Townships Ordinance was passed in 1917, nearly all the seven Second Class and twenty-two Third Class Townships created were government administrative stations.⁵⁶

But these did not in themselves ensure urban growth. It would be true to say that "where both administrative and commercial centres coincided, the two factors complemented each other and the urban community flourished. Where there was competition between a commercial and an administrative centre...the commercial centre prevailed eventually taking over the political functions of the vanquished town."⁵⁷ Of the four Provincial Headquarters in the region only Onitsha and to a lesser extent Calabar grew into large towns because they were fairly large towns already and had colonial administrative functions added to them. Their trade also increased. Aba experienced more rapid growth than Owerri from where it was for a long time administered. With the growth of Port Harcourt as a port and railway terminus the headquarters of the Owerri Province was transferred there in 1926. Neither Udi nor Bende from where Enugu and Umuahia were for some time respectively administered, developed to the size and importance of their subject towns. Although Enugu became the headquarters of the Southern Provinces in 1929 and the headquarters of the Eastern Province ten years later, its initial growth had nothing to do with an administrative presence.

It is important to stress that whatever the intention of the colonial administration, the administrative centres that were created were meant to serve the needs of the hinterland, at any rate as conceived

56. C, 10/1917 CSE "Order in Council Made Under the Townships Ordinance 1917," No. 19, 1918.

57. B. W. Hodder and U. I. Ukwu, Markets in West Africa: Studies of Trade and Markets among the Yoruba and Ibo, Ibadan, University of Ibadan Press, 1969, p. 146.

by the colonial government. Indeed it is the argument of this study that colonial administrative policy in itself imposed severe limits on urban growth. British adherence to the policy of indirect rule was in many respects incompatible with urban development. That policy was geared more to maintaining local political and economic institutions than to the development of a 'detrribalised' non-agricultural urban population. The role of political institutions in urban development in the colonial period differed greatly from that in the pre-colonial period. In the latter, African states were drawing agricultural surpluses and people to their capitals, within their states. For the colonial government, the large towns and industries of the empire were conceived to be in the metropolitan country. The colonial economy was a predominantly export oriented economy. The major export staples were rural and not urban based. Towns were meant to develop only in so far as they subserved the interest of export trade and primary production.

Of much greater significance for urban development was the establishment of an improved system of transportation. This developed in three stages. Up to 1914, effort was confined largely to the improvement of existing land and river routes. Subsequently a railway line was constructed and along with it a number of feeder roads. From the later 1920s when bicycle and motor traffic increased, roads began to play a more important role.

As indicated earlier, a number of small rival ports had developed at the coast before 1900. European traders, also torn in their own rivalries, supported different rival ports.⁵⁸ There was very little

58. G. I. Jones, The Trading States of the Oil Rivers, London, O.U.P. 1962, Chapters VI and VII.

connection between the ports and none of them commanded the dominance and resources to develop efficient port facilities. Expansion was hampered by topographical problems. Connection lines with the hinterland were poorly developed and not infrequently obstructed by rival communities. Transportation was by means of canoes and head loading. Although the Brussels Conference of 1890 had prescribed railway construction as one of the clearest proofs of effective occupation, railway construction east of the Niger, though considered at the same time as the Lagos Ibadan line was being constructed⁵⁹ was not undertaken until 1913.

To expand trade in the meantime, the administration initiated a vigorous policy of clearing, widening and patrolling existing land and river routes. The Roads and Creeks Proclamation of 1903 empowered District Commissioners to recruit unpaid labour through local chiefs for work on roads and river routes.⁶⁰ Among the numerous waterways cleared of snags, deepened and widened between 1903 and 1904 were the Imo from as far north as Owerri to the port of Opobo, the Azumini creek from Aba south to Opobo, the creek route between Opobo and the Qua Ibo River and a number of less important routes. Most of these waterways connected the trade of the hinterland with the trading stations at Calabar, Opobo and Degema where European traders remained in spite of repeated attempts by Ralph Moor, the High Commissioner, to persuade them to move inland. In addition to improving the waterways, the government Marine service, equipped with a number of light craft, started Marine service on the Niger from Idah to

59. See C.S.O. 1/13 Moor to C.O., 6/6/02 proposing an eastern railway line to be aligned from Calabar northwards.

60. See Ofonagoro, W. I., "The Opening Up of Southern Nigeria to British Trade," Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1972, pp. 341-5.

the coast and on the Cross River.⁶¹ These efforts speeded up but did not alter the pre-existing pattern of trade flow. Bonny and Degema continued to be important import and export ports as the volume of trade for 1914 and 1915 shows:

Exports:	1914 - Degema	117,797 cwts, (oil)	7,711 tons, (kernels)
	Bonny	46,678 cwts, (oil)	2,678 tons, (kernels)
Exports:	1915 - Degema	100,765 cwts, (oil)	6,632 tons, (kernels)
	Bonny	44,483 cwts, (oil)	2,581 tons, (kernels)

The value of exports for the two years at both ports totaled £1,679,052.⁶²

Road construction up to the late 1920s was amateurish, geared largely to connecting government administrative stations. Udo Akpabio, an Ibibio chief, remembered how grotesque some of the road construction work at the time was:

We were compelled to clear the bush, make roads through the towns and keep them clean. Everybody was employed in this work; men, women and children... It was very funny sometimes in making the roads. One Commissioner would tell us to make the roads flat. Another would make us change it and make a hill (camber) in the centre. Another would tell us to make drains by the side...and then a new one would come and tell us to fill them up again. Some of these changing ways of the whiteman used to make us laugh but we did not let them see us laughing.⁶³

Before the introduction of light Ford vehicles in the region after 1918, and the expansion of bicycle traffic, roads were of very little importance except for cask rolling. Indeed they were a nuisance to

61. See R. O. Ekundara, An Economic History of Nigeria, N.Y., African Publishing House, 1973, pp. 130-4.

62. EP 1308/2 CSE, Annual Report Owerri Province, 1914/15.

63. Udo Akpabio, op cit. p. 55; cf E.578/1910 Calprof, "Roads in the Eastern Provinces; E. 3794/09 Calprof, Annual Report, P.W.D., 1909.

porters. "Carriers do not like the new roads and they are often compelled to bind up their feet with rags to protect them from the burning heat on the hard surface."⁶⁴

The construction of the railway line which began at Port Harcourt in 1913 and reached Enugu in 1916 altered the pre-existing organisation and flow of trade. The discovery of coal in Enugu in 1909 reinforced the long recognised need for an Eastern line.

Port Harcourt, thirty-eight miles from the Bonny Bar was chosen as the site for the seaport and railway terminus because "it had high ground connected with the mainland with deep waters alongside." It had easily drained ground for railway yards and would, by official estimation, allow "for a large town consisting of residential and trading sites and could be easily adapted for handling coal as well as produce and general cargo."⁶⁵ Because of wartime problems, however, a projected extension of the line to the Jos tin mines was postponed until the late 1920s, but a line was constructed to Enugu in 1916. The line took the shortest possible route and lay between the two areas of high population concentration in the region. It required numerous feeder roads to funnel the produce of the densely populated areas to the break-bulk points on the line where European trading firms had begun to establish themselves. Because of the heavy capital outlay on railway construction, the government was determined to protect this line from the competition of other forms of transportation. Roads were not allowed to be constructed parallel to the line but must be ancillary to it.⁶⁶

64. S. R. Smith, "Bush Paths and Roads in Nigeria," Empire Cotton Growing Review, Vol. VIII, No. 8, July 1931, p. 223.

65. C.S.O. 1/32 Vol. II, Lugard to C.O. 5/6/13 enclosure 2.

66. See G. O. Ijewere, "Rail-Road Problem in Nigeria," Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1955, pp. 17-26, cf A. M. Hay, "The Development of Road Transportation in Nigeria 1900-1940," Journal of Transport History, New Series Vol. 1, 1971/2, pp. 59-107.

Until the early 1930s no important roads were allowed to be built into Port Harcourt. Nevertheless the flow of coal and much of the agricultural produce of the hinterland began to focus on Port Harcourt. With the extension of the line to the North, tin and other northern produce flowed to the port also.

The growth of Port Harcourt led to the decline of the Delta river routes and gradually to the decline of the coastal ports south of it. Although Opobo, Degema and Calabar continued to handle substantial (and in the case of Calabar increasing) proportions of the export-import trade, their hinterland was gradually captured by the rapidly growing seaport of Port Harcourt.⁶⁷

Aba also developed relatively rapidly as a focus of road and rail transportation. By 1918 it had been linked by road to Bende, Ikot Ekpene, Azumini, Asa Ozoako, Omuma, Omo Obegu and Owerri. Mr. Weeks Transport and Engineering Co. operated a regular motor traffic service from Aba to Itu, Aba via Owerri to Onitsha, Aba to Opobo and Aba to Oron via Uyo. By the mid-1930s, the town had become the "largest traffic centre in the Eastern Provinces and a centre of the motor transport trade."⁶⁸ It was also the second most important town after Onitsha for the distribution of imported European goods. The railway connection with the North made it the most important centre from which foodstuffs, particularly gari, was exported to the Northern region.

Umuahia was also an important centre of communication. Apart from the railway line, motor roads radiated from the town in every direction.

67. EP 1308/4 CSE Annual Report, Owerri Province, 1914/15; cf R. K. Udo, "The Growth and Decline of Calabar," Nigerian Geographical Journal, Vol. X, 1967, pp. 91-106, cf MSS Afr. S. 546, F. B. Carr, Reminiscences, 1919-1949.

68. File No. OW 26/20 Abadist, "Roads and Bridges," 1920-; File No. 57/22, "Weeks Transport," in Owdist, 1/7/7.

By 1921 the Public Works Department began to construct a number of roads linking the town with Owerri, Uzoakoli, Okigwi and Ikot Ekpene.⁶⁹ The rail link with the North supplied the cattle industry to which the town owed much of its commercial importance.

Enugu depended more on the activities of the Collery and the Railway for its growth. Road connections to it were more of administrative than commercial significance. Much of the trade of northern Igboland flowed via Awka by road to Onitsha and through the Anambara river to the town. The Niger Marine Service linked the trade of the North to Onitsha and thence to the coast. Even when the government closed this Marine service in 1926, the trading firms based at Onitsha continued to operate a regular traffic thus sustaining the port function of the town until further development of the road network diverted much of the trade of the town to Port Harcourt and Aba.

The road transport pattern became more systematized with the increase of motor traffic and the creation of the Road Board in 1926. A hierarchy of roads was established. Trunk A roads were designed to link regional administrative headquarters and Trunk B roads to link important administrative and commercial centres within each region. Minor Native Authority roads connected the rural areas to the more important roads.

Collectively, improved transportation reduced transport time and cost and eased the flow of people and trade to towns. The railway played an important part in the movement of produce and trade goods but at the expense of cheaper and, in some respects, more efficient means of transportation. It is in fact conceivable that even larger towns would have developed at other points in the region in the absence of the railway

69. OW 6789, Handing Over Notes, Ashley to Wair, 1/2/21.

which inhibited the expansion of rival means of transportation until the end of World War II. At Aba for instance, it is significant that the railway actually retarded trade. A local official complained in 1940 that

the freight rates on the railway (were) a serious obstacle to any long distance trade within the country and a source of constant complaint. Owing to the heavy rates, traders of this Division could not possibly compete with the Onitsha District in say edible oil trade to the North.⁷⁰

It is very easy to exaggerate the role of the railway in the general development of the region and in relation to urban growth. The railway has in recent years lost much of its relevance to the Nigerian economy yet the growth of the towns whose location and initial growth it greatly influenced, has not been affected. The major impact of improved transportation in general for urban growth was the impetus it provided for the expansion of trade. The development of modern transportation in British West Africa was influenced by official assessments of the resource potential of the different areas where railway lines were constructed. The system was adopted in Eastern Nigeria only when

the great wealth of the forest produce and the report (on) the Udi Coalfield...proved that a railway would have an immediate certainty of high paying traffic.⁷¹

It can in fact be argued that railway and port facilities which were provided during the colonial period merely helped to populate the towns but did not create or form them. "A harbour as an entreport site is clearly a city-filling rather than a city forming factor for it requires that there be a prior pattern of settlement, providing goods for export and demanding imports"⁷² The same is true of the railway which is

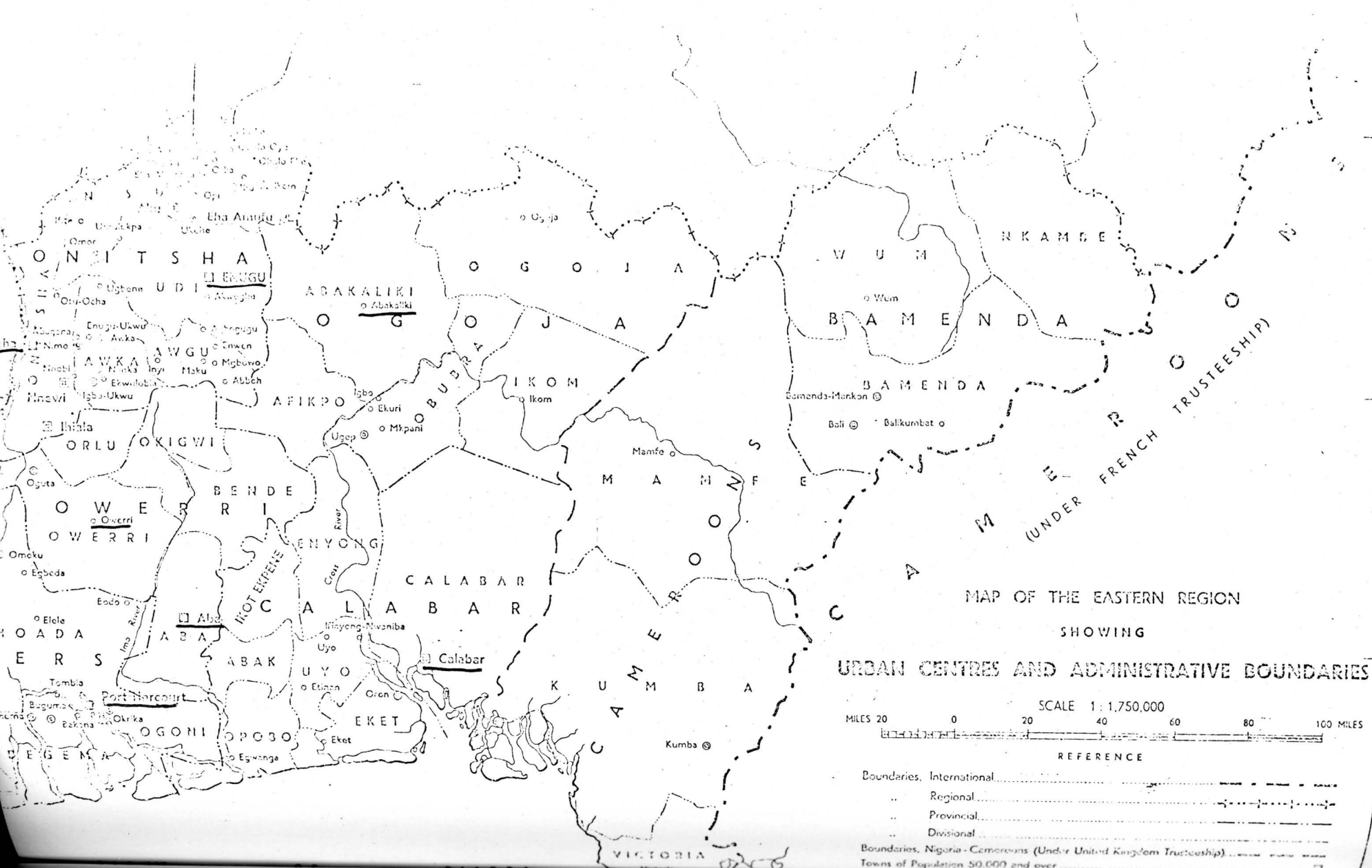
generally constructed only when it pays to do so.

70. File No. 1083/1 Abadist, Report on Trade in Aba Division, 1940.

71. C.S.O. 1/32 Lugard to C.O. 5/6/13, enclosure 2, cf A. G. Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, London, Longmans, 1974, pp. 196-198.

72. E. Smolensky and D. Ratajczak, "The Conception of Cities," Explorations in Economic History, series 2, Vol. 2, 1965, pp. 90-99.

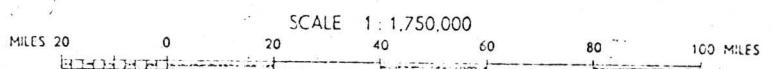
The expansion of export trade and the growth of local trade were central to urban growth in the region in the colonial period. Local producers and local and expatriate traders played a crucial role. The colonial economy was a predominantly trading economy, based, except for the coal industry at Enugu, on the export of established staples and imported trade goods. There was thus continuity in the development of nodes which served special functions in the region. Like their pre-colonial counterparts, the larger towns that developed in the twentieth century were essentially trading and service centres. The development of the latter owed very little to any structural change in the economy. It has been said above that colonial presence itself and improved transportation facilitated the growth of trade. But the structure of production and the pattern of trade remained basically unchanged. The plantation system was rejected in the region on pragmatic grounds so that official encouragement of production was confined to advice which was offered by the Agricultural Department to local producers. Pioneer oil mills were introduced in the 1950s, otherwise export expansion was achieved by local effort. The pressure of taxation after 1928 encouraged extra work and the introduction of a common currency facilitated trade. Yet it would be true to say that the role of the colonial government in urban growth in the region has been overestimated. The emphasis should be placed on the expansion of trade which resulted from the more intensive exploitation of local resources in response to increased demand. The colonial government and expatriate trading firms facilitated this process. With increased trade, there was increased purchasing power in the rural area which in turn created a demand for the goods and services in the urban centres.



MAP OF THE EASTERN REGION

SHOWING

URBAN CENTRES AND ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES



REFERENCE

- Boundaries, International.....
- .. Regional.....
- .. Provincial.....
- .. Divisional.....
- Boundaries, Nigeria-Cameroons (Under United Kingdom Trusteeship).....
- Towns of Population 50,000 and over.....

CHAPTER II

URBAN LAND: POLICIES AND PROBLEMS

The attitude of the colonial government to urban development in the region is reflected in its urban land policy. The administration wished to own and control all urban land but it was slow to adopt a definite land policy because it sought to adhere to the traditions of different parts of the country. After Northern Nigeria was conquered, the government took over control of land believing that such a policy conformed with the tradition of the area. The Land and Native Rights Ordinance which was formally passed in 1910 vested the freehold of the land in the Governor. In the South, government policy varied considerably.¹ West of the Niger, indigenous land rights were recognized except in the Lagos colony where the administration claimed the land as "the gift of the crown". All unoccupied land outside Lagos was inherited by the government on the ground that the traditional rulers whom it succeeded controlled such land previously. In Eastern Nigeria, there was no clearly defined policy but the principle was adopted from an early date that urban land was to be crown estate, that the relationship between landlord and tenant was to be between the crown and its tenants.²

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1. C.S.E. 1/86/102, Buchannan Smith, Commissioner of Land, "Memo on the Existing Methods of Government Control of Crown and Other Lands in Southern Nigeria", 1912; cf Allen McPhee, The Economic Revolution in British West Africa, London, Frank Cass, 1972, pp. 173-189.
 2. File No. 323 ONDIST, Circular Memo, Town Planning Instruction, 1951. This policy was adopted from the early days of colonial rule.

The policy of government control of urban land is common and has some potential advantages. In the colonial period, especially before direct taxation was introduced in the region, such a policy could provide a valuable source of government revenue. It could facilitate town planning, enable the government to check the abuses of land speculation and curb the excesses of private developers. Indeed government control of urban land is still recommended to most African states as essential for effective urban development.³ But the success of such a policy presupposes that the government has a purposive urban policy and that the land is acquired by regular means for bona fide public purposes. Otherwise the government could merely constitute a monopolist landlord and use its rights to the detriment of urban development.

The changes which were taking place in the region in the early 20th century encouraged the growth of large towns. The government had the opportunity to acquire land properly and plan the development of towns in a modern way. But because of official obsession with indirect rule, it claimed it wished to preserve tradition even in the face of rapid change. This chapter tries to show how government policy clung to and often perverted tradition and thereby retarded urban development. It first outlines the relevant features of customary tenure and tries to see in what respects that system could create problems in the colonial period.

When colonial rule was established, the traditional system of land tenure in Eastern Nigeria was not legally defined or documented. Government officials had much difficulty understanding how it worked. The system

3. United Nations, Urban Land Policies and Land Use Control Measures Vol. 1, Africa, N.Y., 1973, pp. 33-47.

had evolved over centuries of adaptation to population pressure on agricultural land. By 1900, communal holdings were breaking up as settlements became more and more dispersed in response to increased land needs. But the main principles of land ownership and transfer remained basically unchanged. Traditionally, communal and individual ownership of land were closely bound. Every piece of land belonged to some community. Even land lying temporarily fallow formed part of the agricultural system of rotational cultivation and was therefore not conceived to be unoccupied. Although there were some persons whose social status limited their rights to land, there was no landless class as such. Land belonged ultimately to the community but within the community individuals had security of tenure and usually enough land for their needs. In the pre-colonial period, there was little threat to the rights of individuals or communities to land as the need did not always arise for a rigorous definition of the scope of customary tenure or the assertion of all the rights it conferred. Each community exercised collective control over land in the sense that the members defended their land against the intrusion of enemies and checked the excesses of individual members.⁴ Collective pressure was brought to bear on members to redeem land pledged by them.

In the administration of land, family heads and elders had a traditional role to apportion land annually to individual members but no chiefs or kings were known to hold the land in trust for anybody or to negotiate its alienation on behalf of the community. Collective control was not inconsistent with individual rights. A legal student of African customary tenure has

4. see G.I. Jones, "Ibo Land Tenure", Africa, Vol. XIX, No. 1., 1949, pp. 309-323; L.T. Chubb, Ibo Land Tenure, University of Ibadan Press 1961, Part 11; S.N.C. Obi, Ibo Law of Property, London, 1963, pp. 45 ff.

shown that "beneath the umbrella of this group title is a progressive individualisation of interests specific to particular portions of the group owned land and vested in sub-groups and individuals."⁵ In his Dual Mandate, Lugard also recognised that land tenure in most parts of British African colonies was not communal in the sense of tenure in common. He observed that its "fundamental characteristic" was rather "an individual tenure of land derived from the common stock at the disposal of the tribe or family." He also noticed a consistent "tendency towards individual ownership...fostered by pressure of population"⁶ as was the case in Eastern Nigeria.

The disposal of land was a very sensitive issue. Traditionally land was exchanged, pawned, pledged or borrowed but it was not alienated permanently to strangers. It was definitely not sold for profit because it had a strong spiritual content as it was associated with ancestors and posterity. In the Onitsha area for instance, land was given to strangers for farming and building purposes on 'kola tenancy' terms. A stranger on request was given some land for which he made a token payment periodically in kind or cash to the landowner. This did not confer freehold title but merely showed that he recognised the right of the landowner for as long as he remained in lawful occupation.⁷ M.D.W. Jeffreys, a colonial government anthropologist, gave a fairly representative account of the traditional practice of 'showing'

5. Kwamena Ben-Enchill, "Do African Systems of Land Tenure Require a Different Terminology?", Journal of African Law, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1965, p. 125.

6. Lord Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa, London, Frank Cass, 5th ed., 1965, pp. 285-7; cf C.S.O. 1/19, Lugard to C.O., 19/2/13.

7. OP 490 Vol. 1, ONPROF, "Kola Tenancies" especially the reports of G.T. Basden and Capt O'Connor, July, 1932.

land to strangers in parts of Owerri and Calabar Provinces. A stranger who required land, represented to the living owners for their consent and then made sacrifice to the dead ancestors at a shrine usually on the land under consideration. Publicity was given to the transaction by planting a permanent crop on the land or by driving sticks into the land to be incorporated into the construction of a new building. In each case the host symbolically left something of his on the land to show that he retained ownership of it. The length of tenure was not usually defined but it was understood that the right conferred on the stranger was a personal one which could not be transferred without the consent of the landowners.⁸ By this method, many Hausa settlements and those of coastal traders were established in the region before and during the colonial period. Aro settlements in the region were also established in much the same way.⁹

The traditional system also provided for the acquisition of land for public purposes. The practice of iweputa ala, literally bringing out land, was used everywhere in the region to provide land for such public purposes as shrines, market sites and other places of common social and economic activities.¹⁰ The acquisition of such land created few problems because there was usually full discussion of the proposal and the public purpose was of a kind which everybody understood. There was little distinction between the interest of the 'state' and that of the individual members.

8. E.P. 6028 C.S.E., Jeffreys, "Provincial Court Report, Itu", 18/10/32.

9. E.P. 3993/3 Calprof, Annual Report, Aba, 1909; OW Conf 20/24; UMPROOF "Hausa Settlements in Owerri Province", 1924; File No. 937, Abadist, "The Aro in Aba Division", July, 1938.

10. John Umeh, Compulsory Acquisition of Land and Compensation in Nigeria, London, Sweet and Maxwell, 1973, pp. 17-20.

It is easy to idealize the traditional system the details of which were often only tacitly understood. It can be said that traditional restriction on the alienation of land was bound to create problems in the colonial period. This is not to suggest that the traditional system could not be readily adjusted to changing needs. On the contrary, it was easily adapted to the requirements of migratory tenant farming in the region before and during the colonial period. The stranger settlements referred to above were established in spite of the weaknesses of the indigenous system. Before the establishment of colonial rule, British traders, consular agents and missionaries, were able to acquire land for private and public purposes on terms which recognized the rights of the local landowners. The site for the court of Equity in Calabar was granted to Her Britannic Majesty's Consul for that purpose by Duke Ephrim of Calabar. An understanding was also reached along the coast that "the ground given as a site for a cask house to any supercargo shall be paid for in the case of Hulks at the rate of one H(ogshed) of Rum and three hundred Kroes of salt per annum"¹¹ In the same way, land was granted for trading posts and mission sites along the Niger banks and in the Delta on terms which recognised the rights of local landowners. It was in fact with the establishment of colonial rule that "an anomalous position" was reached whereby provision was made "for a European or a non-native to acquire land but no provision exist(ed) whereby for example a native of Calabar may obtain legal title to land in Owerri Division."¹²

11. F.084/1176, Equity Court Regulation, Old Calabar, 5/6/1862 reproduced in C.W. Newbury, British Policy Towards West Africa Secret Documents, 1786-1874, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965, pp. 396-9.

12. OW 1677/S9 Abadist, C.J. Pleass to Resident Ow. Prov, 20/9/28.

When colonial rule was established, the government was not sure how land was to be acquired in the region. Official attention was directed initially to asserting the rights bequeathed to it by the defunct administration of the Royal Niger Company. The government also doubted what rights it could claim by conquest. Much of the land at Onitsha was bound up with the previous rights of Goldie's Company administration. In the course of the 'scramble', the Company had contracted a large number of treaties with the communities along the Niger banks and also in parts of Northern Nigeria.¹³ It was not clear what rights these treaties conferred on it. As land was not, by tradition, alienable even by chiefs, there is no reason to believe that the Company acquired freehold title in the land. Indeed when the Company understood that its charter would be revoked, it hurriedly arranged a series of 'Agreements' which converted the terms of the original treaties into those of lease in perpetuity. The area claimed by the Company was not clearly defined. Some of the local communities in these areas had no reason to suspect that their land had been alienated. When the crown took over the administration of the Company, it inherited after paying a handsome amount "a nebulously defined sovereignty over an inexact and ill-defined area."¹⁴ The colonial government suspected that the Company's claims might not be valid but Lugard argued that since the claims of the Company, vague as they were, had entitled the government to the administration and mineral rights in most of Northern Nigeria, it would

13. CO 583/267, Unsigned and Undated Memo, "Niger Lands". This document gives a detailed account of the issues connected with this land.

14. CO 583/133, Official Minutes on Greame Thompson's Memo, "Niger Lands", 1925.

be inexpedient to dishonour any parts of them. Besides, the colonial office warned against any action which would prejudice the remaining interests of the Company. The government therefore decided to assert full rights over the areas it had actually put to use or leased to others but to withdraw its claims quietly from other areas. This policy was reversed in 1928 when the government discovered copies of the "agreements" which the company had made in 1896. It was hitherto believed that the claims of the government depended on the Company's earlier treaties but the 'agreements' seemed to confer more valid title to the Company and therefore its successor. The government appointed G.B. Williams, an administrative officer, to look into the facts of each claim. He saw reason to believe that most of the agreements were in fact forgeries. The government therefore decided in 1935 to divest itself of most of the land but retained nine areas covered by the Company's agreements. Some of these were at Onitsha. The original landowners were given the option to dispute government title in court but it was assumed that

since the Company had been in possession for the past 30 years and upwards, no native could now make any valid claim to them under native law and custom which depends mainly on evidence of occupation.¹⁵

It will be seen later in this study how adversely the "imperfection of titles and unobtrusive withdrawal" connected with the Niger Lands affected the development of Onitsha.

Claims of a different nature affected other towns. In the early colonial period, the government claimed the land in most administrative stations by right of conquest. It can be said that if this claim had been maintained

15. C.O. 583/133, Undated Official minute.

firmly, there would have been fewer land problems in the region. It is significant that in 1896, Sir Ralph Moor instructed the officers proceeding on an expedition into Igboland to assure the people that the government would not take their land but would rather ensure them peaceful possession of it.¹⁶ Subsequently however, many officials argued that "in the circumstances of the occupation of the Ibo country by the government,... no rent was really due from the government" for the land it required.¹⁷ Instructions were issued to local officials to delimit the land "occupied or claimed by government" and to acquire more land by "absolute title" where necessary. But there was no clearly defined policy for acquiring land. The Native Lands Acquisition Ordinance was passed in 1903 to confer on the government the right to control land alienation by local land owners to aliens. The Crown Lands Ordinance was also passed in 1908 to define the rights of the government to 'crown land' and to outline how such land was to be administered. But there was no Ordinance to guide the government in its land acquisition.

Because Lugard believed firmly in indirect rule, he favoured a policy of 'patient progress'. In his Political Memoranda, he argued that it was

preferable that the natural evolution of land tenure should not be arbitrarily interfered with either on the one hand by introducing foreign principles and theories not understood by the people or on the other hand arresting progress in evolution by stereotyping by legislation primitive systems which were in a transitional stage.¹⁸

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16. Calprof 8/2 Vol. 1, R. Moor, "Memorandum for Officers Proceeding to Akwette - Opobo", 26/2/96.
 17. SP 3865/11 in File No. 6028 CSE, H.F. Matthews, "Subsidy to Chiefs: Disposal of", 18/3/27.
 18. F. Lugard, Political Memoranda, London, Memo X, 1918, p. 363.

But he was opposed to the government paying rent to local landowners for the land it required. "This anomaly" he ordered "must cease....It may be that finances cannot pay the bill and it may be that other means of expropriation can be found."¹⁹ The West African Lands Committee which was to recommend on a general land policy for British West Africa did not publish its report. Local officials were therefore allowed great latitude in land transactions.

This was the situation in 1913 when the government proposed to acquire large tracts of land for the construction of the Eastern Railway. Port Harcourt, Aba, Umuahia and Enugu, which grew into large towns, were affected by the railway acquisitions. Official thinking at the time of the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Provinces of Nigeria favoured the preservation of tradition. Reginald Hargrove and other local officials who were assigned the responsibility for acquiring railway land preferred local agreements with chiefs to legal agreements of deed. It was argued that "the legal phraseology and binding wordings of such a Deed would greatly increase the difficulty of getting the chiefs to sign",²⁰ and that an informal agreement with chiefs was more in keeping with tradition. The government was aware of the weaknesses of such a procedure. The chiefs were appointees of the government and had no traditional right to negotiate land alienation. Some of them had no interest whatsoever in the lands which they were expected to 'grant' to the government. It is clear that the rights the government claimed by such acquisitions were hardly valid.

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19. Conf C 45/1922 CSE, Lugard's Minutes of 12/2/13 quoted in this Memo: "Land Required by Government: Whether it should be held under lease or obtained under the Public Lands Acq. Ordinance."
20. File No. OW Conf 22/14 UMPROF, Hargrove to F.S. James, Ag. Lt. Governor, S. Prov. 21/9/14.

The system of 'chief chits' as the local agreements were called was preferred by government officials even when the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance was passed in 1917. The Ordinance conferred statutory powers on the government to acquire land for public purposes. But such land was to be clearly defined, the public purpose clearly stated and adequate compensation paid. It required a discipline which the government was not prepared to take. The chief chits "saved money"²¹ and suited the strict economy which was a cardinal principle of the colonial administration. The chiefs were reminded that traditionally land was not sold for money in which case there was no need to argue over the value of land. Unlike the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance which required that the land to be acquired was to be surveyed, delimited and assessed fairly, the agreements with chiefs merely stated that

the chiefs of...fully appreciating the benefit to be derived...do hereby grant freely and voluntarily all such land as may be required.²²

There was no indication of what the rights of the chiefs were to the land in question. The extent of the land that "may be required" was not always clearly defined. It is doubtful whether anybody was in a position to appreciate the benefits of government policy fully at the time when things were so ill defined. Furthermore, as the land was "freely and voluntarily" given, the question of rent did not always arise. When compensation was paid, it was arbitrarily fixed and consisted usually of a small lump sum payment "given out...more with the idea of keeping such native

21. see File No. 6607/C CSE Lt. Col. Rowe, Commissioner of Lands, "Confidential Report on Land Questions in Southern Nigeria", 1931.

22. see Appendix A.

who made claims quiet rather than with the idea of obtaining any definite right for the government."²³ In addition to its economy, local agreements gave the government much scope to shift boundaries more freely than the provision of the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance would allow. During the acquisition of much of township land in 1913/14, Reginald Hargrove did not wish to commit the government to any required area but merely informed the chiefs that an enormously large area would be required. He reasoned that "as the chiefs had generally little idea of what a breadth of 100 or 400 feet was", it was sufficient merely to tell them that an "enormously large area of land would be required". The government could then take what land it required.²⁴

Even greater problems arose when the government used both the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance and local agreements concurrently. At Port Harcourt for instance, the government suspected that if formal acquisition of land was to be made, African lawyers would advise the landowners to put a high price on the land. As Governor Thompson explained in 1927, it was intended in 1913 that an agreement should be made by the government with the chiefs and then immediately afterwards the power of the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance would be evoked to

ensure to government an indefeasible title and to cover any possible defects which might be thought to exist in the powers of the chiefs and people to convey the rights.²⁵

In this way the administration can be said to have perverted the traditional system. It was prepared to uphold the 'tradition' that land was not sold

23. File No. 6607/C CSE, Lt. Col Rowe, op cit.

24. File No. OW Conf 22/14, Umprof, Hargrove to SSP 13/9/14.

25. C.S.O. 1/13, Thompson to Amery, 26/11/27 referring to 1913.

when the government acquired land. But then it applied the opposite principle when asserting its ownership of land. The use of the Ordinance conferred on the government legal rights but saved it the legal obligation to the landowners. These landowners were in fact expected to pay rent for the land which could not be bought from them in the first place! The government also leased land on commercial terms for purposes which were not in any way 'public' in character. To avoid the charge of commercialising land acquired for public purpose, some officials suggested that rather than "rent" the land to European firms,

the tonnage charged on goods taken to traders' sidings and warehouses should be fixed at an amount sufficient to cover the question of rental for the warehouse area. The point would not be raised that the government had leased the land granted for Railway purposes.²⁶

Clifford's administration, which succeeded Lugard's in 1919, condemned this perversion of tradition and sought to reform it. Clifford believed in a more centralised form of administration in Nigeria and in modernisation which was not so inhibited by tradition. In 1921 the Colonial Office warned the Nigerian government of reports reaching it that there were gross irregularities in urban land administration. Churchill reminded the government that it was "not a monopolist landlord entitled to make what profit it could out of its monopoly."²⁷ In a policy statement, S.M. Grier, the Chief Secretary to Clifford's government emphasised that

where the government does not employ the power it has to acquire land under the Ordinance but enters into a private agreement...government is as much bound as would be any firm to respect the native law and custom about land.²⁸

26. File No. OW. Conf. 22/14 UMPROF, Hargrove to S.S.P., 13/9/14.

27. C.S.O. 1/13, Churchill to Clifford, 16/2/21.

28. Conf C 45/1922, CSE, Minutes of S.M. Grier 25/4/22.

He reminded local officials that the warrant chiefs who were said to have granted land in towns to the government had no traditional rights to do so. "But for the fact that they had been given warrants,...would not be entitled to enter into any agreement with the government concerning communal land."²⁹ For his part, Clifford held that land was to be acquired either in strict conformity with tradition or by a strict adherence to the provision of the Ordinance. The latter was preferable in places such as Port Harcourt and Enugu where he believed it was necessary for the government to have full control in order to enforce orderly development. But he insisted that

the government - as far as possible - should restrict their acquisition to purposes which are of a bona fide public character and should not indulge in anything resembling land grabbing and land speculation. I cannot think that it is right for example for the government to acquire large areas in specially valuable situation and thereafter to lease plots to private persons without allowing the local tribal authorities or Native administrations any part of that rent accruing therefrom....Government can very properly claim a share in consideration of the improved value due to expenditure of public money etc etc but that it should take the whole while paying a paper corn rent or no rent at all...does not seem to me to be equitable.³⁰

To reform the anomalies of the old system, Clifford ordered Sir Harry Moorhouse, the Lt. Governor, Southern Provinces, to renegotiate the acquisition of land at Port Harcourt. He also refused to sign the town plan of Umuahia which was prepared in 1923 because the land in that town was acquired in an irregular manner. It is also significant that it was during the Governorship of Clifford that the government successfully

29. Conf No. 03583/S9 in Abadist 1/26/1063 Grier to S.S.P. 31/6/22.

30. Conf C 45/1922, Minutes of H. Clifford 4/5/22.

rejected the plantation system of development in Eastern Nigeria which would have placed much of the land in the region in the hands of foreign plantation owners.

The reform initiated by Clifford's administration was continued by Greame Thompson's administration which followed. Lt. Col. Rowe, the new Commissioner of Lands, was detailed in 1927 to re-examine the whole question of government policy and recommend ways of reforming it.³¹ The major issue which was raised was whether land rents should be paid to individual land owners, to chiefs or to the Native Administration. Nobody seemed to care about the finances of the townships themselves. In any event, local officials "from Residents downwards" favoured the old system of 'chief chits' while Col. Rowe and Mr. Asheley, another land officer who examined the problem, favoured greater individualisation of land,³² as "the natural and inevitable tendency" seemed to be towards greater freedom in the use and disposal of land. In areas where communal holdings still existed, they recommended that crown rents should be paid into the Native Administration.

These reforms were interrupted by the riots in the region in the late 1920s after which there was renewed enthusiasm for a 'reorganised' Native Administration system and for tradition. Residents sustained their opposition to "premature codification" of customary tenure.³³ But from 1930 onwards, the provision of the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance began

31. see Appendix A, extracts from Col. Rowe's Report.

32. File No. 6028 CSE "Land Tenure: General Principles Regarding", 1927/8 especially Reports of H.F. Matthews, 18/3/27, D.S. Cook, Land Officer, 6/8/28 and Col. Rowe, 25/1/27.

33. L.T. Chubb, Ibo Land Tenure, pp. 77-81 discusses some of these reforms.

to be applied more rigorously in respect of urban land while rural land questions were left to the Native Administrations.

The details of the Public Land Acquisition Ordinance raised the more common problems of what constituted 'public purpose' and what was adequate compensation. The paternalism of the colonial administration did not always allow the obvious distinction between private and public enterprise to be clearly defined. For a society with a democratic tradition, this was a potential source of discontent. The government could argue with some justification that the construction of the railway, the development of the Colliery at Enugu or even the establishment of trading stations was essential for the development of the region. But the demand that these made and the loss of private rights to land that they occasioned were selective and concentrated. General good in this sense cannot be rightly considered an adequate quid pro quo for a selective incidence of loss.

The Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance empowered any person to 'sell' land to the government. A recognized chief was authorized to convey communal land to the Governor notwithstanding any native law or custom to the contrary.³⁴ This still had some element of the chief chit system but the more serious problem arose from the provision that all 'unoccupied land' could be taken over without compensation. As has been said before, the contemporary system of agriculture was such that land lying temporarily fallow was not 'unoccupied'. Fallow periods varied with population density

34. see C.K. Meek, Land Tenure and Land Administration in Nigeria and the Cameroons, Colonial Office Research Series, No. 22, 1957, pp. 90-93 and John Umeh, Compulsory Acquisition of Land and Compensation in Nigeria, p. 21ff.

in different parts of the region. It was difficult to conceive of any land in the usually densely populated region to be unoccupied. In any event, when rent or compensation was due, it was assessed at market price, less any enhancement of the value of land by reason of any existing or proposed investment by the government. If this provision was followed logically, it would mean that the government would pay nothing at all as there was no 'market price' for land before the colonial government was established in the region.

Compensation at Aba for instance was assessed in 1921 at an average of about five shillings an acre. The maximum value of oil palm was two shillings, 'tombo' trees were assessed at two shillings each, cocoa at two shillings, kola nuts, orange trees and coconut trees at absurdly low prices.³⁵ The machinery set up by the ordinance for an aggrieved person to seek redress was not easily accessible to the ordinary person. Government interpretation was hardly disputed beyond occasional protest to the governor that

the notice of acquisition was couched in technical terms, giving no indication whatsoever what land was acutally required and your humble servant had no reason whatever to suspect any further disturbance from government.³⁶

The ordinance empowered the government to acquire land in free simple for a stated number of years. This would involve periodic revision of rents in the interest of landowners. In practice however officials insisted on acquisition in perpetuity or for a term of 999 years which would amount to much the same thing.

35. File No. OW 1924 Abadist, "Aba Land Valuation" 1921-23.

36. File No. OW 3083 Abadist, Petition of Browni Brown to His Excellency the Governor, 22/2/32.

These policies and the problems they created could be handled by the colonial government because the people were not in the position at the time to protest too strongly. But when the Town and Country Planning Ordinance was passed in 1946, the same machinery of land acquisition was handed over to the Local Planning Authorities created by the Ordinance. Each of these bodies was authorized to declare any area to be a planning area. No development was allowed on such an area except on a purely interim basis until an approved scheme was drawn up to guide development. In practice many areas were frozen in townships in the region in the late 1940s and early 1950s but they were hardly developed because the planning authorities were invariably impotent.³⁷ They had no funds and hardly any legal backing to discharge their responsibilities.

It is significant that because the government had very doubtful claim to much of the land it controlled, crown lawyers developed a defensive set of arguments to support government policy. It was held that whatever the legal weaknesses of government claims,

crown titles (were) based on grant or at worst long possession with acquiescence....It is common practice and good sense to uphold ones title such as it was especially when fortified with possession until some other party can come forward to prove a better.³⁸

Any dissatisfaction expressed by the original landowners was said to be due to a "misunderstanding of the legal position and a misunderstanding of the intrinsic value of land which in the absence of the improvement effected by government, is in that context negligible."³⁹

37. see Chapter IV pp. 145-148.

38. No. SLA 741/37 in MINLOC 11/1/1438 W.C.T. Taylor, Commissioner of Lands, to Resident, Owerei Province, 8/7/44.

39. File No. EP 22195/20 CSE, Legco Question No. 181, response of Garrard, Secretary Eastern Provinces, 27/2/48.

The application of the policies outlined above and the effects they had on urban development can be illustrated from the experience of four towns in the region.

Onitsha was already a large town before the establishment of colonial rule. Before 1856, the town was located about one mile east of the Niger bank. It was separated from the Waterside (later called Laird's port) by a stretch of farmland. In 1857, European traders and missionaries of the C.M.S. led by Dr. Baikie and Rev S. Crowther were granted trading and missionary sites near the river bank. The nascent Waterside town attracted other European trading interests including Hall and Jack, Miller Brothers, the West African Company and James Pinnock and Co.⁴⁰ In 1877, the interest held by the trading firms to land was formalized in a Treaty which stated among other things that if the European firms ceased to occupy the land, it would revert to the original landowners. Each factory also agreed to "make unto the king a yearly dash" which would be acceptable to both parties.⁴¹ Missionaries were not required to pay "taxes or dashes" as they were locally regarded as agbataobianyi i.e. our neighbours.⁴² The Roman Catholic Mission which came into the town in the mid-1880s asked for a definite cession of land and in 1886 contracted its own agreement which "recognized the R.C.M. of the Holy Ghost as the proprietor of a piece of land 202 acres, 2 roads, 21 Irish perches and eleven square yards" on the left bank of the

40. see Conf. OP 5/1931/2 CSE, C.K. Meek, Confidential Report "Successor to Chief Mba", 1931.

41. File No. 2538 ONPROF "Treaty with Onitsha - Human Sacrifice, Christian Religion, Cession of Niger River," October 5, 1877.

42. M 52/1929 ONPROF, Bishop Basden, "Kola Landlordship", 1932.

river. The Obi (king) of Onitsha is said to have received two cases of gin, several pieces of silk, one keg of powder, twenty four heads of tobacco and so on.⁴³

These transactions were seen by the Onitsha as conforming with traditional kola tenancy terms. "Native foreigners" who came to the town with Europeans were also granted land on customary terms. In 1879 the firms at the Waterside amalgamated to form the U.A.C. under George Goldie. Goldie's Company was overtly protectionist. In a sense such a policy violated an earlier treaty made with Onitsha in 1863. That treaty prohibited the slave trade and provided for free exchange of goods to the mutual benefit of both parties.⁴⁴ But because of the Company's protectionist policy, the prices of goods sold by Europeans rose and produce prices fell. The people attacked the factories of the U.A.C. and as a punishment, the town was bombarded and practically destroyed in October 1879 by a British naval force and a Hausa constabulary. Subsequently, Goldie's Company sought to consolidate its monopoly of trade in the area.

Before and after 1886 when the Company was granted a Royal Charter, it made a large number of treaties with local communities to secure control of both banks of the Niger. Most of the eastern bank of the Niger from the Nkissi River south to the Idemini creek was affected by the treaties which granted the Company trading rights but did not alienate land permanently to it. It is known for example that in 1889, the Ekwerekwu family leased

43. OP 227/1917 ONPROF, "Territories of the R.C.M. at Onitsha" Agreement of 6/1/1886; cf John P. Jordan, Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria Dublin, Clonmore and Raymond, 1949, p. 10. Parts of the land leased to the R.C.M. was later subleased by the mission to European traders on commercial terms.

44. File No. OP 2538 ONDIST, "Treaty with Onitsha" Commerce, Slave Trade, Human Sacrifice, Onisha", October 12, 1863.

to D. McIntosh and other agents of the Company parts of the Akpaka and Onu Nkissi area "on payment of fifty measures per annum local value."⁴⁵ The Company understood that it was granted only limited right to the land. That was why it was considered necessary to arrange a new set of agreements when the Company understood that its charter would be revoked. Unlike the treaties, the new agreements consisted of documents which claimed among other things that

the vendors for good consideration the payment of which is hereby acknowledged, sell to the Company all the private rights of every kind not already possessed by the Company in the land.

But the Company agreed not to disturb the present tenants or their heirs who might wish to continue in personal occupation of their land or houses from the date of the agreement, except at a price to be fixed by mutual consent.

When the people of Onitsha realized the implication of the new agreement, they repudiated it and returned the documents to the agents of the Company.⁴⁶ In any event, most of the Company's claims were transferred to the crown in 1900 when Goldie's administration ceased, though the U.A.C. continued to hold a large area of land at the river bank. As indicated earlier, the government suspected the Company's claims but did not see its way to dishonour them. It did not withdraw its claims nor did it assert them firmly. The uncertainty of government position provoked conflicting claims

45. File No. Conf.27/15 ONDIST, for copy of the Treaty; cf File No. M 644 ONPROF, 'Joseph and William Ekwerekwu to Governor 18/4/39 referring to these transactions. see also Conf. 27/15 ONSIST 19/3/1 "Lands - Original Treaties: Agreement for Purchase of Land" and ONPROF 1/8/1 "Niger Land Transfer".

46. File No. M 644 ONPROF, Joseph Ekwerekwu to Governor, 18/4/39.

and litigation at Onitsha in anticipation of government withdrawal. The Ogu family of Umuesele, chief Kodilinye of Obosi and even chief Momo of Nupe and Sule of Kaduna each staked claim to parts of the Niger Land and each in turn sold large areas clandestinely. These conflicts and uncertainties prevented the proper planning of the town especially as the Onitsha Native Administration had great influence in the administration of the town.

The government also acquired more land in the town by agreement with local chiefs. In 1900 the present site of the European Reservation was acquired for ninety-nine years at an annual rent of £100.⁴⁷ Between 1914 and 1917, more land was leased from the landowning families of Onitsha in the Market Road and Nottidge Street areas at fixed annual rents.⁴⁸ Much of this land was not acquired for public purpose as the government subsequently sublet parts of it on commercial terms to private and other interests. The government did not see itself as building a town at Onitsha. It was in a sense just another private developer. The town of Onitsha thus consisted of an odd assortment of land holdings where the weaknesses of traditional tenure and the weaknesses of government titles combined to obstruct urban development.

The towns of more recent growth, especially those affected by the railway acquisitions of 1913 - 15, reveal the weaknesses of local agreements and the problems connected with the application of the Public Lands

47. see OP 223/1928 ONPROF "Rents: Southern Provinces", 1910 -

48. The main acquisitions include:

Deed B.1,	Vol 1	99 years	dated	26/6/10
" B.2,	" 1	"	"	22/1/14
" B.5,	" 1	"	"	4/5/14
" B.8 & 9,	" 1	"	"	13/10/17

Acquisition Ordinance. Some of the problems which arose at Port Harcourt have been examined in other studies.⁴⁹ The town was established on an empty site on land previously used for farming and fishing by the Diobu and Okirika of the neighbourhood. Although the Ikwerre and Delta areas were sparsely populated, environmental constriction made what land that was available very valuable. British Marine Officers who explored the Bonny creek to select a site for a proposed sea port observed that the land at Port Harcourt had "obviously all been under cultivation" and was "merely farmland lying fallow."⁵⁰ When the site was chosen in place of Okirika, Reginald Hargrove, the District Officer at Degema, was detailed to acquire twenty five square miles of land from the Diobu and Okirika landowners. The Okirika who claimed a larger part of the land had been in longer and more direct contact with Europeans and were therefore in a better position than the Diobu to influence the government in their favour. For their part the Diobu refused to sell the land as it was traditionally not permissible to do so. There is reason to believe that Chief Wobo and other chiefs of Diobu were coerced to grant the land. It is in fact alleged that they were "terrified by armed policemen" and threatened with the destruction of their town if they did not grant the land.⁵¹ Lugard had ordered that the land should be acquired "at once" from the chiefs. He

49. see Howard Wolpe, Urban Politics in Nigeria, pp. 54-57. Clement Anyanwu, "Port Harcourt: The Rise and Development of a Nigerian Municipality", pp. 1-115.

50. C.S.O., Lugard to C.O., 5/6/13, enclosure 2.

51. OW 1/13 Rivprof, Hargrove to Provincial Commissioner, Calabar, 4/10/14; cf C.O. 583/25 Trevers Buxton to C.O. 29/1/14 and OW 7922 Phland, Petition of the Diobu Improvement League to C.O. 6/3/48 referring to the threat of 1913.

hoped that it would be possible later to use the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance to strengthen what legal defects there were in the acquisition from chiefs. The Hargrove Agreement was therefore made in March 1913 and the government based its claim to twenty five square miles on such an agreement. The sum of £5,600 was distributed to different groups of local landowners thus:⁵²

Okirika	£3,000	Omo Amasi	£100
Diobu	£2,000	Omobiakpani	£100
Omo Ime	£ 150	Ogumpa	£300

The Diobu who owned the greater part of the land repudiated the agreement and threw away the voucher for £2,000 which was given to them. The boundaries of the land acquired by the government was not clearly delimited nor were the pre-existing boundaries between different local sub-groups defined.

As the construction of the wharves and railway line commenced, Diobu dissatisfaction was accentuated as they watched the havoc which was done to their economic trees and houses. Some of their chiefs had been promised 'warrants' to sit in a new native court which was to be set up at Port Harcourt. They had also been assured that there would be a railway crossing to enable them to reach their markets on either side of the line. Some of these promises were not fulfilled. Chief Ezenwa of Diobu protested emotionally of the abuse to which his people were subjected by the government:

We the Diobu people believe that the white people stay near the bank side and the railway shall pass, the road is done pass and the telegraph is done pass; for what reason you are drive we?...the chief's house they done break and the yam which we keep inside garden they done cut all down and the palm tree is great money in our country and how they use to cut the palm tree that is good or not?⁵³

52. C.S.O., 1/34 Thompson to Amery 26/11/27.

53. OW 799 Phland, Petition of Ezenwa of Diobu to D.C. Degema, 6/5/14.

In spite of these protests, the government could not use the Ordinance to strengthen its claim because local landowners would demand equitable compensation. "The law being what it was then, acquisition under the Ordinance was therefore almost impossible."⁵⁴

Clifford's administration doubted whether the government had acquired proper title to the land at Port Harcourt and feared that "we may ultimately find that the government is in a quite indefensible position. If we do not make use of the Ordinance...we are bound to enter into an agreement which conforms with the native law and custom. If the signatories to the Port Harcourt agreement had not the right to sell by native law, can we defend what was practically an enforced sale as legal?"⁵⁵ Clifford ordered that the matter be investigated "forthwith...and the position occupied by the government in the affair clearly revealed."⁵⁶ In February 1953, Sir Harry Moorhouse, the Lt. Governor of the Southern Provinces was sent to renegotiate the 1913 agreement. He offered the Diobu an annual rent of £500 with retrospective effect to 1913. The government also promised to pay compensation for damage done to houses and economic trees and assured the Diobu that they would be allowed to remain on portions of the land which the government did not require immediately. The Diobu demanded £1,200 as annual rent but the negotiation broke down because the boundaries of the land were not clearly delimited and pointed out to the people. The Diobu threatened the government with court action and the Colonial Office also

54. Captain Buchanan Smith, (Commissioner of Land) quoted in C.S.O. 1/34, Thompson to Amery, 26/11/27.

55. Conf C.45/1922 CSE S.M.G. Grier to Lt Governor, Southern Provinces, 25/4/22.

56. Conf C.45/1922, Minutes of H. Clifford, 4/5/22.

announced that government title to the land was not sound and "had no real consideration in law."⁵⁷ In 1927 a new negotiation was initiated by Baddeley, the Officer administering the Nigerian government. The Diobu were prepared to accept the terms offered by Moorhouse in 1923 but demanded that the area claimed by the government be clearly shown. A supplementary agreement was made in 1928 amending but not cancelling the Hargrove agreement. The Diobu were not mollified. In fact, £7,000 which O.W. Firth, the Resident for Owerri Province, was asked to distribute to the people of Diobu was looted in protest.⁵⁸ Parts of Crown land continued to be leased by the Diobu on customary terms to immigrants while the government intensified its "eviction of squatter" campaign all through the 1930s and 1940. Town planning was obstructed as the Diobu continued to seek a more equitable settlement of the land question.

Compared with Onitsha, Port Harcourt is a good example of what the government could have done in the face of much needed development. The efficient planning of a modern port required full government control to ensure a proper layout but this was not inconsistent with proper acquisition of land in the manner advocated by Hugh Clifford. The weakness of government policy was not in seeking control of urban land but lay in the constraints it imposed on itself by its flirtation with tradition.

Crown land at Umuahia was acquired piecemeal and in a characteristically irregular manner. The first consisted of a strip of land eighty feet east

57. Mss. Afr. S. 141, O.W. Firth, "Port Harcourt: Some Notes on the Early days", 1964.

58. Ibid. cf File No. 22195/22 CSE, Legco Question No. 187, March 2, 1948 and File No. 7922 Phland, "Diobu land - Deeds in Connection with", 1929 -

and fifty feet west of the railway track running through the whole length of the narrow ridge on which the town was built. Reginald Hargrove negotiated this acquisition during the construction of the railway.⁵⁹ No rent or compensation was paid. When the railway station was moved to the present site of the township in 1917, Frank Hives, a first grade D.O., acquired a further 600 acres of land by yet another agreement with "sundry chiefs" who were assumed to be acting on behalf of the people of Afra, Ugo and Amuzu villages of the Ibeku clan. Compensation of £32 was distributed for damage done to houses and crops.⁶⁰ Two years later, the nascent township was growing faster than was anticipated. Expansion northwards was blocked by Hausa and other stranger settlements which had been established before and during the early colonial period in the present Uzoakoli Road area. Local officials decided to move these 'native settlement' further to the east of the railway line and to extend European traders plots and railway installations to the north.⁶¹ Between 1919 and 1922, Dundas, an administrative officer at Bende, in collaboration with the Resident for Owerri Province, persuaded the Secretary for the Southern Provinces to grant some £400 for the acquisition of the land needed for township extension. There is no record of the transaction that transpired except for an unsigned deed dated 19th July 1919 which stated that "in consideration of the sum of four hundred pounds the grantors" - Aparacha, Anosike, Onyema Obi, Ozebeni and Awelaka - conveyed to the governor "premises

59. Registered as Deed No. 4 page 36 Vol 99, Land Registry, Lagos, 14/5/16.

60. Registered as Deed No. 7, Vol 99, Lands Registry, Lagos, 14/5/17.

61. File No. B 532/1919 CSE, A. Graham to Resident, Ow. Prov. 11/6/19.

and land of the village of Afra." There is reference to another acquisition east of the town for which £200 was paid as compensation. The government was clearly "doubtful if these agreements were in order"⁶² and Clifford refused to sign station Plan UM A.9 which was prepared in 1923 by the Survey Department because he did not recognise that the government had acquired proper title to the land. In any event, all the lands claimed by the government in the town were grouped as A,B,C,D,E. A and B referred to the first two acquisitions while C,D and E referred to the more doubtful ones subsequent to 1917.

Pressure was brought to bear on the administration by local landowners and some government officials to regularise government claims in order to facilitate some administrative and planning proposals which were being made in the mid-1930s.⁶³ Crown lawyers stood firmly on the 1916 and 1917 acquisitions but conceded that C, D and E were "undoubtedly invalid and government had no legal title to the land to which they relate."⁶⁴ Nothing was done until it was proposed in 1947 to transfer the headquarters of the Owerri Province to Umuahia. It was necessary to acquire more land. The government claimed it had paid £32 for all the land at Umuahia from which it derived £90 in rent annually. W.D. Spencer the Secretary for the Eastern Provinces suggested that the government should renegotiate its title and offer to the landowners five shillings per acre with retrospective effect to 1916, i.e. to pay £6,700 less £632 which had already been paid and then

62. see File No. 30/19 OKDIST, "Umuahia, Plots Re", 1919; File No. B 1978/1919 CSE Handing over Notes Hargrove to Brooks, 27/19/19.

63. see Chapter III, pp 121 - 124.

64. File No. 15565/1 MINLOC W.D. Spencer to Chief Secr to Govt. 4/2/47.

to pay £337:15 as annual rent subsequently. This was rejected by Lagos on the grounds that

the existing Deeds do in fact give the crown an indefeasible title. For this reason and because it would create a dangerous precedent ...the increase in land value was due to government investment.⁶⁵

Umuahia thus was the only town in the region where no rent was ever paid. The landowners were asked to challenge government claims in court if they wished but the Lands Department was confident that "the acquiescence of such a party for years would in itself suffice to justify an equitable defense to a stale claim."⁶⁶ Here was another situation where the opportunity for an efficient urban land policy was lost by the drive for economy. But that merely stored up even greater and more expensive problems for the development of the town.

The experience of Enugu was much the same. There also land was acquired piecemeal for purposes which were unrelated and hard to project beyond a limited number of years. Before the government began to exploit the coal deposit at Enugu, most of the land there was merely farmland with scattered farm huts. Different parts of the land belonged to the Nike, Ngwo, Nsude, Ogui, Akegbe and other small communities of the neighbourhood. From the start, it was not government policy to pay royalties on coal or any other mineral in Nigeria. In 1915 the government acquired, in addition to the sites of the mines, more land cutting across traditional boundaries and for the expanding needs of the Colliery and Railway departments. Reginald Hargrove, N.C. Duncan (the D.O. Udi) and J.S. Hays (the Colliery Manager) coerced chief Onyama

65. File No. 15565/1 MINLOC H.F. Marshall to S.E.P., 8/9/47.

66. SLS 741/37 in MINLOC 10/1/1482 W.G. Taylor, Comm. of Lands to Resident Ow. Prov. 8/7/44.

and other minor chiefs to grant most of the central part of the town to the government.⁶⁷ Compensation of £73 was distributed to the chiefs for damage done to crops and other property. In 1917, more land was acquired north and south of the 1915 acquisition. The Chiefs of Udi, Nike and Ogui were paid compensation of £200. The 1915 and 1917 acquisitions totaled 10,227 acres. Two other areas were taken in 1918 and 1923, one for the Railways and the other for the proposed barracks of the B.W.A.F.F. All these transactions were by "Local and District Agreements". After the report of Lt. Col Rowe in 1927 which paid special attention to the land situation at Enugu, subsequent acquisitions were by the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance.⁶⁸

The attitude of the local landowners to government policy was one of bitter disappointment:

We understand that the government pays some money for land...How much does it pay and from what year did it commence to pay such? We know from experience that such amount must accumulate into a high sum and it is now high time for us to know where it is kept.⁶⁹

All the land acquired in the manner outlined above became crown land and was administered according to the provision of the Crown Land Ordinance. Such land was not sold without the permission of the Secretary of State. It could not be occupied by anybody without the express permission of the government in the form of lease or temporary occupation license.⁷⁰ Indigenous

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67. OP 1867 Vol 1 & 11, ONDIST, Enugu Crown Land - Udi Colliery and Railway Lands", 1915 cf File No. NA/10/1 UDDISIT, Interview of the Enugu Aborigines Improvement Union with D.O. Udi, 15/3/40.
68. See File No. 22195/24 CSE Legco Question No. 188/44 of 21/2/48 which gives details of subsequent land acquisitions.
69. OP 1867/Vol 11 Petition of Enugu Ngwo Town to Governor, 15/12/41.
70. C.S.E. 1/86/106, Buchanan Smith "Memorandum on the Existing Methods of Government Control of Crown and Other Lands in S. Nigeria", 1912.

landowners whose settlements were included in the indiscriminate acquisition of crown land became squatters, subject to eviction. There was no provision for resettling them.

Because the government believed strongly in indirect rule as a system of administration, it was the policy that "natives should live in their own towns, under their own chiefs and native courts."⁷¹ Only those employed by the government or European trading firms were allowed to live in the actual precincts of townships. Private African traders seeking profit were not welcome. It was not government policy to allow "native villages" to form part of a township or to grow in "dangerous proximity" to one.⁷² As urban land was under government control, it was possible to control the number of leases and consequently the number of immigrants to towns. Beyond a certain limit, urban growth was considered to be subversive of the system of Native Administration.

One would expect the control of land to enable the government to plan the towns efficiently. But what planning was done was geared entirely to the needs of those whose presence suited official conception of urban growth. In this respect, the convenience of Europeans had high priority. It is interesting that the classification of townships after 1921 was based purely on the suitability or otherwise of a town for the enforcement of "proper segregation regulations". Towns were graded into A,B,C,D,E categories as they approximated the ideal form. The B class of townships which was accepted as the most desirable consisted of those towns in which the

European reservation is divided into a residential and a trading and residential area, separated each from the

71. Lugard, Political Memoranda, London, Frank Cass, 1918, p. 417.

72. C.10/1917 in Calprof 5/7/231 "Circular Memo of H.C. Moorhouse," 1917.

other by a neutral zone of 440 yards in width and in which the European reservation is separated from the non-European reservation by a neutral zone of like dimension.⁷³

This can hardly be said to constitute a rational land use policy except by the criteria of the colonial government. Much of the land was devoted to the lower density European Reservation and the neutral zones which segregated them from the African section of the towns. Up to the mid 1930s, the official attitude to urban immigration was overtly hostile. This was reflected in the methods of leasing plots in towns and in the rent structure. A prospective immigrant was required to fill out elaborate forms giving details of his intention, his financial status and the value of improvement he planned to make on the land. He was also required to furnish a building plan which had to conform to certain minimum standards. He had to pay the surveyor's fee and make a non-refundable deposit in addition to the fixed charge he was required to pay. It is not unusual to demand that residents of a town meet some given requirements. Indeed by present day standards, the demands which were made at the time were by no means excessive. Some of the houses that were built in the colonial period compare favourably with more recently constructed buildings. Yet at the time, the demands were clearly beyond the means of many prospective immigrants. It is instructive that the government assessed the compensation for sixty houses destroyed at Port Harcourt in the 1930s at about £300, each house being assessed at £5.⁷⁴ If that was a fair assessment of the standard

73. C.S.O. 1/33 Thompson to Amery 17/11/26. Thompson recommended that this wasteful system be abolished.

74. C.S.O. 26 - 03269, "Government vs Diobu over Crown Land" especially Comm. of Lands to C.S.G. Lagos, 28/12/40 referring to the 1930s.

of buildings that was common at the time, it is not surprising that the demands of the government effectively prevented many immigrants from entry into towns.

As the towns were gradually laid out on the grid-iron plan, arbitrary rent zones were established. For a long time the government was not sure what the needs of its departments were so that the definite allocation of plots was delayed. Plot holders were usually told that they would be required to move at an early date. Temporary occupation licenses were issued which entitled the government to evict the tenants at three months notice.⁷⁵ The indigenous inhabitants of most towns were given compensation plots at a nominal rent but they were required to develop them according to government standards. They were not to sub-lease the plots except to the government.⁷⁶ Very often many of them left the township to settle just outside the boundaries of crown land. When lease was made, it was subject to periodic revision and there was usually provision that the government could re-enter if the need arose. In the early 1930s the terms of lease were as follows:⁷⁷

Improvement not exceeding £	300	lease not exceeding	20 years
" " "	£ 600	" " "	40 years
" " "	£ 900	" " "	60 years
" " "	£1,000	" " "	60 years and over

Local officials had discretionary powers to fix the terms of shorter leases. The rent and rent zones in different towns varied according to

75. see File No. 7922, Phland, Lands Officer P.H. to Resident Owerri Prov. 9/8/29; cf File No. 36/920 Abadist.

76. See File No. 302/1923, "Crown Land at Aba Occupied by Aba People" contains the correspondence on the problems of compensation plots.

77. OP 845 ONDIST, "Crown Leases: Principles", Memo of G. Shuttes 8/1/34.

the economic importance of each town. At Enugu, the rent structure was:⁷⁸

100" x 50"	plots on front streets	£5 per annum
100" x 50"	" " back streets	£3 per annum
60" x 40"	" " front streets	£3 per annum
60" x 40"	" " back streets	£2 per annum

At Aba, rent zones were arranged thus:⁷⁹

100" x 50"	main Road plots (along Asa Road)	£ 5 per annum
100" x 50"	middle zone (behind Asa Road)	£ 2 per annum
100" x 50"	in other areas	10/- per annum

Port Harcourt was the most important town in the region from the point of view of the government. The land there was limited and rents were much higher:⁸⁰

1st class plots	Main roads	100" x 50"	£15	per annum
2nd "	"	"	£10	per annum
3rd "	"	"	£ 7 : 10	per annum
Plots	100" x 50"	outside main roads wherever situated	£5	
Other	60" x 30"	plots outside main roads	£3	

At Umuahia, large plots of 100" x 100" along Uzoakoli road cost £3. 100" x 50" wherever situated cost £1 and 50" x 50" cost 10 shillings. Commercial plots in all the towns cost much more than residential plots.

For many immigrants, government immigration and rent policy was very annoying and difficult to understand. Restrictions on the lease of plots could not be explained otherwise than that the government was afraid of rapid urbanisation. At Aba for instance, the Aba Community League complained that the greater part of the township was lying unoccupied in the late 1920s yet there were restrictions of the lease of plots. They asked that the terms of lease granted to both Africans and Europeans should be the same

78. ENLA 1/14/3 "Petition of Plot Holders at Enugu", 1932.

79. File No. 219 Abadist, "Rents in Aba Native Location", 1930 -

80. Conf C 76/68 in QW 576, O.W. Firth to S.S.P., 14/1/33.

and claimed that if Africans were granted longer and more secure leases, they would be encouraged to invest in the land and "settle permanently" in the towns.⁸¹ This was of course not what the towns were meant to be. The government did not envisage a permanent African population. It would be true to say that "the lack of commitment on the part of Port Harcourt (and other township) settlers to their community of residence could be attributed...to their tenant status" and the insecurity of tenure.⁸²

Government land policy not only caused disaffection among the indigenous landowners and immigrants but it also offered scope for its violation. Most urban boundaries were very vaguely defined. The administration, always chronically short of staff, could not effectively supervise or police the boundaries. In most cases, 'Property Beacons' were haphazardly set up around crown land and a few boundary men employed to look after them. But very often 'squatters' and local landowners removed and destroyed the posts and not infrequently occupied areas of crown land. They defied and evaded government attempts to evict them. At Onitsha where the administration was still thinking in tribal terms, it was proposed in 1929 to establish "a model village within the township on the line somewhat similar to the sabon gari of the north for the Mohamedan residents of Onitsha."⁸³ The land set aside for that purpose was part of the disputed Niger land south of the Otumoye creek. Groups of Igbo Immigrants who had difficulty obtaining land in the township, seized the area and entrenched themselves

81. File No. 5033 CSE, Aba Progressive Union: Petition to Governor", 27/9/28.

82. Howard Wolpe, Urban Politics: A Study of Port Harcourt, p. 108.

83. File No. OP 1354, Onprof, "The New Nupe Settlement: Onitsha Township" 1929 -

in hurriedly built houses before the government realized what was going on. Although they were evicted and their houses destroyed, the vagueness of government claims to land created serious problems of land control in many towns in the region.

Resistance to government policy was accentuated during the depression of the early 1930s when it became more difficult for rent payers to meet their obligation to the government. This involved the administration in endless prosecutions for the recovery of property. There was also the tendency for large numbers of immigrants to move to the outskirts of towns and acquire land on customary terms from local landowners and set themselves up in houses and shacks under very poor sanitary conditions. The more notable examples of this kind of development were the Ezuikwu and Ndiegoro areas of Aba, the "Afra encroachment" at Umuahia, the notorious Ogui slums of Enugu and the Diobu area of Port Harcourt. Ribbon development along the main roads leading into towns was another result of the restrictions imposed on urban immigration. Some of these areas of uncontrolled settlement were declared "Urban Areas" in the 1930s bringing them under some sort of sanitary and security control but the actual extension of township boundaries to include such areas was not allowed by the government.

In the mid-1930s, some government officials realized that the requirements for entry into townships were "too onerous" and encouraged "a centrifugal movement of population and the creation outside and adjacent to township boundaries of settlements in which conditions are just as bad as those it was desired to improve."⁸⁴ Attempts were made to relax

84. SLS 1537/20 in ONSIST 12/1/1126 Af. Commissioner of Lands, Lagos to S.E.P., 30/4/40.

restrictions in towns. Local officials were asked to write off irrecoverable debts and immigrants were encouraged subsequently to take up more secure leases in order "to give greater security and to give the crown exact and more definite knowledge with regard to its tenants and their obligations."⁸⁵ This development was interrupted by the influx of immigrants during and after the second World War. After 1945, the government became more sensitive to pressures for more fundamental reform in its urban policies in general.

It is possible to argue that the weakness of government policy lay in the lack of a consistent policy rather than in a rigid adherence to one. It is clear that the administration neither adhered strictly to tradition nor did it follow the provisions of the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance. This reflects the problems of change in a conservative administrative framework. Both the traditional and the modern methods of land administration were perverted to the detriment of urban development. The indigenous landowners turned hostile both to the government and to urban development itself. They feared they would be progressively dispossessed of their land and would eventually come under the control of 'stranger' immigrants. Some writers have suggested that such an attitude shows "the extremely conservative and unadjustive character of rural Ibo to urban development."⁸⁶ But it was only natural for people whose rights in land were continually extinguished by urban growth to react in that way. The purpose for which

85. File No. OW 1914/Vol. 1 Phlands, "Leases: General Principles"; cf OW 2689 PHLAND, "Writing Off of Irrecoverable Debts", 1946-8.

86. Simon Ottenberg, "A Social and Administrative History of a Nigerian Township", International Journal of Comparative Sociology, Vol. VIII, 1966, p. 192.

the land was acquired was not always of a bona fide public character. European firms such as MacIver at Aba insisted on the removal of a whole village which was 193 yards from its little plot on the grounds that "these people are a nuisance here and when the plot was purchased it was agreed that no village should be any nearer than 440 yards."⁸⁷ By contrast, the people of Ezianya in Aba had a private soap factory located in their midst. They received regular payments and many boxes of soap annually to the envy and chagrin of neighbouring villages who saw themselves as the victims of government policy and urban growth.

In Umuahia, the government payed no rent at all for all the land in the township while the Onitsha, in spite of the problems connected with land there, controlled most of their land and received regular payments for land. A further source of discontent with government policy was that more land was acquired than was actually required by the government. Pre-existing boundaries between local groups were abolished and people who had no interest whatsoever in the land acquired by government were allowed to use parts of it for farming purposes. At Enugu for instance parts of crown land were granted to Ngwo, Nike and Nsude and others who applied to use them irrespective of their traditional claims to the land. As the Resident of Onitsha observed in 1938, the conflict which ensued between these groups arose from the fact that "old boundaries die hard."⁸⁸ Even more serious was the plight of coastal elements who had acquired land on traditional terms from Aba landowners. When the government took over their

87. see File No. 52/18 Abadist, Agent MacIver Ltd to D.O., Aba, 1/6/19.

88. File No. 7867, Vol. 1, ONDIST, Resident Onitsha, Tour Notes Udi Division", 8/8/38; cf

land, they were asked to seek redress not from the government but from the original landowners. At Port Harcourt, the Diobu who did not in fact recognise government claim to their land continued to lease parts of 'crown land' on customary terms to immigrants. Although the government did not tolerate what it considered "a Gilbertian situation", the irregular methods of acquiring township land were bound to create such a situation.

In spite of its weaknesses, government urban land policy had some positive effects in modifying traditional land tenure. Customary tenure did not provide for the commercialisation of land or even for subleasing part of it to tenants. This was clearly unworkable in a growing town. The case of Onitsha comes readily to mind. There, tenants whose rights to land were based on the traditional custom of kola tenancy invested large sums of money to develop the land. Thereafter, they rented the houses to other tenants on a commercial basis assuming that they had no special obligation to the original landowners beyond the customary kola presents which they or their fathers made periodically. But from the 1930s, the Onitsha landlords threatened to recover all such lands and to re-lease them on more profitable terms. As a government anthropologist put it, the landlords argued with their 'Kola tenants' thus:

Your father was a friend of mine and I let him have for a kola nut land for his use in his lifetime. Now that he is dead, our friendship ends and the land returns to me. You are not a friend of mine. In fact I dislike your modern ways.⁸⁹

89. OP 490 Vol. 1, ONPROF, M.D.W. Jeffreys, "Land Onitsha: Kola Tenancies", 1932.

This attitude was perfectly understandable as the value of land increased but it threatened the development of the whole town. The government had to intervene in 1935 with the kola tenancy Ordinance to regularise the system. The Ordinance recognized the need to have the consent of the original landlord before a kola tenant could commercialize land held on kola tenancy terms. But it was held that the former had no claims to the rent which accrued from the investment of the kola tenant. An independent tribunal was set up to assess the value of improvement on the land which the landlord would pay to the kola tenant if he wished to reclaim his land or on the other hand how much the landlord would receive for the final transfer of the land to the tenant.⁹⁰ This was one of the many effects urban growth had on the commercialisation and greater freedom for the individual to use his land in the way he considered most profitable.

Government control of land was potentially more conducive to proper town planning. In practice, however, it merely enabled the administration to enforce rigid restrictions on urban growth. Consequently the mushroom growth of uncontrolled settlement developed around the township boundaries in contrast to the low density areas of the European reservation and parts of the 'Native Locations' in townships. The government was rightly concerned to ensure that some standards of sanitation and construction was maintained in towns but students of squatter problems now recognise that

the loss of administrative control over urban settlements and the frequent chaotic conglomeration of inadequate structures...are the product of the gap between the values

90. See C.K. Meek, Land Tenure and Land Administration, pp. 140-41.

and norms required by the governing institutions and those imposed on the people by the circumstances in which they live.⁹¹

In this sense, the towns that developed under colonial control were artificial in that they were made to suit not the reality of urbanisation in the region but the abstract conception of what towns were to be. In the same way the experience of the region does not conform to the general assumption that towns develop certain pre-determined patterns--in concentric zones, sectors or the like--which are determined mainly by the distribution of wealth among townsmen. The physical form of towns in the region was determined largely by the hold which the government had on the 'administered land market'. It enabled it to impose what form it wished within the boundaries of crown land.

To conclude, the significance of government land policy lay more in its unexploited potentialities than in the actual benefits it conferred on urban development. Land was acquired by a curious combination of the traditional and introduced methods. The merits of one offset the merits of the other. Statutory acquisition of land could have helped the government to use the money which accrued from land rents for further urban development. But instead, township funds were diverted to General and Native Administration revenue. The result was urban neglect.

Paradoxically however, government policy can be said to have stored up for post-colonial administrations a valuable source of urban revenue. When urban local government and local town planning bodies were set up in towns, they inherited the weakness but also the potential advantages of the land

91. See John Turber, "Barriers and Channels for Housing Development in Modernizing Countries", Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 1967, pp. 168-9.

policy of the colonial government. Eastern Nigerian towns today look much better planned than the towns of Western and parts of Northern Nigeria where indigenous landowners exercise strong control over land. The artificial constraints which the colonial government imposed on the towns of the region encouraged the construction of houses which compare in many respects with those constructed more recently. The large areas devoted to the European reservation can now be usefully integrated into a more efficient town planning scheme. But some of these advantages must be set against the irregular and almost confiscatory manner in which much of the land was acquired in the first place.

CHAPTER III

URBAN ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE

The gravamen of colonial urban development lay in the structure of urban administration and urban finance. The suitability of the policy of indirect rule for the development of modern institutions in Africa has long been questioned.¹ A number of studies which deal with the political development of individual towns in Eastern Nigeria have pointed to the adverse effects which external control had on urban development.² It is however not clear what government's urban policy was and in what respect official emphasis on Native Administration affected the development of urban institutions. The study of single towns in the region cannot sufficiently reveal the problems of colonial urban administration. It would be necessary to examine the stages in the development of government policy and then analyse comparatively the varying responses of individual towns to that policy.

Most governments face the problem of co-ordinating the different levels of administration in a complementary way. This was a particularly difficult task in Nigeria because the vast country was brought under colonial

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1. see J.L.L. Comhaire, Aspects of Urban Administration in Tropical and Southern Africa, Cape Town, 1953, Chapter 3.
 2. see Simon Ottenberg, "The Social and Administrative History of a Nigerian Township", International Journal of Comparative Sociology Vol. VII, 1966, pp. 174-169. His approach and periodization can be compared with those adopted by Howard Wolpe, Urban Politics in Nigeria: A Study of Port Harcourt, and Barbara Callaway, "Confusion and Diffusion in Local Government", Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Boston University Graduate School, 1970.

rule piecemeal. Different areas of the country diverged widely in their traditional political and social institutions. It was expedient for the colonial government to depend heavily on the pre-existing methods of administration. Southern Nigeria was initially administered separately from and more directly than the North. Because the South had more trade with Europeans, it was economically more stable and had the resources to support a more direct involvement of government officials in the administration. The reverse was the case in the North where in addition to the lack of resources, the pre-existing political institutions suited indirect rule uniquely.³

Southeastern Nigeria posed peculiar problems for the government. The area was not fully brought under colonial rule until the second decade of the 20th century. The traditional political organisation of the different communities of the region was one of extreme fragmentation, with none of the 'buffer' institutions which suited an administration with limited staff and funds. Worse still for indirect rule, the communities of the region had a tradition of popular participation which had many of the features of democratic urban government.⁴ Early colonial administration in the region was consequently haphazard and remained so for a long time. It consisted mainly in the creation of artificial native court units in the different districts of the region. These units did not conform to the pre-existing social relationships. Chiefs were appointed and given warrants to do judicial

3. see J.E. Flint, "Nigeria: The Colonial Experience from 1870-1914" in L. Gann and P. Duignan (eds.) Colonialism in Africa, Vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, 1969, pp. 220-259.

4. see A.E. Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs, London, Longmans, 1973, pp. 1-37. cf Mss. Afr. S.855, MacPherson, "Native Organisation", n.d.; David Smock, "Urban Rural Contrasts in Political Values in Eastern Nigeria", Journal of Asian and African Studies, Vol. VI, No. 2, 1972, pp. 81-90.

and civil work for the government. Many of these chiefs had no traditional status to rule. They were disliked throughout the colonial period as agents of an alien government.

In the period before 1914, it cannot be said that there was an urban administration in the region distinct from the law and order administration that was imposed. Some of the major towns were only beginning to form. Calabar and Onitsha which were already large towns before the establishment of British rule became important colonial administrative centres but they had no recognised urban status as such.

The Cantonment Proclamation was passed in 1900 with particular reference to Northern Nigeria. It vaguely recognised the need for a separate administration for aliens residing near pre-existing towns which were controlled by traditional authorities. The same principle was applied even more formally in parts of Southern Nigeria. Because of the historical experience of Lagos, it had a quasi-municipal form of administration from an early date. Governor MacGregor also supported a near autonomous 'city-state' administration in Abeokuta. East of the Niger, Onitsha, Calabar, Opobo and Degema were placed under the jurisdiction of the supreme court to ensure a more equitable administration of justice to the non-indigenous elements of these towns. Indeed the representative system was initially adopted at Onitsha in the appointment of members to the Native Court which was established there at the turn of the century.⁵

In spite of these developments, it would still be true to say that before 1917, there was no urban administration in Nigeria. It is difficult to say how such an administration would have developed in Southern Nigeria

5. Conf. OP 5/1931/2 C.S.E., C.K. Meek, "Successor to Chief Mba", 1932.

if that section of the country had been allowed to develop independently of the North. The former had shown greater flexibility in its attitude to alien settlements. There were more Europeans, Native Foreigners and detribalised Nigerians in the towns of the South. It is conceivable that a more liberal urban policy would have been adopted, distinct from the general policy of Native administration.

But the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 introduced the peculiar features of the Northern administration to the South. The policies adopted after the amalgamation largely determined the course of urban administration and the structure of urban finance in subsequent years. The amalgamation also coincided with the establishment of a number of cosmopolitan settlements along the Eastern Railway line which was constructed between 1914 and 1916. Lugard who became the Governor of an amalgamated Nigeria was a fervent believer in the orthodox version of indirect rule. He had been influenced by the apparent success of that system in Northern Nigeria. Many advocates of the Northern form of administration were appointed to the administration of the South. The controversies which preceded the introduction of a uniform system of administration in Nigeria need not concern us here.⁶ It is significant however that between 1914 and 1916, the Native Authority and the Native Treasuries Ordinances which had been in effect in Northern Nigeria were, in theory at least, introduced to the Southern Provinces. These Ordinances outlined the structure of Native Administration and finance. The administration of towns was fitted

6. see A.E. Afigbo, "Herbert Richmond Palmer and Indirect Rule in Eastern Nigeria, 1915-1928", *J.H.S.N.*, Vol. III, No. 2, 1965, pp. 255-312. cf. J.A. Ballard, "Administrative Origins of Nigerian Federalism" *African Affairs*, Vol. LXX, No. 286, 1971, pp. 337-348.

into the new structure of administration adopted after the amalgamation. Four Provinces were created in Eastern Nigeria, each placed in the charge of a Resident. Each Province was divided up into Divisions under District Officers and Assistant District Officers. The Resident commanded tremendous power vis-a-vis the lower ranks of administrative officers. They formed the backbone of the Native Administration and influenced most decisions in respect of towns in the area under their jurisdiction.

The populations of the towns in the East were still very small but consisted of people of diverse ethnic groups. European traders, missionaries, and administrative officers formed a small but dominant group. "Native foreigners", coastal traders and other immigrants from outside the region had also begun to form a distinct group next in social and economic importance to the Europeans. The indigenous inhabitants were not at the time closely associated with the affairs of the nascent towns though local 'chiefs' exercised jurisdiction over strangers in the local Native Courts.⁷ These Native Courts controlled funds raised from court fees and fines and used them for work in government stations. But this source of local revenue was taken over by the government in 1914 and withheld until the people of the region payed tax.⁸

In 1917, the Townships Ordinance was passed. In theory, it established the broad principles of municipal responsibility graded according to the importance of the community and the

7. This was the pattern of social and ethnic composition of most towns in the early days of colonial rule. See Ottenberg, op cit pp. 180

8. Mss Afr. S.1000 (1) W. Falk, "Notes on the History of Taxation in the Eastern Provinces", 1932.

measure of its ability to accept and discharge satisfactorily independent and quasi-independent powers.⁹

It can be argued that the Ordinance was partly influenced by the wish to preserve the system of Indirect Rule. The amalgamation of 1914 brought the more pragmatic administration of the South in line with the Northern system of administration but it also exposed the north to the influx of aliens and immigrants from the more acculturated areas of the south. Hugh Clifford wondered during his Governorship at the "uniqueness of Northern Nigeria where free immigration was not welcomed, where commerce was suspect and subject to hampering restrictions."¹⁰ The vigour with which the Ordinance was applied to the North contrasted with the levity with which it was treated in the South.

In any event, the Ordinance empowered the Governor to declare any area to be a Township of one of three classes--First, Second and Third--and to declare any area near such a township to be an "Urban Area". He was also authorised to abolish any Township or Urban Area thus constituted if such an action was thought to be desirable. Only one First Class Township was created in 1917, Lagos. It was to be administered by an almost autonomous town council. The Ordinance also created eighteen Second Class Townships and forty two Third Class Townships. Six second class townships were created in the North and twelve in the South. Of those in the South, seven were in the Eastern region. Eight third class townships

9. Lugard, Political Memoranda, No. XI, 1918, pp. 417; cf "An Ordinance for the Establishment and Regulation of Township" to be cited as the Townships Ordinance," No. 29 of 1917, Nigerian Authenticated Ordinances, 1917, pp. 376-425.

10. C.O. 583/80 Clifford to Miler, 3/12/19 quoted in Ballard, op cit cf H.J.B. Allen, "Aspects of Urban Administration in the Northern States of Nigeria" Savanna, July, 1972, pp. 15-27.

were created in the North and thirty four in the South. Fifteen of the latter were in the East.

Townships in the Eastern Region:

<u>Second Class</u>	<u>Third Class</u>	<u>Third Class</u>
Calabar	Abakaliki	Brass
Itu	Afikpo	Degemā
Opobo	Bonny	Obubra
Aba	Awka	Owerri
Port Harcourt	Abak	Okigwi
Enugu Ngwo	Ahoada	Ogoja
Onitsha	Arochukwu	Ikom

This classification¹¹ remained fluid for some time. Some of the townships were proclaimed and gazetted but they hardly operated as such. Three years after Aba was proclaimed a second class township, the District Officer there was still seeking basic information about "the theoretical existence of the Township of Aba...since no attempt has yet been made to run it as such."¹² Indeed the 1917 classification was superceded in 1921 by a new classification which graded townships into A,B,C,D, and E, categories according to their suitability for the enforcement of proper segregation policy.¹³ This new classification did not hold, so that the system established by the Ordinance prevailed.

The Ordinance placed the administration of a Second Class Township in the charge of a "Local Authority" and an appointed Township Advisory Board. The Local Authority was usually a junior officer who worked under the direct supervision of senior Divisional and Provincial officials. He

11. C.10/19 CSE, "Township Bill: Classification of Townships Under", 1917/8 esp the Memo of H.C. Moorehouse, 26/9/17.

12. C.S.O., 1/13 Thompson to Amery, referring to this classification.

13. File No. 590/24/19 Abadist, D.O. Aba to Resident Ow. Prov., 19/9/19.

performed judicial and engineering work and many other duties for some of which he was not trained. He usually had a small township staff consisting of a town clerk, a market master, a sanitary inspector and a few others. The Township Advisory Board was composed of local representatives of the government departments notably the Health, Sanitary and Works departments. Local representatives of European commercial firms were also nominated to the Board. Africans were not admitted until the late 1920s when one or two 'native foreigners' were appointed to the Boards of the different towns. They could not influence decisions appreciably. It is important to note that the Local Authority is an administrative officer who had a dual responsibility to both the township and to the government. He was bound to uphold government policy even when such a policy was in conflict with the interest of the township. Although the Local Authority had much authority in the administration of the township, he was still considered the local representative of the senior Resident under the supervision of the District officer in the exercise of the provision of the Township Ordinance.

Second Class townships were allowed to raise and control funds from a number of sources in towns such as dog licenses, slaughter, hawkers, pound and stallage fees and charges and so on. But the annual estimates of the towns were submitted to the Resident for modification and approval. Only the items specifically approved by the Resident were implemented.

Third class townships were usually small government stations. They were placed in the charge of the officials of the Divisional administration of the area in which they were located. They were in practice administered as an appendage of the Divisional administration.

The machinery of urban administration had many weaknesses, particularly in the relationship between townships on the one hand and the Divisional and Provincial administrations on the other. The fear that a township could grow into a kind of "imperium in imperio" was a real one among senior officials of the Provincial administration.¹⁴ Lugard had tried to dispel the supposition that a junior officer could be set up in a township over whom the Resident had no control. Indeed government officials were assured that Lugard "designed the townships for areas outside the native cities for people who (were) to live under European conditions as far as possible" and not as a rival to the Native administration.¹⁵ But as the towns grew and their needs increased, the weaknesses of these assumptions began to show through especially in decisions affecting towns and in the control of township funds. It is clear that whatever the merits of the system of township administration, its success depended largely on the resources available to it.

In 1918 the only secure sources of revenue for second class townships were dog licenses and voluntary subscriptions made by European trading firms. Rents which accrued from crown land went to General Revenue and the government departments received the revenue from vehicle, liquor, gun and other licenses. The government made token grants in aid for sanitary purposes and also provided prison labour but these were not nearly enough to meet the needs of the growing towns. Government grants for the 1918/19 financial year were as follows: Aba - £52; Onitsha - £368; Enugu - £140;

14. Lugard, Political Memoranda, Memo XI, p. 411.

15. E.P. 4930 C.S.E., W.A. Ross, Resident Oyo to S.S.P., 23/6/25.

Calabar - £448 and Port Harcourt - £136.¹⁶ Even then these were in the form of loans since the recipients were instructed to arrange their budgets "in such a way as to show a surplus approximating the grant."¹⁷ This surplus was to be paid back into general revenue at the end of the year.

It can be said that during the Governorship of Lugard, urban administration was a failure because it was hardly ever tried seriously in Eastern Nigeria. It was not intended that townships should operate outside the framework of the indirect rule system. The powers conferred on townships by the Ordinance were not clearly defined and the towns were left financially impotent. Hugh Clifford's administration which succeeded Lugard's in 1919 merely recognised the failure of the existing system. Clifford did not support the theoretical existence of townships. It was therefore "generally accepted since Sir Hugh Clifford's Governorship that the aim should be to abolish townships where it may be possible to do so without weakening the safeguards provided by the Townships Ordinance."¹⁸

The Colonial Office proposed that as direct taxation was not yet introduced in Eastern Nigeria, it was necessary to support townships financially by allowing them to retain at least one quarter of crown rents.¹⁹ But Clifford's administration did not see that this would make much difference since the funds available to towns were such that they were not even enough for minor works. The tendency during Clifford's governorship was to centralise the administration and strengthen the centrally controlled departments

16. Conf. 308/17 Calprof, Circular Memo of M.O.S. Wright, Secretary Southern Provinces to L. As, Southern Provinces 9/7/19. cf Ref AC/14/18, Wright to Residents, S.P. 7/6/18.

17. Loc cit.

18. Sydney Phillipson Report, 1947, para. 106.

19. C.S.O. 1/13 Churchill to Clifford, 16/2/21.

of the government. To allow township to operate separate funds and to carry out major works would merely complicate the budgeting procedure. At Enugu for instance, it seemed unreasonable that the Health Department would operate two votes - one the general sanitary vote financed by the government and another the township vote - both for work which was not in fact divisible. To avoid this, government departments were encouraged to take over the responsibilities of the township administration.

The townships were thus caught between two evils - Native and Provincial administration control or central government control. The latter had potential advantages. Although it could place the fortunes of townships in the hands of a remote authority, it could also provide specialised and centrally financed services for towns. This was perhaps a good way to impose a controlled overview on urban development in the whole country. In any event the Colonial Office was opposed to "unnecessary and undesirable centralisation" which would make the machinery set up for township administration redundant.²⁰

It is difficult to assess how the policies of Clifford's administration would have affected urban administration if it had a chance to implement its programme for a long enough period. As we shall see later in this study, it was during his governorship that some attempt was made to plan the towns in a more rational way. It is nonetheless true that the machinery set up for township administration was not improved in terms of the resources available to it or of the powers it had vis-a-vis the Provincial administration.

Direct taxation was introduced in the region during the Governorship of Graeme Thompson in 1928. The provision of the Native Treasuries Ordinance

20. File No. ENLA 1/3/13 J.H. Thomas to Clifford, 22/4/24 (copy in).

which took effect with the introduction of direct taxation, raised legal problems of the rights of townships to control their own tax. The Native Authority adjacent to a township was authorized to collect tax from the African population of a township. A variable part of what was collected was paid over to the government. The Native Authority retained what was left and from that, it made a subvention of more or less what it liked to the township. In theory, "fully organised" Native Authorities retained as high as 70 per cent of direct taxation when the government was in a sound financial position.²¹ By the standard of Native Authorities in Northern Nigeria, those in the East were far from being "fully organised". As a government official once observed, they were "not really bodies at all...(but) an amorphous conglomeration of village councils. The village councils consisted of village heads or other representatives. There were as many authorities as there were members. It was impossible to meet the Authority."²² Therefore they received a much lower percentage of direct taxation. The townships which depended on subventions made by such N.A.s received even less of the proceeds of tax revenue.

Between 1928 and 1929 the question was again raised whether to abolish townships and hand them over to the Native Authorities or to strengthen the resources of townships from revenue collected within the town much of which had hitherto been diverted to general and N.A. revenues. The government was emphatic that

In theory there (was) no reason why a township in a statutory sense under the Township Ordinance should be singled out for a grant in aid by a Native Administration

21. see G. Oke Orewa, Local Government Finance in Nigeria, London, O.U.P., 1966, pp. 3-8; cf Phillipson Report, p. 80.

22. Mss Afr. S. 1000, E. M. Falk, "Organization of Native Administration", 1928-1931.

as in theory and in practice they (the townships were) no more self-governing than the other towns under the Native Administration.²³

W.E. Hunt, the Colonial Financial Secretary, argued that Third Class townships were in fact less self-governing and self-supporting than other native towns. In relation to Second Class Townships, he gave what can be said to represent the purely instrumental view which the colonial administration had of urban growth. Towns he held were merely "the commercial clearing houses of the Native Administration in which they (were) situated". The government would "improve facilities for trade and provide greater amenities so that commerce will be attracted and the Native Administration area as a whole profit thereby."²⁴ Because of this Second Class townships could be allowed to retain only the tax collected in excess of the general flat rate. But the collection of taxation in towns was for the Native Administration which would include the needs of the towns in its own estimates:

There need not be any formality about these transactions It would be sufficient if N.A.s made provision under the appropriate heads of N.A. estimates.²⁵

Such second class townships as Opobo and Itu which were clearly not viable in the circumstances were downgraded to third class and placed virtually under N.A. control. The towns that remained as second class sought to strengthen their resources from liquor, gun, marriage and other fees and charges which the government and its departments had hitherto taken.

23. E.P. 4930 C.S.E. W.E. Hunt, Memo on Townships, 12/3/28.

24. Ibid.

25. E.P. 4930, Morgan to S.S.P. 21/12/28.

Captain O'Connor, one of the few officers in the Nigerian civil service with some experience of municipal affairs, questioned government urban policy and asked if a township was a money making concern. He warned that

by cutting down expenditure upon essential services... you may build up a reserve--only to find of course that the need of expenditure will have become so great at some future date (owing to a parsimonious policy) that your reserves will be quite unable to make any impression upon the debts which you will have allowed to accumulate.²⁶

The government was urged to allow townships to retain part of the rents which accrued from crown rents. But senior government officials reasoned that if large revenue was diverted from general revenue to towns, the tendency would be for these towns to become first class townships outside the control of the Native Authorities.

In spite of the weaknesses of urban finance, property rating which was a potential source of urban revenue was not explored seriously because the government owned most urban land. Although the Assessment Ordinance of 1915 existed for the assessment and rating of property in towns, some officials rightly argued that since the government was not providing some basic amenities to towns, it was not justifiable to expect rates to be paid by townspeople. "A householder who sees his house undermined by an uncontrolled flow of rain water would have a justification to complain if he was paying a rate."²⁷ European firms also argued that to impose rate on their establishment in towns would discourage enterprise and further investment. If rate was to be imposed it should be based on the

26. see L.A. 15/28 in E.P. 4930 CSE, Captain O'Connor, L.A. Onitsha to Resident Onitsha, 31/6/28.

27. File No. 15565/1 MINLOC, D.O., Bende to Resident Ow. Prov. 10/6/48.

unimproved value of sites rather than on the value of development. Consequently, this valuable source of township revenue was not exploited until 1948. Rates paid for water and electricity supplies went to government departments and not to township funds.

By the 1930s therefore very little change had taken place in the structure of urban administration and urban finance. The riots which occurred in the region in 1929 led to the reorganisation of the Native Administration system but it did not affect towns in any significant way. Indeed, it merely strengthened official preference for Native Authority rule. Such townships as Onitsha and Umuahia came more closely under the control of the Native Administration. The judicial system was reformed during the Governorship of Cameron and the role of Native Courts in townships became less important vis a vis that of the Supreme Court. During Bourdillon's Governorship, an attempt was also made to reform the system of distributing tax revenue but this did not grant the townships more share of revenue raised in towns. In 1940, the Direct Taxation Ordinance was passed which merely provided that the distribution of tax was to be based more on need than on the haphazard system that had been previously adopted. Yet tax at Port Harcourt was collected by the Ikwerre Native Authority even though the township administration was employed to do the actual collection on a commission basis. Aba paid tax to the Ngwa Native Authority and received a subvention from that Native Authority. In 1945 for instance, £2,044 was raised from the township but a subvention of only £670 was made to the town. The situation at Enugu was even more complicated since both the Nkanu and the Agbanni Native

Authorities in Udi Division shared township tax and each in turn made a subvention which was usually absurdly low.²⁸

Urban problems increased with the growth and expansion of towns during and after World War II. More Africans, mainly 'native foreigners', were appointed to the Advisory Boards of the different townships. But they were nominated members and did not represent the African communities of the towns. In any case there was a limit to which they could influence policy. The Europeans who still dominated the Boards were naturally more inclined to devote much of the limited resources of the towns to the needs of their own Reservations. The African sections of the townships suffered gross neglect.

General dissatisfaction with urban administration and the growing powers of the Native Administration encouraged the growth of ethnic unions in towns. The government which had hitherto supported 'tribal unions' in towns as a means of preserving tradition became suspicious of and hostile to them as they began to play a political role. It was however recognised that reform was at this stage inevitable. The government sought to maintain a balance which would satisfy the aspirations "of an increasing number of the rising generation in the urban districts of Nigeria" without undermining the basis of indirect rule. Democratic representation in township administration was however not considered at this stage as it would constitute "a frontal attack on basic principles."²⁹

28. see E.P. 6937 CSE "Operation of Rates and Taxes in Townships in Nigeria" esp PH-V/6 G.C. Cowan, Senior Assistant Auditor's Report, 23/6/44; cf File No. 1948/Vol. II MINLOC, 'Township Finances'.

29. File No. OD 622/374 In OP 1258/Vol. IV, Denton to Resident, 12/6/45.

The new Labour Government in Britain which had the Fabian Socialist Arthur Creach Jones as its Colonial Secretary was sympathetic to liberal reform in the colonies. In Nigeria Sir Arthur Richard, the Governor in the post war period, was also proposing constitutional changes which favoured the development of representative local government.

In 1946, Sydney Phillipson, an administrative official in the office of the Chief Secretary to the Government, was detailed to "study comprehensively and make recommendations regarding the problem of the administration and financial procedure to be adopted" under the new Richard's constitution. His report³⁰ paid special attention to urban finance and had great significance for the reform of urban administration. He did not support the view that townships should be reconstituted into Native Authorities. He felt that even such a change was to be made, the townships should have a special status and that representatives of local commercial and other African interests should be represented in township administration. He recommended further study of the urban problem but held that in the meantime township funds should be strengthened. "The aim must I think be to develop a true municipal system for Second Class Townships on the basis of financial self-dependence and to quicken the local interest in the management of these towns." He suggested further that the rating system should be reformed and that the financial relationship between the government and the townships should be clearly defined. The best way to do this was, he argued, to amend the Direct Taxation Ordinance so as to give the towns greater control of tax raised in them.³¹

30. Sydney Phillipson, Administrative and Financial Procedure Under the New Constitution, Gov't. Printers, Lagos, 1947.

31. Phillipson Report, par. 106.

The diverging responses of the different urban centres in the region to these recommendations show how far apart they had developed by 1947. The towns which suited and adhered to indirect rule resisted the Phillipson recommendation most strongly while others received it with great enthusiasm. The Local Authority, Aba, E.V.H. Toovey reported that there was no desire from anybody in the town that the township should be constituted into a form of Native Authority. He suggested if the township was granted full financial autonomy, it was possible to raise as much as £11,270 in the town annually.³² It was clear to everybody that Port Harcourt with its polyglot population and rapidly expanding economy would develop into a First Class Township. Enugu responded in much the same way as Aba. The local authority there, H.K. Robinson, complained bitterly that of the five to six thousand pounds raised annually from tax in the township, only £600 was paid into township funds. The entire £2,700 collected from crown land went to the government. A further £650 collected from licenses went to general revenue.

The public sees large sums being paid daily to the L.A.'s office daily and naturally they become disheartened and bewildered when they see that the township can only afford to vote £250 for the upkeep of drains and another £250 on roads. Township rating brought in only £75 a year which was nothing in relation to the rate potential of the town

He therefore suggested that the L.A. should be allowed to "keep all the revenue collected in the L.A.'s office" including rents, marriage licenses and so on.³³

32. File No. OW 6294/12 MINLOC Troovy to Resident Owerri Prov cited in loc cit Butcher to S.E.P. 5/3/47.

33. LA 175/32 MINLOC 16/18/1896 H.K. Robinson to Resident 14/2/47.

By contrast, Onitsha and Calabar saw the Phillipson report as totally irrelevant and inapplicable to them. In the case of Onitsha the members of the newly formed Onitsha Native Authority "were jealous of their newly found powers." In the case of Calabar, local officials argued that the town did not originate as an artificial commercial centre, that the Native Authority "exercises concurrent jurisdiction with the Local Authority"; that "the township should be absorbed into the existing N.A." because

the compulsory payment of the tax collected in Calabar township to township and not to N.A. funds would have the effect of making bankrupt at once the Efik who though living outside the artificial boundaries, are in every way with those within it.³⁴

This response can be compared with that of the officials of the Northern Nigerian administration where townships were under the close control of Native Authorities. There, the Phillipson report was rejected outright because

it would tend to weaken Native Authorities when all government effort should be in the direction of strengthening them....The liability to tax is associated very closely in the minds of Native Authorities with subjection to jurisdiction....There is no comparison - in the North at any rate - between municipal local authority and N.A.s who by inherent powers have the right to collect tax; To differentiate between persons who are otherwise under the jurisdiction of the N.A. merely on the grounds of their being inside the boundaries of a Second Class Township would lead to complication.³⁵

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34. File No. 19487/1 MINLOC "Minutes on the Application of Par 106 of the Phillipson Report to Calabar, 23 Nov 1946.
35. No. 41686/11 in MINLOC 16/1/1896A J.H. Shaw, Secretary Northern Provinces to C.S.G. Lagos, 15/4/47.

The secretary for the Eastern Provinces recommended a "permissive rather than a mandatory amendment of the Direct Taxation Ordinance" to be applied in the Eastern region as circumstances permitted. The amendment of the Ordinance came into effect in the region in 1948. Rates were imposed more rigorously in towns but the financial relationship between the government and townships remained vague and at the discretion of the government.³⁶

The reforms of the immediate post-war years did not go far enough. Urbanisation was still not recognised as an important factor in modernisation nor were towns seen as a preparatory ground for the administration of the future self-governing nation. In many respects it would be true to say that the government had taken a "conservative oriented position which made it difficult for them to handle the developing urban growth adequately."³⁷

The introduction of Local Government did not alter the subordinate position of towns vis-a-vis the rural areas. Because the system of Native Administration had proved most unsuccessful in Eastern Nigeria, the government was concerned to make "Local Government" a substitute for the Native Authority system. In practice there was very little difference between the two as far as township administration was concerned. Brigadier Gibbon, a senior official in the Enugu Secretariat, was appointed to recommend on the organisation and structure of Local Government. He saw the problem merely as one of enlarging the existing Native Authorities into Country Councils. Local and District/Urban Councils would be constituted to operate under the umbrella of the larger County Councils. It seems odd

36. File No. 43910 MINLOC, Chief Secr. Eastern Prov. to S.E.P. 29/8/47.

37. Ottenberg, op cit, p. 192.

that although Gibbon recognised that it was "idle to expect an educated African gentleman eager to work for the self government of Nigeria to fritter away his effort in arguments" with traditional ruler and elders, yet he did not recommend a separate administration for towns. He believed that the educated and professional elements in towns would enable the Native Authorities to learn more about modern ways of administration.³⁸

Lt. Col. Alderton, another government officer on Local Government duties, made the same recommendation for much the same reasons. They were greatly influenced by the British model of Local Government but they did not seem to realise that the circumstances of Eastern Nigeria were much different. In Britain the degree of urbanisation was such that whether a town was a County Borough with an autonomous administration or not, the urban population had a dominant and progressive influence on the Counties. In Eastern Nigeria, the growing towns were hardly in a position to influence the rural areas positively unless they were freed from the stranglehold of a predominantly rural and conservative system of administration. As late as 1950, the government, in response to a question in the House of Assembly, declared firmly that "government is unaware of any intention that any of these towns (Enugu, Onitsha, Aba, Umuahia and Calabar) shall become municipalities."³⁹

The experience of Onitsha, Umuahia, Enugu and Port Harcourt can illustrate the effects which government policy had on urban political development. The administration of Onitsha can be compared with that of

38. Brigadier E.J. Gibbon, African Local Government Reform in Kenya, Uganda and Eastern Nigeria, Enugu, 1949, par 34 and 42 cf, E.P. 15565/136 MINLOC, Gibbon to C.S.G., 4/2/47.

39. File No. 24470/82 MINGOV, House of Assembly Question No. 227, (D.A. Unaji), 1950.

the Native Municipality of Cape Coast in the Gold Coast at the turn of the century. Governor Pine's observation that in Cape Coast, "the chiefs and people rely upon us and we rely upon them and between us there is no government at all"⁴⁰ can also be said of Onitsha. Traditionally the town was governed by the Obi (king) and a council of titled officials called Ndichie. The political situation was very unstable in the 19th century when missionaries and European trading firms established themselves at the waterside in the 1850s. In 1884, the National Africa Company made an agreement with "the king and chiefs of Onitsha" which purported to cede "the whole of our territory to the National African Company (Ltd.) and their administration" on the understanding that the Company would help the town in its wars with its neighbours and would not interfere with native customs and private property.⁴¹ In the same year, Consul E.H. Hewett signed a Treaty of Protection with the people of Onitsha.

When Goldie's Company was granted a charter and became the Royal Niger Company in 1886, it was formally authorised to administer the area from its headquarters at Asaba. The Company opened a British Court at the Waterside with jurisdiction over the non-indigenous elements of the town. When the crown took over the administration of the Company in 1900, it retained the existing structure of administration. The Waterside court was made a Grade B Native Court in 1902 for the whole of Onitsha and neighbouring villages.

40. Sir Benjamin Pine quoted in B. Pachai, "An Outline History of the Municipal Government of Cape Coast", Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, Vol. VIII, 1965, p. 132.

41. Conf. 27/1915 ONDIST, "Agreement between the King and Chiefs of Onitsha and the National Africa Company (Limited)", August 20, 1884. cf J.E. Flint, Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria, London, OUP, 1960, pp.

Members of the court were initially appointed by the government but later, representatives of the different communities of the Waterside and the Inland Town were elected to act as the 'executives' of their respective communities. Although the government intervened in a local succession dispute to appoint an Obi it liked, it did not seem at that stage that the government was keen to use the traditional system of administration for indirect rule. The Obi but not his Ndichie was asked to sit in the local Native Court with the representatives of the Nupe, Hausa, Yoruba, Kakanda and other immigrant communities.⁴² The influence of the Obi at the Waterside was minimal. Both the Waterside and the Inland Town were under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court.

Up to 1917 therefore it looked as though an incipient form of representative urban government would emerge. But just as the Townships Ordinance was passed in 1917, the Obi was gazetted as the Native Authority for the Inland town and Chief Mba, an Igbo immigrant was made the Native Authority for the Waterside on a salary of £100 per annum. At the same time, a government Order in Council No. 27 of November 1917 made the Waterside and the European Reservation a Second Class Township. The jurisdiction of the Township and that of the Native Authority was not clearly defined. In 1922, the Supreme Court which was thought to undermine the role of the Native Court in the town had its jurisdiction removed from the Inland Town and limited to the Waterside. Two years later, the Lt. Governor of the Southern Provinces declared the Inland Town an Urban Area and again extended the influence of the Supreme Court to that area.

42. OP 5/1931, C.S.E., C.K. Meek, Confidential Report on Successor to chief Mba, 1931.

In spite of these changes, the proximity of the Second Class Township to the Native Authority which was more popular with the administration weakened the efficient administration of the township. The latter had been placed in the charge of a Local Authority and a township Advisory Board. The Board consisted of the Commissioner of Police, the Provincial Engineer, the Senior Medical Officer, Chief Mba, Obi Okosi and two representatives of European trading firms. But the minutes of the meetings of the Board, nine years after it was constituted, show that it was an almost lifeless body:

In January a meeting of the township Board was held. There was no business and the meeting adjourned at once. In February, no meeting was held as the two African members were in Lagos and there was no business. In March, a meeting was held and I very much regret that I omitted to forward the minutes and I am sorry I can offer no explanation but only oversight on my part. In April, a meeting was called but only two members were present.... In May the two African members were again absent and no meeting was held. A meeting is called for June.⁴³

The township administration had very little funds at its disposal and hardly any authority.

When direct taxation was introduced in 1928 and the Native Treasuries Ordinance took effect in the region, the government began to enforce a more rigorous adherence to the Northern Nigerian model of Native Administration. The Resident at Onitsha did not at this stage recommend that the Township be abolished but he felt that "the difference between direct rule (in townships) and rule of townships by the Native Administration would necessarily be a purely verbal one only."⁴⁴ The Local Authority at Onitsha, Captain O'Connor, strongly questioned the government's attitude to townships and

43. Annual Report, Onitsha Magistracy, 1926.

44. E.P. 4930, CSE, Resident Onitsha to S.S.P., 2/6/28.

suggested that for the efficient administration of the towns it was necessary that such items of revenue as liquor licenses, motor vehicle licenses and water rates should be paid into township funds and not in General Revenue.⁴⁵

After the riots of the late 1920s, a series of Intelligence Reports was compiled to enable the government to reorganise and strengthen the Native Administration. In 1935, W.R.T. Milne, the District Officer for Onitsha prepared a report which sought to convince the government that "the ancient form of government" still remained and that if it was "carefully fostered" was "capable of taking firm roots once again."⁴⁶ He proposed that the Township be abolished and that a single Native Administration be formed for the whole town. Between 1936 and 1938 the details for a gradual transfer of administration to an Onitsha Native Authority were worked out.⁴⁷ The government station, covering all the land leased by the government, the C.M.S. mission and the freehold of the Roman Catholic mission were to be made a Third Class Township while the rest of the town would fall under the Native Authority. The District Officer in the town was to continue to supervise the finances of the Native Authority but the Onitsha Native Administration was to be given some training in managing their own funds in such works as road upkeep, and other work of a semi-capital nature. Some of the members of the defunct Second Class Township administration would be invited to serve on

45. E.P. 4930, CSE Capt. O'Connor to S.D.O. Onitsha, 30/5/28.

46. E.P. 11724 MINLOC, Milne, "Intelligence Report, Onitsha Township", 1935 esp. pars. 42 - 60.

47. see OP 169 ONPROF, Annual Report, 1936; OP 1659 ONPROF, Annual Report, 1937. see also OP 1351 ONDIST, "Onitsha Township and Native Administration 1936 - 42".

the Native administration, not as "European Elders" since such a concept was considered 'invidious' but they would work as "persons invited to advise on particular aspects of administration"⁴⁸ The Commissioner of Police, Capt. Ballantine objected strongly to the Nigerian Police working under the control of a Native Administration and some other officials complained that the Native Authority was not sympathetic nor was it really able to appreciate the needs of a modern town.

A Native Administration Council was nonetheless set up in 1938. It was composed of the Obi and twenty-three councillors most of whom were titled officials of the traditional political system. Two courts were established -- an appeal court, presided over by the Obi and the higher ranks of Ndichie, and a lower court which was placed under the lower grades of titled men. Representatives of the non-Igbo communities in the town were incorporated into the new administration but the Igbo immigrants of the Waterside were excluded as they were considered "blood brothers" of the Onitsha. It was proposed to extend the membership of the council to forty one to include the more progressive, non-traditional elements of Onitsha and the non-Onitsha Igbo of the Waterside.⁴⁹ Before this was done, the second World War intervened and the Onitsha Town Native Authority as the new administration was called, assumed control. It vigorously resisted any attempt to broaden and democratize the administration. The government could not compel reform as the cutbacks in personnel and funds during the War reinforced the need for an indirect system of administration.

48. OP 1352 ONDIST, L.A. Onitsha to D.O. Onitsha, 28/4/36.

49. OP 1352 ONDIST, R.J. Hook, "Progress Report on the Onitsha Native Administration", 29/8/38.

For their part, the Obi and his titled officials wished to maintain the traditional status of the different component members of the Onitsha Native Authority council. The Umuezechima who were recognized by tradition to be the ruling family tried to preserve their position in the Council. In the same way, the non-titled members of the council were considered to hold an inferior position. The government tried to impress on the Obi and his Ndichie that "all members are equal as Councillor" irrespective of their traditional ranks; that the Obi and his titled men were just ordinary members of an administrative machine and "not little gods".⁵⁰ Significantly, the Resident for Onitsha reminded the traditional rulers of the town that the government had intervened to support both Obi Okosi I and Obi Okosi II, not because it had personal interest in the appointment of an Obi but because it wished to set up a Native administration.

Bear in mind too you who speak so much of Native Law and Custom that the appointment of the present Obi did not follow all the details of native law and custom. The appointment was a government made one....What the government had made, government can unmake with equal facility should necessity arise. Heed my words and you will be blessed and honoured by your townsmen of today and by your posterity. Do otherwise and you will find yourselves extracted and forced into a dishonorable retirement.⁵¹

This threat did not improve the situation. In 1943 the Second Class Township was abolished and the Onitsha Town Native Authority took over control of the whole town. The composition of the Council did not reflect the distribution of the town's population nor the distribution of rate

50. OP 1258 Vol.II, ONSIST, Resident Onitsha to the Obi and others 8/6/40.

51. OP 1258 ONDIST, Resident Onitsha to Obi and Others, 8/6/40.

and tax payers. In 1927 an Assessment Report compiled for the town put the total taxable immigrant population at 2,900. About 2,000 of them were non-Onitsha Igbo residents at the Waterside. The Inland town which was in control of the new N.A. had only about 900 adult males, some eighty percent of whom were farmers.⁵² By the early 1940s, the population of the town was about 37,000. The distribution of taxable males and the composition of the administering council contrasted outrageously:

Tax Payers		Composition of the N.A. Council	
Onitsha Igbo	2,222	Onitsha Igbo	39 members
Immigrant Igbo	4,118	Immigrant Igbo	Nil
Hausa	339	Hausa	1
Yoruba	277	Yoruba	1
Nupe	354	Nupe	1
Others	800	Others	-

The Onitsha argued that the Igbo immigrants were more attached to their home Districts than to the town and were therefore not entitled to representation in the Onitsha Council. The non-Onitsha Igbo on the other hand argued with much justification that they paid tax at Onitsha and had a right to demand representation in the administration of the town. They formed the Igbo Union which grew in membership during and after the War. They protested that

our effort since 1942 to secure representation in the Council have always been frustrated....We will no longer support a Native Authority in which we are not represented. We therefore ask for a municipal administration.⁵³

Progressive opinion among the Onitsha also prevailed on the government and the N.A. to broaden the representation in the Council.

52. C.S.O. 26/3- 20676, Captain O'Connor, "Assessment Report, Onitsha, 1927, pp. 3-4.

53. OP 1258/Vol. II, ONDIST, "Intelligence Reports, Onitsha, 1940-5", esp Ibo Union to Resident, 29/3/41.

It is significant that at this time the N.A. had an annual revenue of about £1,020. £850 of this was derived from direct taxation and £522 of the tax was paid by non-Onitsha Igbo immigrants. In the expenditure of this money, £680 (of the £1,020) was spent on the salaries of Native Administration members and staff. "Time and time again, the interest of the Inland Town was their sole preoccupation."⁵⁴ The government was aware of the weaknesses of the system of administration in the town but allowed it to continue as "an experiment in local government which is so far without parallel in the Eastern Provinces....We have to wait for the outcome of the present experiment."⁵⁵ The dilemma of the government was that democratic reform "would mean, however one would wish to avoid giving it a label, the end of a Native Administration based on indigenous institutions and the arrival of a system of local government bearing all the hallmarks of municipal government."⁵⁶

In the late 1940s, succession dispute over the Onowu (prime minister) title split the Onitsha front and encouraged renewed agitation by the Igbo Union for the reform of the administration of the town. C.A.L. Guise, a progressive government official in the town took the opportunity of the Onowu dispute to press for reform. "My own feeling is one prayerful desire that in some way or another the Obi and all his Ndichie could be swept away and forgotten but I reluctantly have to decide that this cannot yet be done."⁵⁷

54. ONPROF 1/8/37, C. de Neufoille Hills, Report of 1954, par 10.

55. OP 1742/155, I.J. Gavin in Resident to S.E.P. 5/3/47.

56. OD 622/374 in OP 1258, Vol. IV, Denton to Resident, 12/6/45.

57. File No. 12907/1 Vol I, MINLOC, Reform of Onitsha Native Authority especially C.A.L. Guise's Report 10/12/48.

A committee comprising the different interests in the town was set up to recommend on the composition of a Reformed Onitsha Town Council. The committee was expected to report in December 1949 but it was torn by conflicting interests and arguments. Opinion varied widely on the composition of the new council. The traditional Onitsha elements sought to uphold the status quo and favoured a council composed of the Obi, twenty three Ndichie, eighteen elected representatives of the Inland Town, six elected representatives of the Waterside and four 'strangers'. More progressive Onitsha opinion especially the members of the Onitsha Improvement Union were more in favour of a broadly based council composed of the Obi, two Ndichie, twelve elected members from the Inland Town, eight from the Waterside, four strangers and two 'special interest' members. The Igbo immigrants asked for a council composed of the Obi, twelve members from the Inland Town, eleven representatives of wards to be created at the Waterside and two strangers (i.e. Hausa, Nupe, etc.).⁵⁸

The issue was deadlocked and the town was not stable enough to take advantage of some of the benefits of the post-war development programme. The government intervened in 1950 with what it considered a compromise solution--a council composed of the Obi, six Ndichie, twelve elected Onitsha members, ten representatives of the Igbo immigrants of the Waterside and three non-Igbo members. The Igbo immigrants boycotted the election proposed in 1950 so that the new Onitsha Town Council which was inaugurated shortly afterwards consisted of the Obi, twenty seven Onitsha members and five muslims. Continued conflict weakened the administration.

58. Loc cit.

It would be true to say in 1951 that

To all intents and purposes, Onitsha has been virtually unadministered for the past seven years since the Onitsha Town N.A. took over from the Local Authority. This was a deliberate policy consciously adopted with the object of ascertaining if the N.A. was equal to the task. It is recognised on all sides that it failed. We are now faced with an accumulation of problems in a fast growing town.⁵⁹

In the meantime, the East Regional Local Government Ordinance had come into effect. Yet another committee consisting of seven Onitsha members and seven Igbo of the Waterside and one Muslim was set up in April 1951 to recommend on the establishment of an Onitsha Urban District Council which was to be inaugurated in 1953. The committee was also to recommend on the relationship of the Onitsha Urban District Council with the Niger Country Council under which Onitsha was placed. The County Council covered the Onitsha and Awka Divisions and was to be composed of four District Councils and 139 Local Councils.⁶⁰

The composition of the Onitsha Urban District Council revived all the old animosities. In spite of their numerical inferiority, the Onitsha insisted on holding a majority of seats in the new Council. They saw the proposals for a democratically elected urban council as a threat to their traditional hegemony. They quickly resolved their internal differences and successfully maintained a common front against the immigrant population. The Onitsha argued with some justification that the township was more developed than the rural areas which were placed under the same county. It had problems which differed from those of the rural areas. Union with the

59. File No. 22993, Vol. V, MINLOC, Resident Onitsha to S.E.P., 7/9/50.

60. File No. 3464 ONDIST, C.G. Smith, "Report of an Inquiry held under the East Regional Local Government Ordinance into the Proposed Alteration of the Boundaries of the Niger County", 16/10/53.

county would divert funds needed for urban development to the rural areas. But they naively argued that Onitsha had a tradition of independent existence under Onitsha control. They did not concede to the immigrants who were developing the town an equitable position in the administration of the town. They therefore favoured an Urban District controlled by the Onitsha and separate from the County.

On the other hand, the immigrant Igbo community of the Waterside who had been denied adequate representation in the administration of the town sought a merger with the county as a way of undermining the dominance of the Onitsha. But they also naively argued that Onitsha town derived its wealth and importance from the rural areas and should be part of the county and assist rural development. As a government official observed,

At the back of all the arguments, there lies on the one hand the fear of the indigenous minority that if the proposal (of being under the County) is carried into effect, it may lose its cherished and hitherto successfully preserved independence and supremacy and on the other the anxiety of the non-indigenous majority whose aspirations have so far been suppressed to obtain a fully representative and democratic system of local government.⁶¹

The wishes of the majority prevailed. In spite of petitions of the Onitsha people to the Secretary of State, the town was constituted an Urban District Council with eight representatives in the Niger County. Elections were held in 1954 to form the Urban District Council. The Onitsha were given a slight majority in the Council but conflict between rival camps in the town continued as before. Like nearly all the Urban District Councils formed in the region in the early 1950s, the Onitsha U.D.C. proved to be

61. Smith Report, loc cit. cf ONPROF 1/8/39, Collin Hill, "Report and Proposal for the Establishment of an Urban District Council for Onitsha Town under the East Regional Local Government Ordinance No. 16 of 1950", 27/3/53 which examines this issue in great detail.

grossly inefficient and corrupt. It had had little training in urban local government. It was dissolved shortly after it was established and a caretaker council was appointed by the government pending the report of a commission of inquiry.⁶²

Umuahia offers another example of the effects of government's emphasis on Native Administration on urban political development. The town was overrun in 1902 by Major Heneker's column of the Aro Field Force. The following year a minor court was set up at Afor Igbeji, Olokoru, controlled from the Bende District Office fourteen miles away. A small railway halt and watering station was opened there during the construction of the Eastern Railway line in 1915/6. A number of European trading firms commenced to buy produce but there was not enough space for expansion. In 1917, the station was moved three and a half miles north to the present site of the township. In the same year, the Townships Ordinance made the town a Third Class Township and thus granted it a special administrative status. In practice, however, its administration was almost synonymous with that of the Afra, Ugba and Amuzu villages of the Ibeku clan in which the town was situated. Immigration into the town was slow, and the non-indigenous elements were made subject to the Ibeku clan council and Native Court which handled judicial and administrative matters in the town. Except for the Sarkin Hausa - the head of a large Hausa community in the town - no other foreigners were admitted into these local institutions. In any dispute which involved a 'non-indigene' of the area, to decide which a knowledge

62. see File No. 3464 ONDIST, Onitsha Petition to the Secretary of State, 10 Downing Street, 3/7/53. see also G.I. Jones, Report of the Position, Status and Influence of Chiefs and Natural Rulers in the Eastern Region, 1958, p. 30.

of foreign customs was needed, a member of the foreign community was "co-opted to sit with the court as an adviser".⁶³

It was proposed in 1920 to transfer the Okigwi Divisional Administrative Headquarters to Umuahia but this was not done and for a long time the town was administered loosely from the Bende District Office. An Assistant District Officer, V.A. Moulton was appointed a resident Local Authority for the town in 1935 but he was withdrawn shortly afterwards because it was thought that township problems "monopolized his time and precluded him from attending to other, more important duties."⁶⁴ The Resident for Owerri Province ruled that henceforth, all administrative officers were to be stationed at Bende. Much of the administration of the township was placed in the hands of one A. Ituma, a barely literate District employee who performed the duties of transport clerk, rest house caretaker and market master "with remarkable efficiency and in fact deputised for the Local Authority."⁶⁵ Law and Order in the town was in the hands of a disorderly police detachment which comprised nineteen rank and file and a sergeant. Periodic sessions of the magistrate court were held in the town to deal with serious criminal and civil cases but these sessions were so irregular that the Ibeku Native Court handled most of the cases. The immigrant population, estimated at about 1,800 in the mid-1930s, was dissatisfied with and apathetic to the administration of the town.

63. File No. S.P. 10969A, C.J. Pleass, "Intelligence Report on the Ibeku Clan", 1936, par. 34.

64. File No. 15565A MILGOV, J.C. Allen, "Intelligence Report on Umuahia Township", 1937.

65. Ibid.

The Lt. Governor, Southern Provinces, suggested in 1935 that the Third Class Township be abolished. He rejected any "advance towards that hybrid - the Second Class Township - with a Local Authority and the mixed and usually dead-alive Advisory Board."⁶⁶ In the same year the African community of the town formed the Umuahia African Union which aimed at advising and cooperating with the government in the administration of the town. J.C. Allen, a District Officer, Bende, was detailed to prepare a report on how to bring Umuahia in line with the new system of Native Administration which was being introduced in the region in the wake of the riots of the late 1920s. He saw the existing status of Umuahaia as an "anomalous growth under direct alien administration which contrasts strangely with the surrounding villages where the power of the Clan Councils is increasingly felt."⁶⁷ To "rectify this anomaly", he recommended that an Umuahia-Ibeku Township Council should be formed as a subordinate Native Authority for the African population of the township. The Council would be composed of representatives of "natives and native foreigners residing in the town" and would operate "subject to the provisions of the Native Authority Ordinance No. 43 of 1933 in the same degree as the clan Native Authority in the Bende Division."⁶⁸ The council would impose its own rates, control fifty percent of direct and income tax collected in the town and act as "trustee" for the government in the administration of crown land. Although such

66. File No. OW 2790 UMDIST, Lt. Governor's Inspection Notes, Umuahia, October, 1935.

67. File No. 15565A MILGOV, Allen's Intelligence Report.

68. Ibid.

an arrangement would still be hampered by the emphasis on Native Administration, it seemed to offer a basis for the development of a financially stable urban administration. The government accepted that

we should abolish the township, constitute a Native Authority and Native Court without which the N.A. cannot function...and confer on the N.A. such powers as are necessary for the administration of the area. (But) the power to lease land will remain vested in the crown and an annual grant will be made to the N.A.⁶⁹

Delays ensued as the government considered the land question. The Second World War also intervened and all the proposals were shelved. The town remained virtually unadministered as a Third Class Township.

In the meantime, the Umuahia African Union continued to ask for more participation in the administration of the town. The government moved further towards a more orthodox form of Native Administration. The township would form part of the existing Ibeku subordinate Native Authority which was part of the Odida Anyanwu Native Authority. The latter comprised the Ibeku, Olokoro, Igbo and Ubakala clan sub-N.A.s. It was proposed that two representatives of the stranger elements in the town were to be admitted into the Federal Odida Anyanwu N.A. Such an arrangement was assumed to be working well at Onitsha and the Chief Commissioner for the Eastern Provinces took a firm stand that "we shall proceed by way of Native Administration and not municipal government," as it was "unnecessary and unwise to create a separate financial entity for the township."⁷⁰

69. File No. 15565/1 MINLOC, Comments of G.G. Shutte on the Allen Report, 1937.

70. File No. 74/Vol. VII, F.B. Carr, Chief Commissioner's Inspection Notes, Owerri Province, at Umuahia, 25/6/46.

The fact was that neither the Ibeku Clan Sub-N.A. nor the Federal Odida Anyanwu N.A. showed any interest in or understanding of the problems of the township. In spite of that, yet another proposal was made in the late 1940s by S.E. Johnson to send four representatives of "all tribes" in the township to an enlarged, forty member, Odida Anyanwu N.A. to serve on a sub-committee for Urban Affairs which was to comprise fourteen members. Such a sub-committee would function under the direct financial control of the Native Authority. Its estimates for the township would be subsidiary estimates of the Odida Anyanwu N.A.⁷¹ As a progressive government official rightly observed, it was

more than probable that on the present proposal, all the energy and imagination displayed by the stranger elements who are directly interested in the rapid development of the area will be stultified by apathy on the Federal CouncilAfter all it will take some powerful speaking and persuasion to enable a committee of 14 of whom only four (township representatives) are really interested....to persuade a council of 40 to allocate funds, say, on an enterprise that does not concern them.⁷²

In any event, while the details of the Johnson Proposals were being worked out, the Odida Anyanwu Federal N.A. broke up as an administrative unit. It was incorporated into a newly formed Bende Divisional Native Authority which was formed in 1948.

The new Resident for Owerri Province, I.J. Smith and the Senior District Officer, Bende, L.T. Chubb, began to consider "a more specialised form of administration in the form of a 2nd Class Township" for the town. Again this was rejected by the Chief Commissioner, F.B. Carr who favoured

71. File No. 15565 MINLOC, S.E. Johnson, "Memo on the Administration of Umuahia", 19/1/46.

72. Loc cit, Minutes of the S.E.P. on the Johnson Report, 24/1/47.

an administration based in Bende along Native Administration system. He argued that the educated elements of the township, two of whom would be appointed to the Bende Native Authority, would strengthen the Native Authority.⁷³ It was also assumed that the affairs of the township were of interest to the whole Division, that Umuahia township had no existing authority for a separate local government and above all that "the rural areas had come to depend upon the revenue from general taxation (in the township) and could not afford to lose this source of income."⁷⁴

The African Community of Umuahia was rightly disgusted with the neglect of the administration of the town. The Umuahia Township Union was reconstituted into the Umuahia Township League in 1949. The President of the League who had been appointed a representative of the township in the Bende Native Authority was known to be "remarkable" there "for infrequency of attendance." The Secretary of the League, S.B.A. Atulomah had a bad record with the government for publishing "poisonous articles" and seeking for ways to embarrass the government. In 1950, the League petitioned the government protesting

the deplorable situation with which we have been putting up in the social, economic and political life of this township. The situation which we complain of has its origin in the administrative status of the township...a situation which has reduced us to a suffering community and robbed us of our rights and benefits as taxpayers and citizens of a democratic country. This township is a Third Class Township whose affairs are controlled directly by

73. OW 8615/21 in MINLOC 16/1/2484, Memo of I.J. Smith, Resident Owerri to Civil Secretary, E. Region, Enugu, 22/4/52 and minutes of F.B. Carr.

74. see No. 1628/s 5/2 in MINLOC, 16/1/2483, D.O. Bende to Resident Ow. Prov. 10/6/48.

the Native Administration...under which grouping the numerous inhabitants of this cosmopolis have very bitterly suffered from mal-administration and neglect in various aspects of modern amenities and social development. The Bende N.A....does not cater for our interests but rather devotes its activities more in using our taxes collected in developing the villages and clans under her.⁷⁵

It demanded that Umuahia be made a Second Class Township without further delay. Lt. Colonel Alderton, the senior D.O. in Local Government duties reported that Local Government could not be introduced in the Bende Division before 1956 so that the township could not expect to become an Urban District before that date.⁷⁶ The government therefore agreed to make Umuahia a Second Class Township as "a temporary expedient to build up a satisfactory organisation which would approximate as near as possible to that of any Urban District Council."⁷⁷ This was on the strict understanding that the township would not interfere with crown land and that its acts and byelaws would not be binding on the government.

Although the township was to operate in accordance with the Townships Ordinance, elections were allowed to be held to guide the government in 'nominating' elected members to the Township Advisory Board. The A.D.O. Bende, A.H. St. Wood, was to be Local Authority and 'President' of the Advisory Board. The Board which would include such unofficial members as Major O'Beney, the Development Officer, the Medical Officer and the

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75. see File No. 15565/1 E.J. Gibbon, S.E.P.to C.S.G. Lagos, 22/8/47
"As a 3rd Class Township, Umuahia has not in fact been administered."
see in Loc cit, Ref. TCL/U.1/14 "Petition of the Township Community League to Resident, Ow Prov., 30/7/50.
76. OW 8615/22, Lt. Col. Alderton quoted in Smith to Civil Secr. Eastern Provinces, Enugu, 22/4/52.
77. No. 121/910 in File No. 15565/1 MINLOC, S.P.L. Beaumont, Ag. Civil Secretary to the Resident, Ow. Prov. 8/7/52.

Provincial Engineer was to run the affairs of the town almost like an Urban District Council. In November 1952, the township was divided into three wards - A, B, and C. Elections were held and eighteen members elected.⁷⁸ Two committees - the Market and the General Purposes Committees were formed. Two representatives of the Ibeku land owners were appointed to the Board and thus Umuahia began its belated experience with urban local government.

Enugu, Port Harcourt and Aba developed along almost similar lines. Before the establishment of the government Colliery at Enugu, the indigenous settlements around the town were administered from the Udi District Office. Dr. Hair's study shows that although government activity was largely responsible for the development of the town, "the tendency in official circles" was to regard the growth of the town as "a somewhat embarrassing by product of its activities, an unfortunate, even undesirable phenomenon."⁷⁹ This was not peculiar to Enugu alone. The town was initially referred to as a Cantonment but was created a Second Class Township by a government Order in Council No. 19 of 1917. It became a Supreme Court area seven years later. A station Magistrate/Local Authority and an appointed Township

78. File No. 26528 MINLOC, "Umuahia Ibeku Township Advisory Board" 1952. Members were elected thus:

Ward A	Ward B	Ward C
Japan Iloghalu	U. Udechukwu	D.A. Onu
Ikechi Nwadinobi	I.U. Eke	O. Udensi
M.I. Anyanwu	S.E. Nwosu	J.A. Anosike
W.U. Agomu	A.I. Okpaku	L.A. Ofoegbu
C.C. Ribeiro	J.N. Okike	C.A. Okafor
Sarikin Momo	O.K. Ikerigh	A. Nwoka

79. P.E.H. Hair, "The Study of Enugu", 1954, p. 14.

Advisory Board formed the local organ of administration. From the start, the Board was ineffective because it lacked the funds, staff and powers to function properly.

Although Enugu was considered "a cosmopolitan stranger town" the authority of the Divisional and Provincial administration almost always prevailed over the wishes and needs of the township administration. The Divisional Officer at Udi complained that the position of the D.O. in the township was unsatisfactory.

The township is assumed to be part of the Division and therefore under the supervision of the D.O. though no communication to or from the Station Magistrate, Local Authority or Local Treasury passes through him and he is never present at the Advisory Board meetings.⁸⁰

The situation was complicated further when Enugu was made the headquarters of the Southern Provinces in the late 1920s. The jurisdiction of the different sections of the government was not clearly defined. As the Local Authority Enugu rightly said,

the status of the Local Authority vis-a-vis the Secretariat and those many departments (is) nebulous and unsatisfactory for someone with a tidy mind. It takes time to learn how it all works....and is occasionally embarrassing.⁸¹

Much of the revenue raised in the township went to general revenue or to the Udi Native Administration. Local protest at Enugu was weak because most educated townsmen were government employees. The ethnic unions which began to be formed in the 1930s were initially supported by the government as a means of preserving tradition but during and after the second World War, they became more and more politicised and sought greater

80. OP 348/1928 ONPROF, Annual Report, Enugu Division, 1928.

81. OP 717 ONSIDT, P.R. Grant to I.C. Jackson, Handing Over Notes, October, 19, 1950. The problem began to be felt in the late 1920s.

participation in the administration of the town and in the control of township funds. The people were rightly "confused and discouraged by seeing the Local authority whose multifarious duties they cannot understand, collecting so much money and spending so little of it on the township."⁸² The unsatisfactory state of affairs in the town can be seen from a lengthy memorandum of the Local Authority in 1947:

It cannot be denied that the Native Locations at Enugu are overcrowded insanitary slums...Enugu has no public gardens, no play ground, no street light; Drains are filthily inadequate and conservancy arrangements are dreadful....And this is a town of 35,000 people. The cause of this state of affairs is a complete lack of any policy due probably to changes of officers (there have been twenty two since 1940), a conflicting office organisation made up of four watertight compartments all of which spend the major part of their time collecting money and little time spending it; and most important, the shortage of township funds....Short as the township is of funds, it has to subsidize the government. The government and the Udi Division get most of the money. For four years the Local Authority has struggled on with no money, bad typewriters, inadequate office staff and an indifferent field staff....Confusion is made worse by the constant necessity to seek outside advice from the Health Department, the P.W.D. and the Survey Department whose offices are widely separated...causing inevitable delay. Any person wishing to build in Enugu must submit a plan which travels several miles before being approved. The result of all this is that the administration is out of touch with the people. The public does not know whom to obey and authority is weak.⁸³

The reform in township administration which followed the Phillipson Report did not alter the situation in a significant way. The African community in the town was not united enough to form a common front to press for reform. The Enugu Youth League, a branch of the Zikist movement which was

82. File No. 1948/Vol. 1, MINLOC, H.K. Robinson to Resident, Onitsha, 14/2/47.

83. File No. 13453/Vol. 1, CSE. Robinson to Resident Onitsha, 9/4/47.

formed in the late 1940s, demanded an elected Township Advisory Board which would be responsible to the people of the town. The government was not sure how it could introduce Local Government in a town which was fast becoming a regional headquarters. Because the policies of the government were not popular among the township population, it feared that if the principle of election was introduced, its nominees in the Township Advisory Board (notably Messrs B. Gidney, A.N. Eze and F.W. Brodrick, all government employees) might not be elected. The principle of election was nonetheless accepted "as a guide to nomination" in forming a new Township Advisory Board. The Resident would still retain discretionary powers to appoint members to the 'elected' Board. In addition, the membership of the T.A.B. would be the same as that of the government controlled Local Town Planning Authority. In this way the government would still be in a position to control the administration of the town.⁸⁴

Elections were proposed for 1949 but failed to take place

as public opinion in Enugu is very leftist in tendency (and) not easy to reconcile with government policy. This problem is bound to become greater as the weight of unofficial opinion develops with the growth of Local Government.⁸⁵

Although elections were held in 1951 and an elected T.A.B. began to operate as a Local Government body, the role of the Board was overshadowed by the activities of the regional Secretariat. It can be said however that the loss in local autonomy was in many respects offset by the gain to the town of government's interest and effort to develop the regional capital.

84. see File No. 1567, ONDIST, Local Authority to Resident, 23/4/48.

85. OP 1865 ONPROF, Annual Report Enugu Township, 1948/9; cf File No. 13453, Vol. II, CSE, V.K. Johnson to S.E.P., 7/1/48.

Port Harcourt administration⁸⁶ came closest to direct rule. Its problems centred mainly on the relationship between the central government and the local organ of township administration. Before the establishment of the port town in 1914, the Diobu and Okrika communities of the neighbourhood were under the Degema District administration. Between 1914 and 1918, the District administration controlled the town also. It was proposed during this period to establish a low grade Native Court in the town in which local chiefs and other "good men" imported from the home Districts of government labourers and artisans would sit. The promise of warrant chiefship was one of the devices used by the government to acquire township land.

The town grew rapidly. The influx of strangers and 'native foreigners' and the heavy investment which the government made in the town involved the central government more closely with the administration of the town. The town was made a Second Class Township in 1917. The Township Advisory Board which was composed mainly of Europeans met for the first time in 1918.⁸⁷ The authority of the Board was very weak as the government made it clear that

until Port Harcourt becomes a first class township and the advisory council becomes the Local Authority, it cannot authorise anything or anybody. It is merely advisory.⁸⁸

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86. The administrative and political development of Port Harcourt has been examined in greater detail in Howard Wolpe, Urban Politics in Nigeria: A Study of Port Harcourt, and Clement's Anyanwu, "Port Harcourt: The Rise and Development....".
87. see Degedist 6/1/12, "Report on Port Harcourt District, 1915-18; OW 2/13 Rivprof, "Native Court Port Harcourt," 1913.
88. OW 104/18, J. Watt to P.H. Advisory Board 20/10/19 relaying Lugard's orders.

Although the different government departments performed useful functions in the town, the township administration itself was poorly funded and grossly understaffed most of the time. The interests of the rapidly growing African community of the town received scant attention. Rivalry among the different African sub-groups made it difficult for them to co-ordinate their activities and pressure for more participation in the administration of the town. Native Foreigners who had a higher social status and were neutral in the rivalry among the Igbo immigrants assumed the leadership of the African Community League which was formed in 1935. The League was strong enough to demand immediate municipal status. This seemed premature in the circumstances of the 1930s. In the 1940s, the government was prepared to consider a gradual transfer of some administrative functions to an elected body but full autonomy for such a body was ruled out because government interest in the town was too strong. The port served the whole country and government responsibility could not be delegated.

In 1946, the Local Authority for the town, Floyer, prepared a report which divided the administration of the town between the central government and a Township Council which would be formed by election. The government would continue to control port, railway and postal services while the town council would be charged with such duties as the upkeep and sanitation of roads and markets, the provision of some social and public utility services and so on. A Government Ordinance created the town a First Class Township in 1948. This in turn provoked bitter political struggle among the different groups of the African population. The Town Council that was formed, did not function efficiently as it continually came into conflict with the central government. The Ordinance did not provide for full

municipal status for the town but merely granted an elected African majority in the Town Council. This lone experiment in an almost autonomous urban administration proved unsuccessful mainly because there was little experience among the members in urban administration. The Council was dissolved in 1954 on charges of corruption and inefficiency. A caretaker Council of five members was appointed by the government and it held office until the town was granted municipal status in December 1955.

Any assessment of Colonial urban administration would consider such issues as the structure of the administration, the relationship between the different levels of government in relation to urban administration, the management of urban resources, the extent of participation of townspeople, planning policies and so on.⁸⁹ By which ever of these, or indeed any other criteria, the colonial urban experience of Eastern Nigeria is assessed, it is difficult not to see it as unsatisfactory. This was clearly the result of the low priority which urbanisation had in the colonial scheme of things. It is of course easy to be too critical of colonial urban administration in the light of present knowledge of urban problems and how to handle them. It is nonetheless true to say that "the British colonial administration...neglected local government in towns...and made their best effort in the rural areas where indeed their hearts lay."⁹⁰

The administration claimed that it wished to maintain a link between the rural and urban areas. In a sense, town and country are mutually

89. see United Nations, Administrative Aspects of Urbanization, N.Y., 1970, p. 10; cf B. Williams, "Management of Urban Resources in Anglophone Africa", Cahiers d'Administration Publique, 1973, pp. 1-13.

90. see R.E. Wraith, "Local Government" in J.P. MacKintosh (ed.), Nigerian Government and Politics, 1906, p. 204.

dependent. But in the circumstances discussed above, the result was unlikely to be to the benefit of the needy towns which were hardly in a position to influence rural development positively. Indeed the colonial government viewed urban growth itself with much suspicion as a threat to the system of Native Administration. Urban communities were usually seen in "tribal" terms and the administration remained unreconciled to the idea of "detrribalisation". As a result municipal spirit was slow to evolve. When it did, it was a product of discontent. There was little administrative preparation for the kind of autonomy which the towns desired.

It is true that municipal autonomy would have been financially and administratively premature before the mid-1930s ^{but it} and is also true that there was no attempt to encourage the gradual development of municipal spirit. The paternalism of the Colonial government and the idealisation of indirect rule confined what training there was to the institutions of Native Administration which were unsuited for the process of modernisation taking place in the region. The administrative bodies set up by the Townships Ordinance in 1917 and by the Local Government Ordinance after World War II proved very ineffective for urban administration and development because they were subordinated to the Provincial and Native Administrations. It is not surprising that the introduction of Local Government in towns in the 1950s, though received with enthusiasm, was followed in most towns by administrative chaos and unending government inquiries.

CHAPTER IV

TOWN PLANNING: POLICIES AND PROBLEMS

Government land policy and the weaknesses of urban administration affected the physical development of towns.¹ This chapter tries to outline the development of planning policies and institutions during the colonial period and to show how colonial planning has continued to affect urban development in Eastern Nigeria.

Large towns in Nigeria predate British colonial rule² but almost every town in the country bears the imprint of the colonial period. By 1900, the towns east of the Niger were very small. Few if any had attained any high degree of structural or architectural distinction. There were correspondingly few 'ancient inconveniences' to impede the efforts of a would be city-builder. Fifty years later, a number of towns had emerged, some of them very large. Their growth was largely unplanned, haphazard and in some cases stunted. Each of them exhibits "a lack of unity and coherence...that seems to suggest that several people must have had a new idea and thought it would be a good one."³ This state of affairs reflects the weaknesses of British planning and the anti-urban

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1. Some existing studies have examined some problems of towns planning in Nigeria, see: Louis H. Munch, 'Town Planning and Social Systems: The Case of Ibadan' in Michael Koll, (ed.) African Urban Development, Feb. 1972, pp. 55-63; A. L. Mabogunje, 'Urban Land Use Problems in Nigeria,' in Land Use and Resources, Inst. of Brit. Geographers Special Publication, No. 1, 1968, pp. 203-218; Leslie Green and Vincent Malone, Urbanization in Nigeria: A Planning Commentary, (Ford Foundation), 1971.
 2. See W. Bascom, 'Urbanism as a Traditional African Pattern,' The Sociological Review, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1967, pp. 29-48.
 3. C. G. Ames, Gazetteer of the Plateau Province, 1934, p. 428 said this of Jos but it is equally applicable to Eastern Nigeria.

effects of her colonial administrative philosophy. It reflects also the economic and technological problems of the early colonial period and a number of local factors--human and topographical--which from the start lessened the chances of ordered town planning in the region.

Although England has a long history of urbanisation, planning, least of all physical planning, entered late into the field of public administration. The laissez-faire orientation of British officialdom left environmental planning initiative to such humanitarian private enterprises as Cadburys of Bournville until the economic reverses of the inter-war years, serious urban congestion and the ravages of World War II persuaded the government to accept direct planning responsibilities.⁴

Planning Ordinances in England were generally ineffective until the United Kingdom Town and Country Planning Act of 1932 which became the prototype of all colonial town planning legislation after the war.⁵ By that date, however, the amateurish and the haphazard development of the pre-war years had established the pattern of most colonial cities and created serious 'geographic immobilities and institutional rigidities' which hampered subsequent attempts at integrated urban development.

4. See F. J. McCulloch, 'The Social and Economic Determinants of Land Use,' Town Planning Review, 1961, pp. 1-9.

5. R. M. Stevens, 'Planning Legislation in the Colonies' Colonial Building Notes, No. 31, 1955, pp. 10-15; of Sir Frank Stockdale, 'Recent Planning Development in the Colonies,' Journal of the Royal Inst. of Brit. Architects, Vol. LV, No. 4, 1948, pp. 140-148. Note Sir Patrick Abecrombie's remark: "I should like to ask an unpleasant question. Why is it that the Colonial Office has been so late in getting to work on town planning and housing in this way... It seems to me that we have been rather tardy in getting to work to provide this absolutely essential service to the colonies."

Notable exceptions to the British colonial 'non-plan of the non-city' can be found in some East African colonies where economic development was largely urban based. The presence of a substantial number of European settlers and mining interests, depending largely on labour recruited from widely dispersed areas, compelled some form of functional town planning from an early date.⁶

In Nigeria, by contrast, the colonial administration was under no economic or political pressure to build cities. The reverse was in fact the case. The old agglomerations of Western and Northern Nigeria, notably Ibadan and Kano, were considered inconvenient or irrelevant to colonial interests except in so far as the aristocracy that controlled them were found useful for the essentially rural-oriented administrative and economic emphasis of the colonial period.

Local factors exacerbated the muddled urban development of this period. The traditional Igbo settlement pattern reflects a love of space and independence: "In our buildings we study convenience rather than ornament."⁷ But whatsoever the merits and rationale of indigenous building techniques and settlement patterns, some of their features were totally unsuited to a limited urban environment. Furthermore, although urban growth was as much a cause as it was a result of economic development, the size and rate of urban growth, especially in the later colonial period, outpaced its economic potentials. Many immigrants to towns were clearly ill-equipped economically and in some cases culturally for the demands and discipline of modern urban living. All too often, social and

6. See John Gardiner, "Some Aspects of the Establishment of Towns in Zambia," Zambian Urban Notes, No. 3, 1970.

7. Claudah Equiano, The Interesting Narrative of Claudah Equiano or Gustavos Vasa, London, p. 10, cf Julius Spencer, 'Visit to Uburu,' Church Missionary Intelligencer, 1879, pp. 239-42.

economic pressures, coupled with official regimentation and administrative delay obliged many immigrants to crowd into insanitary slums just outside the boundaries of townships, wishing, as an outraged colonial official put it, "to enjoy township amenities but are not prepared to contribute to their provision."⁸ This chapter examines against this rather inauspicious background, four stages--1900 to 1923, 1924 to 1927, 1928 to 1945 and 1946 to 1950--in the development of planning policies and institutions in Nigeria with special reference to the Eastern region.

From about 1900 to the formation of the Northern and Southern Provinces' Town Planning Committees in 1924, 'town planning' in Nigeria was on an informal, day-to-day basis. It consisted largely of local sanitary efforts in government stations and the usually uncoordinated initiatives of government and private agencies--the Railways, the Colliery and Marine Departments, missionaries, European commercial firms and indigenous immigrants--each and all attempting to cater to the conflicting needs, socio-cultural differences and the inherent economic inequality of the colonial period. Most urban land was acquired piecemeal for unrelated and often conflicting purposes which could not be projected beyond a limited number of years. A 1913 map of some of the large urban centres in the region would show small government stations surrounded by indigenous settlements and farmland. The river ports of the Niger and Delta were still the main foci of commercial activities as the basic modern infrastructure for the faster movement of produce and people was only beginning

8. File number 15565/ Volume 11 MINLOC. Minutes of Lieutenant Governor, 14/5/52.

9. Ronald J. Harvath, 'In Search of a Theory of Urbanisation: Notes on the Colonial City,' East Lakes Geographer, Vol. V, 1969, p. 72. "Colonial cities are microcosms of colonial societies and clearly manifest this heterogeneous and plural characteristics."

to be laid. It was not until the construction of the single track Eastern arm of the Nigerian Railway from Port Harcourt to Enugu between 1913 and 1916 that the actual location of some of the major towns was firmly established and their modern urban form began to crystallize. The initial layout of Port Harcourt was largely determined by the vaguely 'probable' needs of the Marine and Railway departments. The planning of both Aba and Umuahia was dominated and hindered by the railway, of Enugu by the conflicting claims of the Colliery, Railways and the Udi Divisional Administration, while Onitsha was carved up by a multiplicity of planners--U.A.C., missionaries, private traders and the Provincial Administration--into a bewildering maze of uncoordinated land use zones.

The major planning issue at this early stage centered around a rigorous enforcement of the contemporary policy of segregation on racial and associated class lines. This in turn influenced the siting of the 'European Reservations' usually in favourable relation to the prevailing breeze with 'a commanding view.' The racial factor was only one aspect of the almost mutually exclusive interests that influenced urban land zoning.¹⁰

Residential segregation was not new to Northern Nigeria but there, colonial planning turned "each town of any size into a conglomeration of Townships (European Reservation, offices and trading plots), the city (African Muslims), the Sabon Gari (African non-Northerners), the Tudun Wada (Northern non-Muslims), with each treated as a separate entity both in the administrative and planning aspects."¹¹ In Western Nigeria, the 'Townships', consisting of the European Reservations and the 'Native

10. D.J. Olsen, 'Victorian London: Specialisation and Privacy,' Victorian Studies, Vol.XVII, No. 3, 1974, pp. 265-278, "what the Victorians desired was Privacy for the middle class, publicity for the working class and segregation for both.

11. S.H.R. Rollison, 'Town Planning in Northern Nigeria,' Journal of the Town Planning Inst., No. 5, 1958, p. 113.

Locations,' were set apart from the traditional towns. In the Eastern region, the zoning pattern was ideally "a European Reservation divided into a residential area and a trading and residential area, separated each from the other by a neutral zone of 400 yards in width, and in which the European Reservation is separated from the non-European reservation by a neutral zone of like dimension."¹²

While this wasteful planning policy was pursued ostensibly on health grounds especially by the Medical Department which pleaded unfamiliarity with the 'African disease environment,' for the European layman and trader the racial and class factors were more influential. Lugard argued that the first objective of the non-residential area--the B(uilding) F(ree) Z(one) as it was called--was "to segregate Europeans so that they shall not be exposed to the attack of mosquitoes which have become infected with germs of malaria and yellow fever by preying on natives and especially native children whose blood often contains these germs."¹³ He also thought it was a safeguard against bush fires and would "remove the inconvenience felt by Europeans whose rest is disturbed by drumming and other noises dear to the natives."

The class factor operated within each racial group. A senior colonial sanitary officer criticized the first plan of Port Harcourt on the very 'serious' ground that the different types of Europeans and Natives were not satisfactorily segregated. He observed that "some loco drivers (Europeans) and others of similar type are not over-cleanly in their habits." With their "many idiosyncracies," he thought that they "ought

12. CSO 1/32 Thompson to Amery, 17/11/26; cf CO 583/107/3957 Dr. T. E. Rice, Memorandum on Segregation and Town Planning in Nigeria, 17/6/21.

13. F. Lugard, Political Memoranda, 1918, Memo XI, p. 420. Some African Doctors in the Colonial Service seemed to share this view. See CO 583/233/81341--Dr. Olunola's view.

to be kept well apart from the more refined members of the community."

In the distribution of plots in the African township, an attempt should be made to "distinguish between the higher and lower classes of natives."¹⁴

Whatever the wisdom or naivete of this reasoning, it was not always easy to superimpose all these prescriptions on the natural features of a town and on the different needs of rival departments. The result was an unending juggling with the zones and boundaries which muddled up the planning process, gave the Europeans a false sense of security and diverted attention from the general sanitation of the whole town.

Although government control of most urban land facilitated the enforcement of a multiplicity of restrictive regulations, supervision was usually inadequate. Housing was a matter for the individual as the "government does not provide quarters for African staff either free or rental except in a limited number of special cases where the officer concerned is required as one of the conditions of his appointment to reside in a special building."¹⁵ As we have seen, urban administration and finance which influenced the effectiveness of planning operated within the Indirect Rule framework especially after the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914. Indirect Rule as an administrative philosophy subordinated the interests of the growing towns to the priorities of the rural based Native Administration leading to the neglect of urban centers in the crucial stages of their development.

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14. EP 4522 1/8/2617 L. Laurier to Principal M. O. Langos, 15/12/12 referring to Port Harcourt. For a critique of this policy see Nug. Med. and San. No. 10327-25 Professor Simpson: 'Memorandum on Segregation and Town Planning in Northern and Southern Nigeria,' 1920, cf. Jean Comhaire, 'Urban Segregation and Racial Legislation in Africa,' American Sociological Review, Vol. XV, 1950, pp. 392-397.
 15. File No. 19772/v.1 CSE, T. Hoskyns Abrahall, Memo of 2/12/44- Appendix B; cf G. Anthony Atkinson, 'African Housing,' African Affairs, Vol. XLIX, No. 196, 1950.

Summing up the period 1900 to 1923, it can be said "that when all the existing towns were planned, if definite planning was in fact carried out, a sufficiently long view was not taken and insufficient allowance was made for expansion. Many places have grown up by a species of mushroom growth leading to...various undesirable features..."¹⁶

This period of haphazard growth was interrupted briefly by the purposeful town planning initiative of Sir Hugh Clifford between 1925 and 1927 as part of his reform of the orthodox Lugardian Indirect Rule. Clifford attempted a centralization policy to strengthen and coordinate the activities of the different departments and levels of government, to curb the separatist ambitions of senior Northern Nigerian officials and to remove some of the anachronisms idealised by the disciples of the unique model of Indirect Rule in the North.¹⁷ Critical of the wasteful segregation and ad hoc planning procedure and the hampering rituals of the Indirect Rule system, Clifford set up two high-powered town planning committees in 1924 based in Lagos. Each of the Northern and Southern Provinces' Town Planning Committees thus formed was instructed

not only to consider such town planning schemes as may be submitted to it for approval by the various local authorities, but also to initiate schemes in any locality where such a course seemed desirable...detailing if necessary a sub-committee of its own members to visit the spot and assist in the preparation of the scheme. In this way, the committee would be definitely responsible in its own Province for the duty of looking ahead and anticipating future requirements so as to avoid the necessity of taking hasty decisions at the last moment...¹⁸

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16. File No. 1677/12 ABADIST, Report of the Eastern Area Development Committee, 1945.
 17. See J. A. Ballard, 'Administrative Origins of Nigerian Federalism,' African Affairs, No. 286, 1970, pp. 333-348; J. E. Flint, 'Nigeria: the Colonial Experience,' in Gann and Duignan (eds) Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960, Vol. 1, 1969, pp. 220-260; J. Osuntokun, 'Post First World War Economic Administrative problems in Nigeria and the Response of the Clifford Administration,' Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol. VII, No. 1, 1973, pp. 35-48.
 18. OP 296/1924 ONPROF, Memo of L. N. Bouliean, S.S.P., 1924; cf Nigerian Gazette No. 45, cf 28th August 1924.

To assist these central committees, local subcommittees, "possessing knowledge of local conditions and requirements," were appointed in Second Class and Third Class Townships. These local sub-committees were distinct from the existing Township Advisory Boards and were to concern themselves specifically with town planning. A potentially sound basis was thus laid for urban development.

The three short years of the operation of this programme--1924 to 1927--could have been the beginning of an era of effective and far sighted planning, involving the extension of township boundaries, the expansion of the cramped 'Native Locations' and the provision of basic urban amenities. But the stronger the influence of Lugard's administrative philosophy was in a town, the less the success of Clifford's reformist programme. There were of course obvious problems to a centralized control of local development in a country of the size of Nigeria. But Clifford's town planning programme operated satisfactorily in some towns where it was tried. Post-war town planning, as we shall see presently, was organized in the same way. In 1927, however, the opposition of the Lieutenant Governors and the ambivalence of the Colonial Office compelled the abolition of Clifford's town planning committees on the flimsy grounds that "they absorbed a great deal of the time of a number of highly paid officials, achieved results which could be secured in a less cumbersome and expensive manner and impeded the settlement of purely local affairs."¹⁹ Clifford's programme was not abolished because of its structural weakness but rather for wider political and administrative reasons involving the distribution of power and responsibility within the Indirect Rule framework. It is significant that after the abolition

19. CSO 1/32 Thompson to Amery, 23/12/26.

of Clifford's committees, "the approval of a layout was vested in the Lt. Governors whose decisions would be final" unless the Medical Officer raised an objection.²⁰ Although the Colonial Office had reservations about the wisdom of this procedure, there was a return to the planlessness of the pre-1924 period.

In the third stage, from 1927 to 1944, a 'new' policy was adopted which in essence held that "town planning in the Protectorate shall be an item of work to be undertaken by normal methods of the established machinery of government and shall not have a special organization set up for it."²¹ In practice, this unleashed once again the inter-departmental rivalries and uncoordinated initiatives of different interest groups, with the Railways and Provincial Administration blocking almost all proposals for ordered and expanded town planning. An all-purpose memorandum was drawn up by the Health and Works departments to guide the planning of new towns even though most towns had been laid out by this time.²² This period deserves credit for the gradual relaxation of the rigid zoning procedure and the recruitment of three town planning officers in the late 1920's (a Mr. Waide for the Lagos Executive Development Board and two other itinerant planners who were retrenched during the depression). A comprehensive planning scheme was initiated for Lagos but only periodic planning forays were made to the Provinces.²³

Town planning in this third phase was still very unsatisfactory.

Official and professional assessments of it reveal its difficulties

20. OP 502/1626, Memo of Senior Resident, Onitsha, 2/12/26.

21. CSO 1/33 conf. Amery to Thompson 9/12/26.

22. See file No. 7567 (PWD Papers Ibadan Archives) Arthur Richards to C.O. (copy Resmin Accra) 13/3/44 explaining this change of OP 499/1927 ONPROF for copy of "Memo. on the General Principles to be Followed in the Selection of Sites and the Laying out of Townships and Residential Areas in Nigeria" 1927.

23. See File No. 7567 (in 22 above).

and ineffectiveness. Sir Arthur Richards observed in 1944, with some justification that

a lot has been done in a small way though it cannot be pretended that it is obvious to the eyes of a visitor that much has been achieved. The country has never been in a position to embark energetically upon an intensive programme of town planning in the protectorate. The depression of 1931, shortage of staff, particularly of town planning officers...and preoccupation with other matters have all contributed to preventing it.²⁴

Consequently, "the records show a series of officers arriving to do one tour of twelve to eighteen months and resigning from pure frustration" and of planning bodies "created only to die of inevitable inanition."²⁵

Professional town planners who arrived in Nigeria after the war found "no sense of planning whatever except day-to-day, piecemeal planning."

In Lagos, they found a town planning officer who "was doing anything else but planning." In Northern Nigeria, "there was a heterogenous development..."

We found a District Officer with his office full of plans of all kinds, irregular pieces of land which had been laid out with curved roads and sometimes on a straight road. In the East, there were no records to speak of in this vast area. The plans we had showed little dots...the little dots being houses."²⁶ Indeed "the situation practically amounted to starting from scratch (as) all to often, development just happened."²⁷

These strictures are understandable and perhaps justifiable from the point of view of idealistic and professional town planners whose visits coincided with the massive urban influx and associated problems during and after the War. Given the economic vicissitudes of the time, the chronic shortage of staff during the depression and War, lack of

24. See File No. 7567, Richards to C. O. 13/1/44

25. S.H.A. Rollison, 'Town planning in Norther Nigeria, p. 113.

26. E. Maxwell Fry, "Town Planning in West Africa," African Affairs, 1946, pp. 200-1.

27. J.D. Tetlow, 'Town Planning in West Africa,' Journal of the Town Planning Inst., Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, 1946, p.17.

expertise, land and other urban problems, it can be argued that some of the achievements in the construction of urban roads, drains and the provision of urban amenities deserve credit. Nevertheless, in the absence of an established planning machinery and a consistent planning policy, planning lacked continuity and a sense of direction. Ad hoc decisions became the norm and urban growth was consequently stunted.

The physical planning of towns was an item in the Colonial development and welfare programme which provided grants for social and economic development of the colonies after World War II. The Lord Hailey Committee on post-war problems stressed the need to examine urban planning more 'systematically' since "the government has never attempted this."²⁸ The committee attributed most urban problems to government's attitude to crown land. But in addition to some of the old problems, this fourth and final stage of town planning faced the serious difficulty of superimposing integrated town plans on existing structures. There were besides, financial and administrative problems to implementing any such plans. The Colonial Development and Welfare Fund of the early 1940s, which was theoretically aimed at correcting some of the anomalies of the earlier Colonial Development Act of 1929, provided the sum of £5,000,000 a year for development in Nigeria, £539,000 of this amount was grudgingly apportioned to 'Urban Water Supply.'²⁹ Even then the Central and Regional Development Boards set up to administer the fund reasoned that development and welfare must 'start from the bottom.' The Divisional and Provincial

28. File No. 421b (Holt Papers, Rhodes House) Minutes of the Advisory Committee on Economic Development and Social Welfare, 1942.

29. See C. 829 Vol. 1 (PWD Papers Ibadan Archives) Central Minutes 1945, and CSO 26-42153, E. Walls, Memorandum on Post War Development in Nigeria, 1945; and File No. 1313 ABADIST, copy of Draft Memo on Policy on Economic Development and Welfare in the Colonial Empire, nd, esp. pp. 1-8.

officials who recommended projects to benefit from the fund argued against the expenditure of "such a sum on so limited a number of people in so small an area" as an urban center.³⁰ Most urban centers except perhaps Enugu had great difficulty securing loans from this Fund for their development projects.

Planners were difficult to recruit for town planning in West Africa after the War. The Colonial Office thought it was "unjustifiable" to make more than one appointment to West Africa. An army engineer in the West African service, E. Maxwell Fry, was appointed to the planning section of the office of Lord Swinton (the British Resident Minister for West Africa (Resmin) based in Accra, Ghana) to give advice and assistance to all governments in the preparation of slum clearance, rehousing and town planning schemes.³¹ The role of this expert and his team in Nigeria was to be purely advisory since the government had decided that "the existing machinery (whatever there was of it) should be retained but strengthened by the appointment of town planning officers, one for each group of Provinces...working directly under the senior officers of the Public Works Department."³² The Works Department was anxious to avoid any criticism of its previous efforts and insisted that the planning experts should confine themselves to new towns rather than the revision of existing layouts. The planning schemes drawn by the experts for the major towns of Nigeria could be regarded as guides but they were not to be considered as documents binding the government either to specific or

30. See File No. 1313 ABADIST D.C. to Resident, 15/6/40 insisting that more money should be spent on Native Courts and the Native Administration; cf OD 897/16 ONDIST, for the difficulty of securing loans and funds for urban development at Onitsha.

31. C.O. 583/161/30459 Secretary of State for Colonies to Governor of Nigeria 25/8/48.

32. File No. 7567, (PWD Richards to C.O. 13/1/44).

to general decisions. When these 'Draft Town Planning Schemes' were attempted, convenient alterations were made in each case which upset the structure as envisaged by the experts.

Planning efforts had as yet no legal backing until 1946 as there was no planning legislation in Nigeria. The model United Kingdom Town and Country Planning Act of 1932, first tried out colonially in Trinidad and Tobago in 1938, was only introduced to British West Africa after the War, first to the Gold Coast in 1945 and then into Nigeria in 1946. It raised its own problems of adapting legislation designed for different conditions to the size and peculiar circumstances of Nigeria.³⁴ The tendency in Nigeria was towards decentralisation. Thus the main feature of the Nigerian Town and Country Planning Ordinance of 1946 was the creation of a multiplicity of Local Town Planning Authorities, sixteen of them in the Eastern region. None of these had the legal, financial or technical capacity for effective planning. Theoretically, each of them was authorised by the Ordinance to declare any area under their jurisdiction as 'a Planning Area' and thereby freeze all land prices and further development except on a purely interim basis. The Planning Authority was then required to prepare a planning scheme, preferably 'self-financing,' which when approved by the Governor or his representative would form the only basis of future development. A long and complicated procedure for the assessment of compensation, recovery of betterment and the raising of loans left most Planning Authorities impotent from the start. There was no clear distinction between the Planning Authorities and the existing Township Advisory Boards and worse still no definition of the precise

34. See 'Characteristics of Legislation Based on the Act of 1932,' Colonial Building Notes, Number 76, September/1961, pp. 2-4.

relationship between these planning bodies and the government and government departments.³⁵ Although the government hesitantly conceded the administration of crown land to Planning Authorities in the late 1940's, this was withdrawn in the early 1950's with the introduction of local government. The government merely promised to make discretionary subventions to townships with money accruing from township land. Loans were difficult to secure from the East Regional Development Board as the Townships could not guarantee repayment. Thus

the Umuahia and Aba Planning Authorities (for instance) appointed respectively in Gazette Nos. 170 of 6th Feb. 1947 and 181 of 27th of May 1948 have been unable to make any headway with planning schemes because of the uncertainty over their legal status in relation to the government and for the lack of a regular source of revenue.³⁶

Looking back twenty years at the post-war planning efforts in Nigeria, E. Maxwell Fry has recently observed that

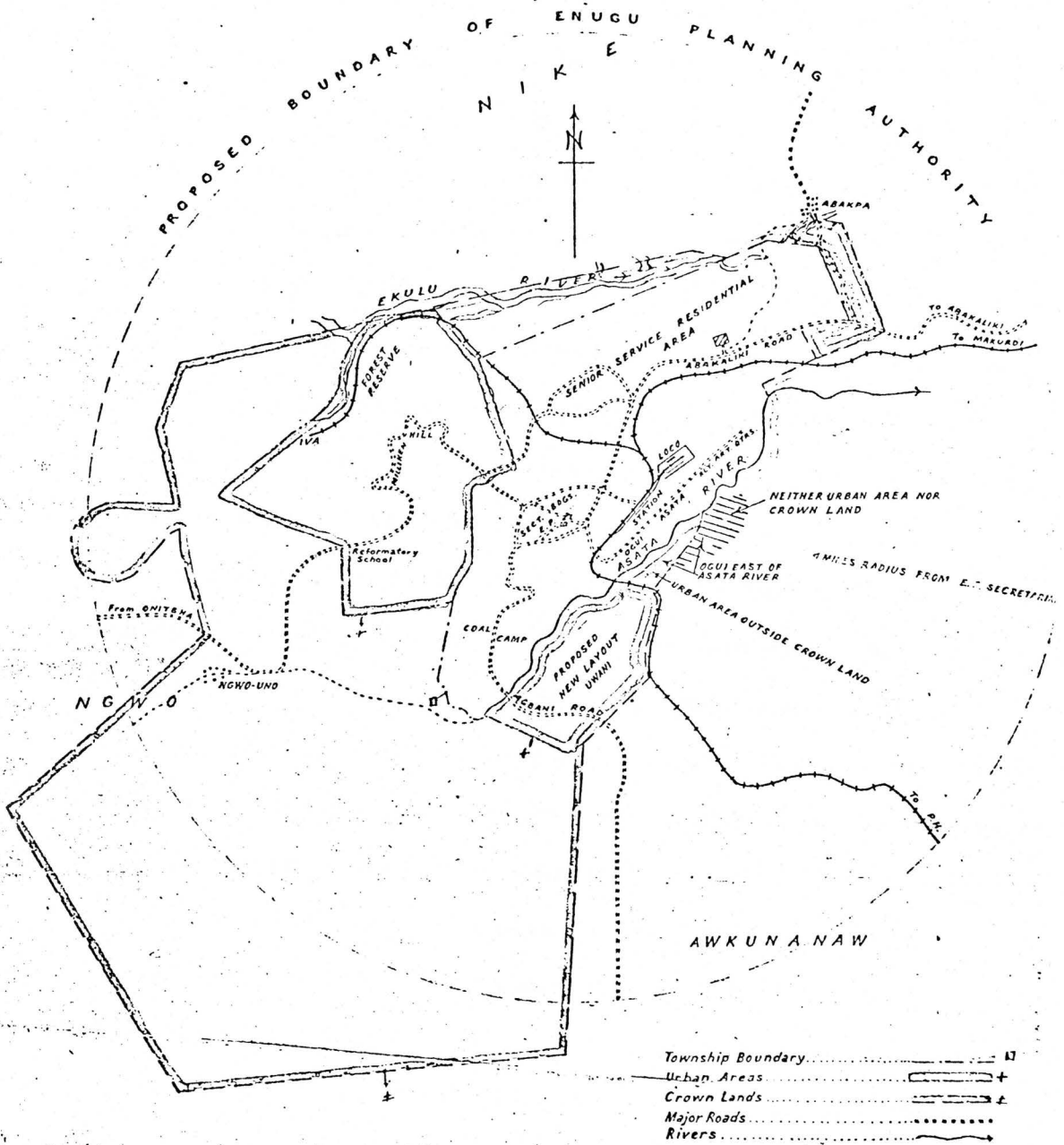
We faced real difficulty in Nigeria... The first was that the then Governor Arthur Richards was too preoccupied with drawing up constitutions...and could not be brought to see town planning as the serious thing it was; secondly the then Director of the Public Works thought he could plan as well as anyone and gave us no help at all but rather the reverse... Reliable plans of the existing towns were hard to come by... but what was much worse was that there was no real authority to which we could present the plans with the hope of their being adhered to.³⁷

The planning history of four towns in Eastern Nigeria--Port Harcourt, Onitsha, Enugu, and Umuahia illustrates the trends outlined above. Enugu is an example of a modern town which could have been well planned from the start. It looks deceptively attractive, almost sophisticated, as a visitor descends the Millikin Hill from a height of 700 feet above sea

35. See MP 23225/co7: Circular Memo: 'Position of the Town Councils and Planning Authorities vis a vis Each Other,' 22/6/50; No. 20-194/3/31, Circular Memo (SEP) Financial Relation Between Government and Planning Authorities, 12/9/51.

36. File No. 14145/1/62 in OW6506 Hill to Chief Secretary to Gov't. 26/9/49.

37. Personal Correspondence--E. Maxwell Fry to Author, 29/3/74.



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level. The broad and well paved roads which run through the 'Secretariat' to the G(overnment) R(esidential) A(rea) and the Business District also lead to one of the worst slums in the region, located right in the middle of the city. Sited at the bottom of the Udi Ridge, the town slopes gradually eastwards across the Asata and Aria Rivers which intersect it rather inconveniently to the north and south. Prior to 1913 the whole area was almost empty farmland claimed by rival villages in the neighbourhood. Its modern growth dates from 1914 when the first coal pit was sunk around the present 'Coal Camp' and expanded gradually in response to increased demand. The eastern ~~Railways~~ line connected the mines to Port Harcourt (150 miles to the south) in 1916 and subsequent urban planning was dominated and not infrequently hampered by the conflicting needs of the Colliery and Railway departments.

Here as elsewhere the government acquired land piecemeal, most of it between 1914 and 1928. Town planning was correspondingly piecemeal and shortsighted. The first group of Colliery labourers, recruited practically by force, were accommodated in temporary 'bush houses,' thrown up in a disorderly manner near the mines. Prisoners and local contractors were engaged to construct what other makeshift structures were required by the administration.³⁸ The major planning decision was taken when Lugard visited the area in 1915 and characteristically 'laid out' the town as represented in Station Plan no. A 1312. The European Residential Area (Jerico Town and Cement Town), laid out on the Garden City model, was located just north of the Aria River, with the Business Area extending as far south as the 'High Street' and far north as the Railway

38. File No. 19929 Vol. 1 CSE H. C. Croasdale, "Intelligence Report on the Labour and Labour Camps of the Gov't. Colliery at Enugu, 1938 (Extracts) cf ONPROF 1/8/10 Annual Report Enugu, 1925.

Quarters. These were separated from the South western Native Location by an irregular neutral zone of 'regulation dimension.'

As demand for coal increased,³⁹ the Iva Valley mine was opened to accommodate more labourers, Iva No. 1 Camp was set up, followed in 1922 by Iva No. 1 Camp both of which consisted of temporary structures. Between 1926 and 1934 these were replaced by semi-permanent buildings on a planned layout, along with the 'Southern Native Location' (present Ogbette) which was also laid out on the grid pattern and rented on temporary occupation licences to government employees, traders and artisans.⁵ In 1923, the Railways built the 'Construction Quarters' north of Ogui, Asta and Secretariat Quarters, known collectively as 'China Town.' As the European commercial firms--Miller Brothers, African and Eastern Traders Company, African Oil Nuts, John Holt, the French Company and the Bank of British West Africa--rented and developed large plots in the Business and European Residential areas, an increasingly large number of immigrants, hampered as much by poverty as by administrative restrictions, established themselves at the 'Overbridge' camp which by the mid 30's had grown into an extremely crowded and insanitary slum. Many more rented land on traditional terms in Ogui 'Overside'--east of the Asata River--and set up their 'huddle of huts' without official hinderance.

Up to 1924 therefore some development had taken place but it was of a hurried and unorganised nature. The different settlements in the town were separated widely and had little in common.⁴⁰ Between 1924 and 1926,

39. Production: 24,511 tons in 1916; 83,403 in 1917; 200,000 in 1921; 300,000 in 1939; 500,000 during W. W. II. The problem of this early period see File No. 19929, Vol. 11 MINLOC 'Overcrowding in Enugu' esp Mr. Dewhurst's Report.

40. See 19487/1 Vol. 1 MINLOC H. K. Robinson to Resident 14/2/47. For the continuing problems of Enugu slums see Mrs. Nwanganga Shields, Ogui Urban Area: A Social Survey, E.D.I. Working Paper No. 2, 1965.

the Enugu Local Planning Sub-Committee, which was formed as part of Clifford's planning programme,⁴¹ initiated vigorous but frustrated schemes for township expansion and sanitation. In December 1915, the committee recommended the extension of township boundaries east across the Asata River to incorporate Ogui Overside and the Overbridge Camp and a further extension westwards to bring 'Hill Top' Iva Camps and other growing settlements into the township. This was vetoed by the Divisional and Provincial Administrations on the grounds that

government (whatever this means) does not approve of the Colliery Hill Top and Iva Valley being brought into the Township... The proposal to extend the Township area (beyond the Asata River) is open to the objection...(of) additional expenditure...and would detach from their tribal sanctions and associations a number of Africans.⁴²

The Railways, too, had habit of freezing large areas of the Township for unspecified needs and the Committee "from time to time urged the necessity of compelling the Railways to meet its obligations" without success.^{43a} The Committee did, however, replace Plan A1312 with Plan No. 2036 which cut the boundaries of the neutral zone to the north-east and east to provide for a second 'Native Location' (the Eastern Native Location) between the Asata River and Railway Quarters. Other planning successes were limited to the expenditure of some £2,000 on township sanitation, improvement of roads and drains and township markets and the allocation of large plots to the Roman Catholic and Protestant Missions in the present 'C.I.C.' and 'St. Baths' areas. Other schemes never got beyond the 'proposal' stage when the committee was abolished in 1927.

41. OP 296/1924 ONPROF Local Planning Subcommittee, Enugu, 1925.

42. OP296/1924 ONPROF See R. A. Roberts (Resident) to L. A. Enugu 7/11/25 cf OP 1567/19 ONPROF Resident to SSO 7/12/37).

43a. OP 1567/ Vol. 1, ONDIST Senior Health officer to Resident 11/6/37.

Enugu became the administrative Headquarters of the Southern Provinces in 1927 and the Headquarters of the Eastern Provinces ten years later and as a result received relatively more planning attention in the otherwise chaotic planning period 1927 to 1944. An itinerant town planner visited in 1928 to advise on the structure of Secretariat Positions and the construction of a Barracks for the 4th Battalion of the BWAFF which moved into Enugu in 1933. The merits of this selective planning was offset by the accelerated growth of uncontrolled settlements east of the Asata River. By the mid-30's, the Ogui, Nike and 'Overbridge' settlements had each become "a perfect rabbit warren," threatening the health of the entire township.

Both settlements (Ogui and Nike) are rapidly growing control and constitute a danger to the health of the community within the township. Both...provide a refuge for bad characters; the former is composed almost entirely of brothels serving the Royal West African Frontier Force Barracks, and almost all the women in it are prostitutes. The greatest menace, however, seems to be in the danger of a serious epidemic occurring...^{43b}

A series of proposals to declare an area four miles radius from the 'Secretariat' as controlled areas to be surrounded by a building free zone of 2,000 yards involved land, administrative and financial problems which the Township could not bear.⁴⁴ These areas continued as 'Urban Areas' even as planned growth continues beyond their boundaries.

When Miss Benson of 'Resmin' Town Planning Office arrived in 1945, the town was 'hopelessly overcrowded' with the massive influx of soldiers, "hordes of hangers on, legitimate traders and a large number of over-optimistic applicants subsisting on starvation wages." The Benson plan, comprehensive, and almost 'ruthless,' envisaged a radical realignment of

43b. OP 1567 Vol. 1 ONDIST Senior Health Officer to Resident 11/6/37.

44. ONDIST 12/1/126, 'Urban Areas, Enugu' for the voluminous correspondence on this issue.

roads and the construction of one running from the foot of the Millikin Hill straight across the centre of the town, through the Eastern Native Location to a proposed Agbani Layout. She recommended among other things the provision of open spaces and civic centers in the centre of the town (50 acres) on land hitherto frozen by the Railways, the relocation of some 'eccentrically located installations,' notably the African hospital, government control of the area beyond Asata River by legislation and the alteration of the existing building regulations and building plot sizes. Not surprisingly the Works Department was critical of the plan, the Health Department resisted any interference with the existing hospital, 'the District Engineer (Railways) Mr. Heins was naturally unable to commit his department' and the Chief Commissioner...objected to the prescribed procedure which would in the present case deprive his honour of the opportunity to comment on a proposal replanning of his own headquarters.⁴⁵ In the circumstances, the Enugu Town Planning Authority formed in 1950^{46a} was impotent from the start especially as it had no control over crown lands. It did, however, initiate the UWANI extension scheme which from the mid-50's has grown into the best planned part of the town east of the notorious 'Ogui Urban Area.' It may be an exaggeration to see Enugu as "a disgrace to a modern town where the government had every opportunity of ensuring a perfect development."^{46b} But the financial and technical problems of planning were perhaps far less important than official belief that: "the height of progress lies in latrines and drains.

45. See File No. 1345 Vol. I, C.S.E., "Town Planning Enugu." 1945/6.

46a. Government Gazette (27) of 11th May 1950; of File 33830 ONDIST, Memo on Enugu Town Planning Authority and Crown Lands 1950/2.

46b. SME 212 in ONDIST 12/1/491, Handing over notes, 1938.

The people are materialistic and realistic rather than idealistic. What they want I feel is \$1,000,000 well spent on tar and cement rather than on beer gardens."⁴⁷

The physical appearance of Onitsha was described shortly before the British Government took over control from the Company thus:

On the waterside you see well built mud walls, each with its compound walled in by fences made of high grass. Most Christian natives live at the waterside. Between the waterside and the Native Town, one mile off, are farms of Obisi people where they grow yams, Indian corn... The inland town particularly pretty with houses built in the form of country yards...surrounded by a kind of varanda which is...open to the sky. The town is very clean, the open shady spaces are kept well swept and the mud floors of the houses are frequently polished.⁴⁸

The town was already a large one before European traders and Christian missionaries established themselves on the eastern bank of the river Niger, in the mid-1850's. The 'Inland Town' which had a population of about 15,000, was physically divorced from the 'Waterside.' When the colonial administration took over the administration of the Royal Niger Company in 1900, the Waterside Town had grown to 14,000 at the expense of the Inland Town. The latter still retains its 19th century pattern of scattered compounds surrounded by gardens and trees. By 1945, the Waterside had grown southwards to as far as the Otumoye creek and beyond and eastwards to join the Inland Town. Its growth was largely unplanned.

In 1911, Bedwell, the Resident for Onitsha, tried unsuccessfully to lay-out the town in zones.⁴⁹ Again in 1917 when the Waterside was created a Second Class Township, the Survey Department attempted to

47. SME 212 in ONDIST Handing Over Notes of 1938, File No. 1345 Vol. 2 C.S.E. Minutes of S.E.P. on Memo of Mr. Chadwick ref the Zambia planning 'model.'

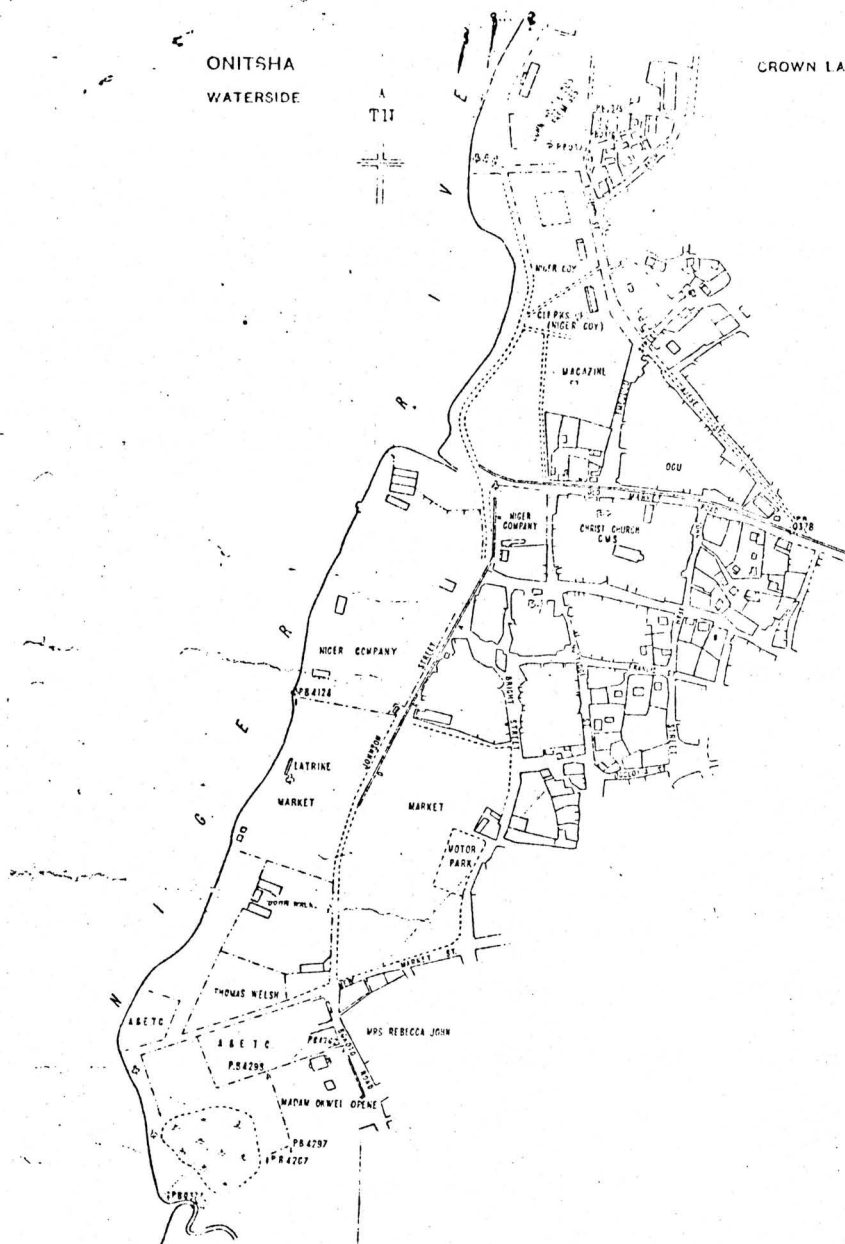
48. E. A. Warner, "Onitsha," Niger & Yoruba Notes, Vol. 1, No. 8, 1895.

49. See File Number C2087/11 ONPROF, "Laying Out of Onitsha Waterside," 1911.

superimpose the 'regulation zoning' pattern on the already chaotic structure of the existing town.⁵⁰ The European Reservation, consisting of the Residency and bungalows of European officials, was located on the ridge which divided the town on the northern side from the valley of the Nkissi River. Mixed missionary, commercial and African residential houses and installations sprawled haphazardly in a south-easterly direction. Residential segregation could not be rigorously enforced as many European and other foreign traders lived close to their stores in the center of the city. The U.A.C. occupied as much as three quarters of a mile of land along the Niger bank, north of the market on crown land, while the Igbo, Hausa, Nupe, Yoruba and Kakanda immigrants settled themselves in a miscellaneous collection of houses and 'quarters', scattered chaotically along narrow lanes which meandered between them. The nature of land ownership, the 'imperfection' of government title to the Niger Lands and the administrative uncertainties of Onitsha limited planning to sporadic and invariably frustrated attempts to nibble at the problem. In 1925, a system of surface drainage, a few of concrete and others mere earth ditches, were constructed along the Old Market Road, Venn Road and a few other narrow and winding roads. Onitsha slopes to the river from a height of about 360 feet above sea level and the serious floods of the town quickly eroded these drains as badly as the roads along which they were built.

In the 1930's, the deplorable state of the town was widely reported in Nigerian newspapers. R.C. Wilkinson, the Local Authority regretted that

50. OP 241/1917 ONPROF 1/18/20, "European Reservation, Neutral Zones, Awka, Onitsha and Udi, re." See Resident to Surveyor General Lagos 3/7/17.



SCALE - 400 FEET TO AN INCH.

The roads resemble rather the beds of dried up mountain torrents than a carriageway. The streets begin and end as they choose; they meet at odd angles and part at unexpected corners. Houses and compounds sprawl across the obvious passageways; the right-of-way buggles and contracts like a snake swallowing a chicken. Some houses have no means of access except by traversing through a neighbours compound...⁵¹

As indicated in an earlier chapter, the ownership of land in the town was confused and in continual dispute:

Over sections of this portion and over other sections, kola rights are asserted. The exact limits of kola rights have up to now escaped definition. Except for the European Reservation which is sparsely occupied, and the Nupe settlement which is not occupied at all except by squatters, no part of the Township is at present laid out in regular plots or limited to any particular size or shape. Accident of the location seems to have determined the boundries in most cases.⁵²

The larger the problem grew in size and cost, the greater was the hesitation of the government to do anything about it. The Onitsha Native Administration which was gradually taking over the administration of the town was incapable of handling the problems of the town.

The planning efforts of the late 1930's were confined to the improvement of the extremely insanitary condition of the Nupe Settlement/Sokoto Road area, and the laying out of the Modebe estate. The administration from the early 1930's decided to build a "sabon gari" for Muslim residents of the town on one section of the disputed Niger land south of the Otumoye creek. When the area was laid out, the government had no housing scheme in mind and the Nupe and Hause for whom the area was planned had little capital or "if they have it are not prepared to lay it out on good quality buildings."⁵³ Consequently, the schemes dragged on until the

51. LA 4/33 in ONDIST 20/1/1842 Willkinson to Resident, Onitsha, 26/7/38; cf West African Pilot, Vol. 1, No. 166, 10/6/38.

52. EP 2861/Vol. V MINLOC, L.A. to Resident Onitsha, 17/9/38.

53. OP 354 ONDIST "Onitsha Township: Extension of boundaries," 1941-7.

Second World War diverted the attention of the administration and encouraged Igbo immigrants to seize the area and set up houses hurriedly and clandestinely on the layout. It was not until the late 50's that the scheme gave way to the present Fegge Layout south of the town.

In 1937/38, a visiting Town Planner prepared a scheme for the Modebe Layout just north of the Otumoye creek. Some progress was made in this but it was not part of any townwide planning scheme. As a result, the post war town planning advisor modified, indeed recommended, serious alterations in the layout which blocked the chances of either scheme being effectively implemented.⁵⁴ Miss Benson of Resmin insisted on a radical restructuring of the town which would involve: the construction of an 'overflow' market to ease the congestion in the old and insanitary market, the construction of new roads and realignment of some existing ones including Bright Street, close control of development along Enugu and Owerri Roads, relocation of some government and commercial installations, change of the existing building regulations and the provision of open spaces and playgrounds.⁵⁵ This of course involved considerable demolition and compensation which nobody was prepared to finance. The Market scheme was opposed by vested interests who felt it would "change the face of trade."⁵⁶ The rebuilding of the market was only possible after 1951 when the Colonial Office gave a specific loan of £50,000 for the construction of a 3,000 stall market. The other aspects

54. See. OP 2572/548 ONDIST 12/1/1841, Resident to S.E.P. 9/11/45.
 55. OP 2724/548 ONDIST 12/1/1840 Fry and Benson: Draft Town Planning Scheme Onitsha 1944-45.
 56. MSS Afr. S 944 (Guise Papers) Papers on Onitsha and Onitsha Market. OP 1500 ONDIST 12/1/1063 MEMO of D.O. on Onitsha Market Reconstruction, n.d.

of the scheme were unpopular and were ignored first because "the present machinery of Native administration is not capable of dealing with even its simplest aspects"⁵⁷ and secondly it involved close expert attention and funds not available to the township. The Colonial Development Fund trickled into the town only after 1951. Besides, the extreme political tension in the town after the War and the unstable land situation made it impossible to have an effective Town Planning Authority. By 1954, there was no copy of Miss Benson's plan anywhere in Onitsha. The town looked just like a local official described it in the late 20's, "an old town, rambling, increasing in size and in population every year..., somewhat neglected in the past."⁵⁸

From the start the government also lost the opportunity to plan Port Harcourt well. When suggestions to make Calabar, Itu or Warri the terminal port for the Eastern Railway were discarded in 1913, the Marine Department chose "Isaka," thirty-eight miles up the Bonny Bar, as the site for the port. In spite of extreme topographical problems, it was believed that the area offered room enough for "a large town which would serve to remove the produce of the wealthy hinterland."⁵⁹ The construction of the wharves and Railway yards was entrusted to Messrs. Coode and Sons and Matthews (consulting engineers not town planners) and Mr. Bland, the General Manager of the Nigerian Railways. Their decisions determined the structure of Port Harcourt. The initial layout of the town was hurriedly planned as it coincided with the economic constraints imposed by World War I. Much of it was makeshift and ramshackle, complicated by protracted

57. OP 897/16 in ONDIST 12/1/1841 D.O. to Resident Onitsha 8/11/45.

58. LA 15/1928 in EP 4930 CSE, Capt. O'Connor to Senior Resident, Onitsha, 30/6/28.

59. C.S.O. 1/32 Lugard to C.O. 5/6/13, Enclosure 3.

land disputes and acute topographical problems. In zoning the residential areas, "the prevailing breeze...from the south-east" decided the location of the European Reservation "back inland to the north and north-east, pleasantly and spaciouly laid out in circles" with a golf course, a hospital and associated amenities.⁶⁰ Immediately south of the European Reservation the wharves, railway and other commercial installations were located right at the center of the narrow peninsula. The Native Location was then sited at the southern extremity of the town, bottled up by the European Reservation and railway installations and hemmed in on all sides by a labyrinth of creeks which made its expansion very difficult.

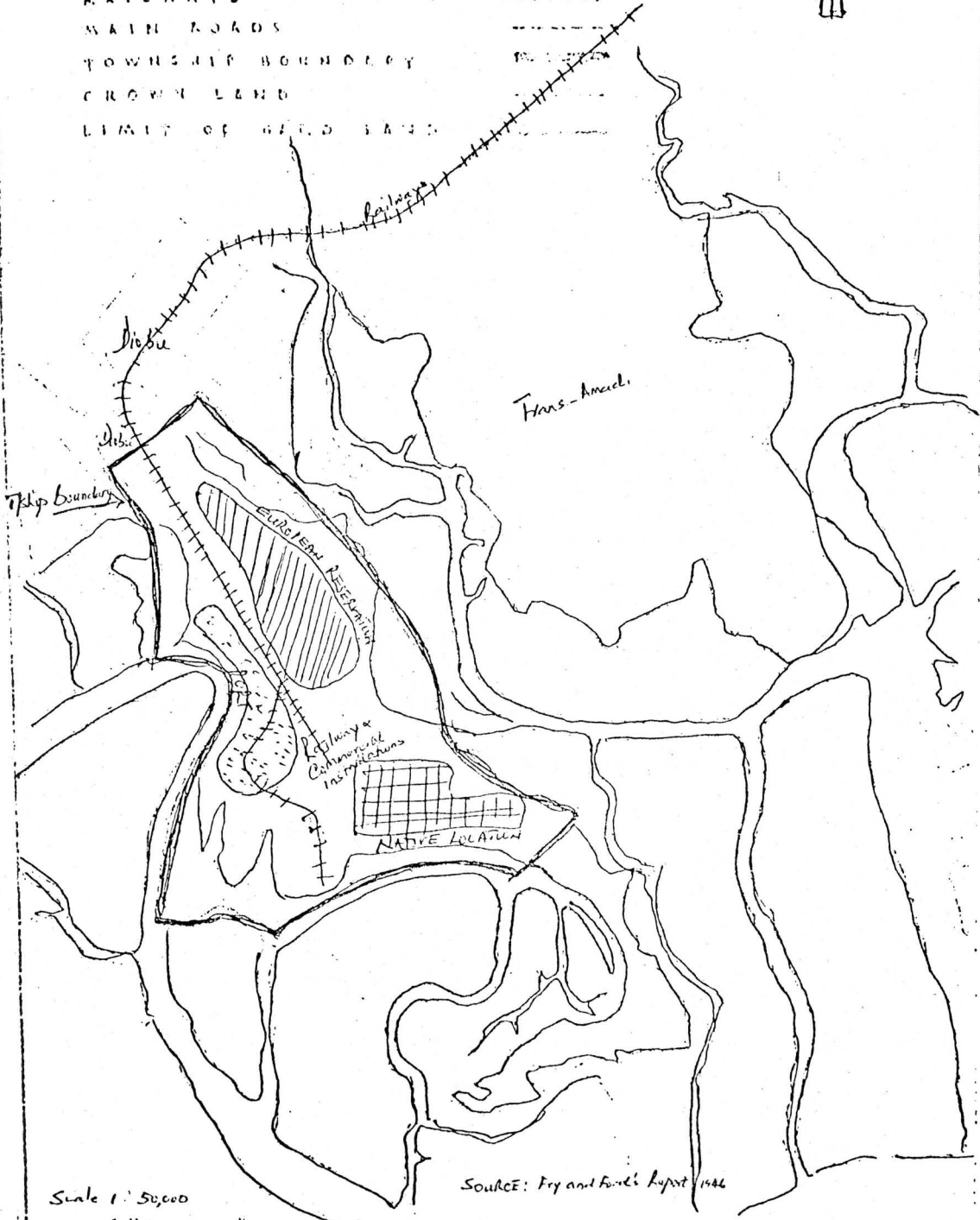
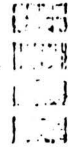
In 1913, some 500 prisoners and 5,000 labourers drawn from all over the country set up two 'native camps'--the Ibo/Ibibio and the Yoruba camps--each consisting of a "large number of temporary structures of palm sides and thatched roofs."⁶¹

Two years later, the camps were already cramped. They were replaced by a new layout on a monotonous grid-iron plan, relieved by nine open spaces which were too small to do more than provide space for latrines. By 1918 the spacious European Reservation, receiving most of the planning attention, was occupied by only eighty-five Europeans while the African township had grown to 7,000. The trend was obvious but no long term view was taken of the expansion of the African population. This initial planning mistake bedeviled subsequent planning efforts. The medical department continued to insist on its 'proper' segregation prescriptions

60. Ibid. cf. Mss. Afr. S. 141 OW Firth, "Port Harcourt: Some Notes on the Early Days," 1964.

61. File No. EP 4522 CSE, Senior Sanitary Officer to M. O. Loges 15/12/13. cf. E. 2661/12 RIVPROF, Dr. J. C. Maxwell, "Inspection Notes, P.H." 16/3/14.

AFRICAN TOWNSHIP
 EUROPEAN RESERVATION
 DIDOU ENCROACHMENT
 THE PORT
 RAILWAYS
 MAIN ROADS
 TOWNSHIP BOUNDARY
 CROWN LAND
 LIMIT OF WILD LAND



Scale 1:50,000

Source: Fry and Ford's Report 1946

while the Railway and the Marine Departments each sought generous concessions in the limited land area, each in turn initiating and operating its own 'town plan.'

In spite of the problems the administration had to contend with, it is still probably true to say that there is

no other newly founded colonial city in Africa where the contrast between the African District and the European Quarters would be greater than in Port Harcourt... The harbour is awkwardly situated around the sharp bend...of the river. Over the hill, just off the river, extends the European District... Further down, between the arm of the river, stretches the rigid pattern of the native district.⁶²

The rapid growth and increased economic importance of the town made it the headquarters of the Owerri Provincial administration in 1926, followed shortly afterwards by the symbolic transfer of the old consulate building from Bonny for the 'Residency.' The town planning committees of the Clifford era hardly had any chance of grappling with the serious problems of the town when they were summarily dissolved in 1927. Shortly afterwards, two planning schemes were proposed for the town, one in 1929 and the other two years later. Neither had much success and town planning up to the end of World War II remained piecemeal, confined to a slow and troublesome expansion of the existing layout.

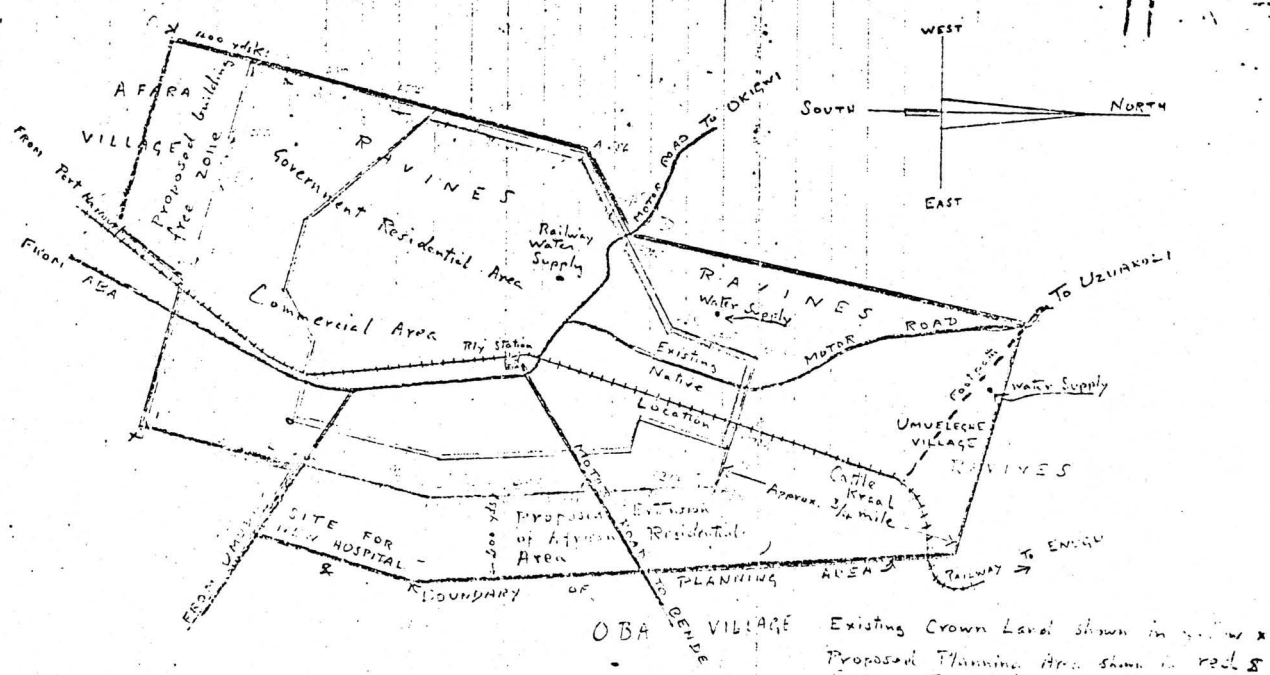
By 1945 the bottleneck in the town was causing serious concern. Only 210 Europeans were occupying the extensive European Reservation. The small Native Location was overspilling with more than 37,000 people. Both H. L. Ford of the office of the town planning adviser for West Africa and the Eastern Area Planning Committee of the post war period were unanimous that the whole town required reconstruction. Two conflicting

62. Pieta Zaremba, "The Urban Development of West and Equatorial Africa," Africana Bulletin, Vol. 1, 1964, pp. 108-109.

proposals were made, first that "the present European Reservation be abandoned and the land incorporated in a new town plan throwing the area open for an African housing scheme,"⁶³ and second, the creation of a satellite town, divorced from the existing township in either the Diobu area or across the Amadi Creek. The former was categorically ruled out while the later had to await the constitution of the Port Harcourt Town Planning Authority and autonomous Town Council in the early 1950's.

The growth of Umuahia as a Township dates from 1917 when a small Railway watering station at Olokoro was transferred to a narrow tableland three and a half miles north. Ordered development was hampered from the start by the administrative uncertainties inherent in the status of a Third Class Township and the deep ravines that flank the whole western length of the town. The government acquired most of the land in an extremely irregular manner hence the planning process was a hush-hush, informal affair. Sir Hugh Clifford did not sign Survey Departmental Plan No. UNU 119 prepared in 1922/3 for the laying out of the town but local administrative and departmental officials divided up the area into the usual European Reservation, a neutral zone and the Native Location, none of which was firmly established on the ground as the Railways and the Bende Divisional administration continually shifted the zones to cater

63. See File No. 166/5/15, ABADIST, "Town Planning:" Section 117 on Port Harcourt; File No. 9962, (PWD Papers Abadan Archives) "Port Harcourt Town Planning Scheme" 1945-8 and E. Maxwell Fry and H. L. Ford, "Draft Town Planning Scheme Port Harcourt," 1946, pp. 108-9. The physical development of the town is discussed in detail in Clement Anyanwu, "Port Harcourt," p. 100ff.



PROPOSED UMUAHIA PLANNING AREA

APPROX. SCALE 1600 FEET = 1 INCH

1/10/56

for their needs.⁶⁴ The European Reservation, hemmed in to the west by the ravine and forest reserve, comprised the 'factories' and bungalows of eight European trading firms, town Rest Houses belonging to the Bende Divisional administration. The Railway station and installations were located in the middle of the jar-shaped layouts immediately south of the township market located in the neutral zone. A mixed Hausa and Yoruba settlement north of the European Reservation and west of the Railway line was converted into a Native Location in 1929, and extended to 420 plots in 1936.⁶⁵

The major planning problems of the town were and have remained the township market, the construction of a cattle kraal and the extension of the Native Location. From the 1920's the Railways operated its own plan No. UML3 which not only froze large areas at the centre of the town and along the Railway line and sidings but also required the removal of the township market from its location in the Survey Department plan. The government which had great difficulty protecting the Railways from rival and generally cheaper means of transportation hesitantly resisted the closure of the market as it would

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64. B. 532/1919 CSE 3/11/6 Report of Mbameron Blair, Deputy Director of Sanitary, Lagos 25/3/22. "The government has taken sufficient land to enclose the European Reservation in a ring fence of neutral zone.... But this neutral zone will be one in name only.... The Railway station is actually situated in the NZ. Umuahia will furnish another example of the Railways attempting to upset a town plan after the proclamation of a Township," 1937.
65. OW 30/19 OKDIST 1/122 Umuahia Plots, 1922, cf. OW6789 Handing over Notes John Ashley to A.L. Wair for the early planning efforts in Umahia, see also No. 15565A Milgov, J.C. Allen, "Intelligence Report Umuahia Ibeku Township," 1937.

tend to drive trade from the Umuahia Township to the two markets outside the Township. It would be undesirable that these two markets should be further developed as the bulk of the produce from them find their way by lorry to Ikot Ekpene and by canoe down the Imo River.⁶⁶

In 1935, J. C. Allen, the District Officer Bende drew up a scheme for the construction of a new market to replace "the mass of untidy and insanitary sheds" that was the old market but the continued intransigence of the Railways coupled with the administrative and financial uncertainties of the Township held up the scheme while also interfering with the old market. As a result many actual and prospective traders in Umuahia moved to the other growing towns especially Aba. By 1946, the African population was still 7,000 predominantly Hausa 'Alahajis' in the cattle trade. When the new market was constructed, its administration raised even more problems and its use by traders was very limited.

In the early 40's, as many as 50,000 head of cattle from the north and the Cameroons passed into Umuahia by rail and road, and created serious health and sanitary problems. The limited increase of immigrants after the War led to overcrowding in the small approved layout that was the Native Location. "Semipermanent dwellings were springing up higgledy-piggledy on the land immediately outside the present boundaries of the Township." The determined but frustrated effort of V. K. Johnson, the senior Divisional Officer Bende, did not improve the problem until J. D. Tetlow of 'Resmin' drew up the first comprehensive development proposal for the whole town in 1945/6.⁶⁷ He recommended

66. 2790 in UMIDIT 3/1/432 F. D. Carr to S.E.P. 12/9/38; cf correspondence in BENDIST 1935/41, Umuahia Third Class Township Market.

67. See 396/Vol. 2/846 UMPROF 5/1/83 V. K. Johnson to Resident, Memo of 5/4/45; See also EP 13145, CSE J. D. Tetlow, "Report on the Future Development of Umuahia," 1945/6.

the immediate construction of a cattle kraal with adequate water supply northeast of the Railway Line and the construction of cattle tracks around the north periphery of the town to avoid the fouling of town roads and streams but this scheme has still not gone beyond the present makeshift enclosure for cattle in the town. A further recommendation to extend the native location east across the railway line and the realignment of the Uzoakoli road east of the line was blocked by government unwillingness to permit extension into crown land and Railway opposition to the construction and manning of a new level crossing. What success the Tetlow scheme had was confined to the structuring and location of office buildings and the relocation of the Township school. The failure of planning in the town was largely because

The Odida Anyunwu Native Administration has its headquarters there but so far has been unable to give effective administration (and the government) is more in favour of developing along native Administration lines.⁶⁸

Although the Umuahia Town Planning Authority was constituted in 1947, a Planning Authority, however effective it may be, was not a satisfactory political instrument. It drew up elaborate schemes for the construction of a large township market and the extension of the Planning Area boundaries of crown land,⁶⁹ but until the 50's when Umuahia was made a Second Class Township, development remained hesitant and results as modest as the size of the town.

Why was colonial city building in Eastern Nigeria, indeed in the whole of Nigeria so ineffective? It would seem that the weakness lay

68. File No. 947 Vol. 11, His Honour the Chief Comm's Inspection Notes 21/4/46.

69. See No. 13145/12 CSE 6519 Town Planning and Development: Umuahia Market Scheme OW 2547 BENDIST 1948/53 Umuahia Town Planning.

not so much in the unenviable achievements in circumstances of limited funds and skills but rather in the shortsightedness of the colonial conception of urban growth and the lack of direction in subsequent urban planning. The colonial administration helped to generate forces for rapid urban growth but the administration, because of its obsession with Native Administration remained for a long time unreconciled to urban growth and the detribalisation process which urbanisation was suspected to accelerate.

A limited African population was envisaged, mostly humble government employees, labourers and domestic servants. This attitude influenced the layout of towns, the size of plots and the low standard of amenities in the African locations. Government control and ownership of most urban land enabled it to enforce hampering restrictions on urban immigration, to establish contrasting residential zones and fix land prices in such a way as to ensure a high standard of buildings and sanitation in and around the European quarters while permitting progressive derioration the further away settlements moved from them. The Railway and Colliery which largely influenced the form of most of the towns of the region are now moribund and almost completely irrelevant to the economy, so that obsolescence of structure is a prominent feature of some towns of the region.

The experience of Eastern Nigeria seems to confirm the view that government or its commercial agencies cannot be entrusted with the responsibility of town planning. It is of course true that idealistic town planning can easily alienate the government whose cooperation is indispensable for the implementation of planning schemes. But a town planning department, attached as it is today in Eastern Nigeria to the

government Ministry of Lands, is left hopelessly impotent before the largest urban land owner, user and offender--the government. Unlike the colonial government, post-colonial administrations have always claimed to recognise and accept that urbanisation is a potentially dynamic force in the development process. But they have operated and continue to operate within the same anti-urban planning framework bequeathed by the colonial administration, inevitably to the detriment of urban development. Piece-meal development is still the norm. The extensive and low density European Reservations offer wide enough room for adjustment. But the indigenous elite appears to have stepped into the privileged position of their colonial mentors and frozen a structure which is clearly anachronistic in the present circumstances. This not only keeps them out of touch with the realities of urban problems but makes them much more insensitive to pressure for urban improvement. It is often argued that to throw open the former European Reservations (now vaguely called Government Residential Area) would lower property values, weaken revenue and lower the standard of sanitation and that to dismantle the whole structure would be difficult and very expensive. Nevertheless, it seems fair to argue that "to expand these districts in their present form would seem to betray the principles of harmonious development and social justice,"⁷⁰ especially in towns such as Port Harcourt and Enugu where they tend to block any form of unified urban growth. In any event, the longer the delay, the more

70. See Zaremba, *op cit.*; for similar observations on the problem of post-colonial town planning, see J. H. Umah "The Economics and Politics of African Slums and Shanty Towns;" Journal of the Royal Town Planning Inst., Vol. 58, 1972, pp. 215-18, cf C. Hywell Davis, "Lusaka: Town Planning Problems of an African Capacity Since Independence," Zambian Urban Notes, No. 1, 1969, pp. 12-18.

the grid-iron layout, indefinitely expanded without thought, creates hazards, slows traffic, wastes space and reduces the whole town into a squared repetition of indistinguishable blocks. There is no picture of the future to guide policy and no policy by which to criticize and encourage today's projects... What is required is a town planner who would have to be a friend of the Urban District Council(s) and the citizens first and an adviser to the government next. Nigeria cannot have big towns without paying for them--in TB and road deaths or in skilled work and cash!⁷¹

71. File No. 9629, ABADIST, on J. Barkley, ADO as a "Memo on Aba Town" 12/1/55 is even more relevant today.

CHAPTER V

INTERNAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TOWNS

Large towns developed in the region in the colonial period simultaneously and in competition with each other. They were all exposed to much the same internal and external forces which influenced the composition of their population and their social and economic structure. Collectively, they had certain characteristics which were different from those of the older towns of Northern and Western Nigeria with a stronger indigenous population base.

The establishment of colonial rule froze hitherto fluid boundaries of rural settlements and influenced the rate and direction of subsequent population movement. Improved transportation which was focused on administrative and commercial towns attracted long and short distance immigrants to the towns from widely diverse ethnic and geographic regions. The convergence in these towns of administrative, service, commercial and professional functions encouraged migration of a selective nature and the concentration of skilled, able bodied and mainly non-agricultural populations in these towns. Such a process in turn exerted pressure for special social services and created new problems of social relationships and social control. These related aspects of urban growth are examined in four major towns of the region.

The Peopling of Towns

It is not easy to trace the early population history of Eastern Nigerian towns or to assess the rate of growth of individual towns first because of the fragmentary nature of statistical data available and secondly because it is not always clear to what precise areas the early figures were applied. Continual change occurred in the official boundaries of towns and very often the population of indigenous settlements near urban centers was not included in the early population estimates. Nigeria has had particularly bad censuses. The first one which was conducted for the Southern Provinces in 1911 was confined to Lagos and the coastal ports. The result was merely "a reasonably approximate estimate" and gave little or no information on the situation in the Eastern hinterland.¹

The 1921 census conducted by Dr. P. A. Talbot combined vast ethnological and historical inquiry with the census at the expense of statistical accuracy. Although the Townships Ordinance of 1917 had created different categories of townships, it was still not clear by 1921 which settlements were 'urban' and which were 'rural'. A senior census official instructed local enumerators to "consider as townships Port Harcourt, Aba, Imo River, Uzoakoli, Umuahia" and any other places they thought to be towns.² The census did however provide

1. H. B. Cox, Census in Nigeria 1931, V. 111 'Southern Provinces', pp. 2-3.

2. EP 4972 CSE 1/85/2804, 'Census of Southern Nigeria 1921'.

valuable information on the ethnic composition and occupational structure of towns even though the figures given were "admittedly inaccurate...and even misleading."³ The riots over taxation and enumeration in the region in the late 1920's prevented any detailed head count as proposed for 1931. There was in fact no census beyond the compilation of existing data from tax returns and the computation of the non-taxable population from those of tax payers. "Unless one follows St. Augustine 'credo quia impossibile', the reported figures must be regarded as largely erroneous" falling as they did far below the 1921 figures.⁴ Because of World War II there was no census in 1941. The 1952/53 census which is still the only officially recognized one in the country is open to numerous criticisms of vagueness of definition and discrepancies in the procedure adopted in different parts of the country.⁵ In any case, only limited accuracy can be expected for the towns which had a large floating population for most of the colonial period.

Whatever the weaknesses of data, the towns of the region owe their growth partly to natural population increase in the towns themselves, partly to the annexation of adjoining rural areas and their people to towns but mainly to immigration from within and outside the region. Natural growth accounted for only a small percentage of increase because

3. Ibid.

4. EP 4972 CSE 1/85/2804, J. M. Jacobs, Confidential Memo 1931.

5. See N. C. Mitchell, "The Nigerian Town: Distribution and Definition" Research Notes, V.7, 1955, pp. 1-13.

most of the towns had little or no indigenous population base. Improved health, medical and sanitary services in towns reduced death rates while birth rates showed no signs of decline. Figures for Port Harcourt and Enugu in the early 1940's indicate relatively high urban birth rates and lower death rates:

<u>Port Harcourt</u> ⁶	<u>1941</u>	<u>1942</u>	<u>1943</u>
Total Births	288	371	627
Total Deaths	207	204	344
Crude Birth rate per 1,000	13.1%	16.8%	23.2%
Crude Death rate per 1,000	9.2%	9.2%	12.7%

Infant mortality in the town declined from 194 in 1941 to 135 in 1943. At Enugu there were 1347 births and 46 deaths in 1944. ⁷ The common practice then of women going 'home' to the rural areas to have their babies and of very sick people being taken home makes it difficult to estimate natural increase in towns.

Administrative action was perhaps more important in urban population growth. Township boundaries were from time to time statutorily extended to incorporate hitherto non-urban populations of indigenous settlements. This was true of the practice of declaring as 'Urban Areas' settlements adjacent to towns, a practice which increased the township population of Aba by 2,000 in 1944 when the Ama-Ogbonna areas was declared an Urban Area. But by far the most important single factor in urban population growth was immigration from within and outside the Eastern region. Immigration from

6. Source: E. Maxwell Fry and H. L. Ford, Draft Town Planning Scheme, Port Harcourt 1946, p. 6.

7. File No. 19929 Vol.11 MINLOC 16/1/1953 Dewhurst's 'Census of Enugu', 1945.

outside the region was more than offset by the flow of people from the region to other towns in Nigeria. Between 1911 and 1951 the number of immigrants to Lagos from the East increased from 264 to 26,000. Emigration to the Northern towns rose from about 3,000 in 1921 to 12,000 in 1931 and up to 120,000 in 1952.⁸ This exodus was a factor in slowing down the rate of urban growth in the Eastern region. Internal migration, which clearly was the major source of urban growth, took place against a background of an uneven distribution of rural population in the region. All the major towns developed on the fringes of the north-west (Onitsha, Awka, Okigwi, Orlu and northern Owerri) to south-east (Annang-Ibibio) belt of very high population density. From this belt, streams of migrants moved north and south, naturally often to towns nearest their areas of origin. The population histories of Enugu, Umuahia, Port Harcourt and Onitsha will illustrate the trend of growth, the ethnic composition and occupational structure of towns in the region.

Enugu was founded on an empty site. In 1914, W. J. Leck, the first Colliery Manager, his European assistant and a handful of mine labourers, drawn mainly from Onitsha, formed the first permanent settlers of the town. Initially the government suspected that the local Udi inhabitants of the immediate neighbourhood would not work so that the two earliest labour camps in the town (Alfred's camp and Aaron's camp) were made up of Onitsha and Awaka workers coerced or attracted to work at the mines.⁹

8. J. S. Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1958, p. 75.

9. File No. 19929 Vol 1 CSE 1/85/9921, C. H. Croasdale, "Intelligence Report on the Labour and Labour Camps of the government Colliery at Enugu", March 1938 (EXTRACTS).

The Udi began to be brought in by their chiefs and government contractors as production in the mines expanded. The more skilled and educated personnel of the Colliery and Railway departments were drawn from the coast, and from among Yoruba and "native foreigners."

The 1921 census put the total population of 'Enugu' at 3,170, made up of 2,613 males and 557 females. Twenty three of the 3,170 people were native foreigners, 353 were Northern Nigerians, 172 Yoruba and 2,320 Igbo mainly of Onitsha origin. Most of the 99 Europeans in the town were of British origin.¹⁰ Although the Igbo formed as much as eighty three percent of the population of the town in 1929, the more prestigious jobs were in the hands of coastal peoples and immigrants from outside the region. By 1931, the population of the town had grown to 12,959 scattered in the different 'locations' of the township.¹¹ The number of native foreigners had risen to 115 and of Europeans to 121. The depression of the early 1930's slowed the rate of growth such that by late 1930's the population of the town was still 18,000, an increase arising mainly from the establishment of the barracks of the British West African Frontier Force in the town in 1933 and the influx of camp followers and traders.

The pace of growth was accelerated during and after World War II. Large settlements east of the Asata River were declared 'Urban Areas' and their populations incorporated to that of the town.¹² Military

10. P. A. Talbot, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, V. IV, 1926, p. 22.

11. EP 4972 CSE 1/86/2804 Census of Southern Nigeria, 1931. cf OP 347/1927, on prof "Enugu Township Assessment Report", 1927.

12. OP 108 Vol. 111 Ondist 12/1/176 Enugu Township Expansion 1944-49.

personnel increased from 1,000 to 7500. Wartime economic boom in both the Colliery and Railway departments led to the expansion of the labour force in the town. Colliery labourers rose from 3,600 in 1940 to 6,800 in 1945/6. Estimates of the total population of the town varied from 40,000 to 60,000 though an official census conducted by the local authority in 1946 showed that the total population was about 35,226 excluding military personnel.¹³ This census showed that of the total adult male population eighty-seven percent were Igbo, three percent Fulani, Nupe, Hausa and Igala, two percent Bini, two percent Efik, Ibibio, Opobo, one percent Ijaw, one percent Kalabari and one percent from the Sierra Leone. The distribution of the Igbo population by administrative Divisions was:

Udi	33%	Awka	16%	Owerri	10%
Okigwi	6%	Agwu	3%	Asaba	3%
Bende	2%	Arochukwu	1%	Nsukka	1%

A detailed population breakdown by sex and residential distribution showed:¹⁴

Non-Government Quarters

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Total</u>
Asata	1,335	1,061	2,599	4,995
Ogui	1,490	1,098	2,428	5,016
Coal Camp	3,271	1,716	3,819	8,806
Ogui Urban Area	2,271	1,268	1,753	5,292
Alfred's Camp etc	291	271	565	1,127
Broderick's Compound	15	19	57	91
Total	8,673	5,433	11,221	25,327

13. File No. 19929 Vol. 11 MINLOC 16/1/1953 Dewhurts Census Report, 1945.

14. All these figures are from the File No. 19929, Dewhurts Census Report.

Government Quarters

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Total</u>
P & T Quarters	52	39	158	249
Secretariat	141	118	452	711
Railway	356	322	1,092	1,770
Police Line	105	71	254	430
African Hos.	83	46	61	190
Warders' Line	145	136	398	679
Police Training Sch.	316	34	159	509
Prisons and Reformatory	642	10	130	782
Colliery Quarters	1,657	651	1,842	4,150
Railway Quarters, Iva	17	4	19	40
Servants to Europeans	275	55	47	377
Total	3,789	1,486	4,612	9,887
Total Afr. Population	12,331	6,919	15,833	35,083
Europeans	104	36	1	141
Lebanese	1	1		2
Total Population	12,436	6,956	15,834	35,226

The rapid expansion of the immediate post war years continued into the 1950's. The 1952/3 census put the total population of the town at 62,764, rising even more rapidly to 138,457 in 1963.

Umuahia had a late start and a very slow rate of growth. It competed for immigrants not only with the older and nearby trading towns of Bende and Uzoakoli but also with the rapidly growing towns of Aba and Enugu to the south and north. The earliest figures available put the total population of the town at 1,712 in 1931, made up of 785 males and 927 females. This very low figure certainly excluded the large indigenous settlements of Ndume and Afra surrounding the narrow boundaries of crown land. Most of the early immigrants were Hausa in the cattle trade and "native foreigners" introduced by European trading firms. There were twenty-two European traders in 1931 most of them of British origin. A survey carried out by J. C. Allen, a Divisional Officer in 1937 showed that the population of the town was not increasing at all. It was still 1,775 comprising: ¹⁵

15. File No. 15565A MILGOV 12/1/131, J. C. Allen, 'Intelligence Report on Umuahia-Ibeku 1937'.

Abiriba	337	Benin	15	Hausa	500	Ohafia	75
Aro	98	Dahomey	6	Ibeku	50	Onitsha	100
Asaba	150	Efik	50	Ndoki	17	Okigwi	125
Awka	150			Nupe	25	Owerri	50
		Gold Coast	50	Yoruba	52	Warri	25

By 1945 the population of the town had risen to slightly over 7,000¹⁶ nearly doubling to 12,259 by 1952/3. The relatively slow rate of growth was in many respects the result of official neglect of the Third Class Township, particularly of the township market in the 1930's when potential traders had other growing towns in the region to attract them. There was very little government presence in Umuahia. Until 1947 when the headquarters of the Owerri Province was transferred there from Port Harcourt, the town was administered from the Bende District Office through a nearby Native Authority. Between 1953 and 1963 the population of the township rose to 28,844 but the town still remained one of the smallest in the region in terms both of size and economic opportunities. "I hold no special belief for Umuahia as a township for as it stands it can scarcely be regarded as a model."¹⁷

The Onitsha have a tradition of migration from Benin under the leadership of Chima. They are said to have driven away the original Oze inhabitants of the town. They were later joined by a small group of Igala and gradually acquired Igbo culture and language.¹⁸ This tradition is now disputed. Nevertheless the town bears comparison with some of the 'traditional' towns of the Northern and Western regions.

16. OW 6500 UMPROF 5/1/83 V. K. Johnson to Resident Owerri Prov. 5/4/45 gave this estimate.

17. OW 6500 UMPROF, V. K. Johnson to Resident on Prov., 5/4/45.

18. See Op 5/1931/2 CSE, C. K. Meek, "Confidential report: Successor to Chief Mba." 1932.

Before European traders and missionaries established themselves on the Niger bank in the mid 19th century, Onitsha consisted mainly of the Inland Town variously estimated at between ten and twenty thousand. By 1900, small and scattered settlements had formed at the Waterside. These were mainly alien settlements dominated by Northerners of different ethnic groups-Hausa, Nupe Kakanda and so on, Yoruba from the Western region and large numbers of "native foreigners" working for the missions or European trading firms. They soon began to attract people from the Inland Town and the Igbo hinterland.

In 1921 Talbot's census put the population of the town at 10,319 though it is not clear whether this figure included the inhabitants of the Inland Towns. There were at that date forty-six Europeans, 172 'native foreigners', 1,684 people from the Northern Provinces and 8,416 "natives of the Southern Provinces" in the town.¹⁹ By 1931 the town had grown to 18,084 with about 14,000 at the Waterside town. The ethnic distribution of the taxable adult male population in the mid-1930's shows:²⁰

Igbo (Mainly Onitsha Igbo)	5,000
Hausa	600
Nupe	300
Yoruba	400
Kakanda	100
Miscellaneous	200

This composition changed dramatically with the post-war influx of non-Onitsha Igbo mainly from the northern districts of Onitsha Province and the densely populated areas of Orlu and Okigwi. The regional distribution of the non-Onitsha Igbo population in the early 1940's was as follows:

19. EP 11734 MINLOC 6/1/2442 W.R.T. Milne, 'Intelligence Report on Onitsha Town' 1935.

20. OP 1250 V. 11 ONDIST 12/1/816 DO Onitsha to Resident, 29/1/42.

	<u>Males</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Total</u>
Awaka Division	1,620	584	2,549	4,753
Okigwi	411	219	1,491	2,121
Owerri	152	156	125	433
Kwale	350	507	530	1,387
Udi	100	60	90	250
Nsikka	65	55	52	172
Total	2,698	1,578	4,840	9,116

By 1945 the total population of the town was estimated to be 37,000,²¹ rising to 76,921 in 1952/3 and 163,032 in 1963.

Port Harcourt like Enugu was first settled by labourers drawn from the different administrative districts of the region to work on the wharves and railway line and installations. Subsequently, Yoruba, "native foreigners" and coastal civil servants and traders came in, raising the population of the town to 7,185 in 1921. By that date there were 333 northerners, 158 Europeans, and 529 "native foreigners." The rate of growth of the town was much faster than that of other towns. It rose from 15,210 in 1931 to 34,000 in the early 1940's, reaching 58,846 in 1952 and more than doubling to 179,563 in 1963. The boundaries to the town expanded and contracted with protracted land dispute between the government and the Diobu. The eventual incorporation of 'Mile 2 Diobu' into the 'municipal boundary' increased the population of the town by 12,788 in 1952. Ethnic diversity was most pronounced in the town. Of the 210 classified in the early 1940's as 'non-natives' eight-four were British, eighty-four Lebanese, three Syrians and the others a miscellaneous collection of French, Czechs, Irish, Indians, Swiss, Dutch, Greeks, and so on.²² Of immigrants from within the region,

21. OP 2774 ONDIST 12/1/840 Fry & Benson, Draft Town Planning Scheme, 1945 par 70.

22. Fry and Ford, Draft Town Planning Scheme, P.H., 1946 section on Population.

Onitsha and Owerri Igbo formed the dominant majority while the Ijaw-speaking peoples of the immediate neighbourhood and the Efik of the southeast formed the main minority groups.

The trend of growth in these towns perhaps exaggerates the extent of urbanisation in the region as a whole. It is true that between 1921 and 1952 the population of the main urban centres in the region increased by as much as 688 percent.²³ But by 1952 only 1,130,000 or 14 percent of the total regional population of some eight million lived in centres considered 'urban' by census definition. This was a much lower figure than the 47.9 percent for the Western region even though it was higher than the Northern figures of 9 percent. Up to 1914, the rate of growth of towns in the East was slow. In fact, such towns as Enugu and Port Harcourt were only beginning to be established. There was however steady growth in the interwar years in spite of the interruption caused by the depression. Growth was accelerated during and after World War II and became even more rapid after 1950. The table below summarises the trend:

<u>Urban Centre</u>	<u>Early 1920s</u>	<u>Early 1930s</u>	<u>Early 1940s</u>	<u>Early 1950s</u>
Onitsha	10,319	18,084	37,000	76,921
Enugu	3,170	12,959	35,000	62,762
Port Harcourt	7,185	15,201	34,000	71,631
Aba	2,327	12,958	21,000	57,787
Umuahia	?	1,712	6,000	12,259

The census of 1963 showed that the population of nearly all the towns in the region more than doubled in a decade. The rapid increase of the 1950's

23. J. S. Coleman, Nigeria, Background to Nationalism, Los Angeles, 1958. p. 72. For more detailed analyses of the demographic characteristics of Nigerian towns see: N. C. Mitchell, op.cit., pp. 1-13; A.L. Mabogunje, Urbanization in Nigeria, pp. 129-171; John Eze, "Towns of Biafra", pp.278-296, C. Okonjo, "Some Demographic Characteristics of Urbanization in Nigeria", Ikenga, January 1972, pp. 73-101.

reflects not only increased population pressure on land in rural areas, but also the greater 'push' which the spread of western education had begun to exert in rural areas. School-leavers in quest of jobs streamed to the towns and out of agriculture which was becoming unfashionable and traditional crafts which were increasingly displaced by imported manufactured goods. Furthermore some of the restrictions that operated in towns in the early colonial period were gradually relaxed as urbanisation and some degree of 'detrribilization' become unavoidable realities of the later colonial period.

Eastern towns had two notable characteristics which influenced their social and economic development. They had on the whole an excess of adult males and relatively fewer number of women, children and aged. Potentially this made their economic life more vigorous ²⁴ though in the period under study, there was very little scope for economic expansion outside trade.

The increase in the number of townspeople created social problems. The existing literature often associates urbanisation in Africa with a high degree of social disorganisation. In its most exaggerated form, Davis and Golden attribute urban social problems in the continent to the "sudden juxtaposition of 20th century cities and extremely primitive cultures."

24. A. L. Mabogunje, 'The Economic Implications of the Pattern of Urbanisation in Nigeria', The Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1965, pp. 9-30 makes this point convincingly.

It is the contrast between neolithic cultures (sic) on the one hand and industrial culture on the other, not mitigated by intervening centuries of socio-cultural evolution but juxtaposed and mixed all at once....It follows that the flow of migrants from countryside to city in Africa corresponds to a rapid transition telescoping several millenia into a short span. The social disorganisation to which it gives rise is probably greater than that ever before experienced by urban populations....The result is a weird and chaotic mixture which gives to the average African city an unreal, tense and jangling quality. 25

The assumption is that the concentration of employment opportunities and social and public utility services in towns attracts streams of migrants away from their traditional kinship ties, ethnic loyalties and therefore causes social disorder. Related to this is the supposed difficulty of developing 'the municipal spirit' in places such as Eastern Nigeria because of the absence of an indigenous urban population which could give towns stability and tradition. The "lack of cohesion between the various classes and sections ... and the transient nature of much of the urban population" ²⁶ which was noted in the region in the late 1940's was attributed to the suddenness of urbanization.

Certainly the relatively rapid concentration of people from diverse backgrounds in towns in the region did create pressures for social adjustment but the changes which occurred were by no means revolutionary in nature. The form that urban social development takes is largely determined by the larger social context of urban growth and the particular

25. Kingsley Davis and Hilda H. Golden, "Urbanisation and the Development of Pre-Industrial Areas" in Paul Hatt and Albert Reiss, Cities and Society, 1957, p. 135.

26. OW 7333 UMPROF, "Social Welfare in Eastern Provinces", 1947.

historical influences on the development of towns. It has been rightly observed that "each society has structural and ethical antecedents of its own which interact with introduced physical and social attributes of cities... and so creates distinct types of urbanism." ²⁷ Audrey Smock's study of the role of ethnic unions in Eastern Nigerian towns has suggested that "traditional Igbo society, that is the social structure existing prior to the establishment of British colonial administration, incorporated many elements of the clusters of values usually associated with modernity. Conversely, for several reasons the new cities lacked characteristics connected with the image of an urban centre." ²⁸

Some of these reasons are historical. Although towns usually exert an influence far out of proportion with their size, the urban population accounted for only a small fraction of the total regional population. Furthermore towns particularly in their early days of growth, were not as attractive and comfortable as is often assumed. On the contrary the earliest immigrants faced serious social and economic problems which compelled them to maintain, indeed strengthen their links with the rural areas and to develop urban institutions which retained traditional features but were not necessarily incompatible with 'modern' urban life. Equally important was the attitude of the colonial administration to urban growth. The practical and philosophical attractions of the Native Administration system lent support to efforts to preserve as much as possible traditional forms of African life, even in towns. Towns were seen by the administration more as bases for administrative and

27. Hilder Kuper, Urbanization in West Africa, California, 1965, p. 16.

28. Audrey Smock, Ibo Politics, Harvard University Press, 1971, p. 120.

commercial activities than as centres of "civilizing influence" or social transformation, still less of permanent African population. Even with the rapid urban expansion of the post World War II years, the official response to proposals for improved social welfare services in towns was that

the first essential in any approach to the subject is that the existing organisation and methods of the people should be utilized and social welfare as such grafted onto the existing organization and methods (a case in point is the age grade system...) rather than that the attempt should be made to introduce exotic conceptions.... 29

The same attitude is evident in urban land and housing policies and the provision of social and public utility services.

The major features of urban social development in the region can be seen in the experience of three towns--Enugu and Port Harcourt which were newest in origin, fastest in growth and had the greatest concentration of government interest. Onitsha, an older town, shows how diverse ethnic and cultural groups organized their social relationships. This study emphasizes the experience of the early migrants, government attitudes to urban social development and the emergence of distinct social groups in the towns.

The earliest immigrants to towns in the region had little cause for satisfaction with their new environment. While a small proportion of them, largely native foreigners and the skilled and literate groups from the coast and the western region saw good prospects of wage employment and the prestige in the white man's job, the bulk of immigrants were either labourers who were forcibly recruited to work on government projects or traders seeking to make a fortune in towns in the face of official hostility

29. File No. 20128/1/72, UNPROF 5/1/109m G.B.G. Chapman to Chief Sec. to the Gov.^t Lagos, 31/1/48.

to entry. At Enugu, labourers for the mines and railway construction were recruited by government political agents through local chiefs and contractors. The government paid more money to the chiefs as commission than to the labourers for the work they did. Indeed forced labour at this stage was a substitute for direct taxation. The first batch of these labourers were accommodated in temporary 'bush houses' in very unsatisfactory sanitary conditions. Since the newly introduced British currency was for a long time unpopular in local markets, their pay was worth very little and their food often short.³⁰ The township was for many people associated with forced labour.

The earliest migrants who worked on the wharves and railway installations at Port Harcourt had similar problems. In November 1913 the first batch of artisans, peg-boys and labourers were sent in from Lagos and Northern Nigeria but were soon augmented by 'political' and 'casual' labour drawn from within the region.³¹ As the District Officer for Ikot Ekpene observed, "I do not wish you to think that they go willingly; they have been practically forced to go and under escort. I understand that 17 have run away from previous batches after being at work a few days."³² Government officials and labour overseers saw and treated them as "a miserable looking lot, obtained only by pressure of their chiefs."³³ Again, their pay was poor varying between nine pence and one shilling a day. Accommodation

30. See Agwa Akpala, "The Background to the Enugu Shooting Incident" in 1949. *J.H.S.N.*, Vol. iii, No. 2, 1965, pp. 335.

31. CSO 19-1941/1913, J. Eaglesome, "Progress Report, Nigerian Eastern Railways" 19/11/13.

32. OW 1/13 RIVPROF 3/1/1 DO Ikot Ekpene to Provincial Commissioner, 24/6/14.

33. CSO 1/32 Vol. 15, Lugard to CO 9/4/15.

was inadequate. Exposure and hard work weakened their health. For this class of immigrants, urban life at this early stage was not fun at all.

Voluntary immigrants increased as trade and other economic opportunities expanded. But except for government and company employees who had a recognised status in the new urban centres, most other immigrants were not encouraged to reside in the towns permanently. Lugard recognised the need for traders, especially those "engaged in trade which either required the facilities afforded by the township or minister to the requirements of its inhabitants" but he was emphatic that in land leases, "a distinction should of course be made between the native trader who seeks a township site for profit and government employees who are ordered to live there."³⁴ Those who could not satisfy government requirements tended to settle just outside the boundaries of townships under little sanitary control. Until the early 1930's the population of most towns remained small and fluid. Most immigrants saw towns as temporary places of abode where money could be made. Strong links were maintained with their rural areas of origin where security in land and the extended family was still strong. In this respect it would be true to say of Port Harcourt (and of other towns) in the 1930's that it was

a railway platform with people coming and going, each family part holding closely together, contemptuous and suspicious of the other ...; where nothing of importance to the real life of the family is allowed to happen. No one takes root in Port Harcourt, no one visualized his future in Port Harcourt, no one hopes to die in Port Harcourt. Men come to make money and have no thought of settling there for good. 34a

34. Lugard, Political Memoranda, 1918, p. 371 and 410.

34a. Sylvia Leith Ross, African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria, 1929, p. 247.

This was part of the reality of urban life at the time. At Aba, members of the Aba Progressive Union complained to the Governor of the difficulty of urban life. First they were surprised at government restrictions even though "the greater part of the layout of the township is still unoccupied". Those who had built houses in the township could not dispose of them as they wished hence the complaint "that since circumstances over which they have no control may compel them to return to their homes or go to other spheres, your petitioners respectfully pray that privilege be granted them to dispose of their properties...." ^{34b} This option was necessary because of the nature of the leases which government was prepared to grant. "...should it be possible to grant longer leases and freehold occupation of land to Africans, it would induce them not only to settle permanently on the land but to invest their capital on it and take a keener interest in the general development of the country and particularly the towns in which they have chosen for their permanent homes." ^{34c} Insecurity was therefore an important factor in the fluid nature of early urban populations.

Urban housing posed its own problems. At no time did it keep pace with the rate of urban growth partly because of the financial and technical problems of the early colonial period but also because the administration did not envisage a large and stable urban population. Government housing was limited to those who by reason of their employment had to live near their work. Otherwise housing was a matter for the individual. ³⁵ In a legislative council address in December 1930, Hugh Clifford admitted the very poor standard of housing in the towns:

The standard of accommodation for government offices throughout Nigeria is quite deplorably low and in some instances which have come to my notice it is of a kind

34b. EP 5033 CSE 1/85/2815 Petition of the Aba Progressive Union to Governor, 12/9/28.

34c. Loc cit.

35. See G. Anthony Atkinson, 'African Housing', African Affairs, Vol. 49, No. 196, 1950, pp. 228-231.

which no government that has regard for its reputation can continue indefinitely to tolerate. The shortage of accommodation--quite apart from the intrinsic inadequacy and insolubility of many of the houses which the government actually possesses--has now become acute. I have become convinced that no mere nibbling at it, no adoption of a hand to mouth policy of local and partial relief--will suffice to meet the difficulty. 36

At Enugu, the early labourers and employees of government departments were housed in temporary camps and 'bush houses', replaced in the 1920's with semi-permanent buildings. The Railway, Prison and Secretariat quarters constructed between 1923 and 1931 consisted mainly of single room blocks which did not encourage single family life. Enugu received relatively more government attention but a report on the housing condition in the town in the mid-1940's showed that

All the buildings at Alfred's camp and Aaron's camp and the Railway Quarters at Iva Valley are bush huts, built of mud-wattle walls and mat roofs. So are many of the buildings in the Ogui Urban Area; the remainder have mud-block walls and mat roofs....The police and warders' lines are constructed in the familiar blocks of one roomed quarters, with two roomed quarters for sergeants and detached three roomed dwellings for Inspectors. The Railway quarters consist of the same blocks of one roomed quarters with detached two room quarters for the more senior employees. The P & T Quarters African Hospital Quarters and the Secretariat quarters consist of detached or semi-detached one, two or three roomed quarters. 37

Even these were not nearly enough for the needs of the town and there were persistent complaints of "the difficulty for clerks newly posted to Enugu for whom no government quarters are available to find private accommodation and when that accommodation is found, it is generally most unsuitable and staff have to live under conditions in which their health

36. West Africa, February 5, 1921, p. 33.

37. EP 19929 Vol. 11 MINL-16/1/1953 Dewhurst's Report 1945.

and efficiency are impaired." ³⁸ Dewhurst's census report of 1945 showed that 63 percent of the inhabitants of government quarters at Enugu lived in overcrowded conditions with between one and seven persons in a room. Private houses were built to house as many rent payers as possible with little thought as to their comfort. Rents were usually very high and houses overcrowded.

Port Harcourt had much the same kind of housing problems. There the Civil Service Union complained a number of times to the Governor of the unsatisfactory housing conditions for junior civil servants. On one occasion a number of junior civil servants undertook an unauthorized reconstruction and extension of their quarters involving themselves in a long legal argument with the government. ³⁹ The Railway quarters which were set up in the early days of the town had by the 1930's fallen into a very bad state of repair. In the same way the labour camps had sprawled into a mass of delapidated bush houses which were an eyesore in such a modern town. The government blamed some of the housing conditions of the town on the geographical problems of extension on a narrow penninsula. The plot system of construction with its sanitary lanes took so much space and 'flat' or terrace systems as an alternative were considered very expensive. There were some improvements in the early 1930's but Leith Ross's picture of the town in the mid-30's did not reflect this:

38. File No. 19772 CSE 1/85/9840 Conf. Memo to T. Hoskyns-Abrahall on 'Town Planning Village Reconstruction and Housing', 1944.

39. File No. OW 16/3/22, RIVPROF "Petition of the Civil Service Union", 1923.

Port Harcourt has a population of about 20,000 of whom 125 are Europeans, 40 are Syrians and 11 are Indians. The Europeans live in a well kept but unattractive reservation separated from the native town by a stretch of dismal no man's land. The Township is even more depressing though it has nothing like the slum quarters which existed in Lagos until a few years ago. Roads are broad but unshaded, houses are according to official specification but have not one single feature of comfort or of beauty; stand pipes and latrines and incinerators are installed but only emphasize the unkempt, inhospitable look. The township has not the squalor of poverty as much as the squalor of alien ugliness. The streets are thronged with men in ragged singlets, dirty shirts and shapeless hats, going to their work among the freight wagons or the canoe boats, the lorries or the cask of palm oil. Women loll at the windows, the overcrowded schools spill their pupils out on the pavements, the church bells of fourteen different sects beat thinly on the hot, moisture-laden air. All around lie the swamps, black mud and sulking water, walled by the stilt-like roots of the mangroves. 40

Post-war expansion intensified housing and sanitary problems in the African location and the Diobu area. In 1946, the African township of about 217 acres housed a total of 28,783 people, upwards of thirty persons were housed in a plot. In the Diobu area of about 6,000 people, the majority of the houses were of stick and mud construction with thatched roof--"a jumble of buildings in all conditions of repair from recently finished and white-washed houses to the decayed ruins of old houses built so close together that in many cases only a narrow alleyway is left by which to walk through the settlement."⁴¹ There were serious outbreaks of smallpox, tuberculosis and chicken pox in the mid-40's attributed to overcrowded living conditions.

40. Leith Ross, op. cit., p. 238.

41. Fry and Ford, Draft Town Planning Scheme, P.H., section on Housing.

Some of these problems were to be expected in circumstances of rapid urban growth in the post-war period. In some towns, the outward spread of the population made servicing very difficult and beyond the resources of the townships. Indeed when compared to the conditions in rural areas the towns did receive much more administrative attention. On the broad regional level it is clear that the distribution of public utility services and amenities favoured urban centres which in many cases coincided with government stations.⁴²

In the early days of town growth, health and medical services were rudimentary and immigrants depended on the services of traditional herbalists or went home for treatment. But by 1917 Calabar and Onitsha had government medical officers stationed there. By the late 1920's, all the major towns in the region had European and African hospitals run by the government or the missions. The enforcement of public health and sanitary laws was more rigorous in towns and ensured relatively good health conditions. Post and telegraphic services had been installed in all townships except Onitsha by the mid-1920's. Water supply at Enugu was initially "very limited and of poor quality"⁴³ but Hugh Clifford secured a loan of £50,000 in 1923 for the township water scheme which was completed in 1927 with a capacity of half a million gallons a day. Water service was extended to Onitsha, Aba, Port Harcourt in 1929/39. Water supply in Umuhia up to the late 1930's was very poor. The main sources were the small riverlets in the ravines west and northwest of the

42. See Akin Mabogunje, Urbanisation in Nigeria, 1968, pp. 114-6.

43. File No. A 1119/1918 CSE 2/11/9 "Supply of Water in Enugu".

town. A system of pipe-borne water was completed in 1937. Sanitation in the town was under the supervision of the Medical and Sanitary Offices located at Umudike, a few miles away from the town. The hospital in the town which had accommodation for thirty patients attended some 20,719 out-patients in 1936. A new one was not built until the late 1940's. Electricity supply followed much the same pattern but drainage and conservancy services remained most unsatisfactory in all the towns down to the 1950's.

This looks impressive on the broad regional level, but at the level of individual towns these services operated in a very unsatisfactory manner. A general look at the major towns in the 1940's shows that Enugu had a European hospital and a usually overcrowded African hospital. There were also three clinics staffed by midwives, two of which were run by Missions and one privately owned. There were thirteen primary schools with a total of 4,224 pupils in 1943. The Catholic Mission had a secondary school for boys and the government was proposing to build two more. Although some parts of the town were relatively well laid out and clean, most other parts were overcrowded and poorly provided with amenities. Drainage and conservancy services were "primitive and a disgrace."⁴⁴

Port Harcourt had a small European hospital and an African hospital with 165 beds on Harbour Road. Two large water tanks supplied some 35,000 gallons of water a day to different parts of the township through stand-pipes in the streets. The town had a good electricity supply except for the Diobu area. Conservancy was poor. Some houses in the European

44. EP 13453 Vol. ii, MINLOC 1/85/6633 "Town Planning Enugu" comments by L.A., 1945; EP 19929, Dewhurst's Report.

Reservation had septic tanks but in most other parts of the town the bucket system was used and might soil dumped into the Bonny River. Drainage consisted of concrete channel drains and earth ditches on the sides of the main streets. These were usually dirty and formed breeding grounds for mosquitos. A common complaint in the town at the time was the lack of open spaces and recreational facilities for much of the township population, a deficiency due mainly to the geographic constriction.⁴⁵

Onitsha had two hospitals, one for Europeans and a sixty-eight bed hospital for Africans on Court Road. The Roman Catholic clinic in the Marina area handled all maternity work. The town had more schools than any other town in the region--thirteen primary schools and three secondary schools with a total student population of about 7,000 in 1945. All the schools were mission-owned. Water and electricity services were good but drainage and conservancy services were extremely poor because of the peculiar planning history of the town.⁴⁶

There was a limit to what the government could do even if it was so disposed. Distinct ethnic, cultural and occupational groups emerged from the mid-1930's to provide their own social control, welfare and group identity. Although there was no residential segregation except between Europeans and the rest of the township population and no permanent clustering of people from the same ethnic groups as in Northern Nigerian towns, clan, religious, union or club loyalties competed with loyalty to the township itself. The small but politically and economically dominant European

45. Fry and Ford, Draft Town Planning Scheme, P.H., 1946, "Social Services", pp. 31-7.

46. OP 2724 ONDIST 12/1/1840 Fry and Benson, Draft Town Planning, "Health and Social Services and Public Utility Services."

population remained socially distinct and aloof in the seclusion of their reservations. They had their exclusive clubs and played their games of golf and tennis. In spite of differences of interest among them as between missionaries and administrators and distinct class differences between say locomotive drivers and rich commercial agents, they constituted something of an 'ethnic' group in relation to the larger township population.

The few Syrians, Indians and Lebanes traders formed a small but economically significant group. At Onitsha they lived above or close to their stores in the centre of the town with a few along the Owerri Road. There were about 100 of them at Port Harcourt in the early 40's running the more important and well-stocked shops along Aggry Road. But nowhere in the region, indeed in the whole of West Africa, did they form anything like the influential group of Asians in East Africa.

"Native foreigners", Yoruba, coastal civil servants and a few Igbo from the more acculturated Onitsha area formed the elite group among Africans. They were closest to the Europeans in business and administration and enjoyed much social prestige. They tended to see the less privileged immigrants and the local inhabitants of the neighbourhood as "primitive". "Native foreigners" at Aba, for instance, petitioned the governor against "the present system of slavery disguised in the name of marriage which is carried out extensively in the Owerri province."⁴⁷ This small group dominated the African clubs and enjoyed a much higher standard of living. Of those in government service who earned over £100 at Enugu in 1941, eighteen percent were coastal people who formed only three percent of the township population. "Native foreigners" had a much higher status. On the other

47. See File No. 5033 CSE 1/85/2815 Petition of the Aba Progressive Union. 1928.

hand, thirty-three percent of the township population was made up of Udi people who held only seven percent of the jobs in the £100 income group.⁴⁸

It is not surprising that there was continuous conflict between the "sons of the soil", i.e., the indigenes of the areas of towns and the "stranger" elements who had a dominant influence in these towns. The Enugu Aborigines Improvement Union for instance petitioned the administration in 1940 against the monopoly of good jobs and contracts by foreigners and the exploitation of "the owners of the land."⁴⁹ The same kind of conflict existed at Aba between the Ngwa and the "strangers" in the town and in a more acrimonious form between the Onitsha and non-Onitsha Igbo in Onitsha town.

As people and interests became more and more diverse, ethnic solidarity, religious affiliation and common economic interests began to pull townspeople into smaller social groups. Ethnic or tribal unions which developed in most towns in the 1930's formed the most important single factor in urban social development in the region. Most of them started as informal family 'meetings' but soon expanded to bind people from the same villages, clans or administrative divisions together. They served functions traditionally performed by kinship and the extended family. They provided not only meeting places for people from the same areas but also linked townsmen closely with their 'home' communities.⁵⁰ Although most of them were

48. P.E.H. Hair, Enugu: An Industrial and Urban Community. WAISER, Publication, 1954.

49. NA 10/1 UDDIDIST 4/1/147 Enugu Aborigines Improvement Union, Interview with D.O. 15/3/40.

50. Mss. Afr. S. 861/ "Community Development in Eastern Nigeria", Report by Chedwick, 1952; section on 'Tribal Unions'.

organized along Western lines--with Presidents, Secretaries, minutes and so on, they retained such traditional features as drumming, dancing and the drinking of large quantities of palm wine. The organization, aims and functions of the Owerri Union of Enugu in the 1930's illustrates some of the main features of ethnic unions. Among its numerous aims were:

to encourage morality, to settle internal differences so as to keep back as far as possible the dancing of 'lancers' (supposedly an indecent dance) in the eyes of the public and that ill-reputation with which the town of Owerri has always been painted. In a union such as this, it is needless to mention that the primary aims include the establishment of mutual sympathy, the promotion of each others' interest and the rendering of assistance, pecuniary or otherwise to any of her members in case of necessity or need. To the satisfaction of members, evil influence has ceased to be at work, tribal squabbles extinct and the habit of warming the benches of the courts practically brought to an end. 51

The union held together smaller 'family meetings' of immigrants from the different villages in the Owerri area. It was required of these 'meetings' to pay "at any special occasion such lump sum of money as the Union may assess or levy ..." for development projects in the Owerri area. The union would give financial assistance to any families that were in trouble and "shall endeavour to bail any accredited person or representative who is locked up in the police cell for committing any crime other than theft and murder." 52

Urban ethnic unions were an important factor in rural development. Much of the money raised by them was sent 'home' for such development projects as the building of schools, hospitals, markets and so on. In 1951 the Enugu township administration was in contact with as many as

51. OW 298 ONPROF 1/14/304 'Owerri Union-Enugu', 'Constitution' 30/1/30.

52. Ibid.

eighty-two such unions who collectively sent home well over £25,000 annually to their different villages. It was estimated that Township Unions financed rural development in the region to the tune of £100,000 annually in the 1950's.⁵³ The administration was initially favourably disposed to these unions so long as they had no political ambitions but merely seemed to strengthen "tribal" loyalties. They were used as tax collecting agencies for Native Authorities and were even granted quasi-judicial functions in towns.

The question often asked about ethnic unions is whether by maintaining members' interests and link with their homes they were not in fact preventing the development of the municipal spirit in the towns where they were based. It seems that there were differences in the attitude of different classes in towns depending on their economic status and the extent to which they had at stake in the town of residence. Petty traders and low income wage earners faced the uncertainties of town life and were compelled by necessity to seek the security of rural land holdings and family ties while the more economically established townsmen had reason to take their urban citizenship rather more seriously. Suggestions of a lack of interest in township affairs at Enugu in the mid 40's was strongly rejected by "several government servants in private consultation (who held) that if they could finance the venture, they would

53. P.E.H. Hair, "The Study of Enugu", unpublished MSS, 1954, pp. 284-292. The most authoritative study of this phenomenon in the Eastern region is Audrey C. Smock, Ibo Politics: The Role of Ethnic Unions in Eastern Nigeria, 1971; see also Kenneth Little, West African Urbanization: The Study of Voluntary Associations in Social Change, 1965.

gladly build houses in Enugu to which to retire rather than return to their homes." ⁵⁴ At Aba some of the more prominent members of the Aba Community League saw suggestions of non-commitment to township affairs as an excuse for denying them political representation in the administration of the town.

In spite of the pragmatic blend of the traditional and the modern in urban social development, there were wider social problems that accompanied urban growth which neither the administration nor the ethnic unions felt able to handle satisfactorily. Crime of different kinds--counterfeiting, burglary, robbery, housebreaking, stealing, juvenile delinquency and prostitution seemed to increase with the expansion of towns. Crimes at Aba numbered 849 in 1931, 11 in 1932 and 565 in 1933. In 1941 there were 1804 criminal cases tried in the same town. The number rose to 3704 in 1950 and 5776 in 1951. Cases of juvenile delinquency rose from 64 in 1949 to 128 in 1950 and 171 in 1951. ⁵⁵ Enugu handled 250 serious cases of juvenile delinquency in 1947. ⁵⁶ Port Harcourt and Onitsha had large numbers of unemployed and children of school age roaming the street as hawkers, truck pushers, gamblers and load carriers, supplementing their meagre income with petty stealing. Charles Swaisland and other social welfare officers who worked in the region in the late 1940's and early fifties recommended that the solution lay in the establishment of rural industries in the areas of high rural population densities from where most of the immigrants poured into towns. ⁵⁷ This was not considered feasible in the circumstances of

54. File No. 1345 Vol. 1, CSE, "Town Planning, Enugu," 1945.

55. Mss. Afr. S 862(2) Social Survey Aba, 1952.

56. OW 7333 UMPROF, "Social Welfare in the Eastern Provinces," 1947.

57. See OP 3020 OWDIST 12/1/2087 Social Welfare Onitsha Town, 1947--
Report of Charles Swaisland.

the colonial period. Prostitution and crime were closely associated. Prostitutes were known to harbour criminals and rogues and to "draw other women from the rural areas who are attracted by fancy dress and loose moral integrity to desert their husbands and homes." ⁵⁸ In almost all the towns prostitution was difficult to combat because of the support it had from "certain big guns who condone this evil" and because "the police did not cooperate." ⁵⁹ Legally it was difficult to establish that a woman was a prostitute and there were many cases of libel instituted by women who were threatened with expulsion from towns for prostitution.

Economically, Eastern Nigerian towns were essentially commercial and service centres on which the administration and expanding trade of the region were focused. Apart from the mining industry at Enugu and the small workshops of carpenters, tailors, blacksmiths and the like; industrialisation, even on the small scale, was not a significant aspect of the economic life of the towns until the late 1950's and early 1960's. The major employers of labour were the government departments and the European trading firms. The bulk of the urban population consisted of self employed traders, artisans and businessmen.

The 1952 census grouped townspeople into five occupational categories: ⁶⁰

Agriculture: includes farmers, fishermen, lumbermen, woodcutters, hunters and related workers.

Craftsmen: artisans, production process workers and labourers.

58. Ande File No. 921 "Brothels in Aba Township."

59. See Mss. Afr. S 862(2) Social Survey Aba--Section on 'Crime and Punishment.'

60. See A. L. Mabogunje, Urbanization in Nigeria, pp. 120-121.

Trading and Clerical: sales workers, traders, clerks, accountants, bankers, postmen, secretaries and related workers.

Administrative and Professional: administrators, public service officials, managers, teachers, judges, lawyers, engineers, architects, religious workers, etc.

Other Occupations: workers such as miners, quarry men, drivers, lorrymen, stewards and other domestic workers.

The distribution of occupations in selected Eastern Nigerian towns was: ⁶¹

	<u>Agric</u>	<u>Crafts</u>	<u>Trade and Clerical</u>	<u>Admin/Prof</u>	<u>Others</u>
Enugu	3.1%	16.1%	17.6%	17.6%	45.6%
Port Harcourt	6.3	10.4	32.0	12.9	38.4
Onitsha	4.5	7.4	59.7	10.9	17.5
Aba	2.8	15.6	48.9	6.0	26.7

Enugu and Port Harcourt had the greatest concentration of government employees and labourers while Onitsha and Aba were dominant in trade. Apart from the routine activities of government employees, the economy of towns centred around trade. The development of trade followed the same pattern of slow initial growth, expansion in the inter-war years, in spite of the disruption of the depression, and rapid expansion during and after World War II.

Port Harcourt was founded primarily for the evacuation of coal from Enugu, tin from the Bauchi plateau and the palm produce of the Eastern hinterland. It quickly overtook Calabar and virtually put the older Delta ports out of business to become the second most important sea port in Nigeria after Lagos. ⁶² It also became the major import and distribution centre from which the towns of the interior were supplied. By 1914 when the first wharves

61. These figures are taken from John Eze, "Towns of Biafra," p. 286.

62. See R. K. Udo and B. Ogundana, 'Factors Influencing the fortunes of Ports in the Niger Delta', Scottish Geographical Magazine, Vol. 82, 1966, pp. 173-174.

and railway line were completed, eight European trading firms took up temporary trading sites in the town and commenced selling cloth and imported foodstuffs. The difficulties of World War I prevented rapid economic expansion but by 1920 nearly all the major firms operating in the region had head offices in the town. There was considerable expansion after the fluctuations of the first two decades as indicated by the volume and value of trade handled by the Railway and Marine departments.

The Railway handled most of the export trade from the interior: ⁶³

<u>Railways</u>	<u>1936-7</u>	<u>1942-3</u>	<u>1943-4</u>
Gross tonnage (excluding coal)	35,000	42,500	43,500
Passengers	93,835	72,115	94,138
Revenue	£30,614	£116,800	£106,000

Coal carried by the Railways to Port Harcourt grew from 169,731 tons in 1939-40 to 37,500 tons in 1944-5. The port also handled a large volume of trade goods. In 1944 it had bartage for four ocean going vessels.

In that year alone export from the port was:

Coal	346,484 tons
Kernels	93,835 tons
Palm Oil	30,614 tons
Tin	18,835 tons
Groundnuts	7,341 tons

The value of imports and exports showed a corresponding increase:

	<u>1935</u>	<u>1936</u>	<u>1937</u>	<u>1938</u>	<u>1939</u>
Imports	£1,013,664	1,474,497	2,254,614	1,471,690	1,388,998
Exports	£1,925,028	2,585,983	3,855,915	2,987,833	3,287,512

Local trade at Port Harcourt did not develop on anything like the scale of Onitsha or Aba, mainly because of the geographical location of the town in

63. The figures here are all from E. Maxwell Fry and Ford, op. cit., section on 'Communication.'

relation to the regional hinterland. The usual hierarchy of African middlemen supplied the depots of the trading firms from the immediate hinterland of Ahoada Division. There were small buying stations at the waterside to handle canoe loads of produce brought in from the creeks. In the early days of the town, the township market was dominated by Hausa and Yoruba traders but from the 1930's Igbo wholesale and retail traders as well as agents of the trading firms began to control the market, supplying the itinerant traders from the towns of the interior. Industrial expansion, for which the town is now known, was a post-1950 development following the discovery of oil around the coastal neighbourhood.

Enugu was closely linked with Port Harcourt in its economic development. Like Port Harcourt it did not develop a strong local trading base first because of the proximity of the large trading town of Onitsha and second because the rural neighbourhood was sparsely populated and relatively unproductive. Economic activity centred around the mines and Railway activities. Colliery employees increased from about 2,000 in 1920 to 3,000 in 1938 and 7,500 in 1945. Production rose from 7,000 tons in 1915 to 328,000 in 1930, 505,000 in 1945 and 680,000 in 1953.⁶⁴ It was estimated that between 1917 and 1937 the Colliery made an average annual profit of £20,000 on an original capital investment of £35,000.⁶⁵

The Railway did booming business moving coal south to Port Harcourt for export to French and British West African colonies and north to the depots of the Nigerian Railways for local consumption. Apart from coal, the Railway moved some 4,500 passengers and seven tons of general goods

64. P. E. Hair, "The Study of Enugu," 1954; most of the figures which follow are taken from his study.

65. Ibid.

in 1918 from Enugu, 42,000 passengers and 25,000 tons of goods in 1929 and 133,000 passengers and 9,500 tons of general goods in 1950. It employed as many as 1,594 workers of different grades in 1944. Export trade in palm produce was insignificant because there were a number of competing produce buying stations along the railway line and because much of the produce of the Nsukka area went by land to Onitsha where slightly higher prices were offered. One European firm at Enugu bought only 18 tons of kernels and 614 tons of palm oil in 1926.⁶⁶ It was about the same for seven other firms in the town. There was better business in imported trade goods which were sold to local agents from the warehouses along High Street.

Provision and retail trade in small street shops and the three township markets was in the hands of different grades of African businessmen and women traders. Enugu gives a fairly representative picture of the multiplicity of occupations which privately employed immigrants to towns in the region engaged in. In 1945 the adult male population of the town was distributed thus:⁶⁷

Engaged in private work	3,886
Employed by Colliery	3,721
Employed by Railways	1,594
Other Govt. Depts.	2,297
Missions	151
Employees, Commercial firms	90

66. OP 347/1927 ONPROF 1/28/132 Enugu Township Assessment Report, 1927 cf OP 522/27 ONPROF 1/28/215 Annual Reports 1925-.

67. EP 19929 Vol. 11 MINLOC 16/1/1957 Dewhurst's Census Report 1945.

Those privately employed were engaged in a variety of work.

Traders	755	Herbalists	60	Pensioners	18
'Applicants'	599	Farmers	33	Mechanics	16
Tailors	234	Motor Drivers	29	Painters	15
Carpenters	230	Tinkers	29	Mattress Makers	10
Contractors	137	Domestic Servants	348	Barkeepers	9
Washermen	120	Photographers	26	Clerks	9
Butchers	120	Shopkeepers	23	Woodcutters	8
Masons	113	Goldsmiths	22	Blacksmiths	7
Shoemakers	69	Gardiners	19	Money Lenders	6
Repairers	69	Cowtenders	19	Auctioneers	5

and so on.

Onitsha existed primarily as a trading centre. Its large market was "the focal point around which the town is centred".⁶⁸ The commercial growth of the town and the expansion of its trading zone have been examined in great detail in some existing studies.⁶⁹ From the mid-19th century, local and external trade which was focused on the town expanded rapidly. The activities of European trading firms in the town attracted much of the expanding trade of the hinterland. Produce was brought from Ogrugu via the Omerun and Anambra rivers and by land from Awka, Udi and Nsukka areas. Because the Niger offered a cheaper means of transportation, higher prices were offered for local produce at Onitsha than in any other town in the region. Imported goods also sold for much less. In addition to the European firms, African businessmen brought in lorry loads of trade goods from Lagos and in this way helped to make the town the most important distribution centre in the region's trade.

68. OP 1500 ONDIST, C. Guise, "Onitsha Market Reconstruction", n.d. cf CSO 26/3-10676 "Assessment Report, Onitsha Township", 1927.

69. See J. Onyemelukwe, "Staple Food Trade in Onitsha Market", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Ibadan, 1970. *Idem*, "Some Factors in the Growth of a West African Market Town", *Urban Studies*, vol. 11, 1974, pp. 47-59 and Hodder and Uknn, *Markets in West Africa*, pp. 235-9.

The economic growth of Umuahia was slow. The initial growth of the town was interrupted by the transfer of the railway halt and European trading posts from Old Umuahia to the present site of the town in 1917. Expansion of trade was subsequently inhibited by competition with small trading centres in the neighbourhood - Uzoakoli, Imo River and Ikot Ekpene Road markets - and the fast growing town of Aba to the south. Although as many as twelve European trading firms had factories and produce buying agents in the town in the 1930's, both retail and wholesale trade expanded rather slowly. The market in the town was always in a bad state of repair and was "not a prolific source of revenue". A new market was constructed in 1940 and there was a short trade boom in the immediate post war years. In 1942, 3,894 tons of oil and 4,630 tons of kernels were exported from the town. The figures rose to 4,409 tons of oil and 5,771 tons of kernels in 1943 and 6,200 and 6,000 respectively in 1945.⁷⁰

Cattle trade in the town was of much greater economic importance. Umuahia was the centre for the distribution of meat for the whole region. In the mid-1930's, ten to twelve thousand head of cattle passed through the town yearly and as many as sixty were slaughtered weekly in the town. In the 1940's, about 50,000 cattle, valued at about half a million pounds was brought into the town by land and rail from the North and the Cameroons. Hides worth about £15,000 were exported to the United Kingdom yearly. There was also a flourishing trade in fruits, mainly oranges. Some 25,000 tons

70. OW 5586, UMDIST, Annual Report, **Sender**, 1943-5.

of oranges and large quantities of coconuts were handled by the railway in 1945 alone.⁷¹ In spite of these and of the establishment of two government industries in the town in the late 1950's, Umuahia has remained a small town with very limited trade.

The internal social and economic condition of towns in the colonial period contrasts sharply with the conventional image of the 'bright lights' draining the countryside of its virile population. For most of the colonial period, the rate of urban growth in the region was slow in relation to the size of the total population. The towns themselves had obvious deficiencies in terms of social services and opportunities. This was the result as much of official neglect of towns in the early days of growth as of the semi-rural outlook of most immigrants themselves.

The towns were officially conceived as small commercial and administrative enclaves where a permanent African population was not envisaged. It must also be granted that even with the best of intentions, there was a limit to which the towns of the colonial period could be developed as the necessary funds and skills were always in short supply. The African population of towns, especially those of them at the periphery of townships, differed little in their way of life from their rural counterparts. Insecurity within township boundaries reinforced the cultural need to maintain close links with rural areas. Urban ethnic unions developed to meet this need. The government which also wished to maintain tribal loyalties and preserve the institution of Native administration can be said to have weakened the development of a municipal spirit.

71. File No. 1345/1 MINLOC, "Umuahia Township Development" 1945. cf OW 2747 Vol. 11, "Umuahia-Ibeku-Cattle Krau Scheme", n.d.

Urban economic growth was largely influenced by the expansion of local and external trade which was handled by European commercial firms and a hierarchy of African traders. There was very little change in the structure of the region's economy. Coal mining at Enugu and the semi-skilled jobs offered by the Railway, Marine and other government departments employed numerous labourers, artisans and clerks but the towns remained essentially trade and service centres as were their pre-colonial counterparts.

CHAPTER VI

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ABA TO 1944

Pre-Colonial Aba

Aba appeared in a late 19th century map as a "large market which supplies Okrika, Bonny and adjacent places"¹ but tradition carries its origin back to legendary times when splinter groups of the Ngwa people settled first on the Western bank of the Aza river and in the process absorbed, pushed back or otherwise disposed of the original inhabitants of the area. Tradition relates that sometime in the remote past a group of Igbo agriculturists, in quest of new farmland, moved from Umunoha in the Owerri area and stopped over briefly on the western bank of the Imo River to prepare their food, some boiling others roasting their yams. As the river tide began to rise, three brothers in the group promptly crossed to the eastern bank because they boiled their yams quickly while the other group slowly roasting theirs, was stranded on the western bank. Those who crossed established new settlements at Okpuala/Ekelafor - about eighteen miles north of the present Aba township - and over the years became the progenitors of more than 400 villages that now constitute the Ngwa clan.

For obscure reasons variously attributed to population pressure, drought and Aro slave raids, some groups, following elephant footpaths

1. See CALPROF 8/2 Vol. 1, G. C. Digan, 'Report on the Bonny District', 31/3/96 for copy of this map lent to British officials by Archdeacon Crowther.

leading to water, moved south and south-eastwards from the parent settlements and established new ones within and around the present boundaries of the Aba Urban District Council area. Eziukwu, Abaukwu, Obuda, Ndiegoro, Ogor and other villages of the Aba-na-Ohazu 'Native Court Area' hold one version or the other of this migration story. ²

Although most Ngwa people acknowledge this common historical experience, there is some controversy over the precise order of migration and settlement. The growth of the township has involved continual displacement of indigenous settlements leaving no physical traces of their original pattern. The appointment of warrant chiefs in the early colonial period and the commercialisation of township land encouraged the belief that any group which could prove its seniority to the rest would be entitled to land rents and political consideration. Consequently Eziukwu, one of the large Ngwa groups of Aba, has from the 1920's claimed to have "come out of a hole in the ground" at Aba to establish its seniority. ³ Abaukwu, a rival village, said to have migrated into the area from Mvosi and to have established the first Ngwa settlement at Aba, claims with some plausibility that "this Aba is no inanimate object but a person the name Abaukwu (literally 'big Aba') prima facie conspicuously proves that we are land owners". ⁴ The

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2. Interviews with Chief Egbulefu of Eziukwu, Frank Nwogugu of Obuda, Nwaejiene Ugbo of Abaukwu, James Nwosu of Umokporji and others between 23/11/73 and 4/12/73. Their versions agree substantially with Official Intelligence Reports. See C.S.O. 26/3-20610, John Jackson "Intelligence Report on the Ngwa", 1933, J. C. Allen, "Supplementary Intelligence Report on the Ngwa, 1934 in EP7612/1C.
 3. See File No. 123/21 ABADIST, Secretary of Native Affairs Visit to Owerri Prov. esp correspondence relating to the Ugwuzor vs. Uzoigwe chieftaincy and land dispute, 1924.
 4. AUDC File No. 1652, Petition of Chief Ukaegbu Ogbuju and Others of Abaukwu to Minister of Local Government, Enugu, 6/7/60 restating this old claim.

Mgboko groups, who were probably of the Ibibio stock, now scattered about in the Aba Division, claim that they "owned all the land from the Imo River to the Asa boundary" and had received tribute from the pioneer Ngwa immigrants in the early years of their settlement.⁵ Even 'Native Foreigners' in the town have from the mid-1920's argued that "properly speaking" Aba is "a colony of settlers and not an indigenous native town in the ordinary sense of the word."⁶

It would appear that during these migrations, which occurred as part of the general phenomenon of population adjustment to land needs in the region, each group of the Ngwa settled on sites which appeared suitable for cultivation without reference to other groups, thus forming independent or at best remotely related nuclei of what later became the Aba-na-Ohazu group of villages. Most of these family groups trace their origins seven to ten generations back which would suggest an early 18th century date for the migration of the Ngwa into the Aba area.

In the early days, settlements in and around Aba were small and dispersed.⁷ Each unit consisted of a number of compounds of extended

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5. Interview with Chief Elijah Okezie (clan head of the Mgboko) 26/11/73.
 6. EB 5033 CSE Petition of the Aba Progressive Union to Resident Owerri Prov. 12/9/28. Ngwa Migration is discussed in more detail by J.E.N. Nwaguru, Aba and British Rule: The Evolution and Administrative Development of Aba Division of Igbolend, 1896-1960 Enugu, 1973.
 7. See MINLOC 17/1/11, "Southern Provinces: Tribal Customs, & Superstitions compiled from Reports of District Officers"; 1922 p. 1313 ff cf. W. B. Morgan, 'Farming Practice, Settlement Patterns and Population Density in Southeastern Nigeria', Geographical Journal, Vol. 121, 1955, pp. 320-333.

family units. Each compound in turn was a collection of clay-walled, thatched-roofed houses, arranged spatially to reflect the relationship within the extended family. Although common interests and common enemies caused a number of them to combine temporarily for defense and related purposes, they remained semi-autonomous and extremely segmented in their social, political and economic organisation. Politically, compound heads controlled the affairs of the extended family. Elders from different compounds formed the village council. Different grades of title holders - eze ofo, eze ala, eze mmuo, oke amadi and other persons of wealth and proved intelligence held positions of respect and influence in the affairs of the village. In addition to the village councils, the Okonko society, which could be joined on payment of an entrance fee, performed judicial and civil duties. It was also a mutual aid and cooperative society as well as a court for enforcing payment of debts, punishment of crime and other offences against native customs.⁸ Age grades formed a training ground for leadership and a mechanism for rapid mobilisation of able bodied men in times of emergency. They also performed communal duties such as the cleaning of roads and markets and the policing of the village, collection of tolls and arresting malefactors. Although the Aro seem to have dominated the trading life of the area, they exerted very little political influence over any groups but rather 'made Okonko' i.e. joined the Okonko society in whatever community they lived, in.

There was thus no political or religious group to exert a coercive influence for large scale population concentration. Hostilities were

8. See Mss Afr. S. 1000(1) Falk, 'Notes on the Customs and Superstitions of the People of the Aba Division, 1921.

limited to local skirmishes or surprise attacks by Aro mercenaries. The defense system did not go beyond compound walls and trenches around settlements to keep off enemies.

The dispersed settlement pattern reflects not only political decentralisation but also the economic and environmental conditions of the area. The Ngwa are an essentially agricultural people inhabiting a Guinean forest environment.⁹ Aba is located forty miles from the coast in a plain, almost featureless country relieved only by the shallow valleys of the Aba river and the Ogor hill north east of the town. The soil is sandy and an annual rainfall of some seventy to eighty inches is concentrated to between June and October. The agricultural technology was simple and farming was on a small scale. In the early days, the forest set a limit to the area that could be brought under cultivation even by communal labour. The family was the basic unit of economic organisation. Yam, the major staple crop yields best on virgin ground hence the tendency to move settlements to uncultivated areas from time to time. But with population growth, land shortage compelled the rotation of cultivated land around fixed points of settlement.

Although settlements were generally dispersed, they were grouped in some order around common centres which acted as the focus of common ritual, political and other common activities and directed competing land use activities away from the centres of settlement.¹⁰ British officers who

9. See CSO 26/3-2061/11 Captain A Leeming, 'Assessment Report on the Area under the jurisdiction of the Aba Native Court', 1927; cf Mss Afr. S 1000(1) Falk, *op. cit.*

10. Cf. G. I. Jones, 'Ecology and Social Structures among the North Eastern Igbo' *Africa*, Vol. XXI, No. 2, 1961 pp. 117-134, applies to the Ngwa too. cf. Idem 'Agriculture and Igbo Village Planning', *Farm and Forest*, Jan. to March 1945, pp. 9-15.

traversed the area in the late 19th century saw large "yam plantations extending in all directions and towns beautifully situated and kept." The towns were in most cases "approached along fine broad avenues with smaller ones in the towns themselves." The avenue leading to Obegu was twenty yards broad and had splendid trees along its entire length.¹¹ In 1896, Major Leonard on his journey to Bende met "crowds upon crowds surging around and about" at Aba, though the houses appeared no more than 'miserable huts' scattered around.¹² Some of the towns were estimated at between 400 and 800.

The major settlements near Aba itself were grouped around the Eke Oha market - an "animated assembly" during its sessions. Its minor sessions were held daily while the full ones were held periodically. It was "a place of resort and recreation when people returned from their farms. The big Eke Oha market held annual celebrations and was a pride to the heart and soul of the people commercially speaking."¹³ Itinerant craftsmen and long distance traders in the region - from the coast and the hinterland - attended large sessions of the market. The Aba river, a navigable tributary of the Imo was an important route for Aba trade with the coast. Along the watersides at Aba, coastal traders from Bonny, Opobo and Okrika established trading settlements and handled the trade between the producers of the interior and European trading firms and wealthier middlemen at the coast.

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11. FO 403/233, Report of Harcourt on the Akwette Expedition, 1896.
 12. Major Arthur Glyn Leonard, 'Notes of a Journey to Bende', The Jnl of the Manchester Geographical Society, 1898, pp. 190-2.
 13. See OW2388 UMPROF. 'Markets in Owerri Province', cf The Nigerian Observer, Vol. 3 No. 6, 1941 - "Aba Chief Protests Against Closure of Village Market"; referring to the early days of the Eke Oha market.

The growth of Aba from a large market town in the late 19th century to a 53,000 strong commercial and transportation centre fifty years later reflects a series of changes affecting not only the Ngwa agricultural country in which the town is located but also changes affecting the wider region. Just as the Ngwa migration and settlement story was part of the more general trend of population redistribution and adjustment in the region¹⁴ so was the greater concentration of population and specialised urban function at Aba in the 20th century a reflection of the general historical experience of the wider regional hinterland that sustained urban growth.

Up to the 1880's, European traders and consular agents confined their activities and influence to the coast. African middlemen showed remarkable efficiency in the trade between the coast and the interior, particularly in the 'Oil Rivers' where the import and export trade was most intense.¹⁵ Commercial competition and diplomatic rivalry among Europeans were still confined to the coast and Niger banks. From the 1880's however, the era of 'free trade' and legitimate commerce came under severe strains. Britain, France and Germany, each trying to preempt the other in securing commercial and political spheres of influence in the interior, began forceful thrusts into the hinterland.¹⁶ King Jaja of Opobo whose commercial empire blocked

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14. R. K. Udo, 'Disintegration of Nucleated Settlements in Eastern Nigeria', Geographical Review, Vol. LV, 1965, pp. 53-67.
15. For detailed discussion of developments of this period, see K. O. Dike, Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, OUP, 1956; J. C. Anene, Southern Nigeria in Transition, Cambridge 1960 and Walter Ofonagoro, "The Opening up of Southern Nigeria to British Trade and Its Consequences 1881-1916", unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, University of Columbia, 1972.
16. The literature on the 'Partition' is extensive. See J. E. Flint, 'Britain and the Partition of West Africa' in J. E. Flint and G. Williams (eds.), Perspectives of Empire, London, Longmans, 1974.

British access to the rich palm belt was shabbily deposed in 1887. The Aro, believed by the British to be exerting a pernicious political and spiritual influence in the interior, were also to be defeated.

In the last fifteen years of the 19th century the British moved their military forces into the interior during the general 'pacification' of Southern Nigeria. Between 1885 and 1896 treaties were made with towns of the southeastern hinterland - Akwette in 1892, Obohia in 1894 and Obegu - the most southerly town of the Ngwa clan - in 1895.¹⁷ In 1896 a British administrative sub-district headquarters was set up at Akwette and a military and police post at Azumini nearby. In the same year Major Leonard made a reconnaissance mission through Aba to Bende, and reported on the situation in the interior. Two years later, nine Ngwa towns including Aba were brought into treaty relations with the British on the assumption that "Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, ... in compliance with the request of the chiefs and peoples of Aba ... hereby undertakes to extend to them and to the territory under their authority and jurisdiction Her gracious favours and protection."¹⁸ Chiefs Ebe and Owuala of Aba gave a piece of land just east of the Eke Oha market to British agents for a rest house but there was little physical presence of the British in the area until the Aro expedition of 1901-2.¹⁹

17. CSO 26-2928, C.T.C. Ennals, Intelligence Report on the Ndoki Clan, 1934.

18. CALPROF 8/7/5 for Copy of Treaty; ch The Nigerian Observer, Vol. 3, No. 6, 1941 referring to this treaty.

19. See ABADIST 1/28/1 Akwette District Palaver Book, Entry for 9/10/00.

In November 1901, the Aro and a number of Ngwa towns, notably Ihie and Ogwe, apprehensive of British penetration and disturbed by the fraternisation of Obegu and the other 'treaty towns' with the British, carried out a savage attack on the town of Obegu, killing over 500 people and destroying the whole village. The Aro expedition which had been delayed for reasons of strategy was precipitated in December 1901. Column 3 of the Aro Field Force, consisting of fifteen officers, six European NCOs and 430 rank and file, heavily armed, was assigned the forceful penetration of the road from Akwette via Aba to Bende. After subduing the southern Ngwa towns Major Faunce's third column converged on Aba which had been "selected as a site for a combined fort and barracks" by the Officer commanding the expedition. It was more centrally located and "admitted of good defence" than Akwette or Azumini bases.²⁰ The D Company of the Southern Nigerian Regiment began garrison duties in the town on March 4, 1902 as the expeditionary force continued its thrust into the hinterland. Ralph Moor, the High Commissioner, held a meeting with representatives of twenty-nine towns in the neighbourhood explaining to them the intention of the colonial administration.

Aba 1902 to 1917

The movement of British military and civil personnel inland threatened the traditional position of coastal middlemen who in response began to move inland in increased numbers well ahead of the British. As European traders

20. ABADIST 12/1/1 Akwette District Officers Diary, Entries 1900-1902 cf CO 520/14/18725 Gallaway, "Political Report in Connection with the Arc Field Force Operation", 12/6/02.

were still hesitant to abandon the security of their coastal factories, Bonny, Obobo and Okrika traders established trading posts inland and continued to dominate the import-export trade until about 1918. The first significant change in the pre-colonial structure of Aba came with the growth of large permanent 'waterside' (locally called 'Ubani') settlements on both sides of the Aba River, notably "Jombo Waterside", "Allison Waterside", "Green's Waterside" and a number of such stranger settlements. Some of the settlers claimed to have acquired land from the indigenous landowners by paying "all the necessary customary fees and expenses" but more often they pretended they were in a better position to protect indigenous land rights by "interceding on behalf of the natives" with the advancing British forces.²¹ Like the first set of educated Africans west of the Niger, British penetration seemed to hold out bright prospects for them. Some of their Waterside settlements were placed in the charge of coastal 'boys' who traded for them or looked after their landed property.²²

With the establishment of a military post at Aba, the town became for some time a scene of chaos and destruction. The British brought with them soldiers and carriers most of whom were Northern Muslims and Yoruba from Western Nigeria. They brought their wives, camp followers and traders who

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21. See A175/1921 CSE 'Aba Station Plan' for the location of these Waterside settlements. Cf. E3793/9 CALPROF Annual Report 1909 and OW 3083 ABADIST Mr. Browni Brown - Petitions from, for the problems of coastal land ownership at Aba.
 22. ABADIST 33/19 Petition of E. S. Pepple to Ass Engineer n d for the system of trade and management of the 'Ubani' settlements.

formed the nuclei of what soon grew into the Hausa and Yoruba Quarters immediately south of the government rest house. Soldiers and their followers began their rampage. The Eke Oha market was no longer attended by any outsiders as soldiers more or less helped themselves in the market.²³ Aba chiefs and women were ordered to organise "a daily chop market" for soldiers. Twenty towns overrun by the expeditionary forces were pressganged for the construction of barracks and 'bush houses' for the office of the District Commissioners administration at Aba. On the pretext that "Aba had been refusing to turn up and work or give yams", many compounds around the area selected for the government station "were destroyed", clearing an area of 115 acres which the administration then claimed "by right of occupation."²⁴ With the use of forced and voluntary labour, bungalows, offices and the barracks were extended. The rudiments of a town plan began to take shape in a haphazard way. A series of broad tracks and pathways crossing and recrossing without much system, began to be constructed in the northern half of what is today the township. The earliest map of the township available (1911) shows all the government offices and installations ranging from the telegraphic office and District store to the north and north east to the courtmessangers' quarters and the execution shed to the south west.²⁵

23. ABADIST 12/1/1 Akwette District Officers Diary, 22/2/02; 20/3/02.

24. OW 160/20 UMPROF, Watt to Sec Southern Prov 21/1/21 referring to this acquisition.

25. Conf E. 40/10(2) CALPROF 13/3/17 'Plan of Aba Station' 1911.

1911

222

AD

PLAN of ABA Station

- 1. Station
- 2. Office
- 3. Telegraph Office
- 4. Police Court
- 5. School
- 6. Police Station
- 7. Dispensary
- 8. Police Station
- 9. Court Messengers
- 10. Court Messengers
- 11. Dispensary
- 12. Police Station
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→ Police Station

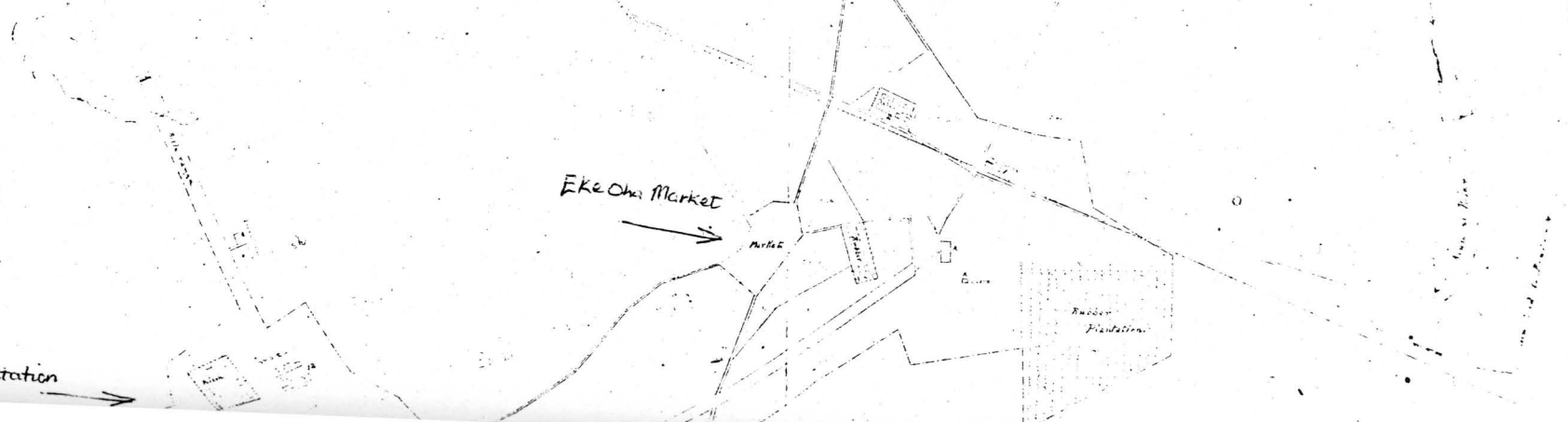
Ekecha Market

Market

Old road to ...

Rubber Plantations

Claremont station



The central location of Aba made it a convenient administrative post from which military patrols were sent to subdue recalcitrant towns. An area with an eleven mile radius from the town was to be administered from Aba. The Native Court Proclamation of 1901 granted Aba a native court which was formally opened in 1904. Some thirty-one chiefs, handpicked mainly from among those "who had materially assisted the government in the subjugation of the area"²⁶ were given judicial warrants. The court in which they sat in turn formed the main instrument through which government work was carried out. Civil law remained largely traditional law. Cases tried by warrant chiefs were subject to review by the local government commissioner. As the Supreme Court Ordinance of 1900 did not apply to Aba until 1924, both the indigenous and native foreigner elements in the town were subject to the jurisdiction of the Aba-na-Ohazu native Court.²⁷

Up to 1914 the government station was small, in the charge of a junior British officer and his small staff of telegraphic and postal employees, clerks, messenger, prison wardens and so on. The prison, with as many as 229 inmates in 1903, provided most of the labour for sanitation, construction and repair in the town. The police force in the early days consisted merely of two NCO's and nine men. Most of the government employees were either coastals or 'native foreigners' from outside Nigeria. In 1909 for instance Epelle took over from Jas Hert as government interpreter,

26. CSO 26/3-20610 John Jackson 'Intelligence Report on the Ngwa', 1933.

27. File No. 2108 MILWORK Petition of Aba Progressive Union 28/6/26 referring to the problems of this judicial arrangement.

Jumbo was District clerk, Swill was the warder, Boni and Willoughby were telegraphic operators and Halliday was assistant Inspector of schools.²⁸ None of the names was Igbo. The Hausa and Yoruba communities constituted a distinct group in their own quarters and provided their own social control almost without reference to the township administration. The earliest Igbo immigrants were the Aro, Item, Nkwere and a few 'ex-slaves' from Azumini who had been active in local and export trade prior to British penetration. They confined themselves to the outskirts of the town supplying local produce and foodstuffs to the residents of the government station. The indigenous Ngwa were shy and apprehensive of government presence, the growing influence of immigrants, the continual interference with their land and the destruction of their economic trees to provide building materials. Missionary bodies, particularly the Niger Delta Pastorate and the Quo Ibo Mission who arrived in the town shortly after the British, attached themselves to individual family groups and were locally known by the name of the village to which they were attached - 'Church Obuda' for instance. In addition to their religious duties they opened small schools to supplement the unsatisfactory and poorly attended government school opened in the town shortly after the establishment of the governmental station.

Changes were also taking place in the economic sphere. The initial disruption was soon followed by increased but altered pattern of commerce.

28. See E 3793/9 Annual Report Aba Div. 1909; For the emergence of these distinct social groups in Aba and other towns of the region at this time cf Simon Ottenberg, 'The Social and Administrative History of a Nigerian Township', International Journal of Comparative Sociology, Vol. 8, 1966, pp. 180; Barbara Callaway, "Confusion and Diffusion in Local Government ...," 1970, pp. 222-4 and Sylvia Leith Ross, African Women, 1939, pp. 236-246.

of Aba was the construction of the Eastern arm of the Nigerian Railway from Port Harcourt in 1913 through Aba in 1914-5 to Enugu in 1916. As in mid-19th century England, the benefits of railway construction was marred by the havoc it wrought along the path of construction.³²

Because of the central location of Aba and its road connections, the government decided to have a railway station there. But at the time the government had no definite land policy. It was not clear whether agreements "properly prepared in legal form" were necessary or whether "the consent of the native chiefs would suffice."³³ The later policy was adopted and Lagos advised that the railway should be explained to the chiefs in simple terms as "a rail-road which the government will bear the whole cost of construction and up keep ... Trains would run on it to take them and their produce at high speed from place to place", it would attract European firms to their land and would reduce prices of European trade goods.³⁴ The principal chief would be asked if he agreed to give up the land and the other chiefs "whose land may not necessarily be directly affected by the railway" would be asked to concur.³⁵ The chiefs should not be asked to sign anything but detailed records of the meeting with them was to be signed by a British officer and an official interpreter.

32. Cf. H. H. Dyos, 'Railway and Housing in Victorian London', Journal of Transport History, Vol. 2, 1955, pp. 11-20; 90-99.

33. OW Conf 22/14 UMPROF Instruction ref Acquisition of Land for Govt Rly, 19/10/14.

34. CSO 26/conf 380/1913 Eastern Railway, Acquisition of Land for 1914-27 esp Memo of H. C. Moorhouse, March 1914.

35. Ibid.

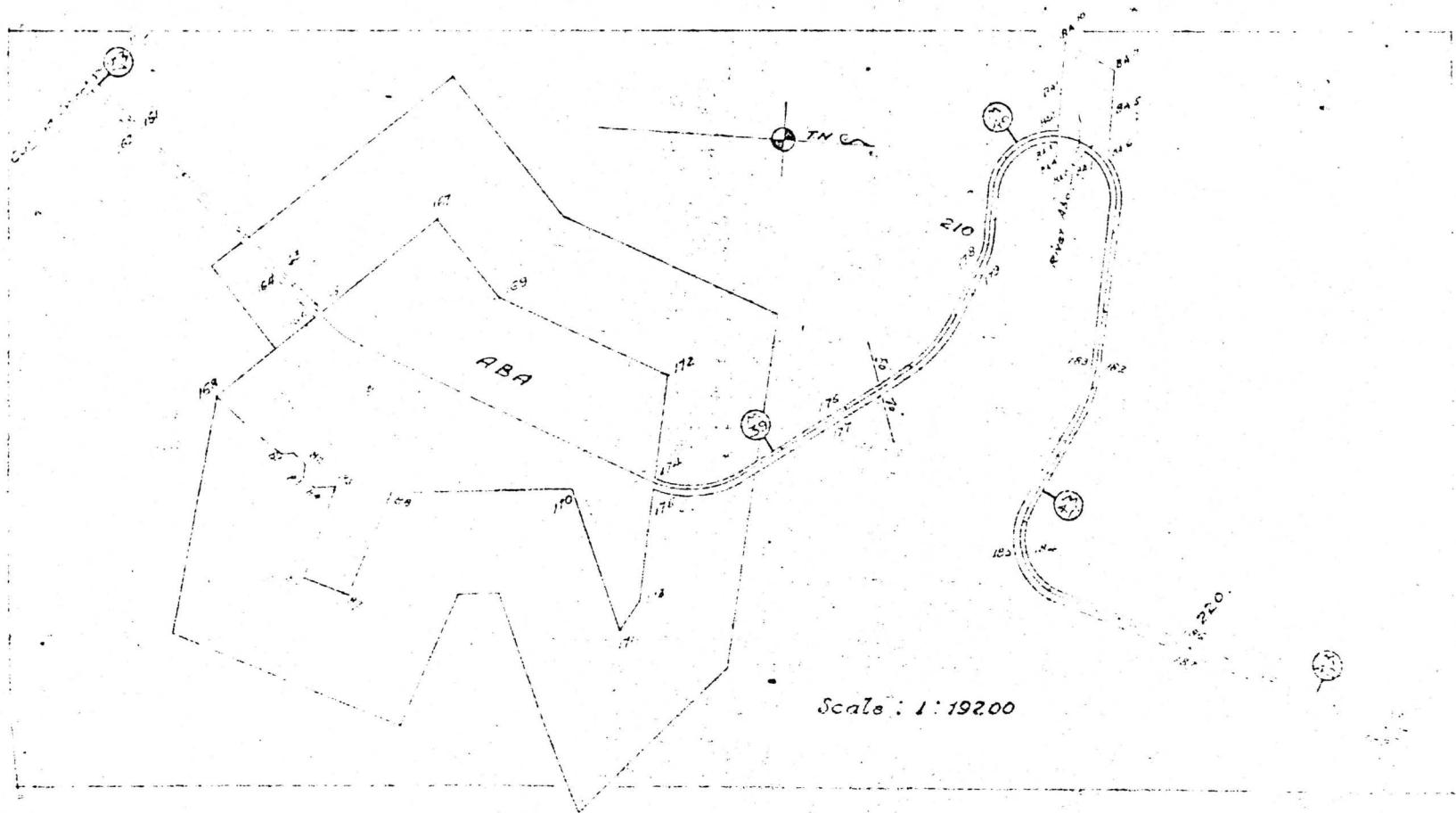
As to the precise area of land required, Reginald Hargrove, the political officer assigned the duty of acquiring railway land, argued that it was not necessary to commit the government to any specified area. He assumed that a meeting with the chiefs could be "rightly regarded" as a general preliminary to the government taking what land it required.³⁶ Because of the political tension at Aba during the First World War a government political agent, Albert Jaja, was summoned from Port Harcourt to persuade the chiefs to be agreeable. Land occupied by coastal traders at the Waterside was to be appropriated as it was not "the intention of the government to recognise in any way that these persons have any claim to the land."³⁷ They were to be treated as "squatters" and the "deeds" they held regarded as no more than "the normal agreement of a semi-civilized native with bush people". The terms of government acquisition were not fixed beyond the vague promise that compensation would be paid for houses and economic trees destroyed by the construction. European commercial firms who would lease trading plots in the station were expected to pay rents but the chiefs were not to know about this. The firms would rather be made to pay in other ways so that "the point would not be raised that the government leased the land granted for railway purposes."³⁸ Although the chiefs and people of Aba strongly objected to the extent of land demanded,³⁹ somehow eighty-two

36. Conf Rly 10/14 Hargroves to Sec. Southern Provinces Lagos 13/9/14.

37. Ibid., cf. EP 130814 CSE Annual Report, OW Prov. 1914 and CSO 16/15 - Search C. 380/1914 Chief Green to DO Aba 26/9/13.

38. Conf. Rly 10/14 Hargroves to S.S.P., Lagos.

39. See OW 13/14 RIVPROF 'Aba People Complain on Sundry Matters 1913/14 of CALPRF 12/E 1050/13 Quarterly Report Aba Dist. 1913.



Scale : 1 : 19200

signatories appear on an "Agreement" which purports to have "granted without charge, freely and voluntarily unto the government of Nigeria all such lands as may be required by the said government for the said railway, for station, warehouse buildings, roads, the establishment of traders' sites and for all and any other purpose for which the said government may think fit to use."⁴⁰ The sum of £648:14 was distributed as 'adequate compensation'. In this way most of the northern half of the present township was taken over by the government.

The railway line, station and sidings altered the physical structure of the town and further changed the existing economic pattern. Between 1914 and 1915 more than 13,000 labourers, recruited by a government political agent through the chiefs, were engaged in the unfamiliar and backbreaking heavy work of tracklaying and earthwork on the railway.⁴¹ Their food was often short and their health poor. The meagre pay of 9 pence a day was unsatisfactory but it helped to circulate the newly introduced currency in the town. Temporary sites were given to traders who supplied food to railway workers. The Hausa and Yoruba and coastal traders in the town did booming business.

The first part of the railway line from Port Harcourt to Aba was completed and opened in February 1915. Subsequent work centred around the plan and construction of the railway station. The layout of the existing government station was incorporated into a wider Railway Station

40. Copy of Hargrove Agreement in Land Registry, Lagos (now Enugu) Vol. 99, No. 3, pp. 18-26. December 1, 1915.

41. OW 578/15 RIVPROF Railway Construction-Quarterly Report September 1915; cf WO 773/14 RIVPROF Quarterly Report for Quarter ending December 31, 1914.

plan No. 69 which in many respects marked the beginning in the creation of the present urban landscape.

An irregular 'European Reservation' of about 60 acres was marked out and surrounded by a correspondingly irregular building-free-zone of over 402 acres, the latter extending a quarter of a mile from most points of the boundaries of the European Reservation. The 'Native Quarters' of the former government station and the Eke Oha market fell within the neutral zone to the south and southeast, thus making Aba a poorly segregated town. On the northern section of the European Reservation the main Railway Station building was constructed along with the Waiters' Room, the Station Master's Quarters and a number of smaller houses for the Railway Police, platelayers and domestic servants. The laying out and construction of buildings in the European Reservation was carried out piecemeal between 1916 and 1924.⁴²

The railway raised commercial expectations but the tempo of change was slowed by the economic difficulties of World War I. Imports were dominated by the materials needed for the construction of the Railway. Trade goods were short and costs were very high. Import trade was hampered by difficulties experienced by merchants in getting their produce shipped and disposed of in Europe. Competition among the firms was lessened because of the war time standardization of prices. Prices for kernels fell rapidly as approximately 80% of kernels previously shipped from the area had gone to the crushing mills in Germany. Trade reduction discouraged production. Trade stagnated.⁴³

42. See OW 5/18 ABADIST and CSO 16/15 c. 380/1913 for the early Station Plans.

43. CSE 841/1915 Annual Report OW Prov. 1914/15.

One European firm opened provisionally at Aba in 1914 but was forced to close down again because of shipping problems. By 1916, however, three firms leased trading and residential plots at Aba.⁴⁴ As war time restrictions eased off, the firms attracted a large number of brokers and subsidiary traders. A new commercial phase had begun.

Aba was accorded second class township status in 1917 which theoretically entitled it to special administrative attention. This and other developments exerted pressure for the physical planning and extension of the town to cater for the increased number of government officials and employees of mercantile firms. The administrative, commercial and physical growth of the town are examined in the next section through the inter-war years to the end of World War II.

Aba 1917-1944: Physical Expansion

When 'Aba' was declared a Second Class Township in 1917,⁴⁵ no plan of the existing limits of the township existed. The Survey Department was instructed to delimit the area to which the provisions of the Ordinance would apply. The administration was not clear whether "native quarters should be included in the Township where Europeans resided."⁴⁶ The African section of the government station lay within the neutral zone of Station Plan No. 69. Further south, a large number of 'native foreigners', Hausa

44. CSE 3/8/3 Annual Report 1915 cf EP 1308/4 CSE Annual Report 1916 on the state of trade during the war.

45. See Nigerian Government Gazette No. 4 of 18th January 1917, making Aba a Second Class Township under the Nigeria Townships Ordinance of 1917.

46. CALPROF 5/7/229, H. Bedwell to S.S.P. 5/4/17.

and Yoruba, were building houses in a scattered manner without reference to the indigenous landowners. The Ubani settlements at the Waterside were increasing in size as more traders were attracted by the growing prospects of trade at Aba. More than eleven European firms had opened trading businesses at Aba by 1918. More government employees were coming in for the expanded administration of the town.

In response to these pressures of growth, the administration decided on "a radical reconstruction" of the town to check the "irregularities now existing."⁴⁷ A new 'Native Location' south of the existing station plan was proposed and hurriedly undertaken. A rectangular area of about 56 acres was taken over without the consent of the local landowners. In spite of persistent protests and demands for the regularisation of land rents, the Survey Department divided up the area into twelve blocks each of 300 feet by 250, separated by 50 feet roadways. Each block was in turn cut into plots 60 feet by 100 feet along narrow lanes which cut at right angles. Some of the existing roads were realigned and some indigenous settlements moved. Only £90 was made available for the necessary clearing and stumping and the construction of houses for telegraphic clerks. Conservancy was by pit latrine system and water supply would come from the nearby Aba River.

Construction was slow and hesitant even as increased numbers of immigrants pressed for plots. The scheme was shortsighted. Taking Opobo trade as the standard, it was estimated that the maximum requirement of fourteen European firms as well as the government (for whom the town was in fact being built) would be satisfied in the next ten years by 500 officials, clerks, carpenters, coopers and labourers.⁴⁸ Shortly after

47. OW 1/18 ABADIST 'Aba Native Town', 1918.

48. Ibid.

construction was started, it was realised that the scheme was already obsolete. Unauthorised buildings were springing up immediately outside the boundaries of the new location. The administration could not instruct those displaced by the scheme where to rebuild their houses as the Railways Department was only vaguely aware of its future requirements. So, little progress was made and by 1919 Aba still looked "as though no effort had been made."⁴⁹ Township staff was inadequate, funds were short and supervision poor. The township was, as a result, downgraded to the Third Class Township in 1919. Development continued to be slow and haphazard until 1921.

The plots that were available in the Native Location were given out on Temporary Occupation Licenses (T.O.L.) at the rate of £2, £1 and ten shillings a plot depending on location. Lease holders were instructed that as definite allocation of plots could not be decided upon at the time, they may be required to move at an early date.⁵⁰

From 1920, the District Officer at Aba, G. Falk, and the Resident for Owerri Province, J. Walt, were asking Lagos for the regularisation of government acquisition and suggesting schemes for the future development of the town. The leading chiefs of the town had petitioned the Governor about "the largest portion of our land taken away from us by the government without our knowledge and with no consideration whatever," including the portion occupied by the Firms and Railways.⁵¹ Local officials were aware

49. OW 590/24 ABADIST Resident Ow. Province to D.O. Aba, 13/11/19.

50. See OW 37/1921 ABADIST 'Aba Native Reservation: Application for plots'; cf. OW 36/1920 ABADIST 'Native Traders Plots.'

51. OW 160/21 UMPROF 'Aba: Land Acquisition at', edp Petition of Chief Ugwuzor and others to Lt. Governor 15/3/20.

that government was "exercising right of ownership over land which it had not acquired" and suggested that the area of the township outside the Hargrove Agreement should be taken over on a perpetual lease, granting the local landowners half of any rents that might accrue from leases to merchants and other traders. They suggested also that the coastal traders should be made to pay rents for the shadowy claims they asserted over land at the Waterside.

On the future development of the town, Falk put up a scheme for the transfer of the government station to the left bank of the Aba River where European agents of Messer Weeks Transport and Engineering Company Limited and missionaries of the Qua Ibo Mission and Seventh Day Adventist Mission were already residing, and for the reordering of the European residential and commercial plots on both sides of the Aba-Owerri Road and the extension of the Native Residential areas southwestwards between the prisons and the railway track. This would extend the 1918 Native Location on a uniform pattern to the western side of the Asa Road.⁵² It was also proposed to transfer the Eke Oha market to a more convenient site away from the European reservation--southwards to an area beyond the Yoruba evening market along Asa Road. This would enable the construction of a new road junction on the old market site.⁵³

Some of these proposals were rejected at this stage on grounds of expenditure.⁵⁴ In the meantime European firms leased large commercial

52. File No. 160/20 UMPROF G. Falk, Memo on the New Government Station at Aba 21/11/20.

53. See 42/24 ABADIST J. Walt to Executive Engineer P.H. 31/12/20; cf Falk to Walt 3/1/21.

54. C. 15/24 UMPROF D. J. Jardin--Ag. Chief Secr. Lagos: Memo on Government Buildings and sites at Aba, 1924.

and residential plots east and west of the railway line on both sides of the Aba-Owerri Road and commenced their own construction. They were so dissatisfied with the attitude of the government to the development of the town that they withdrew their voluntary subscriptions to township funds. "Most of the initial clearing and construction" they argued, "was undertaken by the firms themselves and it was difficult to persuade any government department to take an interest in the matter."⁵⁵ But as they did this they called on the government to remove indigenous settlements near their plots, thus worsening the already serious land question. Pressure from European firms and indigenous land owners forced the administration in 1921 to acquire an area of 958 acres including the 328 acres covered by the railway acquisition of 1915. The Lt. Governor persuaded the chiefs to accept an annual rent of £200. The Public Land Acquisition Ordinance was used to legalise the transaction and the local land owners were promised that in future all land leases would be made by them to whoever required more land.⁵⁶

Here again the acquisition of land and construction that followed it reflect gross official underestimation of the growth potential of the town. There was as yet no picture of the town's future to guide policy. Three plots in the Native Location were assigned to the employees of the European firms, two to government officials, nine to native foreigners, twelve to

55. See ABADIST esp. Jas A. Cowan (Miller Bros.) to D.O. Aba 7/8/18; cf T. A. Grooch (Afr and Eastern Trades Co) to D.O. Aba 31/3/20; see also Watugo of Exiama to D.O. Aba "I learnt yesterday that your favor asked us to quit out from our occupation. 7/14/20. The land of this country it has been separate to each compound but our own land there has (sic) not any part left to us...."

56. See CSO 26-03920 Annual Report OW Prov. 1921; cf Public Notice No. 33 of 22nd October 1921--Gazette Notice of 10th November 1921.

Hausas, two to the Niger Delta Pastorate and the others to 'native locals'. Official projection of the growth of the town in terms of the number of plots required was: ⁵⁷

	<u>For 1922</u>	<u>For 1924</u>
Government	30	20
Employees of Firms	30	30
Hausa	140	160
Yoruba	100	80
Native Locals	40	60
Niger Delta Pastorate	40	--
Roman Catholic Mission	80	--
Market	--	--

A small margin of 96 plots was allowed to avoid overcrowding. Officials were aware that houses were being built daily on the outskirts of the town owing to the fact that the government township was too small. By the end of 1921, it was clear that at least 500 more plots were urgently required as it was proposed that Aba would again become a Second Class Township. It became obvious that more land would be acquired since it was the general policy of the government that most urban land would be owned and controlled by the government.

Hugh Clifford's administration, unlike Lugard's, insisted that "any land acquired for public purposes must be acquired in a regular and legal manner." The extension of the township required further acquisition of land and S. M. Grier, the Chief Secretary to the government, instructed local

57. OW 3207 ABADIST "Native Location Aba; Layout", see esp. N. S. Burroughs to Resident 18/10/21; S. Boalderson, Senior Surveyor to D.O. Aba 10/10/21.

officials to use the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance to secure the additional land required by the township. The opposition of the Resident and the earlier promise of the Lt. Governor to the chiefs were overruled on the interesting ground that "His Honour (the Lt. Governor) had no authority to pledge the government in the matter" and that "the warrant Chiefs of Aba" who had been involved in previous 'District Agreements' "are not the rightful chiefs of the town ... but for the fact that they have been given warrants would not be entitled to enter into any agreement with the government which concerns communal land."⁵⁸ In 1923, therefore, a further area of 829 acres was acquired under the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance on an annual rent of £400.⁵⁹ Compensation of about £160 was paid to those injuriously affected by the acquisition including coastal settlers of Waterside.⁶⁰ Settlers on land acquired but not yet required by the government were allowed to continue in occupation until the need arose to evict them. 'Compensation plots' were granted to some native locals on nominal rents on the condition that they could not be sublet to anyone and they would be developed according to government regulations.

The controversy generated locally by these land acquisitions and the distribution of 'crown rents' has continued to create discord among the different village groups in Aba to this day. It is not surprising that Chief Ugwuzor who had acted as the spokesman of the Aba Chiefs in these

58. Conf. No. 03583/S9 in ABADIST Grier to Sec. Southern Prov. 31/6/22
cf. C 83/22 in ABADIST, Francis Jenkins to Resident Owerri 11/8/22.

59. Nigerian Government Gazette No. 4 of January 20, 1923.

60. File No. 1924 in ABADIST 'Land Valuation -- Aba'.

land deals faced a supreme court action which in 1924 stripped him of his chiefship to the satisfaction of Eziukwu and allied villages who have since received most of the land rents from the government. ⁶¹

Between 1923 and 1925, the business cum residential areas of the European Reservation were plotted. Two rows of plots along the Aba-Owerri Road were laid out and leased to European firms. The Survey Department, the Public Works Department and the Sanitary Department were all involved in the laying out and construction of parts of the extended African section of the township. The Asa Road was straightened and widened to become the second '100 foot Road' in the town--the first being the present Aziliwe Road.

Up to 1930 the extended layouts of the town were being built up and filled in. General guidelines were issued to regulate the leasing of plots and the erection of different forms of buildings. Since the administration did not envisage a permanent African population of the town, temporary occupation permits were issued and the government retained the right to cancel any such permit or lease on payment of compensation. ⁶² The administration argued with some justification that "the population of Aba is constantly changing with fluctuations in trade" and that applicants for leases were not prepared to commit themselves to such a long period as 99 years in leasing plots. Rent zones initially fixed at £2, £1, and ten shillings were raised to £5, £2 and ten shillings. The lower rent zones,

61. See OW 78/1925 ABADIST Aba Land Rents for Chiefs; cf Minutes of the Meeting of the Eastern House of Assembly 19/7/51--response to Question from Ubani ref Aba Land Acquisition and Rents.

62. See OW 13/1930 ABADIST 1/6/11 Building Regulation; OW 27/1920 ABADIST 1/2/27 'European Reservation Aba'.

it was argued, was meant for the "labourers, itinerant Hausa, petty traders and others (who) naturally gravitate towards the town and would not be allowed to congregate in uncontrolled settlements around the perimeters of the township." ⁶³ But the Association of 'Native foreigners' (later the Aba Progressive Union) complained of discrimination in government leases and rent policies. They argued that if the African population was given secure tenure they would invest on the land and settle permanently in the town.

For their part, the European commercial firms, about eleven in the late 1920's, leased plots on secure tenure, for longer terms, paying £5 premium and £10 annual rent for a plot. Lower rates were charged them for less valuable sites in the African section of the township. In the 1930's their rents were raised to over £50 a plot, yielding some £2117 in 1933 and £2677 in 1934. There was no corresponding increase in the rents paid to the indigenous landowners nor into township funds as crown rent was taken by the government. As the township expanded eastwards to the river bank and further southwards in the 1930's, the administration was apprehensive of the high rate of immigration but was not in a position to check it because of shortage of staff. Besides, there was "considerable passive resistance" to government land and rent policies, particularly during the depression. Rent evasion increased to as much as £2200 between 1932 and 1934. In 1933 alone, over 283 actions were taken in court against rent defaulters until the governor cancelled the temporary occupation license system and insisted on legal leases to give the government full rights over

63. OW 219 ABADIST 1/26/155 Rents in Aba Native Location esp C. J. Pless (Lands Officer) to Ass. Comm. of Lands, Lagos 3/1/31.

and more information about its tenants. Outstanding debts were declared irrecoverable and written off. ⁶⁴

Administrative efforts to provide essential domestic and environmental services such as electricity, water supply, township roads and drains, health and other services were not very satisfactory. When the Port Harcourt electricity scheme was undertaken in the late 1920's, members of the Aba Progressive Union asked for but failed to secure similar services for Aba. In 1930 however, the U.A.C. undertook to install an electrical generating plant of sufficient capacity to light government premises and those of the European commercial firms on commercial basis. A few years later some disused street lamps were acquired from Calabar township and sixty points along the major streets were lit till 12 midnight, thus replacing the oil lamps used hitherto. ⁶⁵ Members of the Township Advisory Board also decided to name the streets in the town using first the names of animals and birds in the area but altering them in the mid-1930's to the names still in use in the town today. ⁶⁶

In 1927/9 a water supply scheme costing £11,000 was completed. Twenty three pillar fountains, each of four taps were installed in the town. European consumption was on a twenty-four hour basis while the African section was supplied from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. As there was yet no legislation on rating in the township, a tacit understanding was reached with plot holders

64. OW 2689 PHALAND 6/1/244 Quarterly returns of Rents on Crown Land Aba; cf OW 3763 PHALAND 6/1/301 'Writing off of Irrecoverable Debts'.

65. OW 3782 ABADIST 1/7/1140 Street Lighting Aba; cf OW 3823 ABADIST 1/7/1141 'Electricity Scheme Aba'.

66. OW 7270 ABADIST 1/7/1382 Naming of Streets 1931-51.

to pay 2 percent of the annual value of tenement (roughly 8 shillings) per annum as water rate. This provoked protracted debate in the town until the government firmly fixed rates to recover parts of the enormous sum spent on supplying 54,000 gallons of water daily to the town. ⁶⁷

Aba was prone to serious soil erosion. By 1929, the "primitive method of drainage" in the town consisting largely of earth ditches was creating serious health hazards as the 'oiling and ditching' system of combating the mosquito menace in the town proved ineffective. The European Reservation had a good system of surface drainage. In 1929 the Survey Department was asked to do a cadastral survey of 157 acres of the more densely populated and developed section of the African township as preliminary to constructing a drainage system. The initial estimate for the concrete outfall and earth drains was £5,230 which the township could not afford. The township administration complained that the central government received all the rents paid by tenants and it was equitable thus for the government to finance the scheme. A modified scheme costing £2824 was proposed in October 1930 by the District Engineer but it was rejected by the Medical Officer and a new scheme to cost £6000 was to be undertaken piecemeal over ten years. Again nothing came of that plan even as the situation in the town deteriorated. In 1939, a comprehensive scheme was drawn up by the Provincial Engineer to cost £27,000 but the scheme was modified year after year until a new one was begun in 1943, discarded and

67. OW 503/1930 Vol. 1 ABADIST 1/6/56 Aba Water Supply, cf EP 9899 Vol. 1, MINLOC 6/1/184 Water rate Aba; OW 7022 ABADIST 1/7/1350 Aba Water Supply, ABADIST 1/28/20, An A Rep 1927.

replaced by yet another in 1948. The latter dragged on piecemeal until the mid-1950's.⁶⁸

Until 1927, the medical service at Aba was poor as the medical officer in charge of the town lived at Ikot Ekpene, 27 miles away. Between 1925 and 1928, African hospital was constructed at the cost of £18,000, considered one of the best in West Africa at the time.⁶⁹

As these developments were taking place in the township, the government was not prepared to expand the boundaries of the town beyond the boundaries of crown land. The Township Advisory Board and members of the Aba Progressive Union exerted pressure for the extension of the township to an area with a five mile radius from the District Office. The lawyers in the town were particularly interested in this as it would widen the jurisdiction of the supreme court and secure them more clients. In 1927, the government decided on the expedient of declaring the Ogbor Hill area north of the Aba River as 'an Urban Area' where township sanitary and other regulations would apply without any obligation on the township administration. This was formally done in 1933.⁷⁰ In the same way Ama Ogbonna area of about 2000 people, forming a wedge between two tongues of the township, was declared an Urban Area in 1944 in the face of fierce opposition from the local inhabitants against this interference with their market and land.

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68. See File No. OW 352/1930 ABADIST 1/6/45 'Drainage Scheme Aba'; OW 577 ABADIST 1/7/1363 'Drainage of Aba Township' for the voluminous correspondence on Aba drainage problem.
69. OW 7147 ABADIST 1/7/1363 'General Hospital Aba' cf CSO 26-50860 New African Hospital.
70. OW 942/21 UMPROF 4/3/2 esp D.O. to Hon. Senior Resident 21/9/26 cf Public Notice No. 51 of 1933.

"We are bushmen" chief Ogbonna is reported to have argued, "and we do not want the township to take over our land. Aba was originally part of the land belonging to my father and we were promised at the time that no further acquisition would be made." ⁷¹

It is difficult with these extensions to assess the rate of growth of the town as it is not clear which precise areas the figures available apply to. The boundaries of the township were constantly changing as rural areas were annexed to the town. The medical department estimated, however, that in 1918 the 'Native Official' population of the town was fifteen, Native non-official 3,000, with two European officials and six European non-officials. ⁷² The 1921 census put the population of the town at 2,441 and the 1931 census at 12,958, giving an annual growth rate of about 18 percent.

Urban Administration

Such expansion naturally required administrative attention. Until 1917 Aba had a very informal 'urban' administration run as an appendage to the Divisional administration. Funds were short and uncertain. The 'spill offs' from the locally controlled Native Court revenue ceased after 1914 when Lugard ordered all such funds to be paid into General Revenue. ⁷³ The government made ad hoc grants to the town for sanitary purposes in addition to the services rendered by prison labour. But these were not

71. OW 7059A ABADIST 1/7/1355 'The Extension of the Urban Area' of Public Order No. 17 of July 20, 1944; see also EP 9668 CSE 6/1/42 Urban Area, Aba Township exp Resident to SEP 30/9/43.

72. ABADIST 1/10/2 ADO to Medical Officer Ikot Ekpene, 28/3/18.

73. OW 40/20 ABADIST 1/12/411 Half Yearly Report Aba Dist. 1920 shows that Native court revenue amounted to about £5969:8 in six months. Only £88:17:9 of this was granted for local expenditure.

nearly enough for the growing needs of the expanding town. In 1917 a government order in Council No. 25 made Aba a Second Class Township under the Nigerian Townships Ordinance. O. W. Firth, the acting District Officer, was appointed 'Local Authority' and instructed to form a Township Advisory Board to advise and assist him and to "act as a buffer" between the government and the Aba Community.⁷⁴ Dr. Franklin, the medical officer in charge of Aba, E. Mayhew, the assistant District Engineer and four local agents of European commercial firms were handpicked to constitute the Board. Their first meeting was held informally at the District Office in 1918 merely to discuss "the miserable financial situation" and advise on the need to erect temporary mud latrines until funds were available. They appealed to the government and local European commercial community for financial assistance.

At this stage, the only secure source of Township revenue was Dog Licenses which yielded little or nothing.⁷⁵ In 1918/19 township estimate envisaged a sanitary grant of £56; £1 revenue from Dog Licenses and £25 from slaughter fees. From these and government grants, it was planned that the medical officer would spend £56; £180 would be spent on bush clearing, £105 on the erection of public latrines, £125 on slaughter house and £30 on the erection of dustbins. But very little of this^{was} realised as funds were not available. The Board held only three meetings in two years although it was expected to sit monthly.

The Local Authority was handicapped by his dual commitment to the township and to the Divisional administration as he was instructed to

74. OW 30/18 ABADIST 1/10/31 Township Board: Aba ref.

75. See Ref. AC/14/1918 CALPROF 5/8/10 Wright (Sec.S.P.) to Resident 7/1/18.

keep this distinction constantly in mind. He had to note, for instance "the difference between an expenditure item in the township estimate and an allocation to him...in his capacity as an administrative officer.... It was not part of the duty of the recipient to inquire whether the resources of the Treasury are sufficient or not to meet the charge." ⁷⁶

He performed a multiplicity of duties some of which he was not trained to do. He controlled crown land and leases; he was the station magistrate and reviewed cases referred to him from the native court. He supervised construction and often drew building plans--these in addition to his responsibility to the divisional administration. Government staff was always short but there was great reluctance to delegate responsibility except to the warrant chiefs who could not appreciate the needs of the town.

For their part, the 'official' members of the Township Advisory Board were impotent except with grants made specifically to their own departments. It is not surprising that Board meetings were not free from interdepartmental rivalry. In 1919 cutbacks in funds and personnel left township staff "ridiculously depleted" to enforce the numerous regulations imposed by the Township Ordinance. The medical officer made only periodic visits to Aba from Ikot Ekpene thus making parts of the Ordinance inoperative. As "no attempt had yet been made" to run the town a Second Class Township by late 1919, the new District Officer and Local Authority asked the Resident that the operation of the Township Ordinance in Aba be postponed. ⁷⁷ The town was promptly downgraded to the Third Class Township, a status it held until 1922. ⁷⁸

76. A 1930/1917 in ABADIST 1/10/1 S.S.P. to Residents, 8/6/18.

77. No. 590/18 ABADIST 1/11/18 D.O. to Resident 19/11/19.

78. ABADIST 1/11/16 Resident to Members of the TAB 29/11/19 notifying them of the disolution of the Board.

After the 1921 acquisition of land and the laying out of a new Native Location, Aba was again created a Second Class Township. A new and enlarged Advisory Board was constituted in 1923, again by the District Officer as Local Authority and seven others, all Europeans.⁷⁹ One African, a 'native foreigner' was appointed to the Board in 1924 but the framework of administration remained unaltered. From the minutes of the meetings of the Board, the contents of the yearly estimates and the 'Handing Over Notes' of successive Local Authorities, it is clear that the scope of the operation of the Board was limited and generally ineffective. The members advised the Local Authority on local bylaws and helped in the enforcement of sanitary regulations. Initiative depended on funds available and instructions from the Resident.

The main sources of township revenue were limited to government sanitary grants, grants to government departments in the township, conservancy fees and charged public slaughter-house fees market dues, and Dog, Vehicle, and Hawkers Licenses. These yielded slightly more each year as the township expanded but usually not enough for the needs of the town. When direct taxation was introduced, taxes collected in the town through 'tribal headmen' were turned over to the Ngwa Native Administration which made a subvention of an unspecified nature to the township. Land rents accrued to the government ostensibly to enable it to meet its commitment to the Departments and Divisional Administration staff working in the township. In 1924, £1806 accrued to the government from crown rents. Township revenue that year was £313:14 and expenditure £173:14. In 1925, crown

79. Nigerian Gazette No. 17 of 15th March, 1923.

rents yielded £2500. Township revenue was £463 and expenditure £314. ⁸⁰

Expenditure was confined to minor projects such as the upkeep of some roads, construction of market stalls, upkeep of cemeteries, conservancy services and so on. The government departments with responsibility for major projects collected rents, such that the township administration was in many respects redundant. The tendency was for the township authorities to be very strict in collecting what revenue it could from townspeople, e.g., higher stallage charges and a more rigorous collection of fees and charges. This usually caused great dissatisfaction among townsmen who did not understand the constraints under which the township administration operated. ⁸¹

The major weakness of township administration at this stage, indeed up to 1945, was the relationship between the township on the one hand and the government and Native/Provincial administration on the other. Township administration had very little autonomy but was subject to the flow of directives from the Resident. This was because "in theory and in practice" there was to be no difference between the township and other towns under the Native administration. ⁸² Although Clifford attempted reform some of

80. See File No. 2091 Vol. 11 MINLOC 16/1/160 Report on Aba Township Accounts: cf No. 2091 CSE 12/1/466 Aba Township Accounts. In the year 1930 township revenue improved slightly:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Revenue</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>
1929/30	923:13:11	552:11:6
1930/31	1293 -- --	1794 -- --
1933/34	2131 -- --	1349 -- --
1934/35	1625 -- --	1333 -- --
1940/41	3447:11:7	2849:18:3
1941/42	3462: 1:6	2861:14:9
1942/43	7195: 5:1	4799:14:8

Expenditure was almost always less than the revenue available because of the wish to have a 'surplus'.

81. See OW 572 ABADIST 1/26/294 Aba Township General Correspondence and so on for over high stallages in relation to Lagos.

82. EP 4930 CSE 1/85/5787 Hunts Memo on Second Class Townships. S. Prov. 1928.

which had the character of direct rule, his programme was shortlived and his successors shifted back to doctrinaire adherence to the Lugardian system of administration.

The weaknesses of township administration did not go without protest. From the early 1920's local groups had begun to exert pressure for reform. The native foreigners formed the next most influential group in the town after the small but dominant European community. In 1922 they petitioned the Governor for judicial reform and the admission of more Africans into the Township Advisory Board. The Native court at Aba tried both civil and criminal cases affecting all residents of the town. Although the Local Authority reviewed some disputed judgements of the warrant chiefs, almost always he was careful not to undermine the influence of the Native Courts. Civil law was invariably Ngwa traditional law which did not always suit the foreign elements in the town. While the Onitsha and Benin elements in the town were asking for their own warrant chiefs to sit in the Aba Native court, the Native Foreigners argued that "in their own colonies and coastal towns, they have been accustomed to have council to defend them or present their cases before the court of justice."⁸³ They insisted on Aba being brought under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court as was the case in Port Harcourt, Degema, Bonny, Opobo, and Onitsha. They also asked for wider African participation in the administration of the township. Some government officials signed the petition and consequently had

83. OW 52/22 ABADIST 1/14/12 Petition of His Excellency the Comm. from Native Foreigners Aba, 26/6/22 cf. OW 15/1924 Aba-dist, Petition of the Onitsha Section, 1924.

disciplinary action taken against them. Surprisingly, Governor Clifford considered most of the requests 'premature'.⁸⁴

Aba was, nevertheless, made a Supreme Court area in 1923 but most of the cases brought to the Supreme Court were referred back to the Native and Provincial courts. As the membership of the Native Foreigners Association increased, a new organization--The Aba Progressive Union--was formed which again petitioned against being "compelled to go to Native courts according to the present system of the Commissioner of the Supreme Court." They complained of judicial partiality when one party in a case was European and maintained that the attitude of the "bench has shaken the confidence of the community" as many people in the town felt that the protection to which they were entitled from the court of justice was at stake."⁸⁵

Other demands included prison reforms, the lease of unoccupied plots in the township, the extension of township boundaries and the opening up of an Aba-Port Harcourt road which was left unbuilt to protect the railway.

Very little reform was effected, as seen in subsequent petitions of the A.P.U., The Local Authorities, and members of the Township Advisory Board were sympathetic to some of the grievances of the different petitioners. In 1928 when pressure was brought to bear on township administration from the central and provincial governments to cut down on expenditure for township improvement, the L.A. and Board unanimously

84. OW 52/22 A.D.O. Aba to members of the Native Foreigner Community, 11/9/22.

85. File No. 2108 MILWORK 13/1/41 Petition Aba Progressive Union, 28/6/26
cf OW 5033 CSE 1/85/2815 Aba Progressive Union: Petition from 12/9/28.

demanded that "all crown rents be paid to Township funds less £600 paid to the indigenous landowners," and asked for more direct control of township funds by the township administration.⁸⁶ The reasoning in higher official circles was that there should in fact be a complete reversion to full Native Authority Administration, since Lugard, in creating townships, was understood to mean that "the difference between direct rule and rule of the township by the Native Administration would necessarily be a purely verbal one."⁸⁷ The 'Abeokuta model' was recommended but this city-state model which was so popular with some officials could not operate in a town like Aba. The peculiar historical experience of Abeokuta and its quasi-independent status until 1914 made it possible for the progressive elements of the town to develop an efficient municipal administration in spite of reactionary pressures from traditional authorities.⁸⁸ At Aba the government was not prepared to consider urban autonomy nor was it considered appropriate to incorporate the progressive members of the community into the Native administration at this stage.

By 1929, general dissatisfaction with the colonial administrative system in and outside towns in the Eastern Provinces took a violent turn. Aba was the worst victim. The 'Aba Riots' of 1929 has been extensively

86. OW 296/1927 in CSE 1/85/2787 Ingles to SSP 8/8/28.

87. See EP 4930 CSE 1/85/2782 'Second Class Townships Southern Prov.' 1928 Corres.

88. cf A Pallender Law, 'Aborted Modernisation in West Africa: The Case of Abeokuta', Journal of African History, Vol. XV, 1, 1974, pp. 65-82.

discussed in the existing literature.⁸⁹ The wider issues that led to it were not peculiar to Aba nor was the riot a purely Aba phenomenon. The government ordered fresh enumeration and assessment of taxable property-- adult males, women, children, livestock and so on, in 1929. A similar exercise had preceded the initial imposition of taxation in 1928 hence the suspicion that women were about to be taxed as men. The particularly poor state of the export and import trade, general dissatisfaction with the 'warrant chief' system and the taxation of men itself all culminated in riots organized by women in Owerri and Calabar Provinces in 1929. Starting at Oloko in Bende Division, the riots reached Aba on December 10, 1929. Officials initially dismissed it as 'isolated acts of hooliganism' but shortly afterwards, over 1000 women converged on the town. They "surged down to the District Office and Post Office where officials, Europeans, and Africans were hustled and in some cases assaulted and the buildings damaged. Others raided the station magistrate's compound while another portion... attacked and looted the stores" of European commercial firms.⁹⁰ Significantly, they "flogged a chief" and said to another "if you want to live, go and put away your cap."

89. See notably A. E. Afigbo. The Warrant Chiefs, 1972, pp. 236-247; Harry Gailly, The Road to Aba, 1970, pp. 97-133; V. C. Onwuteaka, 'The Aba Riots of 1929 and Its Relation to the System of Indirect Rule', The Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1965, esp. pp. 271-81; Judith Van Allen, 'Sitting on Men: Colonialism and the Post Political Institutions of Igbo Women', Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1970, pp. 165-182.

90. File No. 22/1929, ABADIST 1/1/14 John Jackson's Report on the Riot and the Imposition of the Collective Punishment Ordinance, 1930.

The riot was firmly quelled leaving over thirty women dead and many more injured. Loot and damage to the town totaled over £3500. The police force at Aba was strengthened for regular patrols around the area. Fines of about £1000 on the Township and £6087 on the outlying villages were imposed under the Collective Punishment Ordinance. The enforcement of the ordinance shows the anxiety of the government over the inconvenient status of townships and Supreme Court areas in the Native Administration system. Officials argued that "since Aba is a Supreme Court area, we cannot prevent anyone who is aggrieved from taking proceedings in the Supreme Court to test the legality of the fines." As it was "desirable that the government should not be made to look ridiculous," it was decided that "fines should be imposed upon the Ibo people in Aba" in order to comply with the Ordinance which stipulates that fines could be imposed on "members of any tribe" creating trouble. ⁹¹

The disturbances of 1929 took new forms throughout the early 1930's. The depressed state of trade, false rumours that government was thinking of withdrawing direct taxation created more tension in the Aba Division. Local newspapers particularly the Dawn made what officials saw as "scurrilous attacks upon the energies and the character of government officials." The International Bible Association was also making "inflammatory pseudo-religious propaganda" intended, it was alleged, "to subvert all forms of constituted authority." ^{91a}

The disturbances compelled a rethinking of the whole administrative setup in the Eastern Province. The first official Intelligence Report on

91. SP 688/70 in ABADIST 1/1/14 SSP to Resident 17/6/30.

91a. cf Conf. C. 6/29 "Political Intelligence", 1929-1933.

the Ngwa in the wake of the riots proposed "that the township should form an independent group of its own. Communities of this description cannot possibly be left outside the scope of such reform of the system of local administration. To include them within the geographical area of a neighbouring village group with its rural problems would be most impracticable and inexpedient for an urban class of people." ⁹² But the supplementary Intelligence Report, prepared in 1934 suggested that as the township was situated in the centre of the Ngwa Native Administration area "it should participate in the benefits of reorganization and be represented in any administrative and judicial bodies" to be appointed in a reorganised Native Administration. ⁹³ The township was in fact not considered viable to constitute a Native Authority of its own nor had it the necessary support and autonomy it required to build up the self sufficiency and efficiency it needed.

The increase in African representation on the Township Advisory Board in the mid-1930's did not improve the Board's position of the Board in relation to the government. If anything it made the government less receptive of suggestions and pressures for reform from the town. Neither the principle of local control of locally derived revenue nor that of representative municipal government were contemplated until the end of World War II. Judicial reform, a major feature of the 1930's was limited in scope. When the Native court at Aba was dissolved as part of Cameron's judicial reform, it was proposed that "some species of tribunal" would take its place to supplement the ineffective operation of the supreme court there.

92. CSO 26/3-20610 Jackson Intelligence Report on the Ngwa, 1933 par. 163.

93. EP 7021/17 CSE J. C. Allen, Intelligence Report on the Ngwa, Supp. 3, 1934, par 64-5; 74.

Trade

Aba owes much of its importance to its economic strength in relation to the other urban centres in the region. Located in the centre of a rich palm belt, it is also uniquely situated about forty miles equidistant from Port Harcourt on the south, Uyo to the east, Umuahia to the north and Owerri to the north-west. This favourable location made Aba an important trade and transportation centre for an extensive area and placed it in good stead in the urban rivalry that characterized the simultaneous growth of the towns of the region. In the period 1917 to 1944, the town established and consolidated this position of dominance.

The economic recovery after 1918 was reflected in the steady growth and expansion of the import and export trade. By 1918 eleven European trading firms had extended their 'ventures' from their beach-head in Port Harcourt to Aba as well as to a number of trading and produce clearing stations along the railway line.⁹⁴ Miller Brothers, African Trades & Co. Ltd., John Holt, W. B. MacIver, African Association Ltd., H.B.W. Russel and Co. Ltd., the Company of African Merchants, Paterson Zachonis, G. B. Oliphant, C.F.A.O. (the French Company) and a number of smaller firms opened large warehouses along railway sidings at Aba and smaller stores and shops in the African section of the township. They employed African agents and shopkeepers because they were more familiar with the local situation. The firms not only provided the capital and experience needed to encourage the expansion of exports but also linked Aba more closely with world trade. It was not the

94. See OW8/1818 ABADIST 1/10/8 European Trading Sites, cf EP 1038/11 CSE 12/1/344 Annual Report 1916 for the poor state of trade in 1916.

concern of the trading firms to create a sound economic base for the towns of Nigeria. Local self-sufficiency was in fact considered detrimental to the interest of the trading firms engaged in the export and import trade. They were naturally averse to local manufacture or import substitution on a large scale.

The European firms could not have operated effectively without the African middlemen. The wealthier middlemen continued in independent export business competing with the European firms while the smaller ones attached themselves to one or the other firm, collecting produce from the interior and bringing it to the depots of their European 'customers'.⁹⁵ The major exports continued to be palm oil, kernels and small quantities of cocoa and rubber. These last items were grown in small privately owned plantations in some areas of the Aba Division and collected in lorry loads for the Bata Shoe Company and other firms for railment to Port Harcourt. Oil and kernels came to Aba by road and were either purchased by the firms or taken to the Waterside for sale to coastal middlemen. The latter usually paid slightly more than the firms. The firms had to contend with the high freight rates on the Railway while the middlemen sent their produce more cheaply by canoe down to Opobo via Azumini. Prices were higher at Opobo than at Port Harcourt so that the middlemen were usually able to compete effectively with the firms, controlling about one third of the export and import trade at Aba.

The smaller middlemen and brokers supplied the major depots of their firms from as far inland as the Okigwi and Owerri Districts. Individual producers did not usually go to the firms, first because it paid them better to sell to the middleman at the waterside and because the firms

95. Mss. Afr. S. 1000(1) Falk's report on Aba Division, op. cit., 1921.

did not sell imported goods except through their agents from whom retail traders were supplied. Competition among the firms and their middlemen was intense and often unhealthy, each trying to pre-empt the other by establishing small buying posts a few miles off the township along the major roads leading into Aba. ⁹⁶

Expanded export was encouraged by the import of a large variety of tempting articles and manufactured goods--tobacco, textiles, salt, clothes, hardware, enamelware, iron pots, lamps, spirits, soap, different brands of cigarettes, bicycles, building materials and so on. These were stocked at the warehouses and branch stores of the firms and sold 'wholesale' often on credit to agents and brokers who carried them to the market and to the producers of the hinterland. Petty traders and hawkers, both men and women, sold these in special stalls in the township market or along street frontages. Such other imported goods as Norwegian stock-fish and dried river fish from the north and parts of the eastern region were handled by special groups in the main market.

Improved transport facilities encouraged the growth of trade. Although railway charges were high, most of the import and export trade was handled by the railway, which was protected by the government against cheaper land and river transport. Each addition to the existing road network added to the flow of produce to Aba. ⁹⁷ From the mid-1920's a number of light Ford

96. OW 1083/11 ABADIST 1/26/616 'Colonial Empire Marketing Board', this report on trade in Aba Division was compiled in the 1940's but has extensive information on the general organisation of trade.

97. OW 28/1920 ABADIST 1/12/28 Transportation Aba 1920. cf OW 57/22 CWDIST 1/7/7 Weeks Transport.

lorries began to ply the roads in the East. Elder Dempster, Garret, Messers Weeks Transport and Engineering Co. Ltd., Summer Transport, with a number of local lorry owners, operated regular passenger and goods transport services to and from Aba--linking the town closely with Itu, Owerri, Onitsha, Opobo and other areas outside the railway lines. As lorry loads of produce began to come into Aba, an increasingly intense 'bicycle transport industry' began to replace the previous methods of headloading and caskrolling. John Holt observed in the late 30's that most of the firms at Aba were dependent on bicycle transport for about eighty percent of the produce brought into Aba. ⁹⁸

It is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the annual volume of trade in Aba for each commodity except where the commodity had a sole destination or source and a sole means of transportation. Whereas it was possible before 1967 ⁹⁹ to use the statistics of imports and exports at the Railway and Produce Inspection archives, the trade carried by water and bicycles in the Aba area cannot be accurately gauged. But trade in Aba followed the general contours and fluctuations in the import and export trade of Nigeria and indeed in West Africa as a whole during this period. Prosperity followed the First World War. There was a rise in the volume and value of exports. This trend reached a high level in 1920. In that year, traders were reported to have brought about fifty percent more than in 1919. ¹⁰⁰ The kernel trade which had been disrupted by the withdrawal

98. OW 1070, ABADIST, "Bicycle Transport Industry" especially Report of A.D.O. Aba, 27/8/38.

99. Some of the records of the Produce Inspection Department were lost during the civil war.

100. OW 40/20 ABADIST 1/12/40 Half Yearly Report Aba Div. June to Jan. 1920; cf ABADIST 1/28/7 Annual Report 1919.

of German traders revived. However, trade slumped in 1921 and prices offered were the lowest in twenty years except in 1914. A puncheon of oil which sold for £40 in 1920 dropped to £5:15 in 1921. The weekly average export from Aba dropped from 150 puncheons of oil and 100 tons of kernels in 1920 to 20 puncheons and 20 tons of kernels in 1921. Imported goods were sold at a loss of about thirty percent.¹⁰¹ Currency problems complicated the situation. Paper notes of all denominations were unpopular, particularly the higher denominations which were practically non-negotiable in local trade. Nor was it possible to obtain legal value for the silver coins either, in spite of the effort of the Bank of British West Africa and the Colonial banks which opened branches in Aba in the early 20's to spread European money. Unscrupulous middlemen exploited the situation, buying produce from local producers in local currency as much as possible and making big profits on sale to the firms in notes. Trade became difficult to conduct. The firms issued 'chits' or vouchers to producers who had them exchanged for trade goods of equal value at their stores.

Although there were fluctuations in the export and import trade in the mid 1920's there was a general increase in the volume and improvement in the prices of goods in 1924. The firms were compelled to reduce prices of goods bought at high prices during the boom of the immediate post war years but the reduction of duties on imports in 1923 enabled them to sell more cheaply and pay slightly more for local produce. Exports increased from about 3669 tons of oil and 3469 tons of kernels in 1923 to 5604 tons of oil and 7314 tons of kernels in 1924. Prices improved from £15 a puncheon

101. ABADIST 1/28/7 Annual Report 1919.

of oil to £18; kernels from £2:10 to £16:16.¹⁰² Traders had to contend with the increased practice of adulteration of produce. Producers and middlemen often added sand, water and 'otari' (the bark of a plant which has the colour of oil but when mixed with water holds oil in suspension) to oil and added other forms of foreign bodies of kernels. In spite of the protests of the firms, it took the ruthless measures adopted by the produce inspection department in the late 1920's to eradicate this practice.¹⁰³

Trade was very good between 1926 and 1928. Encouraged by this trend, the government proposed to construct a branch railway line from Aba through Owerri and Oguta to Onitsha, as much of the produce of these areas were moved by land to Aba for railment to Port Harcourt. Many European firms did not favour the proposal or even the alternative of building a line from Port Harcourt straight to Owerri and thence Oguta. Oil was cheaply floated down the Imo and Niger creeks from Oguta and Owerri down to Degema, Abonema and Opobo making such railway proposal unnecessary.¹⁰⁴ The plan was dropped, as the shocking depression of 1929 - 31 set in. Between 1928 and 1930 prices fell by over fifty percent.¹⁰⁵ The reigning prices from 1924 to 1929 shows this downward trend.

102. ABADIST 1/28/14 Annual Report Aba Div. 1924.

103. See OW 34/24 ABADIST 1/16/23 European Firms: Complaints from and to: ref.; 1924.

104. See C14/1926 UMPROF 1/3/1 for the voluminous correspondence on this esp. C. T. Faulker, Director of Traffic Survey's Report on 'Aba-Owerri-Oguta Feeder Line'.

105. OW C6/29 ABADIST 1/1/3 Political Intelligence Aba Division by J. Jackson 1928-33.

<u>Year</u>	<u>palm oil per ton</u>	<u>palm kernels per ton</u>
1924	£28	£14:10:-
1925	25	15:10:-
1926	25	14: 5:-
1927	25	13:--:-
1928	23	14:10:-
1929	19:12:6	10: 6:-

In 1930 a tin of oil (four gallons) sold for only eight shillings at the beginning of the year falling to three shillings by mid 1930. In 1931 it sold for nine pence.¹⁰⁶ Producers were discouraged and often turned to the production of foodstuffs. But there was a slight improvement at the end of 1931. In February 1932, 480 tons of oil were exported from Aba but the prices were still as low as 1/8d a tin. Imported goods were also sold at 25% less their normal value. The general state of trade was a sad one.

The volume and value of trade rose but fluctuated between 1933 and the outbreak of World War II. Although exports and imports were on the increase reaching 19,000 and 12,007 tons respectively in 1938/9 and 17,526 tons and 13,112 tons correspondingly in 1939/40,¹⁰⁷ The War led to a cessation of imports of foodstuffs and to greater concentration on local trade in foodstuffs. Aba prospered tremendously in this period because of its rapidly expanded export of gari to other parts of Nigeria and West Africa. Over 6000 tons of gari were exported yearly from the Division handled by traders in the township. In the early 1940's, however, concentration on gari production threatened the supply of vegetable oil and other local

106. CSO 26/2- 11930 Vol. 9 Annual Report Ow Prov. 1931; Cf ABADIST 97/30 Vol. 1 Annual Report 1930.

107. OW 1083/11 ABADIST 1/26/616 Report on Trade in Aba Division cf Ref No. G 765/16/160 Report of the Nig Rly Traffic Superintendent. 18/6/40.

produce required for the war. The administration firmly imposed severe control on the export of gari to persuade producers to go back to the palm oil trade. This affected the economic life of the town very adversely.¹⁰⁸ A shortage of salt led to rationing and profiteering which caused great distress to the township community.

All through the period under review, domestic trade at Aba thrived or stagnated along with the vagaries in the import-export trade. When the township market ^{was} transferred to its present site in 1924 it absorbed a number of other small markets as the administration had spent over £700 on market stalls and would not allow rival markets or unauthorized hawking to reduce revenue from stallages. Many people who used to market lived outside the town so that traders, men and women flowed into the town daily from long and short distances. Wholesale traders came from as far as Onitsha, Umuahia, Ikot Ekpene and the coastal towns. Women traders dominated the foodstuff trade with their stocks of green leaves, crawfish, pepper, cassava, tomatoes and dried fish while wealthier traders handled 'higher order' goods in special sections of the market or in shops along the main township streets.

Up to the 1950's Aba continued to be essentially a trading centre. Small scale industries which began to be set up in the late 1940's did not alter the structure of the economy significantly. In 1947 "Mr. Nicholas Soap Factory" was opened on the northern outskirts of the town. Feasibility studies were carried out in the town in 1948 for the siting of other soap factories in the town in the early 1950's.¹⁰⁹ In 1949 a textile centre

108. See OW 1646/S1 ABADIST 1/26/922 'Gari Control' on the voluminous correspondence on this cf OW 1305 ABADIST 1/12/735 'Local Production of foodstuffs', 1940.

109. OW 7758 ABADIST, 'West Africa Market Research, Aba', 1948.

was opened in the town to train weavers for local production. Over 2000 yards of good quality cloth was produced at the centre in one year but the significance of the centre lay more in the large number of trained weavers who after their training returned to their villages to set themselves up in small scale businesses. In 1951, however, the centre was closed for lack of funds.

The Department of Commerce and Industry planned to open a shoe factory for canvas and rubber shoes in the town. This, like many such proposals, was dropped for financial and technical reasons.¹¹⁰ What did grow was a large number of small workshops for motor repair, furniture, locally made tin and iron goods and other traders.

Trade continued to expand. The introduction of 'Pioneer Oil Mills' in the Aba Division facilitated the expanded production of palm oil and kernels. In 1950 some 13277 tons of kernels and 20,750 tons of oil were exported from Aba, rising to 21523 and 39427 tons respectively in 1952. Imported goods expanded in volume and variety. The European warehouses were growing into large departmental stores. Retail and subwholesale trade gravitated to the African section of the township and to the main market. The main market became more specialized handling a large variety of imported and local trade goods. Larger and wealthier traders moved to street frontages especially along Asa Road while an assortment of foodstuff traders, artisans and timber traders dominated the new market. Aba like most towns in the region remained for long a trade and service centre.

110. OW 7880 ABADIST, 'Shoe Factory Aba', 1949-.

Some Urban Social Problems

Aba had many of the social problems of a growing town--problems of social relationship and adjustment to urban life, problems of health, housing and sanitation, of crime and prostitution. It had needs for educational, recreational and other urban amenities. Although some of these problems became more pronounced after World War II, they had been building up over the years, especially after the mid 1920's.

The town was composed of diverse social groups. For a long time these groups remained apart, each holding more of the loyalty of its members than the township itself. The small European community made up of government officials, commercial and missionary agents occupied a privileged social position because of their strong economic and political power. While the missionaries were scattered about the town, the other Europeans were segregated in their reservation. They enjoyed a different set of social services, health and recreational facilities and were not really part of the larger urban community. A European club, formed in 1926 by about 30 Europeans in the town, formed the focus of European social activities.¹¹¹ The Township Advisory Board, which was for a long time wholly European in composition, gave first priority to the social needs of their community. Most of the problems of Aba were not European problems.

The 'native foreigner' groups formed another distinct but divided community. While the Hausa and Yoruba traders and craftsmen had more in common with the lower classes of immigrants in the town, government and

111. OW 7031 ABADIST 1/7/1553 'European Club, Aba', 1926-37.

company employees from the coast and outside Nigeria had a higher social status and exerted a stronger influence for township improvement. Working through the "Native Foreigners" Association (later the Aba Progressive Union), this group claimed to represent the opinion of the whole town in their demand for judicial and administrative reform. The African Club, formed first in 1926 and reorganised in 1927 was almost exclusively for this group. 112

The third group, the indigenous Ngwa and other immigrants from within the region tended to remain in ethnic units, providing their own social controls and later forming ethnic unions to strengthen their relationship within the township and with their home towns. The Eastern region may in this respect be said to be:

fortunate in that a characteristic factor of its peoples is their natural tendency to form 'tribal' (ethnic) unions. Many of these unions were started in the 1930s...They are of natural growth...to fulfill a felt want. They are therefore potentially the most useful organisation for the promotion of social welfare in townships. 113

The numerous 'unions' served a variety of needs. Some were 'cooperative, thrift and mutual aid' associations, ¹¹⁴ others cultural and 'Progressive' unions. The 'Item-Okpi Christian Society of Aba' for instance was formed by the Item, one of the earliest Igbo immigrants into the town in the early 30's, "to bring the people of Item Okpi into closer union and thereby abolish the spirit of antagonism, heathenism;...to raise

112. OW 691/1 ABADIST 1/7/1346-7 Aba African Club; cf OW 5033 CSE 1/85/2815.

113. See Mss Afr. S 861 'Community Development in the Townships of Eastern Nigeria' Report of Chedwick.

114. See OW 815 ABADIST 1/26/418 Cooperative Societies, Aba.

funds to educate of her sons who may be benefitted in receiving higher education...; to improve the sanitary conditions of Item town with the funds..." The association would also "render assistance to any of her needy members and in the case of death of her member to aid in funeral expenses." ¹¹⁵ Most of the other ethnic unions were organised along somewhat similar lines.

Beyond the ethnic unions of this nature, there were other forms of 'Associations' that cut across ethnic groups. The 'Aba Urban District Welfare Association' for instance was formed in 1931

to assist in what makes up the progress of the British Empire and Nigeria in general and of Aba in particular; to bring before the people all the laws and Ordinances of the government and to the government the grievances and hardships of the people of Aba; to render reasonable assistance to any member subjected to malicious and unlawful prosecution...Members guilty of dishonourable conduct shall be expelled. It will be the duty of every member to protect the wife and children of any other relation of his brother member. ¹¹⁶

Some essential urban services--housing, health and educational facilities--could not be provided by sectional unions. As a large commercial centre most people in Aba catered for their own housing needs. But most houses were built to accommodate as many rent-payers as possible without too much concern for the health and convenience of the tenants. Government housing was equally unsatisfactory. In the first place it was not government policy to provide quarters for African officials. The 'Native Location' was laid out by the government but most of the construction was left to individuals. In the late 1930's there were only

115. OW 7275 ABADIST 1/7/1383 'Item-Okpi Xtian Society, Aba'.

116. OW 7275 ABADIST 1/7/1383 'Urban District Welfare Association, Aba',
'31 cf OW 1799/Vol 1 ABADIST 1/26/1017 Isusu Contribution Club.

thirty-four staff houses in the town constructed by the government. These were rented to government and company employees at the rate of four or five shillings a month.¹¹⁷ This may seem generous but the average factory worker at Aba earned £2 a month, government clerical workers £7:6, non-clerical £2:25 and labourers nine pence per day.¹¹⁸ There was always pressure for the few government houses available. Frustrated civil servants often seized what houses were available, involving the government in continual legal action, under the Recovery of Premises ordinance to evict them. The situation became worse in the 1940's when the government no longer accepted responsibility for repair of junior staff quarters but instead ordered all such staff to find themselves accommodation in the 'numerous houses to let' in the town.

The government had one school at Aba mainly for the children of native foreigners. From about 1917, however, missionaries of the different denominations, competing among themselves, opened a number of schools and churches for the indigenous groups and African immigrant communities.¹¹⁹ The Muslim community opened one small school run with a Muslim curriculum. As the town grew, private proprietors, some "with a not too savoury past," opened up a large number of unauthorised and poorly staffed schools to meet the increased educational needs of the town.

117. OWOW 108/1930 ABADIST 1/22/79 African Staff Quarters, Aba; cf OW 7702 ABADIST 1/7/1421 Junior Staff Quarters Aba.

118. OW 244/1930 ABADIST 1/22/20 Particulars of Labour and Industrial Conditions Generally, 1930.

119. OW 49/1920 ABADIST 1/12/49 Schools, Opening of by Missions, 1920-.

For a long time the health situation in the town was bad. Traditional herbalists extended their operation to the township. The situation in the government prison is a good indication of the state of medical services up to the construction of a general hospital in the town in 1928.

A man is reported sick and is seen by a dispenser whose knowledge of medicine is not extensive; but if the man continues ill he may be 'admitted to hospital'. This expression is practically a figure of speech as the hospital is situated in the centre of the prison, has five bamboo beds in it and no means of dieting the sick man. The Medical Officer visits once a week. In theory this might appear a sound arrangement; in practice what happens is that the man is very often sick for so long that by the time he is 'admitted to the hospital' he is so far gone that there is little or no chance of recovery. 120

The health and sanitation of the town improved dramatically after 1928. A resident doctor, Dr. E.B.L. Anderson was posted there in 1927 and the large number of nurses in the new hospital looked after over 10,000 out-patients a year in the 1930's.¹²¹ A child welfare clinic, a maternity and ante-natal clinic were opened at the hospital though there was some difficulty in persuading women in and around the town to use the hospital. Development in the 1940's centred around the construction of a Maternity/Nurses Training School at Aba, the extension of the facilities in the existing hospital and the construction of an Infectious Disease arm of the hospital for isolating dangerous cases.

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120. OW 34/1921 ABADIST 1/13/30 Medical and Sanitary; cf OW 75/1923. Correspondence to and from Medical and Sanitary Department.
121. OW 7147 ABADIST 1/7/1363 'Aba General Hospital', esp. Report of Dr. B. E. Ebdem.

CHAPTER VII

ASPECTS OF POST-WAR DEVELOPMENT IN ABA TO 1952

Administration

The liabilities of many decades of neglect began to show more definitely after the war. Aba shared in the administrative and political ferment of this period. Official restrictions on the economic prosperity of the war time period inflamed the existing dissatisfaction with the administrative status of the township and encouraged the growth of local pressure groups seeking reform. The economy of Aba thrived from the trade boom in gari export, the cost of living allowance which was awarded to government and company employees during and after the war and from the characteristic extravagance of soldiers stationed in the town during the war.¹ Many more traders were attracted to the town, over 2000 of them in the gari trade alone as Aba handled more than eight-five percent of the total export of foodstuffs from the Eastern Provinces during this period.² Shortages of imported goods, especially of salt in the rural markets, attracted even more traders to the town which was the only source of supply. Although the export of palm produce continued, it tended to decline gradually: 20,017 tons of oil and 15,052 tons of kernels in 1941, 17,389 tons of oil and 12,835 tons of kernels in 1942 and 14,553 tons of oil and 12,233 tons of kernels in 1943. Rubber export was only 428 tons in 1943.³

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1. Two Companies of the General Transport Corps and the West African Army Service Corps were based at Aba.
 2. See OW 1634/48 in ABADIST, Dewhurst to Resident 20/7/43. Over 6000 tons of gari were exported in 1941 and as many as 21,000 tons in 1942.
 3. OW 1435 ABADIST, Annual Report 1941; ch OW 1682 ABADIST, Annual Report, 1943.

The administration was concerned about the threat to the supply of vegetable oil for England and the declining supplies for the war effort. Lord Swinton, the British Resident Minister for West Africa, toured parts of the region and ordered strict control of all the activities that competed with the production of palm oil and kernels. Slightly higher prices were offered for palm produce and the volume of gari to be exported was fixed at about fifty percent of the 1942 level. This, in addition to the unsatisfactory system of salt rationing of the town, provoked local protests against "the annihilation of gari traders...rendering life not worth living."⁴ The soaring cost of living during and after the war neutralized the cost of living allowance made to salaried workers. Pressure was brought to bear on the government for increased wages. The general strike of 1945 affected Aba very adversely, disrupting essential services particularly in the Railway and Post and Telegraphs departments. Ex-servicemen were perhaps the most vociferous of the numerous pressure groups that emerged in the town at the time. As many as 2,511 of them had found jobs of various kinds in the Aba Division but over 1,831 still roamed the town as "unemployed agitators" stirring up trouble. The Allen Report⁵ showed that these demobilized servicemen claimed special administrative attention and privilege on account of their role in the war. They resisted local taxation and claimed arrears of pay for their period in the military service. Allen's report recommended that government

4. OW 1646/11 ABADIST 1/26/917 Petition of Aba Gari Traders Association, 16/6/43 cf The Eastern Nigerian Guardian, Thursday 8/7/43.

5. MINLOC 17/1/50, J. C. Allen, 'Report on Ex-Servicemen', 1946.

should finance local industries to absorb them but this was rejected on the grounds that government was not prepared to get involved in private enterprise. Loans were promised to deserving applicants but the £14,000 made available for such loans in the Eastern Provinces in 1948 was not nearly enough to satisfy the demands of numerous servicemen in the region.

Many more pressure groups emerged in the mid-40's. The Aba Branch of the Civil Service Union resolved to "promote the general welfare of African staff" and better conditions of service. Because of war time cutbacks in European administrative personnel, posts hitherto considered 'authorized European duty posts' were thrown open to Africans. Throughout the war there was an average of only 2.6 European officials a year in the Aba Division. They could not cope with the multifarious duties attached to their offices. This created the opportunity and urgent need to expand 'Intermediate Division' appointments leaving more administrative responsibility to Africans.⁶ Increased responsibility encouraged demands for reform and privilege.

A related group, the Aba Trades Council, an amalgamation of the P.W.D. Technical Workers Union, the Postal Workers Union, the Nigerian Union of Nurses, Railway men and so on, was formed to promote the interest of affiliated organizations, to secure united action on all general questions and to establish a close link with the Nigerian Trade Union Congress.⁷ Artisans and the lower classes of workers also formed the "Association

6. OW 1297 ABADIST S. R. Marlow, Financial Secy. Memo on the Intermediate Division of the Civil Service, 18/7/41; cf File No. 1435 ABADIST, Annual Rep, 1941.

7. OW 7457 ABADIST, 'Aba Trades Council', 1944.

of Aba Carpenters, Bricklayers and Labourers" aimed at fostering goodwill, cooperation "and intellectual and technical development" and efficiency of its members, to promote unity of purpose and action and to press for government patronage in the post war development programme.⁸ Traders in the export trade formed their own 'Palm Oil Traders Union of Aba' to improve the quality of produce but perhaps more importantly to demand a fair "share of the profits which accrue to the firms with whom alone the government enjoys the monopoly of export".⁹

Trade disputes did not force the government to do anything. There were very few government establishments in the town. Perhaps the most important development in this era of 'Unions' and protests was the emergence of the Aba Community League in 1943 -- a townwide organisation aimed at coordinating the activities of different interest groups. It was first conceived as 'The League of Aba Township Tribal Unions'. The stated aims were "to foster and encourage the groupings of the various sections, communities and elements in the Township into well organised unions, bodies, wards or electorates and to guide their actions into the proper direction"; and to be a medium of communication between the government and the various groups in the township in all matters of general interest.¹⁰ From the start, the League was torn by bitter rivalries for leadership until it broke up into two rival factions -- the Aba Community Improvement League and the Aba Community League. In spite of official support for the more

8. OW 587 ABADIST, 'The Association of Carpenters, Bricklayers...', 1942-.

9. OW 6004 ABADIST, 'Palm Oil Traders Union of Aba'.

10. OW 1634 ABADIST, 'League of Aba Township Tribal Unions': Constitution and Rule.

pacific Aba Community Improvement League and the denunciation of the Aba Community League as "a thing of straw", the latter soon emerged as the most influential single organisation commanding the support of most of the township population.¹¹ The League, led by its President R. W. Bresindo, a bishop of an African Church, as President and one C. Nweze as Secretary, quickly mobilized public support to deal not only with such wartime problems as salt rationing, income tax assessment and gari control but with administrative issues of popular representation in the Township Advisory Board and township improvement.¹² The League asked that the township be divided into wards on a geographical basis cutting across ethnic groupings which tended to detract from the unity of the town.

Local demands at Aba were only part of much wider national questions requiring official attention in the years following the war. By 1945 the government was still faithful to a reformed Native Authority system of administration. Proposals were made about "a separate legislation constituting a new kind of urban authority analagous to but not identical with the Native Authority".¹³ The Phillipson Report which was concerned with the financial and administrative procedure in the post-war period suggested that even if townships such as Aba were to be constituted into Native Authorities, they should have a special status "admitting of

11. OW 5374 ABADIST, 'Aba Community League' esp Dewhurst to Resident 16/12/43.

12. OW 1634 ABADIST, P. R. Grant to D.O. Aba, 14/7/43. cf. OW 5374, ABADIST, "Aba Community League", especially Dewhurst to Resident, OW Prov. 16/12/43.

13. No. 43910/Vol 2/7 in MINLOC 16/1/1897 S. Phillipson to S.E.P. 23/11/46.

representation of local commercial and non-African interests". As Aba was "a very largely a trading centre", there was "no desire from anyone for the township to be reconstituted into a Native Authority".¹⁴ The Local Authority at Aba insisted that meaningful reform lay only in some form of urban autonomy, allowing the local township administration to collect township tax, and impose, collect and retain its own rates. The existing system whereby the Ngwa Native Authority received tax collected in the township and made a subvention of an insignificant nature was costing the township as much as £1,014 a year as the Ngwa N.A. provided "few or no amenities for the tax payers in Aba".¹⁵ These demands were in keeping with the Phillipson recommendation which not only encouraged local control of direct taxation but insisted on townships levying rates on township property. The report urged the government to make a substantial voluntary contribution to townships in lieu of rates on government property in addition to "a strictly regulated system of grants-in-aid to help townships meet their capital and recurrent costs on particular projects essential to the life of towns".¹⁶ Following this report, the Direct Taxation Ordinance was amended in 1948 authorizing the Local Authority at Aba to be the sole tax collecting authority in the town. Though the government accepted to make a grant to the township of 50 percent of the cost of upkeep of roads and drains, it assessed its own rate liability at only £320.¹⁷ The

14. OW 1947/1 MINLOC, Butcher to S.E.P. 5/3/47 of Sidney Phillipson, Report, Par 106.

15. OW 1948/7/1, Butcher to S.E.P. 5/3/47.

16. Phillipson Report, op. cit., par 106.

17. EP 1948/1 MINLOC Memo of G.B.C. Chapman to Ag. Sec. Eastern Prov., 1948.

government accepted no responsibility for financing major capital projects, most of which were beyond the resources of such townships.

General rating in Aba was hampered as much by administrative indecision as by the fierce opposition of property owners in the township. The Assessment Ordinance (Cap. 16 of the Laws of Nigeria) was applied to Aba with effect from September 1948 by imposing a rate of 10 percent of the annual value of each tenement. This was the maximum permissible under the Ordinance and it is not surprising that it would be opposed in the township. It was expected that rates alone would yield an annual revenue of £3660 which would be used as security to raise more loans for urgently needed work on township roads and drains. The Aba Landlord's Union conducted a campaign of resistance throughout 1949/50. Only about one third of the anticipated revenue was realised from rates forcing the administration to reduce the rates to five percent in 1951 but on a much increased assessment of property.¹⁸ A local tax and rate assessment committee was set up in the town which had great success in improving the financial resources of the town.

These reforms did not go far enough to satisfy the demands of local pressure groups, particularly the Aba Community League whose membership had grown by 1947 to include nearly all the prominent members of the township community. Dr. Udo Udoma, a lawyer, was President with an executive of other educated men and wealthy traders in the town.¹⁹

18. Government Gazette No. 37 of 21/7/49; cf File No. 2092/Vol 111 MINLOC, Report of the Audit of the Accounts of Aba Township 31/3/50; OW 8221 ABADIST, 'Aba Rates: Protest of Aba Landlords' Union, 1950.

19. Officials of the A.C.L. in 1947 were: President - Udoma; Vice-President, Egbo Nwankwo; Secretary - M.W. Ubani (Member of the Eastern House of Assembly); Treasurers J.O. Nwubaye and J. Otutubuike; Financial Secretary, J. Onyia; Propaganda Officer - J.A. Iwunna (Journalist) and so on.

The League forthwith demanded copies of the minutes of the meetings of the Township Advisory Board "in good faith for healthy criticism...since the League represented the community that the Board was serving."²⁰ It asked for the improvement of township conditions and the representation of League members on the Board. It argued that the existing African members of the Board were nominated by the government and were not in any way acceptable as representing the township. From 1949 the demand for broader representation changed to a vigorous demand for full 'municipal status'. Advice on parental lines was no longer acceptable as Aba would no longer tolerate nominated members.²¹ Dr. Azikiwe had raised the Aba problem in the Legislative Council in 1948 asking whether the government was aware that "the rate payers of Aba are complaining that the Local Township Advisory Board is undemocratic because the Local Authority is said to be empowered to select the unofficial members who are regarded as his obedient servant since they are not answerable to the people".²²

In the meantime the colonial administration was considering the introduction of Local Government, particularly in the Eastern Province where both the orthodox Indirect Rule system of administration and the 'Reorganized' Native Administration of the post 1930's had proved most unsatisfactory. Although the system of democratic local government seemed an improvement on the existing Native Authority system, it was not clear how the new system would be organized in practice, still less how it would affect

20. AUDC Archives File No. 326 'Aba Community League', 1947-.

21. Idem. see Resolution of the A.C.L. 14/6/49.

22. LEGCO No. 155/48 Question of Dr. Azikiwe, 2/3/48.

townships. In 1948, a government Ordinance No. 38 granted Port Harcourt an almost autonomous municipal status. The Local Authority at Aba sought the same status for Aba as the two towns were comparable in terms of size and wealth. He proposed municipal status for Aba to take effect from January 1950 since "the only way to evoke the potential civil spirit is to provide function for it".²³ But senior government officials rejected this on the grounds that the town was not sufficiently prepared to become a first class township and that the government was anxious "to avoid as far as possible a divorce of town and country by bringing townships of the Aba type within the general Local Government Organization".²⁴ Brigadier Gibbon, who was commissioned to examine this problem as it affected the Eastern Province, recommended "the transfer of local government powers and financial responsibility to democratically elected County Councils". Native Authorities and their subordinates, including townships, would then take "a subordinate role" as local government bodies within the county framework.²⁵ Gibbon's report generated more agitation in Aba long before the Local government Ordinance came into effect in the early 1950's. Port Harcourt was at this time well on the way to attaining municipal status and full local autonomy. This encouraged the Aba Community League to seek a similar status. Between 1949 and 1951 "a crisis of one kind or another supervened to disrupt the normal course of routine work" in Aba.²⁶ The shooting of

23. File No. OW 7806 ABADIST, "Aba Township Constitution for" especially L.A. Aba to Resident Owerri Province, 18/11/48.

24. Loc. cit., S.P.L. Beaumont (S.E.P.) to Resident, Owerri, 8/2/49.

25. Brigadier E. J. Gibbon, African Local Government Reform in Kenya, Uganda and Eastern Nigeria, 1949.

26. Annual Report 1949/50.

coal miners at Enugu in 1949 offered an opportunity for waves of riots in the town ostensibly to collect relief for the victims of the Enugu massacre. The 'Zikist Movement', a nationalist organisation was banned in the town but was quickly replaced by the 'New Freedom Party' which demanded democratic reform with even greater vigour. Jaja Wachukwu, a Ngwa lawyer, inaugurated his New Africa Party at about the same time attracting among other supporters the large number of disgruntled ex-service men in the town. These protest groups were supported by Aba's first daily newspaper -- the Eastern States Express -- published by Dr. Udoma. The paper was seen by officials as "strongly nationalist and naturally disposed to be critical of the administration".²⁷

The Aba Community League which was involved in some of the wider nationalist movements exerted more pressure for an elected Township Advisory Board as preliminary to the attainment of full municipal status. Government response was slow and cautious. It was accepted that "the time has come to make an advance towards a more democratic system" but the township would continue to be administered under the Townships Ordinance until the Local Government Ordinance came into effect. A mock election was organized which would enable the Resident to know those to be 'appointed' to the Township Advisory Board. Members thus elected and 'appointed' could still be dismissed by the Resident in the new "municipal interim" that was to be introduced. This change was conceived as a preparation for the introduction of Local Government.

On the recommendation of the League, the most representative body of public opinion in Aba, the township and Urban Areas were divided up into

27. Ibid.

nine wards on a purely geographical basis, not on community representation.²⁸ Each ward was to elect three to four representatives depending on the density of taxable population. All tax and/or rate payers over twenty-one years of age were eligible to vote. Since the Aba public would not accept "a system of election by whispering into the ears of government officials, the ballot box was adopted. Intense canvassing and electioneering dominated the life of the town from late 1951 to early 1952. In February 1952, thirty members, largely candidates of the Aba Community League were elected. All of them were then 'appointed' by the Resident to take over the administration of the township from April 1, 1952.²⁹

28. See OW 8438 ABADIST 1/7/1507 'Aba Township Advisory Board: Reorganisation 1950/52'

- A Ward - Government Reserved Area, Trading Location and area north of Hundred Foot Road and bounded on the east by Asa Road and the Urban Area by Nicholas's Soap Factory.
- B Ward - Area south of Hundred Foot Road and west of Asa Road.
- C Ward - Area north of Hundred Foot Road between Asa Road and Gloucester Street.
- D Ward - Area south of Hundred Foot Road between Gloucester Street and Asa Road.
- E Ward - Area north of Hundred Foot Road between Gloucester Street and the River.
- F Ward - Area south of Hundred Foot Road to the main drain and between Gloucester Street and the River.
- G Ward - The Southern Extension Layout area.
- H Ward - Eziukwu Urban Area.
- I Ward - Ogbor Hill Urban Area.

29. Members elected were:

J.D. Anozie	G.C. Anyanechi	F. Ofodum
D.D. Onyemelukwe	E.A. Oke	F. Ogbonna
B. Ene-Ita	D.C. Ude	W. Azuh
S. Agumanu	C.A.C. Ikeotuonye	G.U. Umeasiegbu
D.O. Igbokwe	T.E. Akwari	E.H. Ekong
S.O. Ezissi	G.M. Ibekwe	Macleans Jaja
C. Onuaka	C.N. Obioha	P.E. Akpu
M.C. Ihekweazu	H.O. Chuku	P.E. Ohagu
F.C. Anazodo	S.O. Masi	S. Ogujubas
M.O. Chima	C.M. Obioha	Rubaen Ugwuzor

It is important to note that this election was an "unofficial" one as the Township Ordinance which did not provide for elections, was still in force. There was however a tacit understanding that the Local Authority, who by law still administered the town, would hand over administrative decisions to the elected members of the Board and would merely act as "Local Authority in Council".³⁰ Members had it explained to them that the whole exercise was to prepare them for the role they would be called upon to play when the Local Government Ordinance came into effect. In the meantime they were required to conform to the provisions of the Township Ordinance and accept full responsibility for their mistakes in this period of transition. This was very poor training because the Township Ordinance left very little scope for the necessary training in local self government. The Divisional and Provincial Officials were still around the corner, issuing directives and imposing strict controls on township estimates and initiative.³¹ On the pretext that the Board was being trained for local self-sufficiency, government subsidies were reduced. The Board was almost destined to fail from its inception.

Six Committees were formed through which the duties of the Board would be discharged. These were Finance and Staff, Tax Assessment, Health and Building, Market, Works and Education. Each of these committees had senior government or departmental officials attached to it to ensure continuity and a smooth transition. In practice, very little had changed. Shortly

30. OW 8811 ABADIST 1/7/1559 Annual Report Aba Township 1951/52.

31. OW 8438 ABADIST 1/7/1507 Address of J.S. Smith (Resident Owerri Prov) to the Elected Members of the Aba Township Advisory Board, 2/3/52.

after the Board was inaugurated, the members began to complain, and rightly so, that

thirty of us have been duly elected by over forty thousand people of Aba township and Urban Areas to represent them and play our full part in the administration of the town. Though in fact we do not only discuss but also execute out decisions, in law we are only to advise a single British official in the needs of our people....As 'elected' members, we represent and are responsible to public opinion, yet as 'appointed' members we are responsible to the Resident of Owerri Province. 32

Although it was believed that the introduction of local government would be an improvement on this "curious set up",³³ 'Local Government' threatened the administrative autonomy of Aba even more. There was great apprehension among the township population that the preponderance of Ngwa members in the new County would compromise township identity and subordinate its needs and development to the priorities of the rural areas. Lt. Colonel Alderton, a Senior District Officer on local government duties, was inclined to see the problems of Aba in terms of his experience in organising the introduction of Local Government in Calabar Province. Calabar had always been a Native Authority dominated township and had much less at stake than Aba in its relationship with the County in Calabar Province. But Col. Alderton was very faithful to the 'three tiered system' of local government with 'local' and 'District' Councils (including Urban District Councils) placed under a larger, predominantly rural County Council.

32. AUDC Archives - An Address of Welcome by the People of Aba Township and Urban Areas to His Hon. C. J. Pleass, Lt. Governor on the Occasion of his maiden Visit to Aba "Saturday, 21, 1952".

33. AUDC Archives, Comment of Local Authority on the Address to Governor, 1952.

In his assessment of the situation at Aba, Alderton observed that

the (Aba) urban community comprises a substantial upper class of prosperous businessmen and professional men and merchants and a large middle class of lesser traders, shopkeepers and artisans and a proletariat of a host of unskilled and casual labourers, detribalized and a potential source of mischief. 34

The townspeople were drawn from all over Nigeria and from outside the country and felt no sentimental affinity with the rural areas. Only the Ngwa elements of the Urban Areas seemed to be interested in some form of association with their kith and kin in the larger County. But the majority of the township population rightly feared that their social and political development might be held back by any union with the more backward and conservative rural Ngwa. The township potentially had a stable financial base. The 1952/53 estimates showed a revenue of some £28,000. By union, the township would be involved in serious financial loss to pay the 'precepts' demanded by the County for the provision of mainly rural services. The township could provide most of these for itself. On any issue in which there was dispute with the County, the township would be hopelessly out-voted.

The arguments for the 'union' were hardly justifiable from the township point of view. Officials claimed that they were concerned about the danger of a widening gap between town and country especially as the Ngwa of the Urban Areas wanted to maintain a link with their rural kinsmen. The Northern Ngwa groups who would dominate the County adopted what looked like an 'imperial' attitude, claiming that the southern groups, including the township, were originally from the north and ought to be controlled by

34. MINLOC 17/1/58, Lt. Col. E. C. Alderton, A Report on the Introduction of Local Government in the Aba Division of Owerri Province, 1952 (The Alderton Report).

the 'mother country'. This was of course nonsense as most of the township population had nothing to do with the Ngwa migration tradition. In any event, Lt. Col. Alderton was right to say that "it is of course a matter of policy whether or not to permit townships to stand on their own". He confirmed official concern that "Aba's independence will encourage other separatist moves," and "since it is impossible to please everybody", Aba township was forced into the Ngwa County Council on the flimsy grounds that the township did not have a strong enough financial base and that it would provide the skilled manpower required to make the County work effectively. ³⁵

The Ngwa County was thus constituted of four District Councils -- The Township and Urban Areas as an Urban District Council and three other rural District Councils. ³⁶ Each of the District Councils had a number of local councils which sent representatives to it. The township had its wards as its own local units. This arrangement created serious tension from the inception of the Urban District Council in April, 1953. ³⁷ An official election was held in the township in March 1955 which returned many of the members elected to the Township Advisory Board in the mock election of 1952. ³⁸ The Urban District Council decided to carry on with the County as this had been forced on it, but resolved from the start not to make any financial contribution to the County. This could not be allowed as the Urban

35. The Alderton Report, par. 52-3.

36. Ibid.

37. East Regional Gazettee No. 15 of 2nd April 1953; cf OW 9034 ABADIST 1/26/1073 G. W. Thom, Memo on the Separation of the Aba Urban District Council from the County, 1953.

38. AUDC Archives, File No. 817 'Aba Urban District Council Election'.

District Council was bound by the Instrument that established it to function as a Council under the County. The township sent twelve members to the forty eight member Aba-Ngwa County Council and was required to pay sixteen percent of the County's estimates. From the township point of view nothing was gained by this union. From 1954 a vigorous campaign began in the township for the separation of the Urban District from the County. A government inquiry was set to go through the grounds and arguments examined by the Alderton Report. R. Coatwich who conducted the inquiry found that the internal administration of the Urban District Council was in many respects unsatisfactory. This is hardly surprising since the development and necessary training for an efficient urban government had been neglected for too long. On the main question of the relation between the Urban District Council and the County, Coatwich thought it "would be impolitic" to upset the system of local government introduced in 1953. The status quo of urban subordination to the rural County was upheld.³⁹

Physical Planning

Aba grew in size and numbers following the war-time boom and increased immigration. This compelled the annexation of adjacent villages into the township and a more conscious planning effort within the township itself. The 1923 acquisition of land had caused so much bitterness that the government abstained from acquiring more land. Further expansion was by means of declaring that villages around the township where large numbers of immigrants

39. R. Coatwich, Report on the Proposal to Excise the Aba Urban District Council... 1954.

had settled as tenants of indigenous landlords at less cost had now become Urban Areas. As their numbers increased, these immigrants desired and invited government control to extend to them the services and amenities enjoyed by the township population. This antagonized the indigenous landowners who resisted any interference with their traditional way of life. The Ogbor Hill area had been declared an Urban Area in 1933 followed in 1944 by Eziukwu (AmaOgbonna). The latter declaration generated so much controversy⁴⁰ that the administration felt hesitant to embark on similar measures on the southern boundary of the township where pressure for expansion was very acute. Nevertheless the area north of the township boundary where a Mr. Nicholas, a European, had built his soap factory and quarters for factory staff was declared an Urban Area in 1948.⁴¹

The survey department complained against this piecemeal procedure and undertook a general assessment and survey of the growth needs of the town. The southern boundary where "a higger mugger collection of houses were growing as the immediate and undesirable neighbours of a well planned township"⁴² was surveyed and in spite of fierce opposition by the indigenous landowners, an area half a mile deep from the township boundary was declared an Urban Area in 1951.⁴³ This fixed the boundaries of the Township/Urban Areas which the Aba Urban District Council was to control in the 1950's.

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40. EP 19668 MINLOC 6/1/427 'Urban Areas Aba Township, 1945-, cf Eastern Nigerian Guardian, August 24 and 26, Q4B; WSL African Pilot, August 13, 1943.
41. Order in Council No 13 of 1948; see also OW 7432 ABADIST 1/7/1399 'Aba Township Boundaries' esp S.S.P. to Resident 7/9/48.
42. EP 19668 MINLOC 6/1/427 H.P. Wetherell to Resident 12/4/51; cf AUDC Archives File No. 670 Aba Southern Urban Area - Ndiegoro 1951.
43. OW 7561 ABADIST 1/7/1409 'Aba Township Planning' 1945.

Within the township itself, planning was taken up again after the war. Betty C. Benson of the office of the Town Planning Advisor for West Africa was sent to recommend on the accumulated planning needs of the town. She found Aba a relatively well planned town, complained of the neglect of the African population in the location of major township installations. Her report centred on the reorganisation and realignment of the existing railway and road communication system, the relocation of some township installations to ensure easier access to the African section of the town, the extension of town boundaries and provision of basic urban public utility services.⁴⁴ The importance of her work lies not so much in the extent to which her recommendations were implemented as in the expert assessment of the situation and needs of the towns in the immediate post-war years. Aba township was estimated at slightly over 20,000, mainly concentrated at the African Location. She observed that it was not convenient for the African population to use the passenger and goods' section of the railway station which was located some two miles north of the African township. Her plan envisaged the transfer of this railway station further south or the construction of a railway halt near the centre of the town. The African community had all along complained of "the inconvenience caused by only one train running daily for passengers." This train which connected Aba and Port Harcourt usually arrived at Port Harcourt when all public offices were closed and left again the following morning before the offices were opened. Pressure to open the Aba-Port Harcourt road to motor traffic was not considered by the government as it would compete with the railway. Miss Benson had very little success in improving this unsatisfactory transport

44. Ibid.

system. Her recommendations were turned down as "economically unjustifiable". Government and Railway officials argued that much of the railway was patronized mainly by European commercial firms and that the African use of the railway was economically insignificant.⁴⁵ The construction of the railway halt was rejected outright. Once these aspects of the Benson plan were rejected, many other associated changes had to be abandoned also.⁴⁶

Road realignment met the same opposition. Miss Benson recommended the construction of by-pass roads west of the town 'skirting the residential areas' to ease the traffic congestion on Asa Road. She also asked for the construction of arterial roads and footpaths for pedestrians and the widening of the existing roads to a uniform standard. These were not acceptable to the administration because, it was held, the expert "misunderstood" the road system at Aba and her road scheme would conflict with the existing road and drainage system in the town.⁴⁷ To some extent this was true but the existing system was unsatisfactory. That is why Miss Benson was asked to report. It is probably more true to say that in the circumstances, the township could not afford the necessary expenditure to carry her plan through.

If the major recommendations were rejected, the less important but equally desirable aspects of her scheme were even less likely to be accepted. These included the construction of a new market to relieve congestion in the

45. OW 7561 ABADIST Comments of Development Officer on the Benson Plan, 1946.

46. See No T 336/110 in ABADIST 1/7/1409 L.A. to Resident 7/2/48.

47. OW 7561 see the Comments of L.A. and Resident on the Benson Plan.

'hopelessly overcrowded' township market, the relocation of major government offices, the post office and civic centre to the 'municipal centre of the town', further extension of township boundaries to the south in anticipation of increased growth, changes in building regulations, the construction of a separate zongo for Hausas and others in 'offensive trades' and so on. Most of these recommendations, in addition to the long felt need to expand water and electricity services simply could not be undertaken unless generous loans were forthcoming from the government. Three years after the Benson plan was drawn, the administration came out strongly with the view that the scheme "completely disregarded local conditions...may be extremely good aesthetically but impossible in practice." Senior officials from Enugu advised that "in the time being action should be confined to putting into effect piecemeal such parts of the plan as are immediately practicable as funds and staff permit."⁴⁸ Aba was considered a relatively well laid out and modern town and "His Honour does not consider that at the moment there is scope for a Town Planning Authority as attention must be concentrated on much more urgent Town Planning problems elsewhere."⁴⁹

With the rejection of the Benson scheme, the Local Authority and the Township Board virtually accepted defeat in dealing with the problems of the town. The market was "in a very bad and deteriorating condition", turned into "an effluvious quagmire" after heavy rain. Some ten to fifteen miles of township roads had numerous potholes, while ditches constituted a danger to traffic and health as mosquitoes found convenient breeding spots.

48. No 3207/49 in ABADIST 1/7/1409 S.E.P. to Resident 16/6/47.

49. Ibid.

"The roads in the township have frankly defeated us" complained the Local Authority, "They were almost impossible to tackle piecemeal." ⁵⁰ Pressure was brought to bear on the Resident for the formation of a Planning Authority for the town under the Nigerian Town and Country Planning Ordinance. ⁵¹ One was appointed for the town by government Order in Council No. 818 of 1948 consisting of the Local Authority, the District Engineer, Aba, the Medical Officer, the Development Officer stationed at Umuahia and seven members of the Township Advisory Board. This merely created the additional problem of distinguishing between the duties of the Planning Authority and the Township Board as the membership of both was almost identical. The Planning Authority could do very little because of its financial impotence. Its problems are characteristic of those of sixteen such bodies constituted in the region under the Nigerian Town and Country Planning Ordinance of 1946. The Aba Planning Authority was charged with the responsibility of physical planning and major township development projects beyond the capacity of the Township Advisory Board. Its legal owners in relation to government and privately owned land was not at all clear nor had it a clearly defined source of revenue. Although the Planning Authority was formed for the stated objective of undertaking major projects beyond the financial capacity of the township administration, the Planning Authority was under strict instruction to "concentrate its efforts as much as possible on revenue earning schemes"

50. OW 8811 ABADIST 1/7/1559 Annual Report, 1949/50.

51. OW 7329 ABADIST 1/7/1388 Memo to show causes why His Excellency should be pleased to appoint a Planning Authority for the Second Class T/ship of Aba 25/11/47.

and those the resources of the township could maintain.⁵² In any case, the "ultimate decision as to whether a scheme should or should not be put into effect by the Planning Authority remains with the Governor," the Planning Authority being "the agent of the crown only."⁵³

Shortly after the constitution of the Aba Planning Authority, it declared two undeveloped areas of the township as "planning areas" viz the Southern Extension Planning Area just south of the existing Native Location and the Park Road Extension Planning Area north of Park Road.⁵⁴ Both were meant for residential and commercial development. It was easy to declare these areas as Planning Areas but the Planning Authority then had to prepare detailed planning schemes and find the necessary funds to implement the projects. It needed in addition a loan of about £50,000 for a new market, road tarring and other pressing needs. The government had not yet decided whether the Aba Planning Authority should be allowed to control crown rents as was the case in Port Harcourt. At Aba, everybody was "confused about the way in which apart from rating under section 16 a Planning Authority manages its finance. Can it raise a loan on the security of its intention to raise a rate. And if so on what security?"⁵⁵ The government was however persuaded in 1950 to open a deposit account into

52. File No. 3232 ONDIST 20/1/1455 'Town Planning Instructions' - General Circular see especially 'Position of Town Councils and Planning Authorities vis a vis each other, 22/6/50.

53. Ibid.

54. OW 7329 ABADIST 1/7/1388 copy of 'Aba Declaration of Planning Areas' 1948.

55. OW 7329/27 ABADIST 1/7/1475 R. Kay to Hill 30/8/49.

which crown rents from Aba was paid as security on which the Planning Authority could raise loans. Crown rents yielded £8000 in the 1949/50 financial year. The township raised a loan of £5000 for the most pressing problems of the town awaiting the approval of a more comprehensive planning scheme for the whole township.

In 1951 the government granted the Aba Planning Authority full control of crown rents on an experimental basis.⁵⁶ Elaborate schemes were drawn up. The Southern Extension project would comprise 428 plots, 304 of them residential, forty-seven commercial and seventy-seven non-residential. There was provision for a new market, open spaces, health installations and so on. The Park Road Extension would also consist of sixty four plots mainly residential.⁵⁷ Tarred roads and concrete drains were planned for the whole township. Extended water, electricity and conservancy services were envisaged. The projected expenditure from 1950 to 1954 was £60,000. This it was hoped would be loaned from the Eastern Regional Development Board but successive requests for loans were turned down while Enugu and the other towns of the Onitsha Province were receiving second and third grants from the Board.⁵⁸

The position at Aba was further complicated when the newly elected members of the Township Advisory Board asked to take over fully from the Aba Planning Authority the membership of which still comprised the nominated

56. Government Gazette No. 55, of 25/10/51.

57. OW 7329 ABADIST Planning Schemes Aba Township 29/7/50.

58. File No. 7229 ABADIST 1/26/1067 see Saville to Resident 25/4/51, protesting.

members of the defunct Township Advisory Board with the prospect of the Planning Authority controlling large sums of money and the allocation of plots in the township, the elected members of the Board demanded their full inheritance. They argued that "instead of concentrating on the provision of basic amenities, the Planning Authority has become a kind of subsidiary Town Council making provision for various municipal developments which properly came within the competence of the Township Advisory Board." 59

The government was prepared to allow township control of crown rents so long as the Planning Authority was made up of official or nominated members. When "the fury and anger of the public was aroused" against the government for "withholding half of what it promised Aba", the government quickly withdrew the concession of local control of crown land, 60 and asked that a new Planning Authority be formed of six official members and six elected members of the Township Advisory Board. The new Planning Authority had wider financial power but was warned that it was still "a government body depending largely on revenue from crown land." 61

The early 1950's was essentially a period of administrative apprenticeship for the elected members of the Township Advisory Board

59. See No APA 14/157 L.A. to Resident 4/7452.

60. OW 8811 ABADIST 1/7/159 Annual Report 1951/2; cf No 20194 in ONDIST 20/1/1455 Circular Memo to all Residents re 'Financial Relation between Government and Planning Authorities' 12/9/51.

61. Letter No. 3207/200 in AUDC Archives File No. 843 E. C. Powell to Resident 7/8/52.

and Planning Authority. For the town it was a period of great expectations but not surprisingly also one of great disillusionment. Between 1952 and 1955 there were two major government inquiries into allegations of gross maladministration and continued urban neglect.

Two assessments of the state of the town in the early 50's give a picture of failure as well as hope:

Aba will become increasingly important and will grow dangerously quickly. It has a population similar to Enugu, Onitsha and Port Harcourt. The forces which have drained the country people into the cities in other parts of the world are already at work here and all around the planning areas, there are urban villages whose middle name is Topsy. In the centre of the town people live at a density of up to 100 persons to an acre...mostly in small ill-ventilated rooms...with shockingly inadequate sanitation. The water supply is dirty and insufficient and drainage is generally left to nature. Small industries are scattered among the residential quarters. The market is cramped ramshackle and dirty. There is apparently no provision for future public buildings. Traffic increases in weight and volume every day....We are heading for trouble in a big and expensive way and we no longer have the power, even if we had the time and staff to go in and do the job. 62

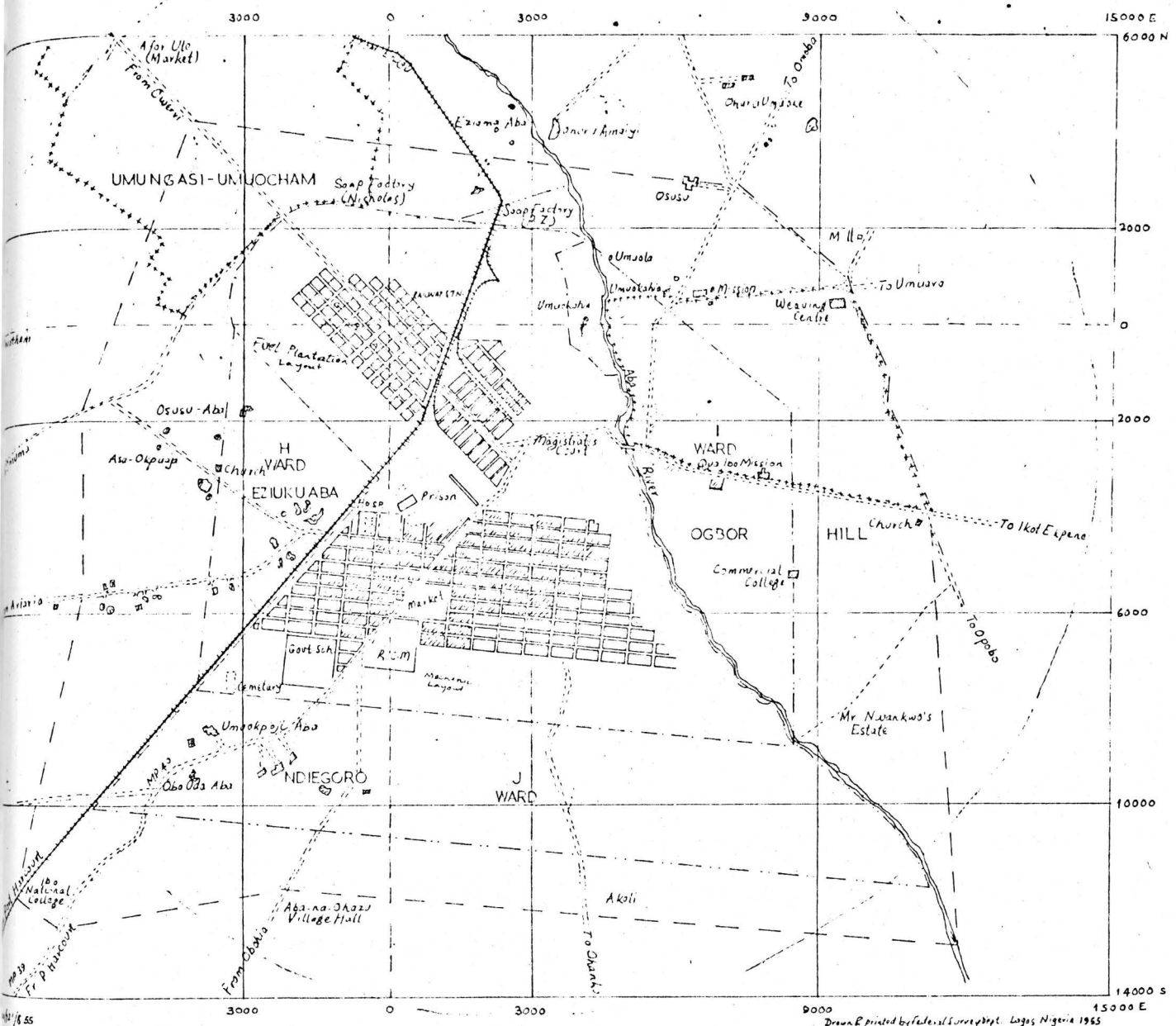
This is a justifiably adverse commentary on fifty years of colonial city building but for the Aba community, the town still had a future:

Aba has in the majority of its citizens men and women of goodwill...becoming conscious of their responsibilities as citizens. There is growing up in the township a very strong body of public opinion which desires to redeem the reputation of Aba and which is still striving to create a sense of civic duty in its citizens. The churches are playing their part...; the Aba Community League is under the control of men of responsibility and known integrity; there is an International Club to foster racial understanding and within the government of the township there are the members of the Township Advisory Board who take an unflinching

interest in their duties....There is in short in Aba a fund of goodwill and civic sense which those who do not know it will never imagine to exist. 63

Aba needed more than goodwill to deal with the problems of the fifties. The future of the town had in a number of ways been determined by many years of conflict between the local and territorial authorities in the administration and ordering of urban growth. The tradition of external control of urban affairs prevented the gradual development of an effective local government. The introduction of Local Government in the early fifties was still within the framework of external control of urban affairs. The belated and ad hoc measures of the late 40's and early 50's proved ineffective in the face of rapid urban growth and increased urban problems.

ABA & ENVIRONS



SCALE - 2000 FEET TO AN INCH

Drawn & printed by Federal Survey Dept. Lagos, Nigeria 1965

REFERENCE			
Abia Township (Crown Land)	[- - - -]	ROAD	[- - - -]
Urban Areas	[. . . .]	RAILWAY	[- - - -]
Proposed Municipal Boundary (9 Sq Mls)	[- - - -]	BUILT UP AREA	[▨ ▩]
		G.R.A.	[□ □]
		RIVER	[~ ~ ~]

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CONCLUSION

A 1961 assessment of the state of research in Eastern Nigeria showed that urbanisation was "a priority topic" because of the striking rate of urban growth in the area and the need to find "what administrative steps are necessary for a sensible improvement of urban centres."¹ Since then, some work has been done on population distribution, settlement pattern and selected aspects of urbanisation and urban problems in the region. This study has concerned itself mainly with the administrative problems of urban development in the colonial period. It has tried first to meet the persistent criticism that historians concentrate so much on towns and cities that they do not relate urban growth to the historic processes of change affecting the wider society which sustains and is served by towns. It has also re-examined the traditional image of the 'colonial city' and the drama associated with colonial urban development in the region.

Urbanisation in Eastern Nigeria reflects a slow and impeded process of change. In the pre-colonial as well as the colonial period there was a close reciprocal relationship between the resources and potentials of the region's hinterland and the development of special centres to serve special social, administrative and commercial functions. The distinction which is often made between pre-colonial and colonial urbanisms suggests a break in historical continuity which is hardly justifiable.

1. Ottenberg, S. "The Present State of Ibo Studies", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1961, p 222.

Before 1900, settlements were generally dispersed--the result mainly of population pressure on agricultural land and the decentralised social and political organisation. That pattern prevailed almost unaltered throughout the colonial period. In the pre-colonial period, local, sub-regional and external trade created the need for specialised centres of trade and social interaction. The development of these centres in terms of size and volume of function was constrained by the scale and nature of local and external trade and the underdeveloped nature of the technology of production and transportation.

The changes which accelerated the process of urbanisation in the colonial period were not of a radical nature, certainly not in the economic sphere which largely determined the rate of urban growth. The towns which emerged to serve the expanding administration and trade of the region led to the shift in the location and significance of some pre-existing nodes but a new urban system can hardly be said to have emerged. There were clear limits to which towns could develop as long as the economy remained essentially extractive with a large subsistence sector. External trade continued to be based on the export of established staples and the import of manufactured European goods. Neither the colonial government nor the expatriate firms saw their role as that of planning or revolutionising the economy. Except for the coal industry at Enugu, economic expansion was based on the diffusely located resources of the rural hinterland which, apart from the needs of trade, exerted no pressure for large population concentration. Rather the reverse. Post-war development affected the economy but little as industrialisation--a possible basis of a new urban system--was considered inappropriate in a colonial context.

Political expediency reinforced the economic constraints on urban development. The rural emphasis of the colonial administration and official adherence to indirect rule created a dilemma which the colonial government failed to resolve--a dilemma of modernisation in a conservative administrative framework. The merits and weaknesses of colonial urban policy in respect of urban land control, urban administration and the management of urban resources, town planning and the provision of urban services can be understood in the context of the unresolved paradox of a colonial situation. Colonial presence and associated social and economic influences encouraged modernisation and urbanisation but government administrative policy retarded urban development. In time and place, the stronger the influence of the policy of Native Administration the weaker the effectiveness of urban development. Because of Lugard's enthusiasm for the orthodox version of indirect rule the development of towns was retarded in the early crucial stages. Neither the efforts of the brief period of Clifford's governorship nor the belated attempts of the post-war period revised the tradition of urban neglect vis-a-vis the rural areas. Urban local government which was introduced in the early 1950s operated in the same framework of urban subordination to unsympathetic external control.

Aba, the case study of this thesis, had a character of its own but its experience illustrates the trend and problems of urban development in the region. Early Aba consisted of dispersed settlements of the Ngwa who expanded into the area in response to population pressure. There were no political, military or economic pressures for large population concentration. The almost autonomous units of settlement were grouped around the Eke Oha

market which served as a special social centre and a regional periodic market. The establishment of British colonial rule encouraged the growth and more ordered development of the town. From a small military garrison in 1902, it developed important administrative and commercial functions which were enhanced by the rail and road network. European commercial firms, African traders and government officials combined to make the town one of the most important centres of trade, transport and administration in the region.

But like the other towns of the region, the development of Aba was hampered by official hesitation to depart from the rural based system of Native Administration. Urban land was acquired by a curious mixture of the traditional and modern methods. Town planning and the provision of urban services and amenities were obstructed as much by a limited official conception of the growth and needs of the town as by the rural outlook of many immigrants in the town. Urban administration and finance developed in a tradition of conflict between the local organ of administration and the higher, rural oriented levels of government. By the 1950s, the town had as many elements of a modern town as it had of stunted growth.

This study is not the Urban History of Eastern Nigeria nor is it intended to provide the solution to the numerous problems of urban development in the region. It is hoped however that it will encourage further research on urbanisation and be of some value to those involved in the development and administration of towns in Nigeria. The main thrust of research in modern African history seems to be African resistance to colonial rule and the process of decolonisation. The role of urbanisation in these processes requires more systematic study. This study deals with

one region of Nigeria and stops in the early 1950s long before colonial rule terminated. Further work is needed on the crucial decade 1950 to 1960 before the precise relationship between urbanisation and Nigerian national development can be assessed. But some pointers seem to emerge from this study.

Indirect rule was the backbone of colonial rule. Post war-reform and the introduction of Local Government did not affect the basis of that system significantly. The conflict between that system of administration and urban development had great significance for subsequent political development in the country. It can rightly be argued that "it is largely because Europeans were unable to keep the cities under control that they have to leave Africa these days."² H.C.B. Denton, a colonial official in Eastern Nigeria sounded "the cautionary note" in the immediate post-war years:

I have observed since my return to this Division after an absence of 12 years a deviation from the former practice of applying the yardstick of "indigenous institutions",...a frontal attack on basic principles--but it reflects the aspirations of an increasing number of the rising generation in the urban districts of Nigeria....I find it difficult to abandon my adherence to the formal policy of Native Administration but that adherence has received several shocks from the middle zone of this Division and I am beginning to wonder whether I am not out of date and out of step with "Africa Renascent".³

It may be opportune to examine further the relationship between urban growth and the political development of other regions of Nigeria and other parts of 'Africa Renascent'.

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2. S. Comhaire and J. Comhaire, "Problems Relating to Urbanisation: Formation of African Urban Population" in Frank Lorimore and Mark Karp, eds., Population in Africa, Boston University Press, 1960, p. 42.
 3. File No. OP 1258, Vol. IV, Denton to Resident Onitsha, 12/6/45.

APPENDIX A

Excerpts from the Row& ReportGovernment Land.

44. "One of the most serious and difficult questions with which the Government is most intimately concerned in the Southern Provinces is that of Government Land. Even the most elementary examination of the question reveals a really dangerous situation all over the country to which I must draw attention as strongly as possible.... In the Southern Provinces...it is the established custom (although a complete fiction in many cases), to consider the freehold vested in chiefs of the locality, the exact persons being ill-defined or not defined at all....
45. The general use everywhere of the word "acquired land" or "Government acquisition" to refer to the right possessed by Government might lead one to suppose, without a detailed examination of the facts, that Government land had, in all cases, been "acquired" under the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance which exists for this specific purpose. In practice the acquisition Ordinance has not always been applied and many such areas have not been "acquired", but, instead, agreements of various natures have been made with local "chiefs". I have been told that one of the reasons for this has been the existence of theories that it is either illegal or improper by native custom for chiefs to dispose of land....Another possible reason against the employment of the Ordinance was perhaps the idea that the local agreements saved money in some way, but, as I shall show, every ten pounds "saved" by such means may possibly mean the expenditure of £10,000 later on.
46. As an illustration of the very unsatisfactory state of affairs existing I will take the land stated to have been "acquired" by the Government at Enugu. One of the documents on which the Government relies is a typewritten sheet of foolscap, signed, or rather marked by certain "chiefs". The document states that these natives "Hereby grant all such lands as may be required...for the purpose of Stations and collieries." From the point of view of a conveyance, the document has no habendum or operating clause and its grammar is poor, but in addition to this, the rights conveyed to the Government, whether freehold, leasehold, mining rights etc. are not specified and no one could tell what was intended. The document is not signed by anyone on the part of the Government. There is an attached sheet signed by Mr. Hargrove and Mr. Duncan to say that it was interpreted to

and understood by the "chiefs", and by Mr. Alexander, who was Commissioner of Lands at the time, declaring that he had registered it at Lagos. The document makes no statement as to the original rights of the natives (who are described as "chiefs of Udi Division", a defunct administrative area) and appears to amount to a statement by some local natives that having received £200 they have no objection to a Government Colliery in their midst. The land is described as shown on an attached plan. There are a number of different coloured areas on the plan and it is only by inference and by examining some other railway leases, that one can be sure which of the coloured areas are the lands referred to in the paper.

47. It is a well known fact...that the so called chiefs east of the Niger are in many cases the wrong men nominated by the Government and sometimes by themselves or by interested natives. It would be very difficult to prove that the "chiefs" whose marks appear on this paper, had any rights to represent the community at all. I do not think it would be very difficult to prove in some cases that they had none....
49. The more these transactions are examined the clearer it seems that such money as has been paid was paid more with the idea of keeping such natives who made claims quiet, rather than with the idea of obtaining any definite rights for the Government, but, however well such measures may succeed for the moment, they do nothing but store up trouble for the future. At any moment the Government's title may successfully be disputed and the Government involved in serious litigation and the payment of large sums of money....
51. The confusion, difficulty and the volumes of correspondence resulting from these proceedings seem out of all proportion to the value of the rights obtained for the Government, which rights in many cases, as I have shown, amount to nothing worth having.

APPENDIX B

Order in Council Made Under the Townships Ordinance, 1917

Under and by virtue of the provisions of Section 3 of the Townships Ordinance, 1917, it is hereby ordered by the Governor in Council:-

1. The following area shall constitute the Township of Lagos and be a Township of the First Class:-

x x x x

2. The following places shall be Townships of the Second Class and the limits of the Townships shall be as shown on plans which have been signed by the Governor and deposited in the office of the Surveyor-General in Lagos:-

Southern Provinces

Calabar	Sapele
Enugu Ngwo	Warri
Forcados	Aba
Itu	Abeokuta
Opobo	Ibadan
Port Harcourt	Onitsha

Northern Provinces

Ilorin
Kaduna
Kano
Lokoja
Minna
Zaria

3. The following places shall be Townships of the Third Class and the limits of the said Townships shall be as shown on plans which have been signed by the Governor and deposited in the Office of the Surveyor-General in Lagos:-

Southern Provinces

Abakalike	Obudu	Aro Chukwu
Afikpo	Ogwashi	Ife
Agbor	Owerri	Ondo
Asaba	Ado	Ubiaja
Bonny	Awka	Uyo
Brass	Degema	Obubra
Burutu	Ilaro	Okwoga
Epe	Ogoja	Benin
Idah	Okigwi	Eket
Ikom	Abak	Ikot Ekpene
Koko	Ahoada	Ijebu Ode
Kwale		

Northern Provinces

Abinsi	Jebba
Bauchi	Kontagora
Bida	Maidugari
Ibi	Offa

APPENDIX C

Excerpts from the Phillipson Report, 1947

Para. 106. Second-Class Townships

(i) Constitution of Second Class Townships.- Townships as they exist today were created under the Townships Ordinance, 1917. The late Lord Lugard, in Political Memorandum No. 11 on Townships stated that the main purpose of the legislation was to establish "the broad principle of municipal responsibility, graduated according to the importance of the community, and the measure of its ability to accept and discharge satisfactorily independent and quasi-independent powers." Townships are divided into three classes. Lagos is at present the only township in the First Class. Third-Class Townships are merely the small Government stations in the Southern Provinces under the direct administration of a Local Authority, who is usually a junior Administrative Officer; they do not collect any revenue and have no funds of their own. This paragraph is concerned only with Second Class Townships.

The control of Second Class Townships is in the hands of a Local Authority assisted by an Advisory Board. The Advisory Board consists of (a) three ex officio members - Station Magistrate (if any), the Local Authority, and the Health Officer; and (b) such other members as the Governor may appoint, (the powers of appointment are in fact delegated to Resident). Such other members normally include Government officers concerned with Township affairs (Provincial Engineer, Sanitary Superintendent, Education Officer, etc.), members of the local commercial community and representative Africans. Decisions of the majority of the Board are carried out by the Local Authority if they are within the powers assigned to him. The Townships Estimates are submitted through the Resident for the approval of the Chief Commissioner after having been prepared by the Local Authority with the assistance of the Township Advisory Board.

Each Second Class Township has a Township Fund administered by the Local Authority into which are paid receipts from (a) Township rates, fees and charges; (b) rates, fees and charges collected under other Ordinances which by direction of the Governor may be paid into the Fund....

(ii) General Policy.- It has been the generally accepted view since Sir Hugh Clifford's Governorship that the aim should be to abolish Townships whenever it may be possible to do so without weakening the safeguards provided by the Township Ordinance. There has indeed

been a considerable reduction in the number of Townships since the early twenties. Up to 1926 there were six in the Northern Provinces but in that year the Town Council of Minna was given the status of a subordinate Native Authority; there are now five Second Class Townships in that region, namely Kano Township (not city), Kaduna, Lokoja, Zaria and Jos. At one time in the Southern Provinces there existed fourteen Second Class Townships but there are now six only; Warri and Sapele in the Western Provinces and Enugu, Calabar, Port Harcourt and Aba in the Eastern Provinces. The Second Class Township of Onitsha was reconstituted as a Native Authority in 1942.

It is proper to ask whether this process of reduction will continue to a point at which Second Class Townships will disappear altogether. My own impression, for what it is worth, is that this is unlikely. It seems most improbable that such regional capitals as Kaduna and Enugu could be handed over within the foreseeable future to a Native Authority. Port Harcourt is about to achieve the status of a First-Class Township. Warri and Sapele owe their existence almost entirely to European trading enterprise. Jos is a mixed administrative and mining centre. Aba is very largely a trading centre. Kano Township is in effect a large Government and trading station. Of the other existing Second Class Townships, I have little or no personal knowledge but I understand that there is a project on foot to reconstitute Calabar as a Native Authority. Are the existing Second Class Townships, or at any rate a number of them, to develop as "municipal" bodies in the proper sense? If so then their finances should be placed on a corresponding basis. In any case I would submit that even if a Second Class Township is reconstituted in any particular case as a Native Authority, it should be a Native Authority of a special kind, admitting of representation of local commercial and non-African interests. The general subject of urban local government in Nigeria whether within or without the orbit of Native Administration requires far more study both from the political and financial aspects....

(iii) Present financial arrangements.- Second Class Townships are in receipt of what are called General Grants....These arrangements cannot be regarded as satisfactory. It has been stressed in dealing with Native Administrations that nothing strikes at the roots of financial responsibility more directly than General grants given to meet budgetary deficits....The aim must, I think, be to develop a true municipal system for Second Class Townships on the basis of financial self-dependence and to quicken the local interest in the management of these towns....

(iv) Native Administration subventions.- Most of the existing Second-Class Townships contain within their boundaries considerable African populations. These Africans are, of course, liable to pay direct tax under the Direct Taxation Ordinance. Second Class Townships are not, of course, Native Authorities and it would scarcely be in keeping with the principles of the Direct Taxation Ordinance to appoint a local authority as a tax collection authority under the Ordinance....A curious

position has thus arisen; an adjacent Native Authority is normally the tax collection authority in respect of the African inhabitants of Second Class Townships. Since these inhabitants normally live outside the jurisdiction of the Native Authority concerned, the practice had developed under which the Native Authority makes a subvention to the Second Class Township. The method by which that subvention is computed varies from place to place....I recommend, however, that the possibility of amending the Direct Taxation Ordinance so as to provide that within Township areas the Local Authority will be the tax collection authority should be examined. This would remove an anomaly which in course of time may lead to friction between the Township and the Native Administration which at present collects the tax....

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MINLOC - Ministry of Local Government

MILGOV - Military Governor's Office

MIE - Ministry of Internal Affairs

Provincial Office Records

O.W. Owerri Provincial Office Papers
 O.P. Onitsha Provincial Office Papers
 UMPROF Owerri Provincial Papers at Umuahia, after 1947
 RIVPROF Rivers Provincial Office Papers

District and Divisional Office Papers

ABADIST, Aba District
 ENLA, Enugu Local Authority
 DEGEDIST, Degema District
 UDDISIST, Udi District
 BENDIST, Bende District

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