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TRADITIONAL OCCUPATION AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF
EZEAGU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE OF NIGERIA.

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Some occupational pursuits can generate specific problems:

Those who sail the seas must at one time face the problem of having to live away from their families. Professionals of all kinds must accept serious training to achieve their status. Even pregnant women are expected to go through labour before experiencing the joys of child birth. More of such cases can be found, In fact, the phrase "occupational hazards" is a common English expression which indicates that pursuit of specific occupations are associated with specific problems or even dangers. This is so with yam cultivation.

Yam - ji - discorea rotendata is the Igbo staple food, the planting and harvesting of which are surrounded with many collective rituals (Basden, 1966: 392; Ejiofor, 1985: 31). Traditionally, the chief occupation of the Igbo is growing yam. Yam also constitutes their main food. Basden suggests that the Igbo consider themselves starving when it is not available to them (Basden, 1966: 390). Yam also stratifies individuals in society for men take titles connected with it thereby distinguishing themselves as people of worth in their respective communities. It also divides the sexes for women are precluded from the social ownership of the product for they cannot take titles connected with yam, nor make a gift of it on formal occasions (Anigbo, 1982). There is also the clear evidence

that the quest for suitable farmland which is linked to the problem of growing yams can lead to certain forms of migrations (Ude, 1964). Similarly seasonal dispersals of the kingship group have been observed for the Nuar of the Sudan (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). But they are herdsmen. At flood season they have to take their animals to safety and thereby disorganising kingship group. They come together again during the dry season (Evan-Pritchard, 1940: 286). The Fulani also practice seasonal migrations when either they are in search of water for their cattle or avoid tse tse fly (Smith, 1960: 2).

The paper investigates the claim that some aspects of the problem of development in Ezeagu Local Government Area, are traceable to seasonal migrations which are associated with traditional occupation of the citizens which is largely growing yam. The ethnographic report is based on a wider research on problems of migrancy as it affects religious conflicts in two local Government Areas of Ezeagu and Igbo Etiti. The fund is from the Senate Research Grant Committee of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka for which I am very grateful.

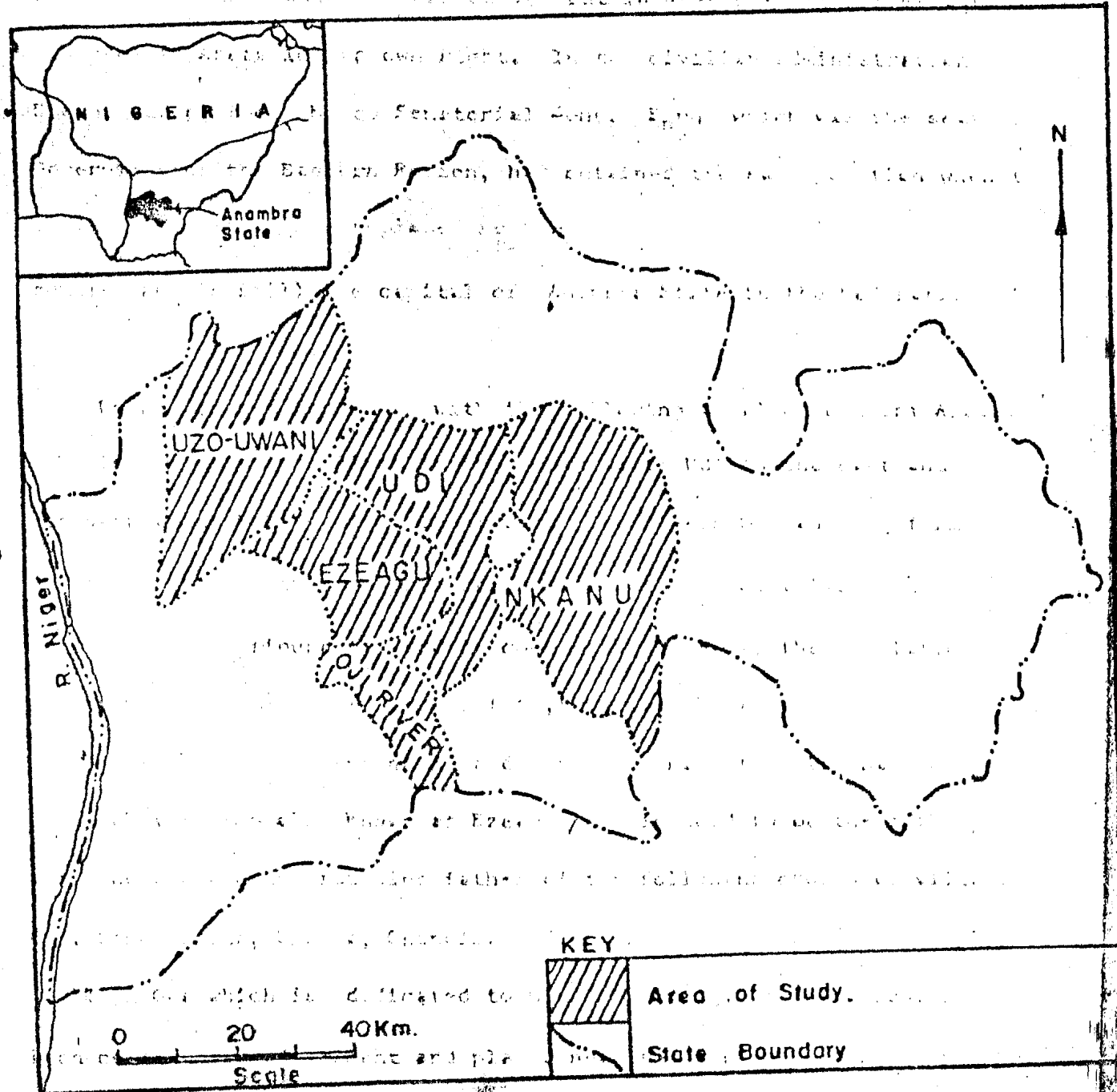


Fig. MAP OF ANAMBRA STATE OF NIGERIA SHOWING THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS STUDIED.

Ezeagu Local Government Area is a political entity found in the northwest of the Igbo country. In the heyday of colonial administration Ezeagu constituted part of the administrative unit of Udi Division from which it was carved out in 1974 when it became a Local Government Area in its own right. In the civilian administration Ezeagu was part of Enugu Senatorial Zone. Enugu which was the seat of Government of the Eastern Region, had retained the same position when the twelve state structure replaced regionalism in the administration of the country and is still the capital of Anambra State in the Federation of Nigeria.

Ezeagu shares boundaries with the following Local Government Areas: Awka in the west; Oji River in the south-west; Udi in the north-east and Uzo-Uwani in the south. The Rivers Doo and Oji form natural boundaries in the south and south-east respectively. Since accurate census figure is hard to come by in Nigeria, the population of Ezeagu has been estimated at about 18,5061 taxable adults.

Ezeagu Local Government Area derived its name from the name of a mythical ancestor also known as Ezeagu. He is held to be the father of six sons who are the founding fathers of the following groups of villages. Owa, Oghe, Umana, Umumba, Obinofia and Oghu. There is a shrine at Olie in Imezi Owa which is dedicated to him. An effigy of the ancestor has been constructed of recent and placed near the shrine to sharpen his purported existence. The claim of unity by the group is difficult to sustain on mere observation. This is particularly so with Oghu which does not share boundaries with any of the groups. Nevertheless, their unity was upheld

by the sister villages and was also recognised by neighbours. In modern times (just before political Independence) when a system of county Council was introduced in the Local administration of Nigeria Oghu was part of Ezeagu county council even though it does not share immediate boundaries with any of its sister villages and is more than thirty kilometers away. The basis for inclusion was idiom of descent from the founding ancestor. For much the same reason, there were village groups which are hedged in between Owa and Oghe and were excluded. These are Awha and Ollo.

Ezeagu is also a Local Government Area. Its unity and autonomy can be explained easily than the county council it replaced. Today, it includes in its area of jurisdiction all the village communities within Owa, Oghe, Umumba and Obinofia as well as those other immediate neighbours which were excluded in the county council system because of the claim that they were not descendants of Ezeagu. Such village communities are Awha, Ollo, and Amagu Umulokpa.

Aguobu Owa was chosen as Headquarters of Ezeagu Local Government Area because it is at the centre of the component village. In Nigeria, the purpose of the Local Government is to bring the government nearer to the people for the purpose of effective administration. As such, the Local Government sees to the upkeep of elementary schools and payment of teachers' salaries, hospital staffing and maintenance of roads within its jurisdiction.

The Local Government generally derives its revenue from the following sources; Direct grant from Federal Government; Revenue allocation from the State Government; Rates imposed on the adult males of the local population. There are other sources such as fees from market stalls, parks and liquor licences. A ministry of Local Government, Youths and Culture coordinates the running of the Local Government system at the State level.

II

Taxation as such cannot be shown to be alien to any form of administration even though the form of payment and collection may differ in place and in time. For example, in Northern Nigeria, the Sultan of Sokoto extracted tributes from the subordinate Emir of Zaria and the latter had to pay to validate the relationship. Slaves, horses and cowries made up such tributes (Smith, 1966: 74). Also, the Oba of Benin, Head of another traditional State, utilized his hereditary chiefs to raise the necessary revenue to maintain the splendour of the court (Mair, 1974: 15). Among the Igbo, with their segmentary lineage structure, the situation was some how different. But also there were some form of taxation. In the Nsukka area of the Igbo country, the Onyishi, the oldest surviving male of the major lineage was not allowed to leave his compound. Therefore he did not work but stayed at home to serve the ritual needs of the members of his descent group who came to him for the purpose. In reciprocity, the people supported his position and contributed their labour force to attend to his farm (Anigbo, 1980). In each of the named

systems taxation could be seen as a revenue yielding source introduced to keep the administration going. Ezeagu Local Government Area is also a unit funded from sources generated internally and externally. But the internal source is beset by problems derived from the traditional occupation of its citizens.

III

In discussing the problems, special attention must be paid to land because the traditional occupation of the Igbo of Ezeagu leans heavily on land utilization. In Ezeagu, two types of land can be considered vital for the conceptualization of the basic problems of the people. These are: ala uno - meaning the territory or the area on which a house is built or expected to be built. The second is ala agu which can be translated as bush, grassland or suitable farmland.

Uno can imply all sorts of things: a house, a home or even an Igbo village with specific territorial boundaries and membership of which can only be gained by ascription (of, Anigbo, 1980). On the other hand agu stands in opposition to Uno especially in its implications for agu can also stand for a leopard. It may be necessary to recall that wild animals live where grass abound and they feed on grass to survive, but leopards also feed on wild animals to keep alive. But traditionally, the Igbo require grass for thatch and in their quest for it often encounter wild animals which they hunt, trap and kill to add to their diet. On this instance, agu can stand for a battle ground between wild life and men.

Each village community has its uno residential area and agu - area for growing its food. But some villages have more of farm lands than others. Where the need for more farmland is felt, custom allows negotiations for a lease. In most cases, ala agu is the boundary line separating one village community from the other. Except where such boundary is clearly marked or demarcated by physical features such as - river or a hill, farm sites can be highly contested between two or more villages in Igboland, contests of that nature is often being decided by physical combat or concluded in a court of law. This is because living close to a particular territory may not be a condition for claiming the ownership of the area. (Anigbo, 1980).

It has been observed that a number of factors tend to remind the Igbo of his traditional home and how important it is for him to return to it from time to time, distances or places of sojourn notwithstanding. The chief of these is the land itself. What is envisaged here is not just any piece of land which the individual may have acquired as in modern urban conditions. The land in question is the piece of land which one owns with others as a corporation and the owners include the living, the dead and the not yet born of the group (cfr, Floyd, 1967: 200). Such land is sanctified by the ancestors who lie buried in it and where the individual expects to be buried in his turn. The Igbo also require the ancestral land for the formal practice of his religion for the essences of the Igbo traditional religion commands communion with the ancestors who cannot be approached from an alien land. Therefore, one can infer that outside

such land the individual is a stranger and can be subjected to all kinds of deprivation or even humiliations (cfr. Middleton, 1960, Anigbo 1980).

One also ought to recognise the integrative function of the oil palm tree. For although it grows profusely throughout Igboland, the individual can only harvest palm nuts from trees growing on his own land. Moreover, Igbo traditional economy did not develop ready cash for one to depend on the market for the supply of essential commodities such as palm oil. And since the individual needs oil in his diet one can envisage a psychological motivation sticking together to tap resources from the land (Anigbo, 1980: 78).

While the harvest of the oil palm tends to foster unity, growing yam appears to produce disintegrative effects. This is mainly because yams, unlike the oil palm tree are a seasonal crop and require special type of rich soil for successful production. Fertile soil is often in great demand and struggle for it can lead to some disharmony which can threaten internal unity. Conflict of that nature is often resolved by individuals or groups resorting to some kinds of migrations. (Udo, 1971: 81) gives a useful hint on how this could happen in an Igbo community. Karmon accepts this observation and adds that the traditional village community may retain its status as a meeting point for the entire people no matter where they may have spread to (Karmon, 1966: 41-42).

Abundant support for Karmon's observation can be found in Ezeagu Local Government Area and most of the adjoining communities. There, it is glaringly clear that the economic culture of the people is solidly

rooted on growing yams and despite external influence such as formal education, they are still preoccupied with their traditional business of growing yam. Even some features of their social organisations tend to give credence to the meaning of yam in their life. For the quest for land suitable for the cultivation of yam gives rise to seasonal fluctuations in populations. At one time in the year, the village communities in Ezeagu are replete with people and alive with all kinds of activities. But after a period the same villages are almost deserted. Only children, the aged, the few on salaried employment plus a few straggling youths appear to provide evidence that the villares are not completely abandoned.

The terminology which gives hint to this phenomenon is agu. There, in the Local Government Area, one can readily overhear the expression: 'Njem agu' - I am going to the farm or 'Anyi k'eje agu echi' - we are going to the farm tomorrow. The we here generally implies that the speaker is a member of a household unit which may include wife, husband and their children and also goats, sheep and birds which are also another feature of the family business. All these constitute the we and are being referred to as those who would be travelling to the farm the next day.

The implication of this expression would be lost to most people unless they are used to that kind of phenomenon for agu in the present context does not just mean grassland or suitable farmland. Agu, here means a quasi permanent settlement where the people stay for months at a time engaged in their business of cultivating yams.

The impression may be gathered that the farmland belongs to the settlers as of right. This could not be so for even the location of the settlements demonstrate effectively that they cannot constitute part of the traditional villages of the settlers. Ezeagu farmers are not constrained by distances for they are found concentrated in Uzo-Uwani, Nkanu and Oji Rive Local Government Areas of Anambra State. Large concentrations of settlers can also be identified in Alla and Ibuzo of Bendel State as well as Avurugo in Adoro Local Government Area of Benue State. A breakdown of the settlements, and their approximate distances from Ezeagu are shown in the table below:

FARM	LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA	DISTANCE FROM EZEAGU
Adani	Uzo Uwani	160km
Agu Ofuu	Uzo Uwani	60km
Umerum	Uzo Uwani	80km
Adaba	Uzo Uwani	70km
Agu Ndiogo	Uzo Uwani	70km
Agu Ndi Awha	Uzo Uwani	74km
Ugbo Owa	Nkanu	80km
Four Corner	Nkanu	90km
Okpa Ugbo	Nkanu	90km
Ugbo Odogwu	Nkanu	35km
Nkwelle	Oji River	40km
Oji Nato	Oji River	25km
Allah	Bendel State	250km
Ibuzo	Bendel State	140km
Avurugo	Bendel State	160m

Apart from variations in distances from traditional villages, most of the farms and settlements share similar characteristics. Their farmlands are all leased out to them on specific terms mutually acceptable to both tenants and landlords; failure to honour the terms of the agreement by either of the parties would terminate the contract. One can envisage the agu - farm can lead to precarious and uncertain existence. The number of settlers in each camp are not fixed but they must be sufficient to constitute effective deterrents to menace from wild animals otherwise individual lives as well as crops can be endangered. They work and cooperate like business partners but punctuate their stay in the camps with occasional visits to the traditional homes especially as individual or group needs demand.

Individual needs could refer to what is known as olu imezi which means work in the traditional home. Such can imply all sorts of activities especially those which cannot be done in agu - farm for different kinds of social reasons. Olu imezi may include harvesting of palm nuts and extraction of oil from them; there is also the religious needs which occur during some changes in the agricultural cycle. Olu imezi can even mean planting or weeding some fields which are cultivated in the traditional villages. This is done to meet the food requirements of the family because they have to retire to the traditional villages for a period of leisure after completing a cycle of farm work.

Ezeagu is reminiscent of the movements of migratory birds which in one season swarm a particular place and disappear from it when the season is over. Today, this kind of phenomenon constitutes obstacles to the development of the individual as well as that of the Local Government itself.

IV

Seasonal migrancy and traditional festivals are social phenomena which can be observed following the pattern of farm work in Ezeagu Local Government Area. At the end of each cycle, farmers have to return to their traditional villages and there mark it by celebrating traditional feasts. A traditional feast brings all kinds of people together and during the occasion some important issues affecting a group may be brought to light and discussed (Anigbo, 1980: 198). Some discussions may be quickly disposed of while decisions on others may have to be postponed to some future date.

It is important to note that discussions affecting a descent group may not be held in the farm because quorum may not be formed for members may find themselves dispersed to different farm sites in the country. Rushed decisions or those delayed or postponed may not be welcome to the individual person or the group involved with such cases.

Generally, when people migrate, their homes and grounds becomes over-grown with weeds and the village wears a face of desolation or abandonment. When they come back after a cycle, their immediate task is to repair their huts and clean up their surroundings. There is hardly time for improving the building and grounds. Meanwhile the stay in the traditional home is over and the return to the farm witnesses similar

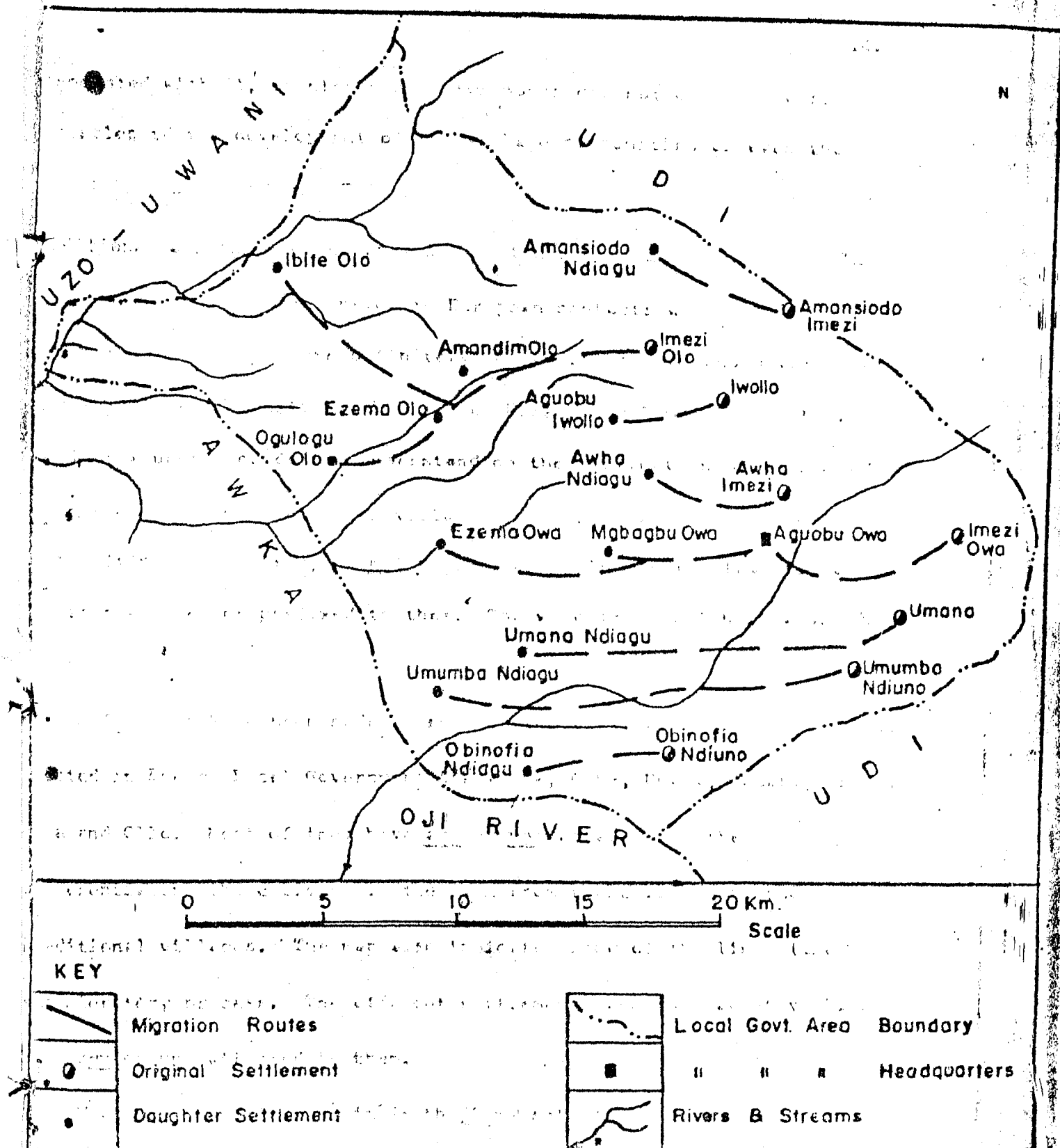


Fig 3: MAP OF EZEAGU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA SHOWING MIGRATORY ROUTES AND THE SETTLEMENTS

activities as when the home was re-occupied. The cycle is repetitive. But then before the introduction of formal education and the new money economy associated with it, maintenance of two homes did not constitute serious obstacles to the development of the village communities or even the individuals within them. This was simply because social life revolved around traditional agriculture and anything that promoted it was upheld. In fact, it can be shown that prior to European contacts with the Igbo migrancy as described here definitely led to the growth and development of new village communities. The map of Ezeagu Local Government Area provides a useful guide for understanding the implication of this claim. The map contains many names of village groups with agu - farm or ndi agu those living in the farm; or ndi uno, those living in the traditional villages affixed or prefixed to them. The word imezi which is also used means traditional home.

References have been made to some of the village communities that are located in Ezeagu Local Government Area; Owa, Oghe, Umana, Umumba, Obinofia, Awaha and Ollo. Most of them have agu or uno attached to them differentiating those living in the farm from those living in the traditional villages. The map also indicates some of the lines taken in the migratory process. The offshoot settlements and the parent villages have agu or uno attached to them.

What may indicate that it is the same set of people who were involved in the migrations is property inheritance. Even today, although most of the groupings named in the map are recognised as traditional Igbo villages

including those with the prefix agu and has a chief to confirm their autonomy, individuals from the respective groupings can inherit wives or properties resident in either of the settlements. Let me take the case of Owa for an illustration.

A careful investigation would show that it is the same group of people or even the same group of families who were involved in the original migrations from Imezi Owa to Mgbagbu Owa and to Aguobu Owa respectively. This is mainly because even today, individuals resident permanently in any of the zones can find himself inheriting wives or other forms of property from a deceased member of his lineage who was living in either of the three settlements. Moreover, the proclamation of Akani - a Yearly reunion festival at which married daughters are expected to return to their natal homes is held at the same place on behalf of the three communities.

V

Today, it can be shown that formal education, which is one of the most important aspects of development suffers a great deal in Ezeagu Local Government Area. Though farmers generally appreciate the utility and importance of formal education for their kids, their interests in growing yam and its logistics undermine the principles of sound atmosphere for learning especially for growing children. This is mainly because farmlands are generally far removed from traditional villages where the community could afford to build a school. Migrants in their

camps are too few to organise one. Moreover, stay in the farms are intermittent and occasional returns to the traditional villages form part of the cycle of farm work. If a child must go to school, he must do so in the traditional village for cases of available alternatives are too few to be significant. But at such an early age both parents and children find parting difficult and it is often the child who follows the parents to the farm rather than the other way round. Moreover, such separation divides the domestic unit and makes the provision of food for the child an extra duty. Poor farmers on account of that decide to put off schooling for their children altogether.

Kids who brave the separation find it difficult nonetheless. Generally, such children settle around the very old people who have retired from farming. Catering is achieved in a number of ways: Some children may cook and eat alone. But this demands maturity which may be lacking in a child starting school. The general practice is that children contribute yams and cook them together under the supervision of the old person with whom they stay. But this too has its own problems. There is no standard measure to ensure equality in the contribution of yams to be cooked. Even when cooked some children eat fast while others are on the slow side. Consequently, some may be overfed while others may not have enough to eat. Many children find it difficult to cope and drop out from school.

In a study of causes of dropouts from elementary schools in Affa, a village community in Udi Local Government Area, of Anambra State, Onyibo made the following observations. "The town (Affa) has dropouts as

her major educational problem. The rate at which children dropout from school is very alarming. Many children stopped attending schooling and turned to farming. The problem was not halted as a result of the introduction of Universal Free Primary Education in 1976 (Onyibo, 1982). He also noted that children contacted explained that they had to leave school because they cannot live alone (Onyibo, 1978: 3).

Moreover, although there has not been a study of dropouts in Ezeagu Local Government Area, common observation would confirm that Affa findings can apply there (see Onyibo). But even without this, there are other ways to test the effect of migrancy on development of the area. This can be done through comparing modern facilities found in two or more communities with varying degrees of migrancy. Such facilities would include modern residential buildings, schools, colleges, mission houses or other projects which are mostly achieved through community efforts.

Two village groups are compared in the first instance. These are Aguobu Owa and Akana Oghe, two village groups from the Local Government Area which although are migrants traditionally are now influenced by different kinds of social factors. Aguobu Owa houses the seat of government on the local government level and it is expected that factors emanating from these could influence the pace of her internal development, Akana Oghe on the other hand is nearer to Enugu. It is also on a good road. Proximity to Enugu and good roads have considerably affected the character of migrancy in the area and the people are now taking to trade and other

business and are becoming more settled in one place than before. This is also helping the pace of development.

It has been observed that most clerical workers and especially executive officers and above who are posted to work at Aguobu Owa prefer to live at Akama Oghe and trek to work from there even though it is more than eight kilometres away from the place of work. When such workers are asked why they prefer to do so, the invariable answer is that there are no suitable facilities for rent for their own cadre of workers at Aguobu Owa. These are not available because maintenance of two homes hardly leave them time to concentrate on developing that kind of accommodation.

Other factors that could be compared are community oriented projects such as schools, cottage hospital, mission houses. The communities compared are those within the Owa clan. These are: Imezi Owa, Aguobu Owa and Mgbagbu Owa. The population density in each of the three villages can compare favourably with one another though Aguobu Owa experiences greater effect of migrancy than any of the sister zones. While Imezi Owa has been able to organise themselves and set up two secondary schools and the other mixed, Mgbagbu Owa constructed three one for boys, one for girls and the third mixed. As for Aguobu Owa, it is only external aid probably supported by environmental factors which can account for the establishment of two secondary schools in the community.

VI

There, also in Ezeagu Local Government Area, due to the features of migrations, revenue collections especially rates and taxes can pose serious problems which affect the availability of funds necessary for development.

Experience shows that many people pay rates or taxes under pressure. Moreover, there are other factors which can facilitate or put heavy obstacles to such collections. A few of them are raised and discussed. At the onset of colonial administration in Nigeria, the form of the receipts appear to reflect the awareness of general illiteracy in the country. The tax receipts were issued in the form of metal plates with number and year inscribed. The colour of the plate number was also varied from year to year to enable the illiterate pick up the current receipt and produce it on demand. Tax collectors were appointed to collect from members of their own descent groups. Each is expected to render his account to the chief of his village who in turn is accountable to the officer at the government sub-treasury from whom he collects the tax receipts and have them distributed along the lines of the collection. These steps ensured accurate collection and accounting since all those involved in the process could easily be traced or identified.

But when Nigeria became self governing a new experiment was introduced. This was the system of Okacha mma - the best man system, an elected officer which replaced the warrant chief in many places. Generally, the change was not well taken as some of the older chiefs continued to assert their

authority in the villages. This caused some confusions and created divided loyalty in some communities. Some people continued to give their support to the old chiefs while others to the new officers. The divided loyalty in the villages equally affected the traditional system of tax collection. Some tax collectors even felt that their duties lapsed with the demise of the warrant chief system. Tax defaulting and other aberrations grew with the confusion.

In order to rectify the situation and ensure prompt collection of rates and taxes, salaried officers were appointed. Their main job was to enforce payment, collect the required amount and issue paper receipts on the spot. But the new officers were not limited to a descent group as his predecessor for they had to collect from a number of communities which did not make h their jobs any easier. In Ezeagu, the problem was compounded by the fact of their seasonal movements from the traditional villages to the farms. But the tax must need to be collected. In order to succeed, some collectors picked strategic places in the communities such as exists to the farms, paths or roads leading to local markets and they stationed themselves in order to trap down adult males on their various business. They are required to produce tax receipts or pay on the spot or failing which face arrest and confinement.

These measures had very limited successes. They also led to other abuses. Very often those who have not paid their rates or taxes learned to adjust their travelling time outside the official hours of the tax

collectors and it caused a considerable loss of revenue to the local government. It also posed serious problems to business as the number of adult males attending local markets declined for fear of arrests and other abuses. In fact one who is not aware of tax problems in the area would have the impression that the local markets are meant for women and children.

It may also be recalled that paper receipts replaced metal. This created special problem for farmers who have to travel long distances on foot and very often under heavy rainfalls. Paper receipts require greater care than metal plates. A rumpled or defaced tax receipt exposes the holder to all kinds of humiliations and offers the tax collectors a favourable opportunity to make extra money while on duty. In fact such officers sometimes enrich themselves even at the expense of the government who must also find money to pay them their regular salaries.

In the very recent times, Ezeagu local government is facing serious financial problems because of requirement for individuals to pay their rates and taxes at their respective places or work, original homes notwithstanding. It can be estimated that about eighty percent of the citizens are migrant farmers, over sixty percent of them holding their tenancy outside the local government itself. It can also be expected that most of them would prefer to pay as required by law rather than be expelled from their farms and exposed to more problems.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to investigate some problems of development in a new agrarian Igbo political unit made up of several autonomous village communities. The word agrarian is emphasised because the peoples' culture hangs largely on land utilization. There, land is owned collectively as it is the basis for their religion and economy. The chief economic pursuit of the people is growing yams.

To succeed with the crop, one requires constant supply of rich soil. However, rich soil may not always be available with the traditional agricultural method which reduces the fertility of the soil after several years of frequent cropping. If it happens that the land is no longer potent, the most enterprising farmer must abandon the old site in quest of better alternatives and thereby starting off fresh migrations. It is against such background that the distinction between uno - traditional home and agu - farmland becomes significant as a sociological phenomena.

From the study, it is also clear that agu is laden with all kinds of conflicts because the use of it leads to the maintenance of two homes, it thereby develops atmosphere which has been shown to be uncondusive for sound education especially for a growing child. The local government is not able to raise necessary funds for developments because her citizens farm outside the area. But the revenue must be collected for essential services and the government is constrained to adopt harsh measures which aims at collecting rates from citizens who may have paid in their areas of work.

NOTES

1. The secondary school for boys (Fatima High School) built originally by Mr. Peter Chukwura as a private school.
2. The Secondary School for Girls was a Primary School built for the Community by the Federal Government. The Community decided to use it as a secondary school for Girls.

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