

**BRITISH COLONIAL INTELLIGENCE REPORTS AND THE CONQUEST OF THE LOWER
CROSS RIVER REGION, 1885 – 1929**

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Abstract

Throughout the British colony of Nigeria, intelligence gathering included reporting rebellious behaviour, political activity of the people as well as contentious information about local demography, economic activity, and the indigenous institutions of the people which gave foremost information about the people, culture and environment. The conquest and success of the "colonial order" rested, in turn, on the degree of information or intelligence gathered by the British authorities. From 1849 to 1900, Southern Nigeria came under consular jurisdiction of the Foreign Office in Britain. During the last half of the 18th century, the industrial revolution took place in England, creating the demand for natural products to keep the factories humming – and Africa was a store-house of untapped wealth. The British outrageous attempt to eliminate the role of the coastal chiefs as middlemen who controlled the trading inlets to the hinterland to foist favourable price regime resulted in the opposition of the Africans. There was also the problem of international trade competition, especially between the French and the English which led to the establishment of consular rule. The British Consul was to protect the British commercial interests on the coast and pre-empt any hostile activities and warfare, which led to stoppage of trade. As soon as the Upper Cross River opened up, the Lower Cross followed and this happened with bombardment of Old Town in 1855. Consequently, the foremost military encounter leading to the opening up of the Lower Cross River commenced with the elimination of local rulers whose monopolistic and hegemonic influence threatened the colonial authorities. In doing this, the British authorities employed the services of early explorers, missionaries and keen observers who gathered information about the people's socio-political and cultural activities as well as military architecture of the people which consequently led to the consequent of the area.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the British colony of Nigeria, intelligence gathering did not only include reporting rebellious behaviour and political activity of the people but also involved less contentious information about local demography, economic activity, and the indigenous institutions of the people which gave foremost information about the people, culture and environment. The conquest and success of the "colonial order" rested, in turn, on the degree of information or intelligence gathered by the British authorities. Also, the quality of infrastructure and internal communications systems determined the speed with which all intelligence were collected transmitted from different local administrative units to the central power.¹ Road systems, postal and telegraph networks later 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.²

In the Lower Cross River region, much of the day-to-day, monthly and annual administrative activities and information about the populations, a cycle of clerical record keeping and statistical returns, provincial tours, meetings with local communities, and the arbitration of minor and major disputes were sources of intelligence reports. These accumulated tasks were typically registered in summary reports of past activity of the British government about the Lower Cross River. Also, details

¹S. A. Abam, *A History of the Eastern Niger Delta 1885-1960. Challenges and Responses of a Society in Transition* (Lagos: University of Lagos, 1988).

²Enugu National Archive, Annual General Report for 1930, Nigeria, Section VI, File No. 1528.

of public works inspections, meetings with settlers, traders, and mission staff, discussions with lowly village headmen or chiefly rulers: all were distilled into written reports.³ Individual events, interviews, interrogations, discussions, or observations of particular events justified a letter, telegram, or telegraphic dispatch to the consular's office or governor's office or the local military headquarters, among others, played premium demand in the British intelligence report.

Intelligence reports 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 British occupation of the Lower Cross River region started with the declaration of the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1885 and later the conquest of Opobo in 1887 when King Jaja was kidnapped and exiled to Accra by the acting British Consul in the Oil Rivers Protectorates, H.H. Johnston on the grounds that Jaja refused to sign the clause of open trade in the treaty he entered into with the British.⁴ By 1891, effective administration was established with the arrival of Claude MacDonald as the High Commissioner. Throughout this period, the intelligence reports played a vital role in the conquest of the area.⁵

The paper examines the role of intelligence reports and its implication to the conquest of the Lower Cross River region from 1885 and 1929. The period - 1885 is chosen as the originating chronology because it marks the Berlin Conference; while 1929 as the terminating chronology is chosen to make emphasis on the Women's Riot, which epitomized failure of intelligence gathering in the colonial state of Nigeria.

The Lower Cross River Region

The geographical space known as the Cross River region has been 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 Akwa Ibom State, the Efik, Biase, Yakurr, Mbembe and the Ejagham, among others, of the present-day Cross River State and the Cross River Igbo, particularly the Aro and Ohafia, Abriba, Afikpo, Edda and others, found in present-day Abia and Ebonyi States.⁶ The Lower Cross River region existed as a socio-cultural unit.

The Cross River region is located in South-Eastern Nigeria and stretches from Benue State southward and covers all of Cross River State and Akwa Ibom, the Eastern part of Enugu, Imo, Ebonyi and Abia States, 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.⁷ The northern three quarters of the Cross River basin, between latitudes 5^o30' North and longitudes 8^o and 9^o40' 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.⁸

As a natural region, the identity of the Cross River basin is evident from its physical setting which defines a low land surrounded by watersheds of varying elevation and prominence. The Lower Cross River region which is the focus of the study 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,

³S. A. Abam, *A History of the Eastern Niger Delta 1885-1960. Challenges and Responses of a Society in Transition...*

⁴*ibid.*

⁵*ibid.*

⁶Uwem 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.

⁷*ibid.*

⁸*ibid.*

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.⁹

According to Noah, the region can be conveniently divided into two main occupational zones. Though not mutually exclusive, those who live by the river banks and along the estuaries of the region's numerous rivers engage mostly in fishing, while those who live in the drier parts are mostly farmers.¹⁰ 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. It should be added that the environment has greatly affected the settlement pattern of the region. At the coast were, and still are found Efik trading and fishing settlements clustering along favoured spots which later grew into city-states. Within the hinterland (outside Efik land) are 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.¹¹

In view of the ethnological background which the region presented to the early explorers and visitors, Afigbo and Erim observe that the explorers and visitors concluded that the existing structure was that of political fragmentation.¹² 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."¹³ 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.¹⁴

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,"¹⁵ 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 splinter communities were quite unpredictable. However, as indicated by Akpan, this should not give

⁹*ibid.*

¹⁰Monday E. Noah, *Old Calabar: The City States and the Europeans, 1800-1885* (Uyo: Scholars Press, 990).

¹¹E. 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

¹²A. 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...."

¹³Uwem 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.

¹⁴A. E. Afigbo, "Trade and Politics in the Cross River Basin, 1895-1903," *Transaction of Historical Society of Ghana....*

¹⁵*ibid.*

an impression that anarchy prevailed in the region in the past.¹⁶ Evidence 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.¹⁷

The Advent of Imperialism in the Lower Cross River Region

From 1849 to 1900, Southern Nigeria came under consular jurisdiction of the Foreign Office in Britain. During the last half of the 18th century, the industrial revolution took place in England. It created a demand for natural products to keep the factories humming – and Africa was a store-house of untapped wealth. In Southern Nigeria, the most important resources were palm oil and palm kernels (used in making soap, margarine, Vaseline and various kinds of lubricating oil for industrial machinery), Britain also needed new markets for finished products and new fields for investment of surplus capital made possible by industrial revolution. With the new opportunities afforded by the industrial revolution, Britain turned her back on the slave trade. At the same time, she prohibited her subjects from taking part in it. The British merchants in Southern Nigeria were forced to find a new source of income; consequently, they turned to the buying of and selling of natural products.¹⁸

The British outrageous attempt to eliminate the role of the coastal chiefs as middlemen who controlled the trading inlets to the hinterland to foist favourable price regime resulted in the opposition of the Africans. There was also the problem of international trade competition, especially between the French and the English. This led to the establishment of consular rule. The British Consul was to protect the British commercial interests on the coast and pre-empt any hostile activities and warfare, which led to stoppage of trade.¹⁹

The first British Consul, John Beecroft, visited the trading rivers regularly and kept to his instructions of facilitation of the overseas trade and noninterference in local affairs. He was friendly with the Old Calabar river chiefs and traders and it was owing to his influence that they remained pro-British during the European scramble. His successors became increasingly involved in the activities and politics of the coastal states.²⁰

Through the instrumentality of the missionaries who operated in Calabar from 1846, various consuls made several attempts in (1856, 1872 and 1882) to move their headquarters to the Old Calabar River. Their power lay mainly in campaigns of the British warships (men-of war), on board which they used to patrol the rivers, signing treaties, settling disputes and dispensing British “justice”. The presence of the powerful outside forces – missionaries, traders and consuls, led to increased political pressure and interference in the local economic and political mechanism, which further weakened the fibre of the indigenous society and increased the internal frictions. In 1882, the British consul, Edward Hewett, finally moved the consulate headquarters from Fernando Po to Old Calabar.

Meanwhile, the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 marked the climax of the European competition for territory in Africa, a process commonly known as the scramble for Africa. Inevitably, the scramble for territory led to conflict among European powers, particularly between the British and French in West Africa; Egypt, the Portuguese, and British in East Africa; and the French and

¹⁶*ibid.*

¹⁷A. E. Afigbo, “Trade and Politics in the Cross River Basin, 1895-1903...”; E. O. Erim, “The Upper Cross River Region: Early Migrations and Settlement....”

¹⁸*ibid.*

¹⁹*ibid.*

²⁰Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period* (Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2018), p. 202

King Leopold II in central Africa. Rivalry between Great Britain and France led Bismarck to intervene, and in late 1884, he called a meeting of European powers in Berlin. In the subsequent meetings, Great Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, and King Leopold II negotiated their claims to African territory, which were then formalized and mapped. During the conference the leaders also agreed to allow free trade among the colonies and established a framework for negotiating future European claims in Africa. Neither the Berlin Conference itself nor the framework for future negotiations provided any say for the peoples of Africa over the partitioning of their homelands.

The Berlin Conference did not initiate European colonization of Africa, rather it did legitimate and formalize the process; hence, British claims over the territory of the Lower Cross River region was formalized. In addition, it sparked new interest in Africa. Following the close of the conference, European powers expanded their claims in Africa such that by 1900.²¹ After the Berlin Conference of 1885, the Lower Cross River region began to witness serious colonial intrusion into the area.

In 1885, the Oil Rivers Protectorate was established; however, effective administration was established in 1891 with the arrival of Claude MacDonald, 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.²² 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.²³ The Lower Cross River region connotes in parts Eastern District and Central Districts.

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.²⁴ 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.²⁵

Intelligence Report and the Conquest of Lower Cross River Region

Intelligence report is a specific report of information, usually on a single item, made at any level of command in tactical operations and disseminated as rapidly as possible in keeping the timeline of the information. Intelligence report can be seen from different dimension. For instance, military intelligence has to do with the knowledge of a possible or actual enemy or area of operations acquired by the collection, evaluation and interpretation of military information. Combat intelligence is the knowledge of the enemy, weather and the terrain that is used in the planning and conduct of tactical operations. Counter intelligence is activity pertains to all security measures designed to

²¹*ibid.*

²²Monday E. Noah, *The Story of the Old Calabar, A Guide to the National Museum at the Old Residency*, 1986 in Akpan *ibid.*

²³Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period* (Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2018), p. 202.

²⁴*ibid*

²⁵*ibid.*

ensure the safeguarding of information against espionage, personnel against subversion, and installations or material against sabotage.²⁶

As soon as the Upper Cross River opened up, the Lower Cross followed and this happened with bombardment of Old Town in 1855. Consequently, the foremost military encounter leading to the opening up of the Lower Cross River commenced with the British experience with Jaja of Opobo, whose monopolistic and hegemonic influence threatened the colonial authorities. In 1885, the British declared a protectorate over the lower Niger and Oil Rivers known as "Oil River Protectorate." Jaja of Opobo became involved in the resistance movement as he shrewdly questioned the British 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.

This quarrel had to do with the British traders attempt to gain direct access to Jaja's hinterland markets. Jaja's influence sufficiently frustrated the British traders from the area. In retaliation, the British reduced the fees paid to Jaja and Jaja retaliated by banning all trade with European firms, while he arranged to ship oil directly to Europe. The amalgamated Association of Liverpool Traders then adopted a boycott strategy to force Jaja to yield to their terms on trade in Opobo. The merchants usually forwarded reports to consular office on the activities of Jaja on how he has been obstructing trade in the area. 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 fulfil 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.

Another incident was that of the Bressmen. The Charter granted to the RNC in 1886 met with sporadic opposition in the Niger Delta area. The riverine people vehemently opposed the establishment of its authority and bitterly resented British intrusion into the economic affairs of its polity. This was well demonstrated in the Akassa Massacre. The Brassmen resorted to violence and direct attack on the company. "The Akassa raid was the most significant event of the Brass people's²⁷ police and military exploit. The RNC in the process, molested and maimed, killed and seized all Nembe trading canoes at the Niger Delta Coast along Brass (Membe area) known as the brave city states, and the creeks, thereby cutting the Nembe middlemen off their legitimate trade into the hinterland. King Koko, Mingi VIII, Amanyanabo of Nembe Kindgom could not withstand the injustice and oppression meted out to his people. In effect, he mobilized all the Kings and Chiefs of Nembe Kingdom to take action against the RNC. They collectively decided that it was better to die by the Whiteman's gun than to die of hunger. They launched the attack and raided the office of the RNC at Akassa on 29th January 1895.²⁸ The Royal Navy (the strong police agency) sent a reprisal attack,

²⁶Scribd, "Military Intelligence Report" Available at:
<https://www.scribd.com/document/331835616/Military-Intelligence-Report>

²⁷Akassa is in present-day Nembe and Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

²⁸ E. H. Carr, What is History...

warships into the river, bombarding the offending towns on 22nd February 1895 was enormous and pathetic.

Intelligence Report in the Lower Niger

Intelligence gathering was not entirely a matter of reporting seditious behaviour and political activity. British colonial government also required less contentious information about local demography, economic activity, and the institutions of government. The success of this colonial "information order" rested, in turn, on the degree of economic development in individual territories. The quality of infrastructure and internal communications systems determined the speed with which all intelligence could be transmitted to the central power.²⁹ Road systems and postal and telegraph networks augmented the scale and speed of governmental activity, enabling politicians and officials to take a welter of diverse up-to-date information into account as part of the daily cycle of decision making and policy planning.³⁰

The rising forms of indigenous opposition to British rule in Lower Cross River region precluded the maintenance of stable imperial systems in the Lower Cross River region. Colonial intelligence gathering thus straddled the boundaries of conventional military intelligence, which focused on gathering and analyzing information about foreign powers, and internal security intelligence, which was devoted to political policing of the domestic population. First and foremost, surveillance of colonial populations targeted internal subversion. The British colonial state amassed information about subject populations to guarantee its monopoly over the use of force and to impose its authority on a subject population designated to play arduous but subordinate parts in a European-dominated economic system. It is because colonial rule was not rooted in consent, self-determination, or popular will (indeed, it stood in complete opposition to them), colonial security intelligence was intrinsically different from the security intelligence practiced "at home" by the imperial powers. By the start of World War I, the centralized accumulation of information about British subjects was not only integral to state intervention but popularly accepted as such. This data collection process had, of course, begun much earlier, even though the Treasury proved consistently reluctant to fund it.

The conquest of the Lower Cross River Region could be said to have commenced in 1885.³¹ The conquest of the Lower Cross River Region as part of Bight of Biafra (Oil River Protectorate) was an episode involving intelligence reports, to the benefit of the British colonizers. Just as the other European officials were making frantic efforts to subdue other area, British imperialists in the Oil River Protectorate were also penetrating the Lower Cross River Region. They equally engaged in leveling accusations on "Stubborn" kings who fell apart with them.³² This area was declared Oil Rivers Protectorate and by implication, it became part of British Empire. Having set the stage with the official declaration, British nationals, such as traders, Christian missionaries (especially Scottish and Irish Catholics and Protestants), political agents and military personnel collaborated to enforce the *pax-Britanica* via the imposition of British economic, religious, political and military systems. The declaration of the Protectorate administration over the Niger coast area after the Berlin West African Conference in 1885 was in many ways the turning point in the history of British relations with the communities of the Niger districts. By this time, the Lower Cross River Region as part of Niger Districts was under the supervision of the Royal Niger Company.

²⁹Richard J. Popplewell, "Recent Approaches to British Counter-Insurgency," *Journal of Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1995): 337

³⁰*ibid.*

³¹Uwem Jonah Akpan, "The British Sujugation and their Imposition of Colonial Rule in Akwa Ibom: 1900-1929," *Polac International Journal of Humanities and Security Studies*, Volume1, No. 1 (2015), pp. 1-10.

³²*ibid.*

Colonial rule was established in Lower Cross River region when the British invaders conquered the area through Calabar and imposed its authority on the people. The appointment of John Beecroft in 1849 as the British Consul for the Bights of Benin and Biafra helped to extend British influence in the Lower Cross region. Beecroft was a known name to most of the coastal chiefs, and in 1836, Calabar chiefs solicited his assistance to lead them in a steam boat up the Cross River to bring the Ibibio, Annang, Oron of Lower Cross River Region to a better understanding.³³ Beecroft was, therefore, better prepared to use his new position to lay the foundation of British authority in the Lower Cross region. In the process, however, bombardment, cajolery and direct intervention in the internal affairs of the coastal areas were often employed to achieve the desired goal, but this was not possible without intelligence report from local and colonial agents, aided by new infrastructure.

The Consular regime was inaugurated in the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1885 and Major Claude Maxwell MacDonald – the first British Commissioner and Consul-General was appointed. 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.³⁴ They included, Eastern District, Central District and Western District. The Lower Cross River Region was under the Eastern District.

The arrival of Christian missionaries in Calabar in 1846 also marked a new chapter in the history and application of intelligence in the Lower Cross River Region. Led by the United Presbyterian Mission, other missionary groups included the Qua Iboe and the Methodist. The Christian missionaries were, by and large, intelligence agents through whom consular authority was felt in the inland regions, beyond the coast. For instance, Mary Slessor was not only a magistrate in a number of minor courts in the area, but in 1892 she was appointed Vice-Consul for Okoyong district.³⁵ This informal alliance between the Christian missionaries and consular authorities was of mutual benefit to both groups. Both the missionaries and the political authorities were interested in establishing peace network in the area either for reasons of humanity, political control or for the sake of trade in palm oil. With this development intelligence reports were often offered to the detriment of the people.

Warfare was not only anti-religious but it also militated against peaceful trade. Since the trade in human cargo which required warfare had been abolished, the only condition under which the trade in palm oil could flourish was peace especially in the inland areas which produced the bulk of the oil. Under such considerations, warfare was also anti-commerce. And if the missionaries lacked the means for enforcing peace in the area, the consular authorities had the war boats at their disposal and the efforts of the missionaries could thus be supplemented by the military might of the consul. If peaceful negotiations with the indigenous peoples along with Christian persuasions of the missionaries failed to produce peace, the threat of the gun-boat could be useful. What the missionaries needed to do was to identify the trouble spots which had the potential of disrupting British trade and the consular authorities would do the rest.³⁶ This however, involved early warning signals and intelligence gathering even though some were not well trained in the act of intelligence gathering. Areas of potential conflict between the missionaries and the indigenous peoples were not lacking. Area of intelligence reportage include: burial customs, the killing of twins and the ostracization of twin mothers, the role of secret societies, concepts of freedom and liberty especially as they affected the slave population - all these were potentially capable of causing trade problems to warrant consular intervention.

³³Monday E. Noah, *Ibibio Pioneers in Modern Nigeria* (Uyo: 1980) p. 11.

³⁴Uwen Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*, p. 198

³⁵James Buchan, *The Expandable Mary Slessor* (Edinburgh: Prent, 1980), pp. 113. 144.

³⁶Monday E. Noah, *Social and Political Developments: The Lower Cross Region, 1600-1900...*

By 1893, the British government changed the name of the territory to the Niger Coast Protectorate but retained the three units identified with the Oil Rivers Protectorate except that the districts were designated by way of elevation because of their importance - to Divisions, and in respect of the Eastern Division which had its capital at Calabar, under this new grouping.³⁷ By 1896, Sir MacDonald was succeeded by Sir Ralph Moor, who replaced MacDonald's policy of gradualism in the imposition of colonial rule to a policy of aggressive imperialism. Moor's notion of effective administration was one in which intelligence and military force would be the ultimate arbiter for the Niger Coast Protectorate. Military and punitive expeditions along with intelligence gathering efforts were the most popular instruments for subjugating indigenous regimes to British rule. This policy was one which created socio-political and economic impacts on the Lower Cross River Region and its indigenous institutions.

With the opposition to further penetration of the hinterland by the indigenous people of the Lower Cross River Region, and by Britain's own imperial design, the Protectorate government under Sir Moor resolved to subdue the people by force as a prelude to effective colonial administration. By the end of the 19th century, the Lower Cross River Region had fallen to the military might of Sir Moor. However, this did not go down well without stiff resistance from the indigenous people. The people living within this the Lower Cross River Region had *Ekpò* society which served as the main military force against Moor's colonial army. Both the Imperial government of the British and the local people employed the use of different intelligence tactics to maneuver each other.

The major event in this direction occurred in 1896 when some of these communities felt the presence of consular power. Details of the reasons are not clear but it was generally agreed among consular officials that until these inland peoples encountered colonial forces, they would always believe that British government was a myth.³⁸ The immediate occasion for the presence of the colonial forces in these inland areas was the installation of a Native Political Agent in Eket District in the Lower Cross River Region. The installation over, Horace Bedwell, then acting for the Consul and who presided over the occasion, was about to return to Calabar, the headquarters of the Niger Coast Protectorate, when he received information that the people of Mkpok in Eket had sacrificed a human being in an attempt to propitiate their Deity since his (Horace's) visit was considered a 'pollution'.³⁹ Bedwell then decided to investigate the matter by holding a meeting with Chief Ofon, the ruler of Mkpok. Accompanied by two escorts, Bedwell reportedly found the body of the victim headless on the way. Upon arrival at Mkpok, a meeting was summoned. According to Bedwell:

I do not know what happened, but suddenly we were attacked from all sides (by the villagers). We defended ourselves as best we could, and a fierce fight ensued. We were, of course, greatly out-numbered, and were having a 'bad time of it, when suddenly a friendly chief appeared and with difficulty rescued us.⁴⁰

In consequence, an expedition of 180 troops, 400 carriers and six white officers commanded by Major Leonard started off from Opobo (Ikot Abasi) to Eket in the Lower Cross River Region. It was calculated that with such a display of force the people of the Lower Cross River Region would surrender without a fight. But no sooner had the advance party entered the first Ibibio village than they were surrounded by the village soldiers. Major Leonard seeing that they were perilously outnumbered tried to conciliate and buy time. Within a matter of two hours the main body of the soldiers arrived. The commander then ordered the troops to open fire. Mkpok was shelled and Chief Ofon fled from village to village but all in vain since any village that offered him protection was to

³⁷*ibid.*

³⁸*ibid.*

³⁹Monday E. Noah, *Social and Political Developments: The Lower Cross Region, 1600-1900...*

⁴⁰*ibid.*

be burnt down. The old chief was finally captured, tried and sentenced to seven years of imprisonment at Calabar.⁴¹

The troops then marched to Ubium where Chief Ekpumo had earlier sent a bundle of four poisoned arrows to the Consul, daring him to attack his town.⁴² In the encounter, the courage and stiff resistance of the Ubium people soon yielded to the superior weapons of the invading forces. All Ubium towns were burnt down and a proclamation was issued forbidding any resettlement until two chiefs from each of the rebellious villages had been surrendered to the Consul. By the end of that decade, the British had signed treaties with Ikot Akpatek, Ikot Ubo, Ekpene Ukim, Mbiokporo and Afaha Offiong, all in the Lower Cross River Region⁴³

The 1896 expedition which started from Opobo towards Eket and Ubium under Major Leonard was supplemented in 1897 by another expedition into the Oron district. In September, 1897, Chief Osung Atanang's son had murdered a pregnant woman suspected of being a witch. Whitehouse, the pro-consul for Eket, had authorized the execution of the murderer. Meanwhile a court session was to be held at Udung Uko to sort out matters in connection with the murder and Etetim Okon Ene, a court messenger, had been sent to inform the parties concerned.⁴⁴ Chief Atanang who had begrudged the government and consequently the consul for the execution of his son arranged and murdered the court messenger. Whitehouse then ordered an expedition against Udung Uko. Starting from Eyo Abasi, Udung Uko was overwhelmed and therefore surrendered and Chief Daniel Henshaw was stationed at Oron as the political agent who was gathering intelligence on the activities of the people. Thereafter, the march proceeded to Oyubia where a court was established in the compound of chief Enyenihi.⁴⁵ The political agent at Oron and the out-post at Oyubia served as agents of intelligence report for the extension of British authority in the Oron district. He rendered intelligence report to British authorities.

Elsewhere in the Lower Cross region of Uyo, Abak and Ikot Ekpene, no serious encounters occurred until after the Arochukwu expedition of 1901. But by 1900, the coastal areas of Calabar, Eket, Opobo, Itu and Oron had been effectively brought under the orbit of British control either through the physical presence of the Consul or pro-consul or through the presence of African political agents or at least the court and its personnel. The administration was now poised to break the power of the Aro whom they regarded as the main obstacle to free trade in the region. The destruction of the Long Juju of Arochukwu was seen as a *sine qua non* to free trade, and Arochukwu was, in the thinking of the colonial officials, the gateway to the vast hinterland markets. The Aro expedition of 1901/2 was then followed by the establishment of British occupation forces in such inland places as Ikot Ekpene, Akwete, Abak and Uyoare, as hitherto inaccessible to British colonial forces.

The British colonizers were able to achieve all these through several intelligence agencies that aided them in their possible conquest of the Lower Cross River region. The reason is that, in its entirety, colonial administration of the Lower Cross River region was more animated by problems of internal security. Also, the demands of wartime government between 1914 and 1918 stimulated greater bureaucratization of Lower Cross River region, especially colonial intelligence gathering. British civil and military intelligence staffs gathered information about colonial subversion sponsored by the home government and of course, planned subversive operations and propaganda offensives of their own.⁴⁶

By 1899, important changes were observed in the administrative set up of the Niger Coast Protectorate. This was the transfer of the control of the Protectorate from the Foreign Office to the

⁴¹Monday E. Noah, Social and Political Developments: The Lower Cross Region, 1600-1900...

⁴²*ibid.*

⁴³*ibid.*

⁴⁴*ibid.*

⁴⁵*ibid.*

⁴⁶*ibid.*

Colonial Office and the liquidation of the Royal Niger Company as potential agency of British government. Consequently, the territories formerly administered by the Company were added to the Niger Coast Protectorate and the areas became the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, which was divided into four divisions: Eastern Division, Cross River Division, Central Division, and Western Division.⁴⁷ The Lower Cross River Region was excised under the Eastern Division.

The urban center of Ikot Ekpene in western part of the Lower Cross River Region was attacked, though the area was not extensively patrolled until 1903 when the colonial force of 400 men started through Itu and marched through Ibiaku and pitched a camp in Ikot Ekpene early in 1904. The British army continued the patrol of Annang and Ikono areas of the district.⁴⁸ Treaties were signed between the British and the chiefs of many villages. In 1904, Sir Walter Egerton became the High Commissioner of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and continued with Moor's forward policy of military pacification. Egerton established seven new government stations with residential political officers who were actively involved in intelligence gathering. One of the government stations that came into existence during this period was Uyo District with Robert Bernard Brooks as the District Officer. Brooks' intelligence reports were very useful in the subjugation of the Lower Cross River Region.⁴⁹

As a result of the amalgamation of the Colony and the Protectorate of Lagos with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1906, and with Sir Walter Egerton as the Governor, Lagos was made the capital of the new territory. The new protectorate was divided into three Provinces – Western, Central and Eastern.⁵⁰ Consequently, with the amalgamation of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria with the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria in 1914, the existing provinces were further divided into smaller units. At the conclusion of the exercise by 1917, South-Eastern Nigeria was divided into four Provinces, namely: Calabar, Ogoja, Onitsha and Owerri.⁵¹ By this time, the Lower Cross River Region came under Calabar province. Each of the Provinces was split into Divisions which were further divided into Districts. Uwem Akpan noted that this remained the basic administrative structure until the eve of Nigeria's independence.⁵² Under Calabar Province, six administrative districts were established, namely: Uyo, Itu, Opobo (Ikot Abasi), Eket, Abak and Ikot Ekpene. The administrative districts were otherwise referred to as the Six Ibibio Districts which is under this study considered as the Lower Cross River Region.

Consequently, native courts were established by the Native Court Ordinance of 1906, and were situated at the District headquarters. The native courts were presided over by the District Commissioner who possessed wider jurisdiction. The Native Courts Commissioners and their agents became instruments of intelligence gathering in the Lower Cross River Region. The minor courts were located elsewhere in the District and were presided over by a Native Authority or local chiefs who possessed less jurisdiction. The District Commissioner, however, had overall supervision over all native courts. Each native court comprised a number of chiefs from the native court area, who were given certificates or warrant of recognition, caps and staffs as insignia by the colonial government.

Indirect rule as a structure was adopted British colonial authorities to enhance the quality and quantity of intelligence reports used for effective subjugation of different people. According to

⁴⁷Uwen Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy since the Pre-colonial Period*, p. 210.

⁴⁸Uwen Jonah Akpan, *Ikono: The Cradle of Ibibio Nations: A Refutation.*, p. 491

⁴⁹Nsikak Edem, 60+ Years, Village Head, Okpoto village, at his office, Ikono Local Government Area, 4 August, 2024.

⁵⁰Uwen Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*, p. 210

⁵¹*ibid.*

⁵²*ibid.*

Bade Onimode,⁵³ Lugard fashioned the apparatus of Indirect Rule. Under Lugard who was then the Governor General, were the Resident Commissioners who administered the Provinces and the Division Officers popularly known as the D.Os, who were in charge of Divisional affairs. There were also numerous colonial officers who manned different Departments that provided intelligence reports. There also existed the subordinate and supportive tier of British Officers known as the Warrant Chiefs. This group essentially consisted of Traditional Chiefs called the Warrant Chiefs. These hierarchies of Chiefs under the Residents and D.Os enabled the British Colonialists to gather intelligence and dominate the people up to the level of Wards or Villages/Hamlets.⁵⁴ The functions of these Warrant Chiefs included but not limited to imposition and collection of monetary taxes and dues both in cash and kind, extraction of court fines and levies, mapping out and allocation of land to the Colonial Government for building projects like, Police Post, Prisons and Courts as well as leasing of land to the trading companies, encouraging the peasants to raise crops that will serve as raw materials for Colonial Government. In the words of Bade Onimode:

The oppressive colonial functions of these feudal agents of imperialism included the collection and imposition of monetary taxes and dues in kind of extraction of court fines and levies, alienation of land to the colonial administration and imperial trading firms and recruitment of forced and contract labour.⁵⁵

In fact, under Indirect Rule, the Warrants Chiefs served as the obedient representatives of the Colonial Authority. According to Ajayi Crowther: "They had the specific duty of reporting, collecting taxes and conscription of forced labour, part of which was given to the colonial administration and part of which was retained by them for administration of their chieftaincies."⁵⁶ Apart from these responsibilities, other duty discharged was that of reportage and intelligence gathering for the Colonial Office.

CONCLUSION

Early reports from explorers, missionaries such as Mungo Park, Hugh Clapperton, Richard and John Lander (Landers brothers), Mary Slessor, among others, provided insight and early intelligence report 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. For instance, Mungo Park (a physician) offered 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. 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 firsthand information for the administrators. 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 native.

Throughout the British colony of Nigeria, intelligence gathering included reporting rebellious behaviour, political activity of the people as well as contentious information about local demography, economic activity, and the indigenous institutions of the people which gave foremost information

⁵³Bade Onimode, *Imperialism and Underdevelopment in Nigeria: The Dialectics of Mass Poverty* (Nigeria: Macmillan, 1983), p.39.

⁵⁴*ibid.*

⁵⁵*ibid.*

⁵⁶Ajayi Ade Crowder, *History of West Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 517.

about the people, culture and environment. The conquest and success of the “colonial order” rested, in turn, on the degree of information or intelligence gathered by the British authorities. From 1849 to 1900, Southern Nigeria came under consular jurisdiction of the Foreign Office in Britain. During the last half of the 18th century, the industrial revolution took place in England, creating the demand for natural products to keep the factories humming – and Africa was a store-house of untapped wealth. The British outrageous attempt to eliminate the role of the coastal chiefs as middlemen who controlled the trading inlets to the hinterland to foist favourable price regime resulted in the opposition of the Africans. There was also the problem of international trade competition, especially between the French and the English which led to the establishment of consular rule. The British Consul was to protect the British commercial interests on the coast and pre-empt any hostile activities and warfare, which led to stoppage of trade. As soon as the Upper Cross River opened up, the Lower Cross followed and this happened with bombardment of Old Town in 1855. Consequently, the foremost military encounter leading to the opening up of the Lower Cross River commenced with the elimination of local rulers whose monopolistic and hegemonic influence threatened the colonial authorities. In doing this, the British authorities employed the services of early explorers, missionaries and keen observers who gathered information about the people’s socio-political and cultural activities as well as military architecture of the people which consequently led to the consequent of the area.

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