

**COLONIAL INFLUENCES ON OSOPONG –IZZI INTERGROUP CONFLICTS IN OBUBRA
AREA, 1910 – 1960**

Pius Akugom OWAI
Piusowai82@gmail.com
Department of History and International Studies
University of Uyo, Uyo

Abstract

The Osopong and Izzi people in Obubra area with little skirmish had enjoyed peaceful relations until the invasion of Colonial Administrators who orchestrated conflict among the people just to dislodge them and to their economic advantage. Major influences were made by Colonial administration on their relations first through the imposition of political institution - dividing the area into Districts and Divisions and assigning a Native Court (NC) over the Clans, and disposing the pre-colonial political structure of the people. The paper adopted a historical method of analysis. Using the primary and secondary sources of evidence, the paper found that, for the Osopong and Izzi Boundary Conflicts, the Colonial Administrators made some influences, first through a Boundary Demarcation Arbitration set up in 1910, known as Duncan Boundary Arbitration Panel chaired by Sir Duncan. Further arbitrations followed such as that of Allen's (1926) and Cook's Arbitration (1933). The paper also found that, the 1910 arbitration and the ones that followed yielded marginal results as the conflict continued to take violent dimension, involving lengthy litigation processes. It concludes that the case of Osopong and Izzi is one amongst many episodes, exposing the character of colonial administrators who found gratification in demarcating and splinting groups (linguistically, culturally and ethnically) without proper consultations on the people. This remained at the front burner of discourse that pertains to boundary and land disputes across the African continent in general and Nigeria in particular.

Introduction

The issue of boundary disputes across the Southern region of Nigeria began to gain momentum when government officials and communities started to delimit boundaries owing to their desire to increase economic activities in the frontier areas, particularly in the form of the exploitation of forest resources of which timber, rubber, palm oil, and other cash crops were most important.¹ Even beyond issues bordering on economic activities, another sources for boundary disputes were government policies, on the delimitation of boundaries by colonial government officials. Thus, most boundary conflicts would not have risen if boundaries delimitation had not occurred.

Further, boundary conflicts were considered as violent events that occurred where there were conflicting claims by two or more communities having contiguous territories over the right to ownership of title to an identified piece of land.² At this juncture, however, it is important to stress that there given the position of Oludoyi,³ there is absolutely no way two far flung communities can ever be entangled in any sort of boundary disputes. The question of boundary conflict, it should be noted, must be in relation to ownership and not mere claim to right of possession or occupation. The foregoing depicts that what transpired between Osopong and Izzi was nothing short of boundary conflict, which over the years led to countless loss of lives, collapse of local economies as well as threatening state security intermittently. Indeed, it is imperative that an academic exercise of this nature be conducted to put the record straight and possibly identify a way forward for the groups.

Colonial Administration and Osopong-Izzi Relations

¹Adejuyigbe, *Boundary Problems in Western Nigeria*, p. 60.

² J. Oludoyi, "The Challenges of Boundary Disputes to National Security," Unpublished Manuscript, (nd), accessed 27 October 2019.

³*ibid.*

The Osopung clan is found in present-day Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria, with 27 villages stretching across Northern Osopung Division with 16 villages and Southern Osopung division with 11 villages. There are some Osopung people found in surrounding Biase, Akampka, Abi, Ikom and Ogoja.⁴

On the other side, the Izzi is a clan found in Abakaliki bloc of present day Ebonyi State. Villages in Izzi include Enyigba, Ebyia, Iseke, Inyimegu, Igbegu, Agbaja, Echara, Abaomege and Agba, Izhamgbo.⁵ However three villages of Izzi (Okpuitumo, Ohenna Edda, and Amachi) are by boundary demarcation grouped along with Osopung unit in Obubra in Cross River State.

Rationale for this pattern of settlement between the Osopung and Izzi groups were found in the migration account and attendant events which led to conflict. The Obubra area was established as a British Colonial District in 1902 which then covered areas bounded by Abakaliki and Ikom to the North, and Afikpo and Calabar to the South.⁶ By description, this means that its jurisdiction extended to present-day Biase, Akampka, Abi and Yakkur as well as Ikom and Ogoja areas. Further excision years later, left the Obubra area with the majority Mbembe people (comprising of villages in Adun clan, Ofumbongha clan, Okun clan, and Osopung clan), and the minority nationalities in Yala, Ekuri, Isobo and Izzi speaking people.⁷

Findings from the studies on these areas revealed that the British had their earliest contact with the Benue Valley as far back as 1899 or even sometime earlier.⁸ Many other parts of what would later become colonial Nigeria had felt the British presence long before 1899. Some of the examples include the British bombardment of Lagos in 1851. Lagos was declared a British colony in 1861.⁹ There was also the consulate activities within the Oil River Protectorates, which was constituted by the regions of Akassa, Nembe, Opobo, among others.¹⁰ The point to note here is that with British presence around the Cross River region, – and as the case may be – almost every facet of life of the indigenous peoples of that region began to experience new changes.¹¹ Many smaller communities, villages and towns were summed up to make up clans, districts, divisions, and provinces.

Consequently, in order to administer the people adequately, the British colonial government set up political structures such as the warrant chief system based on their hasty generalizations, which drew a conclusion that many of the societies across the old Eastern Region were acephalous in nature, and lacked a centralized leadership feature.¹² To remedy this shortcoming, the British

⁴A Description of the Osopung People

⁵Nico Van Steensel, Izhi: Their History and Customs,

⁶Ovat Okey, “Obubra Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: An Assessment of Economic Development of a Local Government Area in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Journal of Economic and Sustainable Development*. Volume 6, No. 20 (2015), p. 78 – 86.

⁷*ibid.*

⁸ Kasimu S. Judde, “Resistance to Colonial Administration in Keffi: Magaji’s Encounter with the British,” in: Aliyu A. Idress and Yakubu A. Ochefu (eds.), *Studies in the History of Central Nigeria Area*, (Volume 1) (Lagos: CSS Limited, 2002), pp. 597-621; Aliyu A. Idress, “Colonial Conquest and Reaction in the Middle Niger: The British Subjugation of the Nupe 1897-1900,” in: Aliyu A. Idress and Yakubu A. Ochefu (eds.), *Studies in the History of Central Nigeria Area*, (Volume 1) (Lagos: CSS Limited, 2002), pp. 661-686.

⁹ Preye Adekoya, “The Succession Dispute to the Throne of Lagos and the British Conquest and Occupation of Lagos,” *African Research Review; An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal* Vol. 10, No. 3, Serial No. 42, (2016), pp. 207-226; Oludamola Adebawale, “Game of Thrones: 1851 Bombardment of Lagos by the British Naval Forces,” *The Guardian Newspaper*, 29 June, 2019, accessed 04 June, 2021, <https://guardian.ng/life/culture-lifestyle/game-of-thrones-1851-bombardment-of-lagos-by-the-british-naval-forces/>; Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Waibinte E. Wariboko, *Elem Kalabari of the Niger Delta: The Transition from Slave to Produce Trading under British Imperialism* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2014); E. J. Alagoa, *The Akassa Raid*, (Ibadan: University Press, 1960).

¹¹ Obaro Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria* (London: Heinemann, 1977), p. 30.

¹² Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, p. 156.

colonial government introduced the indirect rule system for easy administration of both the political and economic life of the peoples.¹³

Unlike the smaller units of political, economic, and social structures that existed before the emergence of colonial administration, every society was merged into a broader political unit, irrespective of linguistic, and cultural differences. With reference to the area of our study, the British colonial government designated both communities – Osopong and Izzi – under the broader umbrella of Ogoja Province, which was one out of the five provinces that was in existence in colonial Southeastern Nigeria. Established in 1905, the Ogoja Province was a tapestry of various administrative Divisions.¹⁴ Some of these included: the Afikpo Division, Obudu Division, Abakaliki Division, Ikom Division, Obubra Division, Uyo Division, among others.¹⁵ While the majority of the Osopong domiciled under Obubra Division, some minorities Osopong sub-clans (especially the Ntrigum, Ijege Ibom, among others) found themselves under Abakaliki Division. However, such restructuring was not altogether devoid of some forms of petty resistance from the people (Osopong and Izzi inclusive), until by 1930s reorganization of these Osopong sub-clans.

Oral account, however, claim that there was opposition to colonial rule in some villages within Obubra (to which Osopong belonged), even though the Europeans had in possession of dangerous weapons to decide the fate of the Osopong against their whim. Evidence shows that a clash between the people of Ogoja Province and the Europeans happened when one European officer, "on his way to Obudu was confronted by the Nyanye people and he had to deal with them brutally. The people readily yielded or succumbed to the European authorities because of his possession of dangerous weapons and even pledged loyalty to them. A second incident was recorded in the Ujia sub-clan. It was reported that the colonial officer resided first at Ugidi market located formally in Ububa Ebechua village under Ujia sub-clan area; from where he planned a military expedition that devastated villages such as Ububa, Ayikang and their environs. The inhabitants of these area put up very weak resistance and were quickly subdued because of the superior weapons such as guns, as opposed to their native cutlasses, bow, and arrows.¹⁶

After a series of shows of force on the people, the British colonial government stamped its authority across many societies in Southern Nigeria. Unlike when the people of Osopong and Izzi had autonomous leaders (comprising men from the family level), the colonial authority disrupted such a system when they forcefully grouped the people under a single socio-political authority. As part of the political blunder made by the British colonial government, one central administrative office called the Native Court (NC) was created and assigned to a clan. This act alone disposed the pre-colonial political structure, where the recognized chiefs and leaders were relegated to the background, and the sovereignties of the people of Osopong and Izzi were usurped.¹⁷

This became worse by 1935 when the chiefs and elders from Osopong and Izzi – as well as members of other communities across Southeastern Nigeria – were relegated to playing only nominal, unofficial, and supervisory roles in the new administration that followed the post-1929 Women's War. In fact, the experiences of both Osopong and Izzi neighbours under colonial rule became very uniform. For instance, both groups later came to realize that the British colonial rule had truncated their customary laws, since disputes that involved offences against customary taboos were directed to the Native Court, whose laws were not in tandem with that of the indigenous customs and undermined the sovereignties of the indigenous chiefs. Collectively, the loss of

¹³*ibid*, p. 178.

¹⁴ Patience O. Erim, "Impact of Colonial Rule on Old Ogoja Province, 1905-1955," (Ph.D. Thesis, (University of Calabar, 1992).

¹⁵Erim, O. Erim, "The Emergence of a New Society: Upper Cross River," In: Jaja S. O., Erim E. O. *et al*, *History and Culture of the Upper Cross River* (Enugu: Harris Publishers Ltd, 1990); Donald O. Omagu, *A Neglected History: The Bekwarra people of Cross River State and the Nigerian Civil War* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited, 2016).

¹⁶*Ibid*.

¹⁷ Interview with Godwin A. Enji, 76 years, Bekwarra, Cross River, 23 March 2021.

sovereignties for both the Osopong and their Izzi neighbours was an unfortunate rape on their tradition, and this undoubtedly embittered not only the people, but had a corresponding aftermath effect on the societies. Thus, the chiefs, as well as those considered as the mouthpiece of the peoples began to resist colonial interest and actions in more subtle ways.

The Osopong people were reported to have consulted their Izzi neighbours on the matter of ill-treatment by the colonial servants within their spaces, and certain decisions were reached. According to Godwin Enji,

In 1932, side by side with the Native Court system, the old organization remained active, and where the official native court member had no locus standi, according to Native Custom, he usually referred all instructions from government to the rightful ruler, who in turn, set the Native Organization in motion.¹⁸

Such were the issues that came to characterize the experience and interactions between Osopong and Izzi during the heydays of colonial rule. Nonetheless, pieces of evidence show that the nature of relations between both parties was, however, impacted by the British colonial rule and its handmaidens – Christian missionaries and trade merchants – in diverse manners. One of such manners was the fact that unlike what obtained in the pre-colonial times, when people from both sides engaged in the worship of different deities, the arrival of the Church of Scotland Mission in 1846 – which began operations in Calabar – ensured that people from many parts of the Northern Cross River area began to adopt a singular faith – Christianity.¹⁹ By 1921, the Catholic Missionary Society (CMS), through the assiduousness and relented nature of the Holy Ghost fathers extended their missionary activities in Ogoja areas. Omagu noted that:

On arrival, the missionaries first settled at Ishibori in present day Ogoja Local Government Area. Representing the mission were Rev. Fr. P. J. Costelloe, Monsignor P. N. Whitney who was Prefect Apostolic of Ogoja Prefecture in 1938. In 1939, Fr. McGetricck took over the Prefecture in Ogoja, and later became Bishop of Ogoja.²⁰

Another key area where the missionaries influenced pre-existing relations between the Osopong and the Izzi neighbours was in the aspect of education. However, it must be stressed at this juncture that prior to this time, both Osopong and Izzi people never lacked a form of education. Their own form of education is what scholars have referred to as traditional education steeped in the framing of the African Indigenous Knowledge System (AIKS).²¹ It has been argued that the primary aim of exposing the indigenous people to Western education was just to make out auxiliaries that would “service the technical and clerical needs of the colonial system,”²² and not to produce fine intellectuals who might eventually rise to challenge the colonial exploitative system. Evidence shows that most of the worship centres and churches established served multiple purposes. First,

¹⁸*ibid.*

¹⁹Omagu, *A Neglected History*, pp. 67-70.

²⁰*ibid.*

²¹ Gloria Emeagwali, Dei Sefa and J. George, (ed), *African Indigenous Knowledge and the Disciplines* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2014); Andre Lalonde, “African Indigenous Knowledge and Its Relevance to Environment and Development Activities,” *The Common Property Conference*, 26-29 September, (Winnipeg: International Association for the Study of Common Property (IASCP), 1991), pp.1-12; Joseph R. Bassey, “The Indigenous Knowledge of Law in Pre-Colonial Akwa Ibom Area: A Comparative Study of the Similarities and Differences between the English and the African Legal System,” In: S. Oloruntoba, O. Yacob-Haliso (eds.), *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Development in Africa*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 207-230; S.G. J. N Sananayake, “Indigenous Knowledge as Key to Sustainable Development,” *The Journal of Agricultural Sciences* Vol. 2, No.1 (2006): pp. 87-94.

²²A. Omagu, *Neglected History*, p. 56; Funso Afolayan, “African Nationalism, 1914-1939,” in: Toyin Falola (ed.), *Africa* (North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), p. 288.

they served as places of worshipping God; second, as places for teaching the rudiments of European values and ways of life; and third, as a place for elementary healthcare for the people.²³

The effect of Western education on the Osopong and Izzi people (for those who were privileged to have taken advantage) was that it created a new class of people. This set of people became a distinctive class in the general society. They benefited from job opportunities that emerged since they had acquired Western education, which afforded them the capability to read and write in the English Language.

The improvement of the road network also enhanced trade relations between both groups. This enhancement, of course, was brought about by the ingenuity and innovation of British economic interest in Nigeria, which precipitated better road networking in many parts of colonial Nigeria. The nature of trade and commerce, which had hitherto existed between the Osopong people and their Izzi neighbour recorded some increase. This was because colonial government constructed roads, which linked these communities in a bid to ease the stress associated with conveying goods from one location to another. By 1925, the Abakiliki – Bansara Road (where Osopong was situated) was been constructed to link Osopong with Izzi communities. In the same year, other road (nine miles), which was intended to promote 'inter-tribal' trade and foster the confidence of Native market for people was constructed.

Moreso, the people were not just confined to trade between themselves but made more fortune as they traded with colonial companies such as John Holt, which was then sited at Bansara and other neighbouring villages. In return, they bought European manufactured goods such as spirit, liquor, books, bicycles, among others. The people were further exposed to a new medium of exchange when they conducted trade activities. Unlike during the pre-colonial times when trade-by-barter, and bulky brass rod, iron cowries, and shells were used, a new legal tender was introduced.²⁴ Let it also be stressed here that the year 1925 marked a watershed in the history of British colonial economy in Nigeria. This was the year taxation policy was introduced in Abakiliki, Obubra divisions and her environs. The introduction, no doubt, came with social, economic, and political impact on the lives of the people of the region. First, although its introduction stimulated economic activities, it also created a sort of rural poverty. It also compelled the people of Osopong and Izzi to go all out from their original enclaves in search of paid jobs, to enable them to pay their taxes.²⁵

On a collective note, the Osopong people and their Izzi neighbour, left with no choice, joined forces with other groups in Nigeria – who had been massively marginalized, oppressed, and victimized by the supposed 'majority' ethnic group (Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa-Fulani) – to organize strong agitations demanding for states of their own. In Southeastern Nigeria, the agitation called for the creation of three states: Cross River, Ogoja and Rivers, with the acronym "COR" by the 1950s.²⁶ During a 1953 Constitutional Conference, the minorities – Osopong inclusive – expressed fears about their future within a three-region arrangement. Their constant expressions at the Constitution Conference (especially that of 1957) compelled the colonial government to set up a Commission of Inquiry to investigate fears and means by which such fears from 'minority' can be allayed. A Commission, known as the Willinks Commission, "reported that "unity" would have the same effect as "separation" as a remedy for minority problems and that while a commission cannot manufacture unity, it could devise machinery aimed at holding the country together. It therefore recommended reforms and constitutional provisions for human rights."²⁷

Based on the foregone narratives, it is pertinent to add here that colonial rule had some vital implications for inter-group relations between the Osopong and Izzi people. Such implications could, of course, be streamlined into two viewpoints. First, it created a massive distortion on several fronts.

²³ Michael Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule*, (London: Hutchison, 1968), pp. 123 – 124.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ Ugbana Okupu, "The Politics of State Creation and the Outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War," *Transafrican Journal of History* Vol. 11, (1982), pp. 147-166.

²⁷ *ibid.*

Secondly, it found a way to bring the people even closer based on the introduction of elements such as Western education, missionary medicines, colonial economy, among others. Moreover, it meant, on a general note, that people had to take into account (new) ideals, interests and institutions, which arose not only from their indigenous experiences and sanctioned by their trado-religious beliefs, but others as were introduced and systematically imposed by their new overlords – British colonial government.²⁸ Hence, communities such as Osopong and Izzi – just as their other counterparts – brought under effective control by the British learnt that they had lost the sole-initiatives to determine for themselves whether their relations with their neighbours would be either peaceful or conflict-prone; as there were no chances for them to make any more independent choices as they deemed fit earlier before the intrusion of colonial authority.

Osopong-Izzi Boundary Dispute and Colonial Influence

Major Claude Maxwell MacDonald who was the first British High-Commissioner and Consul-General for Oil Rivers Protectorate gave account of inter-tribal wars between different groups, especially people living on the river banks which interfered with trade and threatened peaceful movement into the hinterland. Inter-village land cases in this area were abounded and almost every village was involved in one case or the other. The inter-tribal wars prevailed until the area was fully taken over by the British authority and the establishment of Obubra as an administrative unit.

Historically, the movement and expansion of people (who in their quest for land for peaceful abode or farming), directed the course of relationship between the Mbembe (Osopong) and other groups, which led to the conflict between them and their Izzi neighbours, the North-eastern Igbo,²⁹ for which the Osopong people were perhaps forcefully driven away or pressured to abandon their own land for the Izzi people. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Osopong people had moved from their settlement, towards the left bank of the Cross River. The Izzi people succeeded in moving towards the left bank of the river, occupying lands originally occupied by the Osopong.

Meanwhile, few Osopong settlements that were not suited to the normal Izzi tactics terrain resisted vehemently the annexation efforts of the Izzi especially in area where belt of gallery forest had served as a shield for them. This forests belt formed an effective dividing line between the Osopong and Izzi peoples at the end of the nineteenth century, making for their present border. The only Osopong village to remain on the right bank of the River outside this protecting forest belt had almost lost all its land to the Izzi people. However, the Izzi did not occupy the land South-east of the forested belt because in passing through it and settling beyond it in small groups, they would have been highly vulnerable to Osopong attacks.³⁰ At the dawn of twentieth century, the Izzi had occupied a greater portion of the Osopong land area through annexation of their land.

In the face of ensued intergroup conflict and the claims that the land upon which the Izzi people occupied belonged to the Osopong Clan, a boundary demarcation line was set up in 1910, known as Duncan boundary arbitration panel chaired by Sir Duncan, a colonial administrator.³¹ Litigation concerning the land started in 1910 when Chief Egwi on behalf of the Chiefs and people of Afunakum (Osopong) brought an action in the Native Council of Abakaliki against Alaga, on behalf of the Chiefs and people of the (Okpuitoma, Amachi and Edda) Izzi tribes, claiming the return of a piece of land belong to Osopong. The Native Court before which the case was brought composed of N.C Duncan, Acting District Commissioner, Abakaliki, as president, with three chiefs as members.³²

²⁸ Adiele Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria* (London: Longman, 1972), p. 79.

²⁹“Izzi is a North Eastern Igbo sub-group in South Eastern, Nigeria. It is also the name of the territory in which they live, the Local Government Area of Izzi. They speak the Izzi dialect. Izzi is spoken majorly in Ebonyi State and Some part of Benue State. Available at: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/izzi_people

³⁰ Rosemary Harris, *The Political Organization of the Mbembe, Nigeria. Oversea Research Publication*, No. 10 (1965).

³¹*ibid.*

³²*ibid.*

N. C. Duncan asked the other members what was the native method of settling land dispute before “European protection” arrived. They unanimously replied that they usually referred the matter to a third disinterested party or parties. This was an indication that before the arrival of the Europeans, Africans had already established an organized system of conflict resolution which was based on arbitration method. The Native court thereafter ordered that the dispute be settled by arbitration, and appointed Captain R. Hopkinson as an umpire and N. C. Duncan and J.D. Thomson as arbitrators.³³

The arbitrators inspected the disputed land and heard evidence from seven witnesses. They found that there had never been a definite boundary between the Osopong clan and the Izzi tribes, but that it was essential that a boundary be demarcated at once, and they directed that a boundary be cut as shown in suggested map, and be marked by a trench and by cement and iron pillars every furlong and at all salient angles. This decision was precisely taken on 16th December, 1910. However, as claimed by the Izzi people in a later court issues, the suggested boundary demarcation plan was not executed by the authorities at that time, until about 1920. According to the Cooks Arbitration Award of 1933:

The 1910 Duncan boundary arbitration panel was demarcated the boundary with cement pillars from a point on the Cross River near Akataka market up to a point slightly west of Ijege Ibom, about 400 yards south of the Amachi-Eja main road (pillar “B”).³⁴

The Duncan Boundary Demarcation panel had both short and long effects on the intergroup conflict between the Osopong and Izzi people. First, it opened up series of litigation processes which lasted for many years and only had subtle effect. Following the decision of the panel in 1910, next time the case was brought before a court was in 1920,³⁵ as at the time, the Administrative Division of Abakiliki and Obubra was marked out with cement pillars, Abakiliki lying to the West and Obubra to the East of the boundary.³⁶ The surveyor contracted by the court stated that from a comparison of the plans, that the administrative boundary followed the boundary decreed by the Duncan arbitrators in 1910, but his finding showed that the boundary was encroached.³⁷

The next after Duncan arbitration was the Allens arbitration of 1924. Following complaints by Awkum of Igbagu (a community of Izzi) encroachment a boundary was determined between Akwum (Osopong community) and Igbagu, but it was not until 1926, when the Igbagu made fresh attempt to force their way through Akwum land to the Okpoku River, that cement pillars were fixed up to a point on the Abakiliki-Bansara road near Igbagu settlement of Ndi-Akparata (pillar “A”).³⁸ The boundary thus demarcated linked up the two points and stood at 9.4 miles in line.³⁹ This doubled up for the 7 miles settled at Duncan arbitration.

Between 1930 and 1960, a number of suits involving the Osopong and Izzi intergroup conflict were instituted in variety of courts. In these numbers of suits, the Izzi people claimed that the matter was never determined by any court and they did not directly help either party. However, in 1957, when this case came up for trial, the witnesses for the Osopong stated and the Izzi agreed

³³Case File (No. F.S.C 201/1959) Containing an Appeal by the Izzi people in the Federal Supreme Court of Nigeria, Holden at Lagos, Friday 18th Day of March, 1960. Before Her Lordship Sir. Adetokunbo Ademola, Chief Justice of the Federation.

³⁴Cooks Arbitration Award of 1933, Ref. No. 0.6.1132 “Izi-Igbagu-Amachi Arbitration Award – Ntrigum – Osopong” (March, 1933). Enugu National Archives, Enugu.

³⁵Case File (No. F.S.C 201/1959) Containing an Appeal by the Izzi people in the Federal Supreme Court of Nigeria, Holden at Lagos, Friday 18th Day of March, 1960. Before Her Lordship Sir. Adetokunbo Ademola, Chief Justice of the Federation.

³⁶ibid.

³⁷ibid.

³⁸Abakiliki Native Court Case No. 41/1924, “Izi-Igbagu-Amachi Arbitration Award,” March 1933. Located at National Archive Enugu.

³⁹ibid.

that people from each of the three Izzi compounds (Okpuitoma, Amachi and Edda) were occupying land of the Osopong people in the Obubra Administrative Unit, under a lease granted by the Osopong and had been doing so since 1943.⁴⁰ The Izzi people had noted that the arbitrators of Duncan boundary demarcation panel lacked the jurisdiction to order the partition which neither party had asked. It is also believed both parties also rejected the demarcation of the panel.

By 1933, the British colonial government came to realise that there was need to promulgate a law that would help regulate the plethora of boundary disputes that were almost threatening the entire peace of colonial Nigeria. The British colonial government was swift in responding to whatever may appear as a threat to its economic interest, thus, to curb any further set-back, especially on issues that had to do with land/boundary related between indigenous population, the Inter-Tribal Boundaries Settlement Ordinance No.49 of 1933 was promulgated. Emmanuel Mbah's comparative analysis on how colonial powers addressed issues of boundary conflicts among the indigenous populations in both Cameroun and Nigeria proved vital.⁴¹ Mbah argued that unlike the Germans who held sway in northern Cameroun, and restricted themselves only to economic issues in order not to interfere with the authority of native chiefs, the British (in Southern Cameroun) had no choice but to meddle especially as "at the beginning of their tenure in the region the British encountered many disturbances over land between villages".⁴² Prior to 1933 – when the ordinance on inter-tribal boundaries settlement was established – the Europeans were of the belief that solutions to these problems of boundaries among the indigenous population was in the use of European ideals "of cairns and pillars planted on demarcated boundaries. [Contrary to their views] By 1933 the futility of such a policy was realised and the entire system was overhauled."⁴³

Between 1917 and 1932, British colonial government utilized the various Native Courts (NCs) to tackle issues that revolved around land and boundaries issues.⁴⁴ But this changed with the 1933 Inter-Tribal Boundaries Settlement Ordinance. This Ordinance worked in a way that incorporated the several constituted authorities. Mbah noted that "under the Abakaliki District, Native Courts examined disputes at lower levels and were presided over by clan chiefs while other chiefs sat on the bench as judges."⁴⁵ The court president was elected each session, although once elected he could hold office for as long as his conduct and management of affairs of the court were good.⁴⁶ In both Calabar and Ogoja provinces, Native Courts were given a hand in the resolution of land/boundary disputes because British authorities presumed, rightly, that they knew more about the history and intricacies of disputes in their Native Authority (NA) areas. In situations where one Native Court had to adjudicate a dispute between two chiefdoms belonging to two Native Authorities, an administrative officer was supposed to sit in as president of the court, and this was stipulated by Native Court Ordinance order-in-council No. 19 of 1934.⁴⁷ The main function of Native Courts was adjudication, 'the process by which in African tribes with courts, judges take and assess the evidence, examined what they regard as the facts, and come to a decision in favour of one party rather than another.'⁴⁸

The intervention of the British colonial government in the boundary dispute between the people of Osopung and Izzi was in 1910. This came 23 years before the activation of the Inter-Tribal Boundaries Settlement Ordinance. On the 9th of June 1947, the then Senior District Officer, N.C. Duncan presided over the boundary dispute between Osopung and Izzi in a bid to settle the

⁴⁰ibid.

⁴¹Emmanuel Mbah, "Disruptive Colonial Boundaries and Attempts to Resolve Land/Boundary Disputes in the Grasslands of Bemenda, Cameroon," *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* Vol. 9, No. 3 (2009), pp.11-32.

⁴²ibid, p. 22.

⁴³ibid, pp.22-23.

⁴⁴ibid, pp.11-32.

⁴⁵ibid, pp.11-32.

⁴⁶Colonial Office. Cameroons under United Kingdom Administration: Report for the Year 1955. London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956. (Published for the Colonial Office). p. 64

⁴⁷N.A.E. Ogpr of, 2/1/157, Annual Report, 1947, Ogoja Division, 16th January 1948

⁴⁸Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law, and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1965).

protracted conflict between both groups. On the said date, two interpreters – Messrs. Nenji and Obim – were invited to help make the communication easier during the proceedings. In attendance were Chief Egwi (represented the people of Osopung), Uga (represented Izzi people), and Ebgara (represented the Osopung), among others. Duncan sitting as the presiding judge invited several persons from the contesting group to speak before the Commission-of-Inquiry.

Conclusion

The paper which deals on colonial influences on the Osopung-Izzi intergroup conflict captured the nature, praxis and trajectory of the protracted boundary dispute that engulfed two communities – Osopung and Izzi – in the Obubra area of Cross River region of Nigeria. First, it considered the relationship that existed before and during colonial administration. It observed that the Osopung and Izzi people had enjoyed a peaceful relation until the invasion of colonial administrators in the area for which they mounted opposition to colonial rule. It noted that, in many instances, the British administrators staged or orchestrated conflict among the people just to dislodge them, sometimes by arming one group against another. Also, a major influence of colonial administration on the Osopung and Izzi intergroup relations was the imposition of political institution by dividing the area into districts and divisions and assigning a Native Court (NC) over the clans, thereby disposing the pre-colonial political structure already known to the people. Thus, the powers of the traditional rulers were relegated to mere nominal, unofficial, and supervisory roles in the new administration. For the Osopung and Izzi boundary conflict, the colonial administrators made some influences. In the face of ensued intergroup group conflict and the claims that the land upon which the Izzi people occupied belonged to the Osopung Clan, a boundary demarcation line was set up in 1910, known as Duncan boundary arbitration panel chaired by Sir Duncan. Further arbitrations followed the 1910 boundary demarcations, like that of Allen's (1926) and Cook's arbitration (1933). The arbitrations and the ones that followed in the boundary dispute yielded marginal results as conflict continued to take violent nature - involving lengthy litigation processes. From the foregoing analysis, the paper posits that the case of Osopung and Izzi is one amongst many episodes, exposing the character of colonial administrators who found gratification in demarcating and splinting groups (linguistically, culturally and ethnically) without proper consultations on the people. This remained at the front burner of discourse that pertains to boundary and land disputes across the African continent in general and Nigeria in particular.

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