

INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION METHODS AMONG THE BRITISH IN THE LOWER CROSS RIVER REGION, 1885 – 1929

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Abstract

Intelligence gathering is the process of collecting and analyzing information to understand and evaluate threats, risks, opportunities, and challenges. It is a critical component of decision-making in various fields, including national security, law enforcement, business, and finance. Effective intelligence gathering requires a range of skills and methods including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination. The paper examined the wide array of intelligence gathering methods of the British in the Lower Cross River region between 1885 and 1929. The study adopted a historical method of analysis. Using both primary and secondary sources of evidence, the study found that due to insecurity challenges encountered by the colonial authorities in the Lower Cross River region, the officials adopted different methods of intelligence gathering in the area which include environmental intelligence (Envint), human intelligence (Humint), signals intelligence (Sigint), among others. It also observed that the success of the colonial "information order" rested in turn, on the degree of methods adopted in the gathering of intelligence. It concluded that intelligence gathering played a major role in the conquest and administration of the Lower Cross River region where local resistance and opposition posed a serious threat to the colonial order. The gathering of information for intelligence purposes often came from different methods for which environmental intelligence (Envint) and human intelligence (Humint) played a greater role.

INTRODUCTION

Intelligence gathering is the process of collecting and analyzing information to understand and evaluate threats, risks, opportunities, and challenges. It is a critical component of decision-making in various fields, including national security, law enforcement, business, and finance. Effective intelligence gathering requires a range of skills, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination. By gathering information, organizations and individuals better understand the environment in which they operate, identify potential risks, develop strategies, and make informed decisions. Additionally, information gathering or intelligence can help to inform public policy and create public awareness on important topics.¹ Intelligence gathering is essential for national security and law enforcement. It enables governments to identify and prevent potential threats, such as terrorism, cybercrime, and espionage. It also helps law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, money laundering, and corruption.

Within British colonies, intelligence gathering played a major role in the conquest of territories, especially in the Lower Cross River region where local resistance and opposition posed a serious threat to the colonial order. The British intelligence gathering did not only include reporting rebellious behaviour and political activities of the local people but also involved less contentious information about local demography, economic activity, cultural practices and the indigenous institutions of the people.² The success of the colonial "information order" rested in turn, on the

¹Esteban Borge, *Information Gathering: Techniques and Tools for Effective Research*, *Recorded Future*, 7th March 2024. Available at: <https://www.recordedfuture.com/threat-intelligence-101/intelligence-sources-collection/information-gathering>

²C. A. Bayly. *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 412.

degree of information gathered from the colony. The quality of infrastructure and internal communications systems determined the speed with which all intelligence was transmitted to the central power.³ Later in their scheme, road systems, postal and telegraph networks augmented the scale and speed of governmental activity, enabling British administrators to take a mass of diverse up-to-date information into account as part of the daily cycle of decision making and policy planning. The litanies of documents found in Nigerian archives were evidences of the type of information or intelligence needed by the colonial authorities.⁴ Much of the day-to-day work for those gathering information about the populations was routine, a cycle of clerical record keeping and statistical returns, provincial tours, meetings with local dignitaries, and the arbitration of minor disputes. These accumulated tasks were typically registered in summary reports of past activity of the British government about the Lower Cross River.⁵ Details of public works inspections, meetings with settlers, traders, and mission staff, discussions with lowly village headmen or chiefly rulers: all were distilled into written records.⁶

The Advent of Imperialism in the Lower Cross River Region

Since the abolition of slave trade, the British government had been searching for a way to end the slave business and introduce a legitimate trade in the Lower Cross River and the rest of Africa. The British interest came in 1851 when they bombarded Lagos which served as location that facilitated slave trade. Of course, the British Government thought about putting an end to slave trade and at the same time, they wanted to protect its economic interest.⁷ When the British bombarded Lagos, then occupied it in 1861 and announced it as a British colony, they signed treaties with the local chiefs who forbade slave trade activities and secured British merchants and missionaries. Also, the British made the natives promise to practice legal commerce. The occupation of Lagos was the gateway to the southern of Nigeria, which were rich with natural resources that were needed for British industry. They established their administration in Lagos and started commercial affairs.⁸

After Lagos occupation and the competition that was between Europeans to take over the African lands, they met in Berlin Conference (1884-1885) in which they validated the access to scrambled Africa by dividing the continent between the European powers to colonize it. Later, the British government declared that it owned the Oil Rivers Protectorate in the Nigerian south-eastern region.⁹

The British started their expansion through chartered companies as Goldie's Royal Niger Company or their consuls, who guaranteed the protection of the British advance in the hinterlands. They faced a big resistance from the tribes which made the British use power and tactics to deter them. Also, the application of intelligence gathering played a vital role in the area, because the British found themselves in confrontation with the Nigerian powerful states in the region. After the subjugation of the people through punitive wars, the British rushed to establish their administration

³*ibid.*

⁴J. Brockmeier, *Beyond the Archive: Memory, Narrative, and the Autobiographical Process* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵Patience O. Erim and David Lishilinimle Imbua, "Colonial Education and Women of the Cross River Region of Nigeria, 1900 – 1960: An Appraisal," *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, Vol. 10, No.1 (2013), pp. 80-95.

⁶C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870...*

⁷Cynado C. N. O. Ezeogidi, "The History of the Evolution and Administration of Nigeria, MA Dissertation submitted to the Department of History and International Studies, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Igbariam, February 2020, p. 4

⁸*ibid.*

⁹Nadia Louahala, "A British Colonialism from Survival to Fulfillment: The Case of the Nigerian Traditional Authorities," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of SBA, Academic Year:(2015-2016), p. 101

in these territories in order to control and made it under the British colonial legitimate rule. The Berlin Conference that ended in 1885 insisted that each European country should hurry to occupy the wanted land, using military forces before asking for its sovereignty. The British, for the fear of the French advances that had avidities in Nigerian lands pushed, pushed further into the hinterland, applying different methods to subdue more territories.¹⁰

In 1885, the Oil Rivers Protectorate was established which included the Lower Cross River region. By 1891, effective administration was established with the arrival of Claude MacDonald as the High Commissioner. In 1892, the protectorate territories were extended inland under the name of the Niger Coast Protectorate; it covered the Southern Nigeria areas from the outskirts of Lagos to the Rio del Rey in the Cameroon.¹¹ The Oil Rivers Protectorate consisted of two main Provinces, but for the purpose of administration, it was divided into three distinct Districts, each of which was under the supervision of a Divisional Consular Officer, Udoma notes that the districts were: (1). Eastern District: which consisted of the area embracing the Cross River and the Qua Iboe or Akwa Ibom River;(2). Central District: comprising the areas covered by (formerly the Opobo) now Ikot Abasi and Brass River; and, (3). Western District: was made up of Benin and the Warri Rivers.¹²

In 1896, Sir Macdonald was succeeded by Sir Ralph Moor as the High Commissioner in charge of the area. Macdonald's policy of gradualism in the imposition of colonial rule was replaced by Moor's policy of aggressive imperialism. Moor's notion of effective administration was one in which military force would be the ultimate arbiter for the Niger Coast Protectorate.¹³ Military and punitive expeditions were the most popular instruments for subjugating indigenous regimes to British rule. With the opposition to further penetration of the hinterland by the indigenous people, and by British's own imperial design, the Protectorate's government under Sir Moor resolved to subdue the people by force as a prelude to effective colonial administration. Thus, the immediate occasion for the presence of the colonial forces in the Lower Cross River region was the installation of Native Political Agents in Eket District. These political agents played a huge part in intelligence gathering.¹⁴

Intelligence and Imperial Order

The problems of imperial authority in the region stemmed above all from the gathering popular pressure for greater rights, freedoms, and cultural autonomy. Simply put, the rising force of African nationalism and other forms of indigenous opposition to British rule precluded the maintenance of stable imperial systems in the Lower Cross River. This was made possible with resistance movement British rule which began with the establishment of Consular administration. The very imposition of British political control in the area catalyzed the development of national identities defined in resistance and opposition to this external authority. A notable case of opposition was the case of Jaja of Opobo.

In 1885, the British declared a protectorate over the lower Niger and Oil Rivers. Jaja of Opobo became involved in the resistance movement as he shrewdly questioned the White officials on the meaning of "protectorate" and refused to accept provisions for free trade on British terms. Further to Jaja's effort to preserve his independence, a quarrel ensued between him and the Europeans merchants who tried to break his monopoly of trade in the hinterland. The British traders and missionaries usually gathered intelligence for the British Consul about the activities Jaja in the region and persuaded their government to declare the entire coastal region as a protectorate because of the intense competition and rivalry from French and German traders. The amalgamated

¹⁰*ibid.*

¹¹Monday E. Noah, *The Story of the Old Calabar, A Guide to the National Museum at the Old Residency*, 1986 in Akpan *ibid.*

¹²Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period...*

¹³*ibid.*

¹⁴*ibid.*

Association of Liverpool Traders then adopted a boycott strategy to force Jaja to yield to their terms on trade in Opobo. Failing in this approach, the Acting Consul, Mr. H.H. Johnson in 1887 decided to wade in and persuade Jaja to grant freedom to the palm oil producers in the hinterland to bring produce directing to Europeans on the seacoast without demanding comey/custom duties. Jaja's refusal to succumb to the whims and caprices of European merchants on trade in Opobo did not augur well for him. Mr. Johnson sailed into Opobo in a warship, surreptitiously inviting Jaja aboard the ship for a discussion.

Jaja was suspicious of this intrigue and rather demanded an assurance on the condition that he would be free to return home after the meeting. Johnson gave this assurance but failed to fulfill the promise made to Jaja. As Jaja entered the warship, he was given options to chose from being taken to Accra to face a trial, or return ashore to have Opobo bombarded by the warship. With discretion on his part, Jaja meekly surrendered himself to the Acting Consul and was taken to Accra. In Accra, Jaja was unfairly tried and found guilty of blocking the highways of trade and failing to honour the erroneous 1884 treaty signed with Great Britain. In the process, Jaja was deported to the West Indies in 1887. Four years later when he was eventually allowed to return, he took ill on his way home and died. Thus by seeking to guard his sovereignty, Jaja fell afoul of both the traders and missionaries.

To subdue the rest of the people of the area, the British navy and Consular Service adopted different methods of intelligence gathering which was vital in the subjugation of the area. As already noted, intelligence gathering of the British involved the process of collecting and analyzing information to understand and evaluate threats, risks, opportunities, and challenges. By gathering information, the British better understood the environment in which they operate, identify potential risks, develop strategies, and make informed decisions. Additionally, information gathering or intelligence can help to inform public policy and create public awareness on important topics.¹⁵ Intelligence gathering was essential for securing the Colonial state and for law enforcement. It enabled the British administrators to identify and prevent potential threats, since the capturing of the territories were acquired by force and espionage. It also helped Native Police Force and Colonial Police Force to investigate and prosecute criminal activities, such as practices in line with what was branded as fetish religious practices and act of insubordination against the colonial order, for which human intelligence (Humint) collection methods from explorers, traders, missionaries, political agents, among others, image intelligence (Imint) and signals intelligence (sigint) (technology) techniques were employed. The next sub-headings deals with the methods adopted by the British in intelligence gathering.

Methods of Intelligence Gathering: Environmental Intelligence (Envint)

The importance of gathering information on the terrain (environment) to the imposition and maintenance of colonial rule in the Lower Cross River region cannot be overemphasized. For instance, the maps in cartographic and cognitive domains were very crucial for the understanding the area of occupation. Early reports from explorers such as Mungo Park, Hugh Clapperton, Richard and John Lander (Landers brothers), among others, provided insight over the region and gave successive colonial administrators clue of the topography and the cultural practices of the people, which the British authorities took advantage of.¹⁶ In his writings titled, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa: Performed Under the Direction and Patronage of African Association, in the Years 1795,*

¹⁵Esteban Borge, Information Gathering: Techniques and Tools for Effective Research, *Recorded Future*, 7th March 2024. Available at:<https://www.recordedfuture.com/threat-intelligence-101/intelligence-sources-collection/information-gathering>

¹⁶*ibid.*

1796 and 1797;¹⁷ Mungo Park (a physician) offered a perspectives of the landscape and cultural practices of people, and his exploration served as a gateway for subsequent intrusion of the explorers, traders, missionaries, administrator, into the Lower Cross River region.¹⁸ Some of the information about the land and people were found in their diaries. The method applied here was that of environmental analysis which provided first hand information for the administrators.

For the area under study, the works of these intelligent agents were able to understudy the area, and most of the information gathered about the Cross River region in general and Lower Cross River region in particular gave the imperialists clue about the people and the environment. From the description of the area, the geographical space known as the Cross River region as a whole, existed as a socio-cultural unit, inhabited by various groups of people from the early period. These people include the Ibibio and her related groups of Annang, Oron, Eket, Ibeno and others, of Ibibio, the Efik, Biase, Yakurr, Mbembe and the Ejagham, and the Igbo-speaking people, particularly the Aro and Ohafia, Abriba, Afikpo, Edda and others.¹⁹

From this information, the Cross River region stretched from Benue State southward and covers all of Efik, Ibibio, Annang, Oron, Andoni and continues into Mamfe Depression within which it flows into the upper courses of the Cross River in Western Cameroon. The entire drainage basin of the Cross River including the catchment area of all its tributaries covers about 53,590 square kilometers of which 39,490 square kilometers fall within Nigeria while the remaining 14,100 square kilometers lie in the Cameroon Republic.²⁰ The northern three quarters of the Cross River basin, between latitudes 5° 30' North and longitudes 8° and 9° 40' East, can be defined as the Upper Cross River area. A line running south of Ediba and Mamfe between the local watershed of the Calabar-Kwa River system and some northward flowing tributaries of the Cross River, forms an appropriate demarcation between the Upper and Lower coastal parts of the Cross River basin.²¹

The bunch of intelligence reports found in Nigerian archives provided proofs geographical or environmental survey at introductory part of their Intelligence Reports. For instance, in the Intelligence Report of Ikot Ekpene Division (Abak District) dated 15th January, 1923, information related to geography, demography, history, tribal organization, judicial components, land tenure and ownership system, etymological and linguistic, among others, were found in this kind of report.²² Jones in his description of the Ibibio people noted that:

A study of the present distribution of the Ibibio tribe suggests an earlier scatter of Ibibio over an area extending from Arochukwu in the north, Ika in the west and Oron in the south. This was followed by massive dispersal north and south from a center somewhere between the present Abak and Uyo government stations and a differentiation into Annang (western) and Ibibio (Eastern). The dispersal is clearly preserved in the tribal traditions, all but a few tribes in the extreme north, south and west tracing their origin and present territorial distribution of this movement.²³

¹⁷Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa: Performed Under the Direction and Patronage of African Association, in the Years 1795, 1796 and 1797*, Mungo Park (a physician) offered a perspective of the people of the area he visited.

¹⁸*ibid.*

¹⁹Uwem Jonah Akpan and Susan Ikwolseyen, Aspects of Pre-Colonial Economic Diplomacy in The Lower Cross River Region, *Ibom Journal of Social Issues*, Volume 11, No. 1 (2022), pp. 1-11.

²⁰*ibid.*

²¹*ibid.*

²²Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period...*

²³G. I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963), P. 31

The statement above gives a description of a man who had an in-depth knowledge of the Ibibio people and their environment. From the works of these agents, the imperialists gained the knowledge that the Lower Cross River region was a natural region, and the identity of the Cross River basin was evident from its physical setting which defines a low land surrounded by watersheds of varying elevation and prominence. The Lower Cross River region is a vast area encompassing many ethnic groups some of them mentioned above. The area is flat and low-lying and is characterized by its mangrove swamps with its many creeks and rivulets. The region is drained by four important bodies of water, the most important of which is the Cross River. The other rivers include the Qua Iboe, the Imo and Akpa Yafe. These rivers with their tributaries and creeks, provided excellent means of transportation especially at a time when road transportation was scanty and far between.²⁴

British mapmakers, many of whom were employed by their military intelligence departments, traversed African territories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's. Some produced the cartographic information available to Western officials charting the topography of colonial territories.²⁵

Most African scholars in their effort to reconstruct the history of their people relied on the early works on environmental intelligence in the area. For instance, Noah observed that the Lower Cross River region can be conveniently divided into two main occupational zones. Though not mutually exclusive, those who lived by the river banks and along the estuaries of the region's numerous rivers engaged mostly in fishing, while those who lived in the drier parts were mostly farmers.²⁶ Noah's further description on the people's occupation was a product of British intelligence gathering innovation on the environment. For instance, he noted that, the products of the farm like yams, palm oil and vegetables, among others, constituted the main items of trade which were exchanged for the products of the sea such as shrimps, fish and salt manufactured from the salt water. Locally produced crafts of various types including woven goods usually made out of raffia and from barks of trees, carvings and pottery formed parts of the merchandise. Edible roots spices and honey were also important trade supplements.

The intelligence gathered on the environment painted a picture of the pattern of settlement of the people, for which most works observed that the environment greatly affected the settlement pattern of the people of the region. Within the Lower Cross River region were two types of settlement patterns: nucleated villages clustering along river banks as well as groups located within surrounding forests (perhaps for defensive purposes). Also, although, early occupational specialization led to various forms of contacts, each ethnic group preferred to defend its political independence. This scenario in turn produced "economic sphere of influence" which generated conflicts that occasionally made life unsafe for traders and travelers.²⁷ Through this kind of intelligence, the British imperial army was able to engage the local army in a battle.

Roads, railways, harbours, cables, and telegraphs followed, their lines of advance revealing the progress of colonial expansion in general, and the advice of military intelligence experts, surveyors, and crown agents in particular.²⁸ Some of the intelligent gatherers acted as social anthropologists. Some produced the first cartographic information available to colonial officials charting the topography of the Lower Cross River region. Roads, railways, harbors, cables, and telegraphs followed, their lines of advance revealing the progress of colonial expansion in general,

²⁴*ibid.*

²⁵Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period...* p. 200

²⁶Monday E. Noah, *Old Calabar: The City States and the Europeans, 1800-1885* (Uyo: Scholars Press, 990).

²⁷E. O. Erim, "The Upper Cross River Region: Early Migrations and Settlement." In: Abasiattai, M.B. (Ed.), *A History of the Cross River Region of Nigeria* (Enugu: Harris Publishes, 1990), p. 26

²⁸*ibid.*

and the advice of military intelligence experts, surveyors, and crown agents in particular. Some focused on human geography and social anthropology, compiling ethnographic surveys of tribal concentrations and migratory patterns.²⁹ An instance of terrain information gathering in the area was rendered by Talbot who described the Ibeno (in Lower Cross River region) as recent settlers in the low-lying lands by the mouth of the Kwa Iboe River. In his account about the people, he records that:

Whenever...an Ibeno hunter killed an elephant – herds of which were, and still are, fairly plentiful amid the marsh land near Stubbs Creek – the head chief of Afaha Eket, Edocho by name, used to send and demand the tusk... the newcomers had neither the land, nor knowledge, necessary for the planting of farms. So, they used to bring their smoked fish to exchange for yam, plantain and other produce in a bush market at the neighbouring village of Urua Ita.³⁰

In the statement above Talbot was giving account on the cultural practices of the Ibeno people in Lower Cross River region, to which he lived with. Others produced revised intelligence assessments that updated or corrected previously available information about water sources and rainfall, tribal migrations and agricultural activity, topography and communications.³¹ Others tried to learn from local populations how best to adapt to physical conditions, and placed social behaviours as diverse as childrearing, marriage codes, and funeral rites in their environmental context. In his knowledge about the Ibibio people, Talbot noted that they are "one of the most ancient peoples in this or perhaps any part of Africa."³²

Whether maps, anthropological surveys, or sociological studies, these assessments were pivotal to military conquest and strategy in the Lower Cross River region campaigns, and the frontier delimitations that followed in the 1920s. Talbot did not eschew this skill when he traced the origin of the Ibibio and accounts that "there is still a delightful little village of this name – Ibom in the Obon forest."³³ This was what one analyst has dubbed "strategic knowledge in the service of the colonial system."³⁴ The gathering and recording of ethnographic information was however, subjective, loaded with the values and presumptions of its practitioners. Another case of British understanding of the people is the account rendered by H.F.P. Wetherell in Intelligence Report on Nsit (Western, Uyo District) who state that:

...the parent site of the clan is known by different names which are Afaha Nsit, Obio Nsit and Ikot Oku Anyang, but for sake of convenience in this report the parent village is called Afaha Nsit, and a royal family at one time part of Afaha Nsitas NduoEduo. Afaha Nsit lies just to the south of the Uyo-Abak road and there may be some significance in the fact that the parent villages of the largest Ibibio clans, Nsit, Ikono and Iman all lie within an area of three-square miles.³⁵

²⁹*ibid.*

³⁰Percy Amaury Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria. The Magic Belief and Customs of the Ibibio Tribe* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1923), p. 287.

³¹Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period...*

³²Percy Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria. A Sketch of their History, Ethnology and Languages with An Abstract on the 1921 Census*, p. 184

³³*ibid.*

³⁴Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period...*p. 200

³⁵H.F.P. Wetherwell. "Intelligence Report on Nsit," Western, Uyo District, No. 222, Agency Mark 29802, N/A Ibadan, 1932, p. 4.

The above clearly indicates that the British imperialists apparently took time to study the terrain, institutions, people and their cultural practices, among others. Also, factors such as education, racial prejudice, a scientific understanding of the natural world, political outlook, or religious affiliation informed the ways in which apparently empirical evidence was recorded. Mental maps were never simply about geography. As reported by S.T. Harvey in the Intelligence Report of Ikono clan, Ikot Ekpene Division, "Ikono clan occupies an area of 39 square miles in the north east of the Ikot Ekpene Division with a population of approximately 40,600 and the density 436 to the square mile. The density of the area is therefore approximately 436 persons to the square mile."³⁶ They also represented the cognitive recognition of what was deemed important in any particular environment.³⁷ It was through this accumulation of written records and personal experiences that British colonial policymakers in the Lower Cross River region built up their mental maps of the territory and society under their authority.

This brings back to the role of terrain intelligence gathering as observed from official and personal records of colonial administrators. Taken together, these materials represented a constantly updated archive of colonial geography - physical, human, political, and economic - intended to facilitate governmental decision making and promote inward commercial investment.³⁸ Information about climate, meteorology, river systems and water sources, demographic distribution, farming, and livestock conditions helped British officials between 1885 and 1929, to construct a map of the local economy, political institutions, among others.

Intelligence provided information on the institution the imperialists met at the time of their arrival. In view of the ethnological background which the region presented to the early explorers and visitors, Afigbo and Erim observed that the explorers and visitors concluded that the existing structure was that of political fragmentation.³⁹ Indeed, like other areas of later day Nigeria, the area consisted of autonomous village communities whose people were very democratic and disliked centralized governmental control. For example, the Efik, from the 16th century formed settlements which later developed into city-states. Available records reveal that these city-states derived their prosperity from the trade with the Europeans on the one hand and with the hinterland groups on the other. Their political organization was based on the "House System."⁴⁰ The head of the "House" was responsible for trading activities of members. Among the city-states there is no tradition of any house exercising any form of control over others, rather, each "House" was politically independent and individualistic. However, Afigbo notes that it would be absurd to regard any of these tiny republics as absolutely independent of its neighbours economically or otherwise. According to him, the fact of the autonomy of each unit did not constitute severe hindrance to trade.⁴¹

The issue of fragmentation was not applicable only to the Efik, but also to the communities within the area of study. Politics was organized on the basis of "village democracies,"⁴² The village formed the fulcrum of the socio-economic contacts. Those who lived outside these communities or visited them were regarded as "strangers." Consequently, inter-group relations between these

³⁶S.T. Harvey. "Intelligence Report on Ikono Clan," Ikot Ekpene Division. N/A, Serial No. 144, Agency Mark, 29949, 1932, p. 2

³⁷Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period...*p. 200

³⁸*ibid.*

³⁹A. E. Afigbo, "Trade and Politics in the Cross River Basin, 1895-1903," *Transaction of Historical Society of Ghana*. Volume 12, No. 1 (1972); E. O. Erim, "The Upper Cross River Region: Early Migrations and Settlement...."

⁴⁰Uwem Jonah Akpan and Susan Ikwolseyen, Aspects of Pre-Colonial Economic Diplomacy in The Lower Cross River Region, *Ibom Journal of Social Issues*, Volume 11, No. 1 (2022), pp. 1-11.

⁴¹A. E. Afigbo, "Trade and Politics in the Cross River Basin, 1895-1903," *Transaction of Historical Society of Ghana....*

⁴²*ibid.*

splinter communities were quite unpredictable. However, as indicated by Akpan, this should not give an impression that anarchy prevailed in the region in the past.⁴³Evidence shows that the entire region formed an economic unit with none of the “tiny” settlement particularly on the river banks being neither economically isolated nor self-sufficient. The political independence and autonomy did not constitute an absolute hindrance to the movement of trade and trade goods within the region. Occasionally, trade was punctuated by either by inter-ethnic wars, suspicions or open warfare. On such occasions, each community had to erect all kinds of trade barriers fondly referred to as tolls.⁴⁴

Human Intelligence (Humint)

The role of humans cannot be down played in intelligence gathering effort of the imperialists. Distillation and exploitation of information about local conditions, physical as well as political - not to mention intelligence of perceived internal or external threats to authority -enhances the state’s capacity to make reasoned policy choices about how best to use the security forces at its disposal, in this case – the occupation army. It is important to remember the predominance of human intelligence (humint) sources in the array of information available to colonial security services in the Lower Cross River region. Human surveillance and intelligence gathering was another technique of the British colonial information gathering method in the Lower Cross River region. Human surveillance and intelligence gathering involves the covert and overt monitoring of someone’s or people’s movements, conversations and other activities. This method of intelligence gathering was carried out by highly skilled specialist surveillance officers who may work or live among the people under surveillance from a fixed observation post. The agent in this regards often worked in close cooperation with the natives.⁴⁵

The establishment of consular services initially, and later, the excising of more administrative units such as provinces, divisions and districts and the commissioning of political agents to the area constituted approaches to the British intelligence gathering methods in the Lower Cross River region. First, the appointment of John Beecroft as the first consul for the Bight of Benin and Biafra in 1849 marked the beginning of direct military dimension of human intelligence gathering in the Lower Cross River region. The Lower Cross River region before 1885, had consuls such as: Thomas Hutchison, Richard Burton, C. Livingston, C. Hartley, D. Hopkin, and Edward Hewett. These consuls leveraged on intelligence gathered from military and non-military agents among whom were vice consuls, district commissioner, traders and missionaries. The first major move in the area was in 1882, when Edward Hewett moved the consulate headquarters from Fernando Po to Old Calabar, there making the colonial government closer to the people. From this point, the people of the Lower Cross River region were monitored by a mass of political agents. To make matter easy for the intelligence unit of the colonial security service, warrant chiefs were appointed by the government with Native Courts established at different districts to addresses cases from this region. The Consul Offices at Calabar received periodic reports from these agents and Native court attendants. This move had effect on the people as many areas began to open up for *Pax Britannica*.⁴⁶ From this post, the activities of the people were monitored and reported to the colonial government.

This consular physical presence in the area involved mostly the use of gun-boat diplomacy on the people. The consular authority of the Bight of Biafra was established to monitor activities in the Cross River region and to ameliorate the increasing disputes and contradictions among the European trading inlets. Initially, the human intelligence (humint) was meant to protect the British commercial interest and preempt any hostile activities and warfare on the coast, which led to

⁴³*ibid.*

⁴⁴A. E. Afigbo, “Trade and Politics in the Cross River Basin, 1895-1903...”; E. O. Erim, “The Upper Cross River Region: Early Migrations and Settlement....”

⁴⁵Security Service MI5 “Covert Surveillance,” Available at: <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/how-we-work/gathering-intelligence/covert-surveillance>

⁴⁶*ibid.*

stoppage of trade.⁴⁷ The next human intelligence (humint) was geared to subjugating the territories and maintaining colonial order. Further steps were taken by the British authorities to gather intelligence from this area.

In 1885, the area was declared "Oil River Protectorate,"⁴⁸ with Calabar as the capital. By 1891, Major Claude Maxwell MacDonald, became the first Commissioner and Consul-General with his staff of six vice-councils. Further steps were taken to bring British presence closer and for the purpose of gathering information. The Oil River Protectorate was divided into two provinces and was divided into three distinct Districts, each of which was under the supervision of a Divisional Consular Officer. The Eastern District, Central District and Western District were created. Under this structure, the Lower Cross River region fell under the Eastern District. Sir Ralph Moor succeeded MacDonald. Moor's intelligence gathering techniques were followed up by punitive expeditions which he used to subjugate indigenous regimes to British rule.⁴⁹

For Moor to succeed in his rigid information gathering approach, he established several Native political agents who watched and reported the activities of the people of the area. This directed surveillance techniques worked for British colonial administration under Ralph Moor. By this time, a native political agent was installed at Eket District. This agent was involved in intelligence reportage. As reported by Uya, the expansion of colonial authority into Oron involved the application of considerable force as well as the participation of a noted Efik Political Agent, Chief Daniel Henshaw.⁵⁰ In that incident which took place among the Udung Uko people in 1897, the second son of Chief Osung Atanang of Udung Uko, killed one of the women of his father's household, having accused her of being a wizard that caused his brother to fall sick but her magic. This incident was reported by the agent to Talbot and he informed other colonial government officials. Consequently, this man was arrested, tried and sentenced to death by hanging in his village to serve as deterrence to others.⁵¹ Following this incidence, were series of attacks and raids on different villages in the region by the British naval force.

The growth in administrative units and the involvement of personnel to a great extent contributed immensely to information gathering in the British colony of the Lower Cross River region. Greater bureaucratization of government and a system of record keeping for rapid data retrieval were essential to enable senior officials to act on a manageable volume of all information reported. In this sense, the increasing sophistication of intelligence gathering with a broader pattern of technological advance that underpinned imperial conquest and consolidation is worthy of recognition. Typically gathered from controlled sources, often agents, informants, or local officials in the pay of the security services, humans enabled colonial governments to evaluate indigenous responses to state action.

The Aro expedition was an aspect of British intelligence efforts which led to the conquest of the area. The Aro was related to an oracle which was believed to have been introduced into Ibom (the foremost Ibibio settlement) by an Ibibio man and later captured by the Igbo slaves and later renamed *Ibin Ukpabi*. The deity grew in influence to become the most powerful oracle in the area and beyond. The Aro used the special protection which this oracle was widely believed to afford them to promote their commercial interests. The Aros, moving from their hometown of Arochukwu, near Cross River traded and settled in groups, large and small, throughout the region, buying and selling slaves and a host of other valuable items and serving as agents for their oracle and for hiring

⁴⁷Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*...p. 200

⁴⁸*ibid.*

⁴⁹*ibid.*

⁵⁰*ibid.*, p. 204

⁵¹*ibid.*

of mercenary soldiers. The imperialists saw these groups as threat and from the moment, designed a plot to demolish the influence the oracle had on the people.⁵²

By 1898, it had become increasingly apparent to the British imperialists that the securities of the area was the precursor of trade stability, which by implication, would reduce the effect of economic depression experienced in Europe. In the thinking of the imperialists, this could only be achieved through the extermination of the Long Juju of Arochukwu and the curtailment of Aro political hegemony and economic control of the area. With the official consent of the British colonial office at the instance of Hoseph Chamberline, the following objectives for the Aro expedition were outlined: to stop slave trading and slave trade; to abolish the Juju hierarchy of the Aro; to open the area (Lower Cross River region and its environs) to civilization, among others.⁵³

In November 1901, preparation for the Aro expedition began after a series of intelligence had already been gathered through human agents. The imperialist had recruited local militia groups within the network of Aro villages who ferried intelligence to the Consular office. The Aro expedition was undertaken under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Montanaro who was put in charge of the Aro Field Forces comprising 87 officers, 1550 soldier and 2100 carriers.

Signals Intelligence (Sigint)

Colonial policymakers were privy to large quantities of signals intelligence. The bulk of sigint material either acquired by or relayed to the British authorities in the area derived from intercepts of diplomatic activities (with the people and groups like Ekpe societies) and military correspondence from the Native court police. Some of these intercepts were enclair dispatches, but most were transmitted as coded ciphers (i.e *nsibidi* sign language) that required dedicated code-breaking staffs to decode them or *ekpe* members. From time to time, the imperial authorities even recruited members into the *Ekpe* society and supplied personnel to encode sigint traffic on behalf of the governments, and thus monitor outgoing events of the group.⁵⁴ One usage of the Sigint was the application of *Nsibidi* sign language used by secret societies like *Ekpe* group. It was not uncommon for *Ekpe* societies to use *nsibidi* in their communication. This was possible because of the regional usage *nsibidi* had acquired. *Nsibidi* sign language enhanced diplomacy in the area.

The competition over the spheres of influence among the Europeans demanded that Sigint was to be used for intelligence gathering. European imperial officials made efforts to intercept one another's cipher traffic. Ironically, sigint was also sometimes shared between them to achieve their imperial missions, notably when it related to resistant groups' act of insubordination to any colonial authority or on the cultural and religious activities of the people.⁵⁵ Also, there was need to counter any effort of other European power who tried to encroach into the area of occupation.⁵⁶

Signals intelligence was therefore pivotal to attitude formation among the policymaking elites in these territories. It commanded respect because it represented information gathered direct "from the horse's mouth." But decoded signals rarely determined short-term policy decisions.

Women's War and the Failure of Intelligence

The "riots" or the war, led by women in the provinces of Calabar and Owerri in southeastern Nigeria in November and December of 1929, became known as the "Aba Women's Riots of 1929" in British colonial history, or as the "Women's War" in the history of the people of southeastern Nigeria. The war was the consequence of many factors inherent in the imperial state,

⁵²J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition, 1885-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 96.

⁵³*ibid.*

⁵⁴Udo Ukpa, 78 Years, Family Head, Atan Ukwok Village, Ini Local Government Area, Residence, 12 December, 2023.

⁵⁵J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition, 1885-1906...*

⁵⁶*ibid*

however, the appointment of warrant chiefs intensified conflicts in the society, as evidenced by the Native Courts Proclamation of 1901, which conferred exclusive judicial functions on the new chiefs in their communities. The village councils were denied their traditional functions and worse still, cases involving abominations were punished without the ritual propitiations and sacrifices necessary for “cleansing the earth” and restoring moral equilibrium. Women were particularly upset by the desecration of laws, and during the protests they called for the restoration of the old order. The British-appointed warrant chiefs also abused their offices to enrich themselves, in part because they were paid meager allowances that could not sustain their newly acquired prestige and lifestyle. Virtually all of them established private courts in their compounds, where they settled disputes. They also used their headman to collect fines and levies, thus alienating members of their community.⁵⁷

The executive functions the warrant chiefs performed for the imperialists, including the recruitment of men for forced labour to build railways, roads, and government guest houses, heightened their unpopularity. During the protests, women complained about forced labour, claiming that it increased their workload by depriving them of the services they received from their husbands in farming and the production of palm produce. Women were also concerned about the emerging urban centers, which had become hubs for those engaged in prostitution and other vices that the women believed polluted the land. The imperialists authorized police and military officers to suppress the disturbances, and district officers were granted the right to impose fines in the affected areas as compensation for damages to property and as a deterrent against future riots. However, the women’s war marked the first time the application of intelligence in the area failed. The consequence was the enactment of Ordinance No. 2 of 1930 which signaled major security reorganization.

CONCLUSION

As identified, information collection did not only include reporting rebellious behaviour and political activities to the British authorities but also involved less contentious information about local demography, economic activity, cultural practices and the indigenous institutions of the people. Some of the methods employed by British authorities over the country were environmental intelligence (Envint), human intelligence (Humint), signals intelligence (Sigint) image intelligence (Imint), among others. The success of the colonial “information order” rested in turn, on the degree of methods adopted in intelligence gathering. The maps in cartographic and cognitive domains were very crucial for the understanding the area of occupation. For instance, early reports from explorers such as Mungo Park, Hugh Clapperton, Richard and John Lander (Landers brothers), among others, provided insight over the region and gave successive colonial administrators clue of the topography and the cultural practices of the people, which the British authorities leveraged on. Also, human surveillance and intelligence gathering was another technique of the British colonial intelligence gathering method in the Lower Cross River region, carried out by highly skilled specialist surveillance officers who worked or lived among the people under surveillance from a fixed observation post. The agent in this regards often worked in close cooperation with the natives. It also observed that the success of the colonial “information order” rested in turn, on the degree of methods adopted in the gathering of intelligence. Intelligence gathering played a major role in the conquest and administration of the Lower Cross River region where local resistance and opposition posed a serious threat to the colonial order.

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