

A photograph of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France, viewed from a low angle across a river. The tower is the central focus, with its intricate iron lattice structure clearly visible. In the foreground, a blue and white boat is docked at the riverbank. The sky is a clear, bright blue, and some green foliage is visible on the left side of the frame. The entire image is framed within a rounded rectangle.

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Review

Animated graphic film for the rejuvenation of a fading culture: The case of an African oral heritage

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Many Nigerian folk heritages including that of the Igbo race are going extinct. The oral nature of folklore is largely responsible for this gradual extinction. One way of preserving such heritage is by making folk stories accessible to the very young because generational transfer of folk heritage ensures that cultures do not die out. Therefore, a paradigm for transmitting culture to the children must be developed and deployed. Beyond entertainment, Igbo folktales are a veritable means of transmitting pristine traditional values that distinguish the race and transfer race memory encoded in symbols, idioms, allegory and other mechanisms of ancient non-literary cultures. This makes it imperative that these heritages be properly transmitted to the young for the purposes of continuity, entertainment, and storing of knowledge. Yet, there seems to be a weak interface between the children and the adults regarding the transmission of folk heritage. Traditional grandmothers that had the duty of telling didactic stories to children hardly play that role in present societies and communities due to urbanization and atomization of families, among other factors. This problem was investigated through personal observation and bibliothecal inquiry which indicated that Igbo children prefer new-fangled 'gizmo' and new media as channel and forms of entertainment. This paper investigates the bleak future of Igbo folk heritage under the circumstances. It notes that writers have stored these race memories in books, but recommends that for their dynamic propagation through children, the electronic platforms must be adopted through the adaptation of Igbo folktales to drama, developmental theatre, video and television formats of cartoon animation and video games. This paradigm shift should bring the benefits of the Igbo folktale to the children of today, thereby propagating and sustaining it.

Key words: Culture, language, video format, values, heritage.

INTRODUCTION

There is growing urgency to stem the death of cultures. It is estimated that several hundreds of cultures are dying out and in a few years, many more would join the growing rank. Indeed, over four hundred and seventy-three languages (a component of culture) are classified in the Ethnologue as nearly extinct because "only a few elderly

speakers are still living." In Africa alone, forty-six languages are listed as extinct (http://www.ethnologue.com/nearly_extinct.asp); and the figure is surely on the rise with the relentless surge of vampire cultures, that are aided, even if unwittingly, by the very people who ought to preserve them: the owners

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of the culture. These people are blinded by the glitter of other cultures and being bereft of the preserving love for their heritage and history, readily absorb what they consider better and more acceptable.

The first victim of culture death is folklore; for, when a people begin to forget the values that are embedded in stories, myths, and the mores of their tribe that distinguish them from others; their past and how they have developed over the millennia, they begin to lose their identity which is what makes them unique members of the human family. Some of these very cultures have evolved into traditions that sustain the people.

The globalization of the world derives its impetus and perhaps sustenance from the diversity of peoples. A world of sameness would be sterile, monotonous, and lacking the variety that introduces a complementarity which fertilizes development. Therefore, it is in the diversity of cultures that humanity derives its existence and development. This is perhaps why there is a deliberate effort to revive dying cultures of which folk heritage is primary.

Nastasi notes that UNESCO is disturbed about the world's endangered intangible cultural traditions. Chinese shadow puppetry, Mexican mariachi music, poetic dueling in Cyprus, are all disappearing. The Igbo folktale is in this league of the oral traditions, art forms, and rituals in danger of becoming lost. "Yet, these practices encourage community participation and cultural unity..." (<http://www.eve-tal.com/about.html>.) It is important to protect "... outstanding but endangered heritage – (as) forms of popular and traditional expression..." which include languages, oral literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, costumes, craftwork know-how, and architecture. (http://www.unesco.org/bpi/intangible_heritage/background.htm) If the drift in culture is contained, the threat to the extinction of Igbo heritage will be stemmed.

Igbo oral heritage

Nigeria's over 250 ethnic groups have over 521 languages, 11 of which are extinct (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria#Demographics>). One of the three largest and most influential tribes is the Igbo of South-east Nigeria (<http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEnglish/imperial/nigeria/origins.htm>). The Igbo tribe are over 20 million people (Okoroafo, 2002) although this figure is disputed given the fact that the Igbos are widely dispersed worldwide. This dispersal seems to be a major contributor to the threat to Igbo traditional heritage because as they migrated from their ancestral land, they assimilated other cultures and returned to propagate those.

The categories of oral arts of the Igbo include storytelling, poetry, songs, lullaby, incantation, proverbs, witticisms, riddles, tongue-twisters, 'gwam-gwam-gwam'¹, nkọọ², njakiri³, etc. This corpus of oral heritage is largely

intangible and so is the first casualty of cultural attrition. Therefore there is need to store it in more permanent forms.

Igbo folktale also come in different forms- song, music, quasi-enactment, or plain storytelling. In translation, most of the songs are lost; a major deficiency since many of them contributes to the overall meaning of the story. Even if it is in the vernacular, the music is not written as a guide, leading to loss of meaning. Finnegan (1970, p. 389) admits to this problem:

Since the songs are almost always so much more difficult to record than prose, they are usually omitted in published versions; even when they are included, the extent to which they are repeated and the proportion of time they occupy compared to spoken narration is often not made clear. Yet the singing can at times become the main element of the story...

Of these oral heritages, the folk tale and songs have the largest repository. The informal, performative and concise nature of the traditional song/ poetry allows it to be largely protected from cultural erosion while the folktale is more susceptible to neglect. It is therefore to the protection of the Igbo folktale that this paper dwells. If folktale is performed, it means that the story is preserved by the narrator and the audience which in turn preserves it through transmission from "father to son"; a practice that vents adaptations, deformities, inaccuracies, and sometimes a loss of the propelling principle of the tale. According to Finnegan (1970, 319),

... the question of originality in oral literature is by no means a closed one. Contrary to the assumptions of many writers, the likelihood of stories having been handed down from generation to generation in a word-perfect form is in practice very remote.

Consistent with his belief that an African writer's responsibility is to rekindle an appreciation of African culture, Achebe turned to Tortoise in two adaptations of Igbo folktales for children that he published in 1977, *The Drum* and *The Flute*. Many before and after this effort have helped to preserve this Igbo heritage in written form.

The Igbo folktale

Abrams (2005) defined folktales as sayings, verbal compositions, and social rituals that have been handed down by word of mouth. It is universal and usually of unknown authorship even if many eventually achieve written form. According to Onuekwusi (2001, p. 55), the personae include "animals, spirits, and human beings as characters hence the categories: animal stories, stories that involve human and super natural characters, and tales that involve animal, human and supernatural

characters.”

Animal characters dominate most folk tales in indigenous cultures. These animal characters exhibit all human behaviour, leading to the conclusions that these tales are largely allegories, with Tortoise being the most prominent and most presented as the Igbo Everyman. Being largely didactic, negative behaviour is punished while good is rewarded. Some of these stories have over time been retained in their original animal format; others have been modified as the culture of the people grew or in a deliberate effort to modernize.

Nwachukwu-Agbada admits that

... the Igbo folktale tradition is on the wane, due in part to the influence of modernization—about which the Igbo have shown much enthusiasm. ... modernity has to a considerable extent taken education and entertainment away from the family and the folk community and given these functions to such formal social institutions as the school and the popular media. (2009, p. 19).

Western education may have something to do with it, but Igbo people are not alone in the embrace of western education. However, while other races are able to differentiate between its own cultural heritage and classroom education, and retain the ennobling aspects, the Igbo, instead of adapting, seem to have adopted these invasive cultures, Okwechime's submission (2004) that highly sophisticated knowledge in modern technology and urbanization have alienated the people from their culture, notwithstanding. The Igbo substituted the pristine homogeneous village setting, which permitted close-knit interaction for the cities where the next door neighbour has other interests beyond sitting around telling folk stories. Besides,

1. Contemporary parents work late and come home tired.
2. Over time, they have lost the art and interest in telling stories.
3. Television and other home-grown entertainment are also providing convenient alternatives.

Interest has shifted from the villages with the common culture and traditions of, among others practices, the moonlight night tales, to the urban centres and their attendant heterogeneity and atomization.

Functions of Igbo folktales

Igbo folk tales stories come in different categories depending on the purpose: aetiological, didactic, satirical, or mere entertainment; and these are drawn from their functions.

Entertainment: Imagine this scenario—After supper a family sits by a fire. Someone, often the elder, begins to tell a story they heard from another storyteller. When the

story is over, the children ask for another. Soon eyes grow heavy, and sleep comes. A refreshing and educating evening has thus passed. Often with a lesson, and some chorus, Igbo tales are traditionally used in that society to educate the younger generations of man's weaknesses and pretensions, even where allegorical characters are used. Clearly, folktales afforded relaxation and pleasure to the senses.

Socialization and community values: Igbo folktales serve other purposes beyond entertainment. According to Obiechina (1991, 26), folktale makes us, think, feel, perceive, and therefore, empathize; it enables us to integrate our consciousness, educate our minds, purify our souls, and refine our sensibilities. It is the key to a humane and humanized existence. The story speaks directly to human heart and soul and mind, and engages our sympathy in a manner that straight forward ideas and logical argumentations do not.

Folktales also ensure that “the Igbo child was sociable, truthful, brave, and humble ...” (Okwechime, 2004, p. 112), and teaches truthfulness and good manners. This is consistent with the view expressed by Opata (1998, p. 88) when he identifies the “strong dose of moral orientation... and the conception of truth” in Igbo traditional society.

The folktale performance also serves to harmonize the society for, when children sit together to listen to the tales, they learn to cooperate, understand each other better and also develop team spirit and self-esteem. Their imagination is exercised and their intelligence tested in the question-answer periods. Again, they also learn proverbs and music that are intrinsic in the story. Okeke (1982, p.19) adds that proverbs and riddles are used to “hide a saying from the ordinary turn of mind... tongue-twisters train the child's capacity to retain the sequence of events.”

Education is another function of Igbo folktale which contains folk's skeptical views about life which are based on their observation of people's behaviour in the society (Ogbalu)

Inspires the young and provides moral standard cherished by their society. (Ogbalu,nd; Ogu, 1992)

Instills obedience and respect, national consciousness and patriotism. Children learn bravery, selflessness etc. (Ogu, 1992)

Provides them a common line for their action.

Mirrors the activities of members of the society- the problems and successes embodied in their folktale are the problems and the successes of the society (nd. 56).

Moral lesson: Some folktales are didactic. Ogu (1992) informs that for the traditional Igbo child story telling sessions affords opportunity of “using imagination to decipher the truth and develop the child's intellectual ability. Their wits are tested by allowing them give quick

answers to questions posed to them.”(68) Most stories and songs condemn bad behaviour as good always triumphs over evil, truth over falsehood, honesty over dishonesty. Every story has a lesson to teach just as the stories about heroes and heroine encourage children to be brave in the defense of their society (p. 22). Folktale is used to satirize the deviant characters in the society thereby making them change their bad behaviours for good.

The need to translate into English language

For the folktale integrity to be maintained, and variations diminished, a standardized tale may well be assured by writing. Igbo scholars have since realized the advantage of scripting the tales leading to a long line of Igbo tales that have been written down. A majority are in English translations some of which do not quite convey the nuances of the original language, Igbo. The loss of aesthetic and meaning is often apparent, but one needs to be a speaker of Igbo to realize this. This therefore limits the use and appreciation of idioms by translation because there is nothing in the English language experience that even approximates to most Igbo idiom. Many Igbo people do not read Igbo script. Again, there is also the need to address the world, and Igbo is not spoken by non-Igbo outside Nigeria. These complexities can be tackled however through the deployment of literary adaptation in order to create different fronts for the fight to keep Igbo folktales alive.

Because of the lack of writing, oral tradition was the primary means of transfer of values, stories, myths, etc. Therefore much folktale came from mouth-to-ear. Obiechina (1994, p. 8) admits that in the preliterate societies “past traditions were largely preserved in human memory and transmitted orally... (it was) slow and limited in effecting diffusion of knowledge...” Another limitation was the doubtful accuracy and difficulty to trace source. The folktales also achieve variety being deformed or modified according to the skill and memory of the storyteller. But, in order to preserve the folktale much more effectively and widely, they are being translated and written in English language. But there must be care in doing this as accuracy and closeness to the original are keys to sustaining the essence of the stories, the entertainment values, and the lessons therein.

Sule 1991 recognizes this ‘devil’s alternative’ when he wrote that “We stand the great risk of losing some of our most positive cultural treasures in the form of ...values, and knowledge ... in various areas of human endeavor if proper attention is not readily accorded this task of the documentation of oral evidence” (1991, p. 20).

Igbo folktale performance scheme

The folk story sessions are best in moonlit nights where

the children in the family gather around an elder, mostly the matriarch of the family to listen to her tell stories of long ago, often beginning with “once upon a time...” The presentation style of the folktale ensures that the session enhances the values that are enshrined in the community ethos. Nwachukwu-Agbada agrees:

The Igbo folktale session usually starts after twilight, (after dinner) ...since it is meant for relaxation and education.... Night too adds its own aura to the realization of a typical folktale plot...Although storytelling sessions among the Igbo can take place all the year round, in practice they only occur in the dry season,... is a more pleasurable time for two reasons: first, the time is auspicious, the ground being neater and tidier to sit on; and second, the burdens of farm work are virtually over for the year... (1990, p.21)

The Igbo folktale is often concluded by a thematic statement. The story teller may also ask the audience to identify the lesson of the story. This is an extension of the audience participation which is encouraged in the session particularly during the song sequences. The audience may ask questions of the storyteller which another child can also attempt to answer. Sometimes altercation arises, but this is always resolved to maintain group harmony.

The use of songs in some of the stories is critical as they are not just for rhythmic entertainment but contains lyrics that are relevant to and enhance the meaning of the story. The songs also drive the audience participation. Basic improvised musical items may be used to improve the song and provide the music. Nwachukwu-Agbada adds that sometimes the songs

.... serve more as interactional, recreational, and diversionary devices than as techniques for advancing the content of the tales... (and may) bear no immediate meaning ... to the action... (and) the refrains ... have no meanings; (other than) as sound and rhythmic devices (1990, p.27).

Finnegan (1970, p.389) noted however that songs do not occur in every story but are “infinitely more common than would appear from a cursory reading of the published collections... (and) the singing can at times become the main element of the story...” These songs, collaborating Nwachukwu-Agbada (p. 26), constitute the entertainment of Igbo tales and are highly valued for their poetic qualities. Tales which bear such songs that “can be shared between a narrator and the audience are more desirable than those that are sung by the narrator alone.” This is perhaps the origin of the type of indigenous minstrelsy the Igbos call *Akụkọ n’egwu* (tale-in-music).

The documentation of Igbo folktale is critical to the survival of the Igbo cultures but an application of this interest in different media is essential to successfully actualizing that goal. The folktale’s primacy in this

documentation is informed by the fact that more than any other aesthetic forms, storytelling projects the psycho-social values of the Igbo most through.

1. The themes of the tale
2. The performance style of the tale (audience participation) teacher-pupil relationship.
3. The content of the tales (etiological animal tales, culture, values, belief system, morals, teachings, etc).

Now is the time to do something beyond putting these tales in book form; a somewhat unsuccessful enterprise given that Igbo children would rather watch television than read story books.

Adapting the stories for the contemporary child

A support of the optional methods of preserving and propagating folk heritage ride on the statement that once an intangible heritage is identified as endangered, it should be documented in reliable storage forms. At present, there are tales translated into novels and short stories for reading. This is literary adaptation- the transfer of a literary source to another genre or medium, such as a film, a stage play, or even a video game. It can also involve adapting the same literary work in the same genre or medium, for instance taking a literary classic and transforming it into a completely different medium. Adapting may be limited to superficial changes or may be a radical recasting or rewriting, while even maintaining the medium. (Etherton, 1982). The oral medium through the human channel makes way for the channel of the written word to the next logical channel of communication in this proposed model- drama and theatre in its living and electronic forms.

For a society like Nigeria where the interest of the children in reading literature has bowed to the compelling attraction of television soap, and graphic animation, the way to go is to adapt the stories into short plays and author them to animated cartoons and stories. This is a project the author is still working on. He has succeeded in adapting a number of folktales to drama and progressively approaching the subsequent stages that should lead to the finished documentation.

The dramatic dialogue the author re-worked presents different characters and provides dynamism to the story. The re-worked dialogue also provided the opportunity for the actor to be in complete control of the story. This is not always possible in the moonlight night story session because the storyteller could always be interrupted by his audience. Due to the possibility of these interruptions, the ending of the storytelling performance is often unpredictable. The unpredictability, while embodying good points, may lead to uncertainties in length and a bridging of the story session. For instance, an altercation and stringent questions and interventions by the audience (which are perfectly acceptable) could lead to disorder if

the narrator is not gifted in flexibility and improvisation, or the audience member is unruly. There is the atmosphere of entertainment rather than didacticism which is an important goal of the folktales even if they are like satire soaked in fun. In other words the lessons are embedded in entertainment not the entertainment waving the moral flag. Literary adaptation is the first step to achieving the makeover proposed by the author, that is, careful selection of stories from the cast repertoire for literary transfer – stage presentation – screen play – voicing – cartooning and animation –voice synching and sub-titling – DVD storage.

Adaptation is useful as it would give fresh insight into a work, call attention to an otherwise ignored literary work, and bring more interest and attention to an existing work. For these reasons literary adaptation has been useful over the years. Etherton (1982) in noting that adaptations are the means by which play-texts have survived the process of history, recommends the efficacy it has and can confer on a waning aspect of the Igbo culture, the folktale.

Transferring the oral form of folktale to written form practically serves to preserve the tales in book shelves, not the mind, as it does not necessarily grow interest in reading. The major reason is that the reading culture in Nigeria is poor due to literacy, among other factors (Duruaku, 2010). The advent of television and the soaps, cartoons and other electronic visual alternatives have put reading in a difficult situation. As the next step, it is beneficial to adapt the written prose folktales to drama and stage the plays to impose the benefits of adaptation identified earlier. Again, since the society has become more visually-oriented, it should be presented visual stories which can help propagate the tales and preserve them in living form, as deployed by stage drama and television cartoons and soaps.

The entertainment, preservation and propagation of the folktales through enactment for theatre while embodying social reality, also affords an escape from it. It stimulates as it entertains but “while stimulating and entertaining, it remains an integral part of society, reflecting society’s feelings and even occasionally acting as its guide” (Traore, 1970, 103). The basic thing here is that the dramatic form would be developed and then through stage enactment and the refreshing of the stories into cartoons, television stories, and video film, the folk stories can be preserved and the lessons and other values inherent therein can be for the benefit of a great many. Dramatizing these tales will go beyond where the scripted narrative has. Graphic presentation is easily the most powerful method of mass address as it appeals to the twin senses of vision and sound. These tales should be imprisoned in the dramatic format and presented as theatre. This way, the stories will be retained, the fun will be enhanced and the moral preserved. What we will have is a thin, interesting story, enriched by a formidable medium. This goal can be achieved through a careful transfer of the tales from the oral to the theatrical medium

and then to the screen in the aforementioned forms.

The tortoise stories as typical folktale series for adaptation to animated film

Very many animal stories have been printed. Clearly however the tortoise is the single most used character in the Igbo folk story corpus. Tortoise (Mbe), variously called 'Nwaokosioma', 'Aniga', 'Nnabe' is a celebrated trickster. Indeed, 'Mbe' is to the Igbo people, what "Ananse" (spider) is to the Akan of Ghana, and the hare to the Tiv of Nigeria, is the dominant character in Igbo animal folk tale. He is the Igbo Everyman, mirroring human behaviour in spite of his 'animalness.' Nwachukwu-Agbada (1990) concurs that the folk stories focus primarily on the comical tricks perpetrated by the ubiquitous tortoise. In these allegorical satires, he demonstrates guile, wit, folly, and other features of human behaviour. Some of these stories are told for reasons of moral, others for fun. They remain as oral entertainment, but the lessons are not lost. Again, most of the stories are short. There might have been a time when they were long. The encounters between the leopard and the tortoise are so many that it perhaps they were once a string of episodes in one story.

The author's work on the tortoise repertory of Igbo tales used to illustrate the folktale-to-drama-graphic animation adaptation model for the preservation and propagation of a dying Igbo oral heritage has been quite enlightening. The author has dramatized a few stories of the tales to 'test the waters' and would, as a next step re-invent them as cartoon animations in the DVD format so that Nigerian children (and adults alike) would readily watch them as entertainment rather than spend useful time gobbling up lines of *Tom and Jerry*, *Scooby-Doo*, *The Jetsons*, *Top Cat*, *Tom Fat Cat*, and so on that refer to nothing in their tradition and contain little didactic or life-long skills development. This format will encourage non-Igbo to share in the pristine values of the people. Animation has graphic appeal, and provides humor. Although the movies take very long to sync the voice and the animation, the end result will invariably be rewarding.

Conclusion

What this paper has done is to identify some problems facing the propagation of and Igbo oral heritage: folklore. In doing this, it notes the impediments for a successful transmission of this heritage to children, and offers some ways out. It is expected that the study will generate interest in the development of the new paradigms which the paper has identified.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Robust work should be done on the adaptation of

selected Igbo folktales from the medium of oral delivery (Igbo-English) to the medium of television drama, video games, and the allied media.

2. Because Igbo children prefer visual information to reading text, there is need to adapt the stories to drama performance. This type of adaptation would re-ignite interest in the information which these folk stories carry. Also, developmental theatre could adopt the folktale approach to push its agenda.

3. The next logical step is to bring the drama to the home in the video and television formats as cartoon strips, character animations, and tele-video drama. Many Nigerian children are deeply interested in home video.

4. Children also like electronically-simulated gimmicks. Digital graphics that can excite them are now available. The production of the episode with crisp tech-driven graphics, music, voicing, and sound effects will add value to the episodes.

5. Investment in the scripting and production of the story videos should be encouraged by the government through public support and funding of pilot versions.

6. Education investors as well as government should consider the investment opportunities these video stories afford. The potential for their distribution is also great. Primary distribution will be possible in Nigeria because here, bulk purchase of such learning aids is common in the Nigeria school system. Variations and follow-up stories can then be purchased from relevant sales points by individuals. These marketing opportunities will encourage investment in these children's videos.

Further study

This researcher invites relevant specialists and researchers to exploit the foregoing proposal:

To develop a TV cartoon animation and video games repertory that would be a good framework for media experts to capture Igbo folktales in TV serials, animations, and cartoons that children will enjoy. The tortoise tales, for instance, will bring to the children of today the life-long benefits of the Igbo folktale. It will also help to preserve and propagate the heritage in a form that is more aesthetically enhanced, electronically stored, more dynamic, and readily exportable. In these days of electronic culture, this is the way to go. Animated graphic film is the new language of preserving and propagating of oral heritage. It also offers better opportunity for educating the child on creative folk heritage.

The appendix following is a sample adaptation from story to drama, which is key to a successful transfer from folktale to video graphics. The author did these stages on a number of stories and will be willing for a collaboration to get to the last stages.

Notes

¹ *gwam, gwam, gwam* -A mental exercise of question and

answer

² *nkq̄q̄* -The Igbo verbal game of jocular abuse or gentle ribbing

³ *njakiri* -A public abuse to make fun of someone else

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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APPENDIX**THE FOLK STORY****TORTOISE IN THE EVIL FOREST**

The tortoise's yam harvest looked promising that year so he decided to consume the lot alone. He did not want his family to eat. He thought about it and soon had a plan.

He went to a native doctor and told him of his (tortoise's) impending death through a terrible disease. This disease, he said, would mean that he should be thrown into the evil forest at death.

Conveniently, this evil forest was near tortoise's yam farm. The tortoise requested that all cooking utensils and ingredients that he had touched in life-time should be thrown into the forest too.

Later, he "died" and his wishes were carried out, "Take him into the evil forest, for that is where he belongs" said the native doctor.

That night, the tortoise came "alive" and set about digging the yams. Day after day, the tortoise helped himself to a lot of yams with the cooking utensils thoughtfully provided. He cooked the yams and ate to his fill.

Meanwhile his wife and children were starving so the other animals advised her to go and dig up her husband's yams. Tortoise's wife, Alii, went down to the farm and saw that the yams had been tampered with. She sang out:

"Tortoise! Tortoise! iwe!
Tortoise! Tortoise: iwe!
Come to my aid iwe!
Tortoise, Alii's husband Iwe!
Thieves have stolen your yams iwe!
He who made nests with salt iwe!
Thieves have stolen your yams iwe!
Don't let your wife be embarrassed iwe!"

The tortoise heard this and replied:

"Who sings thus
Which animal talks? - anumbelembelembe!
Don't come near here- "
If you come near here- "
You shall see spirits-

His wife ran away frightened. She told the other animals of her frightful experience. They thought she was having hallucinations and asked her to make a second trip to the farm. She only found out that more yams had disappeared. She sang out the same lines as she had on the first occasion and got the same answer.

This time the other animals came to investigate the voice. They asked her to sing again. She sang:

"Tortoise! Tortoise! iwe!
Tortoise! Tortoise! iwe!
Come to my aid iwe!
Tortoise, Alii's husband iwe!
Thieves have stolen your yams- iwe!
He who made nests, with salt - iwe!
Thieves have stolen you yams - iwe!
Don't let your wife be embarrassed iwe!"

When the voice attempted to reply as usual, the animals stormed the forest and caught the culprit - the tortoise. He was exposed and disgraced.'

THE DRAMA ADAPTATION**TORTOISE IN THE EVIL FOREST (Aetiological theme/Lessons on Greed & Selfishness)**

Exterior set arranged like a traditional moonlight storytelling arena. Chorus and story teller are on the stage.

STORY TELLER: Chakpii!
CHORUS: Haa!
STORY TELLER: Chakpii!
CHORUS: Haa!
STORY TELLER: I shall now tell you a story.
CHORUS: Please tell us so that we may be happy.

STORY TELLER: All right. I shall tell you a story of greed and selfishness. You know about Tortoise. He is the craftiest person in the world. Sometimes however, he gets caught in his trickery. We must not be like him. At the end of the story, you will see why we should not be like him.

CHORUS MEMBER I: Is it true that the stories about the tortoise actually are about what some people do?

STORY TELLER: Of course.

CHORUS MEMBER II: *(to Chorus I)* Please shut up so that we can hear the story, or do you want to take over.

CHORUS I: Who wants to take over? I just want to find answers to questions.

CHORUS III: If you want answers, go to your mother, or to your father; they will tell you. Don't spoil out story with your stupid question.

CHORUS I: *(to Chorus III)* What is your problem? What is your concern here? Please Story teller, tell us the story before these dogs bite me to death.

CHORUS III: *(to Chorus I)* Are you calling me a dog?

STORY TELLER: Okay! Okay!! Don't quarrel. I can take questions. And the story will not run away. Now let's talk about Tortoise and his greed. But first, a song to ease all tension and make us all friends again.

(A vibrant song to emphasize friendliness)

STORY TELLER: *(after the song walks downstage)* Once upon a time. Tortoise had an uncle who had no child or wife, but he was a great farmer. Just before the harvest

period began, the uncle died. Tortoise automatically inherited the yam farm. He quickly rushed to the yam farm to assess the harvest. He also saw that there were many mounds of yam and the harvest would be good. He saw that the farm was beside the evil forest. He wanted to eat all the yams alone. He did not want even his wife to eat any of the yams. So he thought of a plan. He then went to the native doctor. Let's see what happened. (*joins the chorus*).

(*The native doctor is seated, casting cowries*).

NATIVE DOCTOR:

He who says we shall not live
Shall die with a hunchback.
Let us love other people, but ourselves more.
I am like the policeman
If you come to my house,
I ask: what have brought for me?
If I go to yours,
I ask: what did you keep for me?
I never lose.

(*Enter Tortoise. Native Doctor looks up*).

NATIVE DOCTOR: Who is this I see? Can that be my friend, Tortoise?

TORTOISE: It's me. I want to...

NATIVE DOCTOR: Shhh....! Don't tell me. I know everything. That is how you know a great **dibia*. He knows your mind even before you speak. Not like these modern day doctors. They always ask you what the matter is with you. Where then is their medicine? *Tufia!*

TORTOISE: All right, what's on my mind?

NATIVE DOCTOR: That is simple. You have a problem.

TORTOISE: Only a sick man goes to a doctor. What business does the vulture have with a barber? Of course I do have a problem, otherwise, I won't be here now.

NATIVE DOCTOR: And you want me to solve it. You are sad (*casts his cowries*). Yes you are sad indeed. But you have come to the right place. My fee is little: two fowls.

TORTOISE: I know your fee. The fowls are outside. I came with them.

NATIVE DOCTOR: Good. I trust you. As a bonus to you, I'll also predict the future for you.

TORTOISE: Really? I shall like that. Anyone who knows tomorrow is indeed the master of the world. Now listen, my friend. I have a horrible disease. I shall not tell you the name. (*Native Doctor pulls back in fear*). Don't worry. It will not affect you because I am alive. The disease is dangerous only when the carrier dies. For instance, if I die now, everyone in the village could become infected.

NATIVE DOCTOR: Really! Please then don't die.

TORTOISE: That's the problem. I shall die. I know it. When I die, please throw my body into the evil forest, so that no one will be infected with my disease.

NATIVE DOCTOR: (*fearfully*) That is an easy matter. Don't worry. I shall instruct the villagers when you die to throw you deep into the evil forest.

TORTOISE: (*hurrying to go*) Your chickens are outside.

NATIVE DOCTOR: (*still afraid*) Are you sure you have

not infected them with your terrible disease. Perhaps you should take them back. In fact I need not charge you any fee.

TORTOISE: Do not worry. Like I said, I'm not dangerous until I die. Then, make sure I am cast away into the evil forest. (*pause*) I forgot one thing. You must not bury me, otherwise, the soil will be contaminated and all the crops in that area will be infected.

NATIVE DOCTOR: That would be terrible. I have a farm near the evil forest.

TORTOISE: So do I. I don't want my family to die of hunger because the biggest farm that I have is contaminated.

NATIVE DOCTOR: Don't worry, we shall bury you in the evil forest.

TORTOISE: (*shouts in panic*) No! don't bury me. Just throw me in there (*pauses as native doctor nods vigorously*). Also throw into the evil forest any cooking utensil used to cook food at my funeral.

NATIVE DOCTOR: Cooking utensils?

TORTOISE: Yes, cooking utensils. Are you deaf? This disease is terrible. Once I die, anything used to cover my body, or cook food for guests will become contaminated. So, throw all those things into the evil forest. Are you sure you understand that?

NATIVE DOCTOR: (*Still afraid*) Yes I do.

TORTOISE: Now tell me what will happen tomorrow (*Native Doctor is confused*). You promised to prophesy for me.

NATIVE DOCTOR: Yes... really (*backs away as Tortoise approaches*). Please keep your distance (*casts cowries*). Tomorrow there will be good weather, the cock will crow in the morning. At night, we shall all sleep well after supper. Soon too, you will die of a terrible disease. People will mourn you for days...

TORTOISE: (*interrupting*) What sort of fortune teller are you? You have missed one of the predictions.

NATIVE DOCTOR: Which one?

TORTOISE: That my body and all cooking utensils and left-over ingredients used at my funeral will be thrown into the evil forest.

NATIVE DOCTOR: (*laughs crookedly and peers at his cowries*) Of course. It is in the cowries here.

TORTOISE: All right, you are a great medicine man. Goodbye. (*Tortoise leaves smiling, while the Native Doctor shrugs and fearfully follows him out*).

STORY TELLER: (*Stepping forward*) Tortoise! Fantastic fellow. He had it all worked out. Neat. Three days later, Tortoise was announced dead. Everyone believed he actually died. The native doctor immediately informed the people that he knew why and how Tortoise died. He said that he saw a vision and the gods asked him to make sure Tortoise is thrown into the evil forest along with all cooking utensils and left-over cooking ingredients used at his funeral. Tortoise's disease, he added, was so terrible that calamity would befall the village if the steps were not taken. The villagers did as they were told. In the night,

Tortoise came 'alive' in the evil forest and crossed into his farm and dug up several fat tubers of yam. With the cooking utensils and ingredients, he cooked delicious meals and ate. Day after day, he did this. Meanwhile his wife and children were starving. So the other animals asked them to dig up the tortoise's yams near the evil forest. Alii, Tortoise's wife went to the farm and saw that many of the yams had been dug up. In frustration she sang out.

Tortoise! Tortoise!
(chorus refrains at each line, 'Iwe').
 Tortoise! Tortoise!
 Come to my aid
 Tortoise, Alii's husband
 Thieves have stolen your yams
 He who builds nests with salt
 Thieves have stolen your yams
 Don't let your wife be embarrassed
 Or starve to death.
 In the evil forest. Tortoise heard the song and replied with the voice of the spirits.
(Chorus I plays the role of Tortoise. The rest of the group chorus the refrain 'Anumbelembe anu.' This exchange may be accompanied by rhythmic clapping).

CHORUS I: *(as Tortoise):*
 Who sings this?
 Which animal speaks?
 Don't come near here
 If you come near here
 Your eyes will see the spirits.

STORY TELLER: Alii ran away frightened. She told the other animals of her experience *(Alii moves forward to chorus and mimes her experience and fear. The other animals, played by the chorus, assemble around her and they move towards the evil forest humming the last tune).*

STORY TELLER: The other animals followed her to see things for themselves

(They stop at the edge of the "Evil Forest").

1ST ANIMAL: Sing again Alii. Let's see what happens.

ALII: Don't you see how our yams have been dug up?

2ND ANIMAL: Yes. But sing. Let's see whether this is your forefather's spirit or the devil. We are behind you. Do not be afraid.

ALII: *(sings as before) (The animals rush into the forest and drag the tortoise out. As they tried to beat him up, he withdrew into his shell. Story teller stays backs).*

STORY TELLER: You see, the older animals recognized the voice of the tortoise. They knew that spirits do not speak. Tortoise was caught but he withdrew into his shell to avoid punishment. This is the why Tortoise withdraws into his shell whenever anyone comes near him. This story teaches us to be generous. It is bad to be greedy and selfish.

(The song about the tortoise before he went to the native doctor is heard again in the background as Story teller exits).

End

Full Length Research Paper

The impact of colonial rule on the agricultural economy of Mbaise, Imo State, 1500-1960

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At present, there is no reasonably full account of the economic history of Mbaise in Imo State, Nigeria. The reason for this is obvious. Among others, enough attention has not been given to economic and social developments of mini-polities that dot Igbo land, east of the Niger. Existing historical studies in the area though valuable, are politically biased as early scholars on African past concentrated on documenting political developments in 'mega states'. This has inevitably left a yawning gap in our knowledge of economic developments especially in the agricultural economy sub-sector. No doubt, this present study has helped to narrow the gap and consequently revise the trend whereby political history gained importance, which for quite a long time, remained the focus of historical studies and scholarship. It is against this backdrop that the article examined the impact of colonial rule on the Mbaise agricultural economy and argues that alien influences did not do much to transform the traditional economy, but rather concentrated on improving cash crops that aided the metropolitan economy and wellbeing.

Key words: Mbaise, agriculture, historical, colonial economy, development, political and Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Theorists throughout human history believe in the inevitability of change. Most also believe that change is not mono-causal but multi-causal. The concept of change and continuity is as vast as the whole wide-world; for changes are taken place in all parts and facets of the world society as arrangements, organizations, institutions and management continue to transform year in year out. The idea of change and continuity in the context of this paper shows through available evidence that change, growth or development is intrinsic to any group or society whether traditional or modern. However, these changes may be facilitated and nourished by external agencies. Changes should therefore be viewed as belonging naturally or drawn from within and outside that society. In

this regard, in the case of Mbaise, continuity and change here signify that some agricultural and farming systems have continued to exist in their pre-colonial forms despite colonial and other external influences that introduced significant changes in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The choice of the period of study stems from the fact that through generational age, Mbakwe (2005:56-63) had concluded in a study that the first set of immigrants settled in the Ahiara Clan of Mbaise about the 16th century, hence the choice of the baseline 1500. The colonial era began in earnest in the late 19th century, when Britain consolidated its rule over Nigeria. In 1914, the British merged northern and southern protectorates into a single state called the colony and protectorate of

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Nigeria. Nigeria became independent of British Rule in 1960. For the people of Mbaise, Imo State, the period between 1500 and 1960 was one of immense socio-economic changes.

Identification of area of study

It is important to briefly look at the location and geography of Mbaise. This is necessary because according to Hopkins (1973:11), the geography of an area influences the cause of human history and development. He has also argued that Africa's economic past is the record of a continuous dialogue between geography and history—from the very beginnings of agriculture to the introduction of modern industry. It is in this sense therefore, that the location and geography of Mbaise society has influenced its agricultural economy overtime.

Geographically, Mbaise formed part of the Ohuhu Ngwa sub-section of the southern Igbo, located within the extensive deciduous Forest Belt of West Africa. It is located within the present Imo State, the heart of South-east geo-political zone of the present day Nigeria. It is situated within latitude 5-6 degrees north of the Equator and longitude 7-8 degrees east of the Greenwich Mean Time (G.M.T). Mbaise falls within the Orlu section of the Awka - Orlu uplands with a land area of 404 square kilometers, an official population of 532, 147 and with a population density of 1317 persons per square kilometer (see 2006 Nigerian population census figures). This high population density has a lot of implications. In the first place, it is seen as a major cause of deteriorating fertility of the soil. However, lack of improved agricultural technology has worsened the situation, resulting in effect to decreased agricultural output. In the face of decreased agricultural output, the tendency has been for the people to migrate to agriculturally more endowed areas or seek white collar jobs in urban areas (Olusanya and Pursell, 1981). This may explain partly why Mbaise indigenes are found virtually in every corner of the globe in so far as human beings exist there - in search of greener pastures and genuine means of survival.

Pre-colonial agricultural economy

Before 1900, the economy of the Igbo, like that of virtually every other West African community centered mostly on agriculture. Yet, most economists and even historians took its existence for granted. It is argued that the

domestication of plants and animals, the Neolithic revolution as it is sometimes called, was one of the greatest events in world history and one of the greatest achievements of man (Agwu, 1993:61). It is believed that the peoples of West Africa like the peoples of many parts of the world developed their own agriculture independently thousands of years before the birth of Christ. But over the years, no doubt, a lot have been borrowed outside the borders of West Africa in the development of agriculture.

The place of agriculture in pre-colonial Mbaise economy can be appreciated in the fact that the vast majority of the people were engaged in agricultural pursuits and there were very few members of the society who did not have their farms and herds. In the words of Afigbo (1981:6), "in the pre-colonial Igbo society, agriculture was the most important economic activity with regard both to the number of people engaged in it either on full-time basis or the prestige attached to it". In the same vein, Uchendu (1966:30), appropriately described farming as the basis of the life of the Igbo. According to him, an Igbo was easily humiliated when reminded that he is "ori mgbe ahia loro"; one who eats only when the markets holds. This does not definitely imply that traders were relegated to the background in the people's economic life. This significantly implies that the Igbo saw farming as their main occupation and trading as subsidiary, not a substitute.

Furthermore, the place of agriculture in the culture and cosmology of the Igbo can also be captured in the words of an ex-celebrated Igbo slave boy, Olaudah Equiano:

Agriculture is our chief employment, and everybody, even children are engaged in it. Everyone contributes to the common stock, and as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have no beggars. We have plenty of Indian corn, and vast quantities of cotton and tobacco. Our pineapples grow without culture; they are about the size of the largest sugar-loaf and finely flavoured (Quoted in Afigbo, 1981:125-128).

The Mbaise attitude to agriculture resulted in almost every Mbaise person becoming a farmer. Most families in Mbaise produced well enough of such staples as yam, cocoyam, cassava, and varieties of vegetables. It cannot be compared with some communities in Igbo land whose soils were very fertile and who gave so much of their time to farming to the extent that they also produced for outside markets. This is not to state that production for supply outside the immediate environment was completely non-existent in Mbaise. The fact remains that Mbaise was never among the few Igbo groups that

produced foods in abundance to the extent of satisfying her immediate needs as well as exporting the surplus to other areas in need. Production for outside market on a fairly large scale had been hindered appreciably as a result of deteriorated soil fertility occasioned by over-cropping and population pressures.

Rather than engaging in export of her products, Mbaise even benefited from the surplus products of her eastern and riverine neighbours like Ngwa, Etche, Owerri, Ngor Okpala and Umuahia to supplement her local productions. Isichei (1976:27) writes on this deficiency as aptly as possible:

Mbaise men and women struggled to wrest a living from inadequate and infertile plots; a situation common to most communities in the Igbo heart land areas of Orlu, Okigwe and Owerri. The Nguru clan, in what is now Mbaise, worked leached-eroding land from which no industry or skill could wrest good harvest. Many of its people were forced to work as migrant labourers for the Etche clan, or eked out a living by various crafts...

However, the fact still remains that Mbaise, like other pre-colonial Igbo groups, cultivated varieties of vegetables, food crops such as cassava, yams, cocoyams, beans, plantain, bananas, maize and others. There is no doubt that some of the crops mentioned or cultivated may not be indigenous to the people. Some may have been introduced into the area by the process of diffusion. For instance, cassava has been identified as one of the alien-introduced crops. This may help to explain the reason why cassava, which today is a common complement to yam, was not popular in the past. Cassava was not only unpopular in Igboland, but throughout the entire West Africa before the turn of the 20th century, (See Mbakwe 2005:119).

In the traditional Mbaise society, agriculture was sufficiently intensive and efficient as evidenced by the fact that using such simple tools as the machet and small hoe, the people reduced to either grassland or palm-bush vegetation what most authorities think must have been originally tropical rain forest. It is also seen in the system of land tenure under which firstly, there was no free-born (*amadi*) who had no piece of land over which he enjoyed *usufructuary* rights; and secondly, there was no piece of land, not even that over which stood "bad-bush", without an owner. "An owner" in this sense may mean either the whole community or the founding fathers of the lineage or great ancestors.

In spite of its long history and the importance attached to agriculture, the Igbo and of course the Mbaise agricultural economy continued to be categorized as

subsistence. It was characterized by small holdings whose role was to produce food for the immediate household consumption and the small balance for local market. According to Esse (2011:42), the small-holding system of farming was marked by the use of family labour to work in the farms; the use of little capital, simple tools and farm implements like hoe and machet. In pre-colonial Mbaise, land was deemed to have belonged to the ancestors, the present generation and the generation yet unborn (Mbakwe Oral Information). It was basically the role which agriculture played in the life of the people that determined the great importance which the people attached to land as well as the key place which land and its spirit-force occupied in their lives.

Agriculture was highly ritualized in the traditional Mbaise society. The beginning of the farming season was a formal occasion marked by a festival and a ritual. The case of the Nguru Clan is very apt. The traditional *Ituaka* festival was very remarkable in this regard. No farmer began the season without a sort of "go-ahead order" by holders of the traditional yam title *ndi ezeji*. The festival was marked by special prayers and pouring of libations to their ancestors to protect and reward the farmers with bumper harvest during a particular farming season. During this festival, some sacrifices were offered before any section of the village farmland was cleared for cultivation. The objects for the sacrifice included a sheep, fowl or tortoise. The sacrifice was performed by the yam elders or title holders led by a priest specially ordained for this purpose. During the *Ituaka* festival, farmers were shown or directed to the approved farming areas for cultivation. In recent times, the festival has undergone several changes. An intellectual talk called *Igwo Owa* lecture now heralds the occasion. More importantly, the festival has been purged of all fetish events and beliefs that formally characterized it (Mbakwe, 2013).

The beginning of harvest season was also celebrated and ritualized (Ajaebili, 2002:36-38). A series of harvest thanksgiving offering called "New Yam" festival in Igbo land always marked the commencement of yam harvesting. There must be no harvest of new yam until the ceremonial rituals were over (Aguwa Oral information). In the modern Mbaise society, the new yam festival is celebrated every 15th day of August. The purpose of the festival, in its contemporary form, is to show gratitude to God for the first "fruits" of the farm and to ask for forgiveness of past misdeeds. The care and divine protection of the various farm-families is also sought. Today, the new yam festival is characterized by merriment, public lectures and traditional dances (Njoku, 2003:115-117).

Yam, the backbone of Mbaise agriculture was highly

ritualized. It was believed to have a spirit-force *Arusi* which laid down the specific code of conduct for its cultivation, harvesting, cooking and even eating. It was regarded as the king of Mbaise crops. The spirit-force *Njokuji Ahianjoku* was not only powerful but widely feared and venerated not only in Mbaise but throughout Igboland. Those who broke the rules for handling yam stood the risk of being inflicted with dangerous illnesses like diarrhoea and swollen stomach – *Afotoro* (Ohanele Oral information). The more serious taboo forbade people from fighting or defecating in the yam farm. Also, once yams had been planted, *Njokuji* forbade anybody from cracking palm-nuts at night. The other crops-different species of beans, cassava, cocoyam, banana and others were not thought of as possessing any spirit force except in the general sense that the Igbo saw every individual thing as possessing a spirit force (Agwu, 67).

The pre-colonial Mbaise indeed exercised very great care in agricultural matters. Every young man and woman was well tutored in the art of crop cultivation. Many beliefs were also associated with plant life and growth. Certain crops for example, corn, might not be planted by a lean person. It was believed that the stalk would be leaned also. There was also this belief among the people that corn planted with an empty stomach would also have empty cobs. Another belief was that if alcohol was taken before planting was done, the plants would have white leaves and no chlorophyll. Proponents of these beliefs that the emotional appearance of the person planting affects crop yield. These beliefs were mere superstitions as the writer agrees with an informant who strongly argued that even when planted with empty stomach, corn still did well.

Traditional Mbaise agricultural economy cannot be complete without mentioning of some important tree crops which served as pillars in the peoples' economic life. The oil palm tree, an indigenous tree crop, is very popular in the tropical rain forest areas of West Africa (Ekanem, 1957:169). This crop is a blessing of inestimable value to the people of this region. Almost every part or product of it is economically useful. The tree mainly grew naturally from self-sown seeds. Research has however promoted the domestication and expansion of various species of this plant; making it possible for farmers to plant various seed species in line with modern technology for maximum yields. The kernel derived from oil palm could be eaten raw as it has a very pleasant taste especially when it is fresh. The palm oil is used for cooking almost every meal and supplies the much needed vitamin A (Nwosu, 1979:3-5).

The rise of palm oil trade in the 19th century had in no small measure increased the value and importance of

palm tree in the overall economy of Igboland and Mbaise in particular. In this connection, Mbakwe (2011:2-3) has argued that: "In Mbaise, the only and perhaps the most important crop was oil palm tree. The attention it attracted in the colonial economic calculation increasingly came to determine the peoples' economic development. This attention was increased following the abolition of the slave trade by Britain in 1907 when palm oil exportation assumed increased dimension" Writing in the case of the lower cross River Region, Abia (1998:6) submits that: "between 1907 and 1960, the economy of the region witnessed developments geared towards the enhancement of the trade in palm products". The economy of Mbaise, no doubt, witnessed similar progress within the period in question. Ardner (1952) had noted earlier that: "The most important single source of income in Mbaise... is the sale of palm produce". It is important to note that the production and sale of palm produce were very widespread since nature liberally spread the crop through the length and breadth of Mbaise.

Palm wine is also obtained at times from palm tree. Even though the practice of tapping palm tree for wine making was not popular in Mbaise, this *local* wine had and has continued to serve as an important source of alcoholic drink and indeed a source of income for some communities and families in Mbaise. The popular palm-wine in Mbaise is obtained from *Raffia* Palm tree *Ngwo*. Sometimes, some form of herbs or special additives are inculcated to give raffia palm wine a special taste and to extend its shelf life. This explains why today, Mbaise palm wine is a "hot cake" in the palm wine market as people visit the area to have a taste of this drink from all over Igboland (Anyanwu, LA, 2001, Oral Interview).

The coconut, though not quite an indigenous crop, was also cultivated in Mbaise. Almost every family had some cocconut trees. The "milk" produced by fresh nut is extraordinarily sweet. The nut is eaten, not essentially as food but rather because of its pleasant taste as well as its nutritional value as a source of essential vitamins and minerals (Ekanem, 1957: 169-170). It could be eaten as relish with dry or fresh corn or with specially sliced cassava *Akpumiri*. It was also customary in Mbaise, for a grand-mother to plant coconut for every grand-child. The planter was always advised to sit on a kitchen stool while planting. This was to ensure that the coconut plant yields fruit before growing to a great height. According to an informant, the planter must not also bend down while panting. If she did, the coconut tree would grow to a great height and bend before yielding fruits (Akakwam, C.A, 2002, Oral Information).

The family and household were considered the main source of labour for agricultural production in Mbaise.

Sometimes, this was supplemented with other labourers from neighbouring communities who did not necessarily receive wages for work done. The utility of household labour has been attributed to it being "costless"; that is, in the formal sense of family members not being remunerated financially as well as its ability to be used to the point where its marginal return was zero (Hopkins, 1977:22). In the Mbaïse traditional agricultural production, men, women and children were fully mobilized in every family during either cultivation or harvesting. It is in this regard that the idea of marrying many wives and possessing of large family were not only considered as an index of wealth, but also as a potential source of labour for agricultural production (Agwu, p. 71). The ancient practice of communalism arose essentially to solve the problem of labour inadequacy. Another fundamental factor that enhanced this practice has been linked to the lineage system in which a highly evolved sentiment of attachment to the kin group could make each person his brother's keeper.

Furthermore, labour also resulted from the system of clientele. Clients were those who had either taken yams or money on loan and could not pay back or were required to pay back in labour given on stated days of the week for a specified period, until the loan was repaid. They could also be people who enjoyed the support and the protection of the rich farmers generally and in return, gave their labour to him (Afigbo, p. 130). Other sources included the trading of labour amongst the members of an age-grade or the reciprocal exchange of labour *igba-onwo-oru*, which normally took place between persons and families linked by marriage and kinship. Livestock keeping or animal husbandry and hunting were other aspects of traditional Igbo agricultural economy. At present, hunting is losing its importance understandably as a result of the great dimensions assumed by animal domestication. Hunting has also continued to diminish in the scheme of traditional economic activities for other reasons ranging from reduction in the duration of fallow periods to large-scale deforestation with the consequent destruction of the natural habitat and the entire ecosystem. Apart from serving a source of proteins, livestock such as fowls, goats, sheep and dogs also served a ritual purpose. Pre-colonial Mbaïse believed that livestock formed a buffer between the inhabitants of a household and malignant spirits out to destroy life (Njoku, 1990).

There was the practice in some clans in Mbaïse whereby a man might deliver an animal (especially fowl, hen and goat), to a friend or kinsman to rear. The offspring of the first two rounds of birth became the property of the owner (donor) of the animal, while the offspring of the third round of birth became the undisput-

able property of the bearer (donee). This practice is no longer popular among the Mbaïse when compared to the situation in the pre-colonial times. For the reason that scientific upbringing of domestic animals was lacking and no immunization of the modern types existed, pests and various diseases took the lives of many domestic animals. However, the introduction of modern veterinary drugs and services especially in the twentieth century did reduce the death rate of many domestic animals and consequently, enhanced the income of many farm-families in Mbaïse.

It is also argued that between 16th and 19th centuries, the level of technology for agricultural production remained relatively low not only in Igbo land but in Nigeria in general. Though, this condition should not necessarily imply backwardness as some commentators would like to impute. Traditional technology was a phenomenon not just merely determined by geographical factors but also by socio-cultural elements that may never lend themselves easily to quantitative and unbiased analysis using other standards (Amadi, 1999). It can be said therefore, that the traditional farming implements were efficiently used both for domestic need for food and at times for exchange purposes. The surplus needed for trade and exchange would not have been feasible in the so called backward system. However, looking at the prognosis of change in the agrarian economy of Mbaïse, the 19th century according to Hopkins, could be seen as a decisive watershed, because that was when the slave trade was replaced by the exports of primary agricultural products (Isichei, 1987:417-418).

Even though agriculture was the mainstay of the Igbo economy and constituted the main source of income for the rural dwellers, not much effort was made by the colonial administration to modernize and commercialize agriculture, especially in the area of food crop production. Rather, their emphasis was on cash crop production for export purposes. Emphasis on cash crops production made many farmers to abandon food crop production. Rodney (1972: 48) points out that; "in the centuries before the imposition of colonial rule, the dominant agricultural activity was food crop production" The colonial interest in cash crops stemmed from the serious need to keep the British and European industries running. Some of the cash crops especially palm oil and allied products were the major primary commodities that featured prominently in the Igbo-Anglo commercial relations, and this necessitated the European penetration of the Igbo hinterland and subsequent British military escapade in the early 20th century. It must therefore be pointed out that the economic exploitation of the resources of the Igbo hinterland was the prime *raison d'être* of colonialism.

It must be noted that the colonial government did not make appreciable effort to modernize the traditional system of agriculture in Mbaise because their view was that the peasant farmers were backward, unchanging, conservative; and was fearful of abandoning the methods of their forefathers (Philip, 1981:503). Recent studies in agricultural history have shown that African farmers are never unchangeable, stagnant and unthinking traditionalists. They were usually willing to change, and even anxious to change in so far as the incentives and appropriate methods and techniques were made available by the colonial masters, who had hitherto claimed to have modernized Africa. The most convincing evidence as to the superficiality of the much talked about colonialism being responsible for the "modernization" Africa is the fact that the vast majority of Africa went into colonialism with a hoe and came out with a hoe (Rodney, 239).

Another important element of change that affected agriculture during the colonial era was in the area of land holding or land tenure system. Firstly, land was revalued and this brought about an enhanced sense of value and the economic resources therein. Afigbo, (1981:335) had argued that:

By introducing the idea of deliberately experimenting with the plantation of new cash crops for instance, cocoa, the colonial regime created among the Igbo the new desire to acquire land on free hold terms. Hitherto, all land, whether family or community owned, could not be alienated in perpetuity from the unit in question.

In Mbaise, a crucial factor that gave land enhanced economic value was the huge population which created an unprecedented pressure on the available land in the area. With the activities of land speculators, land gradually became a commodity that could be offered for sale to individuals which would then confer on such person freehold titles. Today, the outright alienation of land by either gift or sale has become a common feature not only in Mbaise but also in the whole of Igbo land (Nwabueze, 1980).

As in other communities in Igboland, Mbaise land witnessed the influence of new and exotic crops following the advent of colonialism. Exotic crops such as cassava, potatoes, plantain, pineapples and oranges appeared in the area as a result of European intrusion. Amadi (2000:1-7) has however, argued that "without colonial influence, these crops would still have found their way into Igbo land". He further argued in this direction that the spread of food crops from one area to another is a common phenomenon in human history and does not

require colonization or sale of human beings. After all, Europeans were not enslaved by the American - Indians from whom they adopted potatoes and other crops. One would therefore add that the spread and recognition of these crops were virtually due to the social and economic exigencies of the 20th century. Whatever is the case, the fact still remains that the introduction and development of these crops no doubt, had far-reaching consequences on the domestic agricultural economy of Mbaise in the late 20th century.

One of the most significant changes brought into agriculture in the 20th century was the introduction of a special scheme for the training of agricultural assistants in Umuahia and Ibadan in the 1940s and 1950s. This eventually brought about the popularization of the teaching of agricultural science in schools. The agricultural assistants training programme followed the establishment of the Department of Agriculture by the colonial government in 1910 (Agwu, 1998:133). The training focused mainly on the production of cash crops especially palm produce. The impact of this scheme was seen in the expansion of palm plantations not only in Mbaise but also in other areas in Southeastern Nigeria. No doubt, this development attracted the participation of so many people who had already been empowered from the skills acquired through the training offered by the agricultural extension personnel to the palm oil and related businesses.

It could be argued at this point that almost all the innovations in the oil palm sector of the Igbo agricultural economy were made possible by colonial government through their agents and firms. For instance, in 1928, Agricultural Department began to encourage local farmers to replace existing groves with small palm plots, with a view to introducing a high yielding strain of palm and adopting more up-to-date methods of cultivation and maintenance. Abia (1998:173) has argued that this task was never easy firstly due to the African's resistance to spend time and money on cultivating palms, the returns on which is differed for some years, whereas the wild palms can be cropped for nothing; and secondly, due to the paralyzing impacts of land tenure laws and customs.

Another important effort by the colonial regime towards the improvement of the oil palm industry was in the area of loan scheme for interested producers. In 1929, for instance, under the scheme, the amount to be granted to anyone individual farmer was £20. But before it was granted, applicant would show proof of title to the land which he proposed to "plant up". Though, the loan repayment with its accruable interest, commenced as soon as the young palms begin to bear fruits possibly, in their third or fourth year. However, most of the men who

embarked on palm plots were at one time, wealthy men to whom small loans on the lines suggested, would not be of much use. Furthermore, there was the fear that any person who accepted financial assistance was being bribed to allow the government to control and eventually to possess his palm trees (Abia, 172-175).

The establishment of Produce Inspection Department by the colonial government was another innovative change introduced into agriculture and produce trade. In a more significant way, this innovation helped in no small measure to depress the economy of local farmers and traders. In Mbaïse, for example, many palm produce farmers and traders gave up the production and trading on this crucial cash crop and eventually turned their attention to food crop production, especially yam and cocoyam. This among other reasons undermined the various innovations introduced by the colonial regime.

Finally, it must be noted that the oil palm industry helped in subverting the authority of the local chiefs and eventually resulted in the imposition of colonial rule. For instance, during the period of the slave trade, it was reported that the Europeans spent a relatively short period on the coast of Africa. In this regard, it was difficult for them to intervene unnecessarily in the political activities of the people. But the trade in palm oil witnessed an unprecedented intervention in the local politics by the Europeans (Mbakwe, 2009:7-10). This was because unlike slave, palm oil was more or less a seasonal commodity. Where the Europeans arrived before or after the season, they had to wait for the next season; the more they stayed in the region, the more they were drawn into local politics. Therefore, the authority of the local chiefs became greatly subverted.

Summary and concluding remarks

In spite of its long history and the importance attached to it, the Igbo agricultural production continued to be categorized as subsistence. The small-holding system of farming, the use of family labour to work in the farms, the use of little capital, simple tools and farm implements, and more importantly, the long established methods of production have not undergone any significant changes. As far as farm techniques are concerned, nothing much changed in Mbaïse within the period of study just like in many areas in Igbo land. The people still engaged in subsistence agriculture as the hoe and matchet, which constituted the basic farm implements and the household, an important unit of farm labour remained the major elements in the production process in the period of our study.

The pre-colonial agricultural economy of Mbaïse might have been underdeveloped but was nevertheless, not lacking in dynamism. The economy was basically dependent upon the efforts of peasant farmers and craftsmen who were ready to embrace innovations and effect relevant changes where and when necessary. The intruding colonial regime, whose intent was the exploitation of the hinterland economy, did not do much to modernize the Igbo and of course, the Mbaïse agricultural sector. It rather channeled available resources, incentives and techniques towards large-scale production of cash crops with the aim of exporting same to promote the metropolitan industries in Britain and other parts of Western Europe.

It has to be stressed that the advent of "Mbaïse agricultural economy" was characterized by an increased awareness on the importance of land as a factor of production. This period also witnessed a marginal improvement in the system and techniques of food and cash crop production. These were made possible by the increased knowledge of iron works which made crop cultivation easier not only in Mbaïse but the whole of Igbo land.

Even though Mbaïse agriculture is still based on the use of simple tools such as hoe and matchet, this is not to say however, that the traditional Mbaïse economy did not undergo significant transformation as a result of colonial influences. However, the drudgery which accompanied the use of these simple agricultural implements, in addition to the poor returns from farming discouraged young people from embracing agriculture and related investments. This no doubt, constitutes the bane as well as impediment to the development of agriculture and economy not only in Mbaïse but the entire Igbo land. More importantly, the Igbo and indeed Nigeria had an agricultural economy but now depended almost entirely on the production of petroleum and importation food to feed its teeming population.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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