

## **COLONIALISM AND THE DYNAMICS OF INTRA-AND INTER-GROUP, RELATIONS IN THE NIGER DELTA: SOME REFLECTIONS ON BUA-SOGHO AND HER NEIGHBOURS, 1900-1960**

**N-ue, UeBari Samuel Ph.D.**

Department of History & Diplomatic Studies, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

**Abstract:** The truism is that the theme of colonialism and its impacts on Africa had for long been the central thrust of both African and non-African scholars around the globe. Apparently, what remains to be analysed and brought to limelight is its actual consequences on the dynamics of intra-and-intergroup relations in Africa, particularly on micro societies like the Ogoni ethnic nationality in which Sogho is situated. Against this backdrop, this paper attempts to investigate the nature, pattern and character of human relations between Sogho and her neighbours during the colonial period. With the adoption of both historical methods and multi-disciplinary approach, this study explores the nexus, linkages, and disconnections caused by colonial rule in the relations among the people. It argues that colonialism was both a blessing and curse. It notes that while the alien rule provided new avenues that succeeded in widening and deepening contacts between Sogho and its neighbouring communities, it on the other hand sowed the seeds of distrust, hatred, mutual suspicion, discrimination, selfishness, irritation, etc. that greatly helped to cause division among the erstwhile interacting communities. This paper calls for all stake holders to appreciate, tolerate, love, cherish and harbour their neighbours' culture in order to deepen the much cherish ancient ties that bind us together. Pointedly, internal colonialism, ethnic politics, self-aggrandisement, etc. should be eliminated from our body polity while justice, fairness, selflessness, patriotism, etc. should be cultivated, encouraged and promoted.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Intra-and-Inter-group relations, peaceful co-existence, neighbours, good neighbourliness.

### **Introduction**

Sogho community is one of the ancient communities in Ogoni ethnic nationality of Niger Delta Region that exercised unrestricted sovereignty over its defined territory and inhabitants before the advent of colonialism in the early twentieth century in the area. Expressed differently, the people of Sogho like other Ogoni communities were independent and maintained law and order without external control or interference. They had contact with the British colonialist in the early twentieth century because of the European's

lack of interest in the hinterland where Sogho and other Ogoni communities are presently located.

The Ogoni territory was brought under colonialism on paper in early 1901 when the British Imperial Power Consulate from Norah Beach declared a protectorate over the area. Sequel to this, the Consul whose responsibility was to ensure smooth Oil Palm trade, tried and summarily executed a man from Bane (in Ken Khana Ogoni) in 1903. He was said to have committed "a brutal murder" (Gibbons, 1932:

p.1). Historically, the Consul at Norah Beach exercised jurisdiction over most of the Eastern Ogoni

neighbouring communities such as Opobo, Annang, Ibibio of Itu, Ikot Esseng, Essene, and Ibekwe. Enenugwem (1990, p. 154) posits that the Norah Beach Consulate was transferred from Obianga (in the Eastern Obolo) to Egwanga (now Ikot Abasi) in 1906 due “to the Atlantic encroachment on its site”.

Oral tradition of the people and documentary evidence reveals that the people of Ogoni who had enjoyed independence since their existence vehemently opposed alien rule. (Naanen, 1995, Sarowiwa, 1992, 1999). The first and earliest form of organised resistance was put up by Zor-Sogho community. It was gathered that following series of ill-reports against the people of Sogho by the agents of the Oil-Palm trade, the patrol team from their Akwete Barracks launched a punitive attack on Sogho via the Imo commercial network which transverses the river ports of Omuosi, Ohambele and Obete. Apparently, to oppose the imposters, the able-bodied men formed themselves into a band of warriors under the commandership of Tee Akeeri Ndu. The warriors laid ambush on the much frequented Obete-Sogho commercial route. From his vantage position, Akeeri Ndu, the ace-pronationalist, fired his dane-gun at the Commander of the patrol team, killing him in the process. The imperialist retreated to their base at Akwete from where they planned and executed a well-coordinated punitive expedition on the people. The spine of the people’s resistance movement was broken with the application of the European sophisticated ammunition occasioned by the industrial revolution and the death of their legendary leader, Tee Akeeri Ndu.

The conquest of the people was followed in a quick succession by the imposition of colonial rule and its structures.

All these paraphernalia had serious repercussions on the relations between Sogho and her neighbours during the period under review. It is, therefore, the business of this paper to discuss and analyse the actual consequences of colonialism on the dynamics of intra- and inter-group relations between Sogho and her

neighbours in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. This work will also highlight the radical changes in the people’s political, social, cultural, cosmological, etc. spheres of life as a result of the contact with the whitemen.

### **Relations between Sogho and Her Neighbours in the Colonial Period**

One of the positive contributions of the “new rulers”, which radically changed the direction and momentum of Sogho intra and inter group relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was the establishment of Native Courts in Sogho in April, 1912. It was the British colonial policy “that the establishment of a viable colonial administration should go hand in hand with the military conquest” (Afigbo, 1980,p.414). The primary responsibilities of the Native Court were to enforce law and order; ensure peace, dispense justice on civil and criminal cases, prevent crime and to improve agriculture, trade as well as health care needs of the rural people (Ennals, 1933; Afigbo, 1972). The Sogho Native court became the hub around which judicial, economic and military process in Ogoni revolved. Apparently, there is no reasonable doubt that the Native Court served as a government institution, an out-post as well as an intelligence gathering and collation centre of the British “army of occupation” since the District headquarters was situated at Egwanga nearly 200 miles away.

### **Sogho Native Court and Intra-and InterGroup Relations**

To make colonial administration effective, sitting members of the court were drawn from the administrative district where the Sogho Native Court exercised its jurisdiction over. In other words members, which included only four *Pyaite-ere-buen*” (Gibbons, 1932,p.53) and “men of influence nominated because of their personality and position” (Findlay, 1932,p.10), came from Bua-Sogho where the court was located and outlying areas like Kaani, Taabaa, Tee (Tai), Gokana, Ko (corrupted by the Ibani to be Kalaoko), Kor, Yeghe, and Obete. From Obete came Chief

Nwankwo Ntambu, “the natural head of one section of an Igbo town with dual organisation” (Gibbons, 1932,p.53). He was later replaced by Chief Fed Opanwa. Most of them jointly adjudicated cases brought by litigants from the judicial orbit of Sogho Native Court until separate courts were formally established for them. Two translators were engaged in the activities of the court. One was to interpret Igbo language and the other to translate Khana/Gokana language to English language. Apart from this political connections, most of the warrant chiefs established familial and connubial ties with the people of Sogho. These relations were cemented through concubinage and marital relations. A classic example worth mentioning here is Chief Richard Kpai of Bodo who joined his ancestors on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> July 1968. He married one Mbia-nwa Nnordee, but Gaa,his father in-law insisted that he would not take his wife away from Sogho. Based on this, Elder Nnordee Gaa gave his daughter a large portion of land to settle in Zor-Sogho. They are still occupying the land till today. This explains why there is Kpai family in Sogho as it is in Bodo, Ogoni.

Remarkably, Sogho and her neighbours as well as those from Sogho judicial and administrative orbit staged different colourful mask dancing groups and cultural plays during the official inauguration of the Sogho Court in 1912. The ceremony began after the traditional libation with spectacular displays of various cultural dances. Suffice to note that, the beautiful maiden’s *Sokoo* dance of Zor-Sogho electrified the audience with their very many scintillating dance styles, wonderful skill and awesome ability. According to Akekue (2004,p.154) “in 1912 at the opening of court (at) Sogho, Kpite women presented a cultural play called *Awii*”.

What is more, the native cow (*nam khana*) that was slaughtered on the unique occasion was accordingly shared among the founder-heroes (*Te-ere-buen*), warrant chiefs (*Pya Mene Abee*) and elders (*Pya Kabaari*) of Sogho and the neighbouring

communities. On another significant note, the Native Court equipped the hosts with new innovation that helped to widen the spheres of interactions with their neighbours. The people of Sogho who were very close to the white men as court messengers (locally called Kotima), headmen, carriers, police in modern day Nigeria and so on made use of acquaintance with the Whiteman’s ways and paraded themselves in their neighbouring communities as government officials from the Native Court headquarters. They corruptly enriched themselves by exhorting money, food, and so on from their vulnerable and unsuspecting neighbours throughout the vicinities of Nyo-Khana, Tai and beyond.

The appointment of Mr. E.O. Okoroji, an Arochukwu of the Igbo extraction, and Thompson Usoro of Ibibio ethnic nationality to serve as court clerks at the Sogho Native Court helped to sustain and promote intermingling of cultures between these interacting groups. They were recruited into the colonial public service by the colonial overlords to make for the acute shortage of European staff. These clerks “recorded its court proceedings, conveyed to the chiefs the list of members chosen by the District Commissioner to sit for the month and issued summonses to the accused” (Afigbo,

1980,p.418). Credible sources indicate that the clerkship of E.O. Okoroji provided a level playing ground for the mass migration of the Ibo into Sogho from where they moved to different communities in Ogoni. Komi (1993:46) affirms that “with surer security, more Igbos (sic) came into Ogoni. Some of them entered through the court officials at Sogho. Its first court clerk was Mr. E. Okoroji from Arochukwu. He introduced his people (Ibo) to Ogoni (Warrant) chiefs at the court. Chief Kabari of Nwebiara took home one Johnson Akogu, Mbonu Daago of Bodo, Vura of Bera and Aatu of Nweol did likewise”. Implicit in the foregoing explanation is the fact that the Sogho Native Court acted as “pushpull” force for the Ibo migrants to pour into Sogho as “permanent settlers”. Through this connection, they

interchangeably shared cultural items across ethnic lines.

#### Forced /Compulsory Labour and IntraEthnic Relations

The affinity between Sogho and her neighbours was further widened by the colonial policy of forced or compulsory labour. Forced labour, according to Ofonagoro (1982,p.222), is

“labour exacted under conditions of compulsion with or without payment. Where a man or woman is compelled to work against his will, and legal penalties are exacted from him for failure to do the required work, such labour must be considered “forced”. Compulsory labour was given legal backing through the rubric of the Native House Rule Ordinance of 1901 and the Roads and Creeks Proclamation of 1903. These laws empowered the chiefs on the orders of the District Commissioner, to recruit all adult men between the ages of fifteen and fifty and all adult women between the ages of fifteen and forty five (Ofonagoro, 1982, Derefaka & Orugbani, 2009). However, chiefs who resisted were often tried and sentenced in the Native Courts while those who defaulted faced official scolding, threats and perhaps a reduction in stipends.

It was therefore, the duty of the chiefs of Sogho and Obete to supply able-bodied men to carry the British administrators on a hammock in a relay fashion. They were carried to and from Sogho through the Sogho-Obete road called “Consul Road”. It is worthy of note that it was the practice of the District Officers(D.O) itinerant court judges, doctors and other medical personnel, as well as engineers when they embarked on their routine tour of the area from Egwanga. Usually, when they travelled by sea in a canoe to either Kono or Obete beach. It was the duty of the people to provide means of transport for the visiting British Administrative Officers and their entourage from these points of their disembarkation. Nwogu’s (2011,p.1534) treatise on this score is very relevant:

*Obete was a strategic location for the Sogho Native Court. The District Officer would arrive at Obete*

*from Opobo... Sogho for the judicial assignment... able-bodied men in Obete from different age-grades would be assigned the responsibility of carrying the colonial officer on their head from Obete to Sogho... in turns. The same Slavish duty would be repeated when the white man would return from Sogho... the route they took then was called consul road (Ellipsis added).*

Orji (2013,p.83) endorses that:

*The British adopted a policy of forced labour in the daily routine of their administration. The arrival of any colonial official into any village or town in the community was marked by different forms of service or labour for which remuneration was given. It was mandatory for every town to provide suitable men to carry the British official from that destination to another town or village whose responsibility it was to proceed in the same manner until the officer in question comes to the close of his journey. The same practice was repeated on his way back.* There is no reasonable doubt that the occasional coming and going of colonial officials and the attendant forced labour helped to forge a much closer link between Obete and Sogho, making them to know and appreciate each other more.

In like manner, for effective administration the construction and up-keep of the native administration roads, bridges, and execution of public works were deemed necessary. In all these, compulsory gang labour was massively utilized. The earliest of these roads was the Ko-Sogho road (known in the parlance of the people as *Nyo-degborbeke*) which was completed and opened to both human and vehicular traffic in 1915 (Ziinu, 1993,Akekue, 2004). The road was constructed by the colonial administrators to bridge the communication gap between the colonial authority stationed at Egwanga, the District headquarters and Sogho, the outpost of the colonial government in Ogoni as it were. Koi was a transit river port on the Imo River, linking Sogho community. The road system had been vital for the realisation of effective administrative control until 31<sup>st</sup> December



1932 when the Kono-Port Harcourt road was constructed.

Like elsewhere, chiefs in the region recruited and supplied able-bodied men on quota basis from the villages to carry on the job of road construction. Ziinu (1993:92) recounts that “the colonial authority established a labour camp at Bunu-Bangha” to fast track the process of road construction and maintenance. Sogho and her neighbours accordingly supplied the bulk of the labour gangs who worked on the road. Chief Ntaa Naa (popularly known as Akpuuwan) who initially refused to mobilize his subjects for the road project was arrested and kept in custody for almost three days before he was released. His refusal should not be misconstrued as anti-development, it should be seen as a protest against the British colonizers’ military campaign (euphemistically called “pacification”) launched against his people in the wake of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Economically, the Ko-Sogho road was of great importance. It “pushed back and reshaped the traditional frontiers of trade” (Hopkins, 1973,p.197). Afigbo (1987,p.85) concurs that the new roads “made long distance travel easier, safer and more attractive than previously”. From the social front, the road facilitated the movement of people, culture and ideas to and from Sogho. In this way, complex web of interactions between Sogho and her neighbours developed. The climax was the nonorific title of “NyoueSogho” meaning the civilized world of Sogho, conferred on the territory by the entire Ogoni people

### **The Ecclesiastical / Literacy Factor and Intra and-Inter-Group Relations**

Christian religious activities in addition to corollary Western style education also pulled peoples of Sogho and Ndoki together. It is relevant to stress that the church and western education were intricately fused into a watertight compartment in which the typical village teacher served not only as a classroom teacher but also as a local church agent. Expressed differently, the village teacher controlled both the school and the

local church. Citing Murray (1929), Coleman (1986, p.113) expresses the inseparable link in this manner: *To all intents and purposes, the school is like the Church. Right away in the bush or in the forest the two are one, and the village teacher is also the village evangelist. An appreciation of this fact is cardinal in all considerations of African education.*

This was an effective policy adopted by the pioneer missionaries in an effort to easily “catch” the young Ogoni children early into the missionary fold. Mr. W.J.W. Chessman, a District Officer of Opobo District, points out that “education, even more than the Native Courts and Warrant Chiefs, has done its share in breaking down the indigenous customs and system of administration. It has been used to foster sects of religion and is a definite bribe to attract church members” (Chessman, 1932, p.49).

In the main, the modern ecclesiastical history of Sogho, which is an acknowledged veritable ecclesiastical prefecture in today’s Niger Delta Region, cannot be complete without the “outside influence” of very powerful evangelists from neighbouring communities. The Ndoki played an important role in this regard. Mr. Jacob Kpaganee Saale, who introduced the Methodist church (formerly the African) primitive (church) in both Okwali in 1918 and Sogho in 1920, was converted to the Christian faith at the African Primitive Church, Umuagbai in Ndoki. There is an existing testimony that one Mr. Isaac a native of

Umuaghai (known among the locals as “Tisa Amuugbagi”) under the auspices of the Methodist Church organised private lessons called “Night school” which was totally different from the day school of the Methodist

Mission. Within a short while “Tisa Amuugbagi” had selflessly and voluntarily drilled a handful of educationally disadvantaged people of Sogho community. Through his midas touch, they were able to read the Bible, write and solve simple commercial arithmetic. Fascinatingly, Mr Isaac began to imbibe

the Sogho cultural items including language. He joined the Ndeede cultural plays but his membership was unravelled following his inability to reply the drum language of the master drummer of the cultural dance group. He was quoted to have said: “Na duakwanu”, a mixture of Khana and Ndoki languages, meaning “what should I do now? He also took his life partner whose name was given as Ndeekor from Zor-Sogho. From the union,

Ntambu and Amuugbagi (also known as “all weather”) was born. Their families exist in ZorSogho to this day. On the other hand, the first generation of Sogho elite like Samuel Baroko Nkue, L.L. Mbiabu, Nkia Ngbaragbe, Daniel Ndorbu, Lekara Nsaanee, to mention but a few served as pioneer teachers in most primary and secondary schools in Ogoni ethnic nationality as a whole.

Generally, the first generation of Sogho elite attended the Methodist Central School, which was founded in 1936. The school which was strategically located at the junction between Teka-Sogho and Okwali, served the academic interests of Okwali, Sogho, Luebe, Loore, Lueku and Taabaa. While there, most of the pupils established mutual friendships with others from Northern Khana villages. HRM chief W.Z.P Nzidee is one of the Sogho products from the school who established such cordial relationship. Most significantly, when the Methodist Primary School, Kaani was established, some Sogho sons and daughters enrolled there for their western education. A prominent ex-pupil of this school was the Late Mr. Ee-nee Ngbor Nkue who gained admission in to the school in 1955. He demonstrated rare academic performance and intellectual prowess while there and clinched the most coveted and prestigious grade-Distinction-in the First School Leaving Certification (F.S.L.C.) in 1962. Likewise, when State Primary School was founded in Sogho in 1958, qualified indigenes from Sogho neighbouring communities were admitted into the school. Academic and nonacademic staff were equally recruited from these areas. On the other hand, the first generation of Sogho

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Furthermore, the birth and development of the Apostolic Church in Sogho is traceable to the Apostolic Church Kaani which was founded in 1954 and led by Elder N-naa N-aabu. A crop of committed evangelists from Kaani established the Apostolic Church, Luusue Assembly in 1955 in the house of Mr. Joel Tenaloo. The team comprised Pastor Gilbert (leader), Elders N-naa N-aabu, Ezekiel Nkiriki and Silas Ndorbu. After being firmly rooted at Luusue, the church spread to other villages in Sogho. The Apostolic church was established in

Zor-Sogho in 1958 and ten years later AkporoSogho Assembly was founded. Also, Christ Army Church of Nigeria (C.A.C), which was an upshot of the Braide’s Movement (Garrick Sokari Idaketima Braide from Bakana Kalabari) spread to Luusue Sogho through the evangelical exploits of one Josaiah Kabari from Kaani. He preached the goodnews of Jesus Christ to the people of Luusue Sogho and they received it, leading to the planting of the church in 1927 and in 1938 in Zor-Sogho. The church spread to Bara-kaani in 1940. The second C.A.C was established in Luusue in 1957. In the same vein, Apostolic Christian Gospel Mission, which was established in Kaani in 1947, was introduced in to Zor-Sogho in 1969. The church was under the leadership of Late Evangelist Ndeebom Kpolor. Sogho worshippers of these denominations came under the same religious umbrella and attended conventions, conferences, and meetings as well as observe religious rituals like baptisms, child dedications, wedding, ceremonies, holy communions, Bible study and so on together with believers from Tai, Kaani, Okwali, and other culture groups. Noteworthy is the fact that Sogho spiritually configured evangelists have taken the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ to these places and even beyond. These included the pioneering efforts of evangelists

Nkia Ngbarabe and Daniel Ndorbu, both of the Methodist family. The duo preached the gospel of Christ, won souls for Christ and built communities of the faithful across Ndoki, Nyo-Khana and beyond. This is also true of late ex- overseer Samuel N-ue. The golden Bible preacher and a strategist evangelist also spread the good news of Jesus Christ across ethnic lines (N-ue, 2016).

### **Political Relations**

Under colonial dispensation, Sogho and her neighbours lost the relative political autonomy to determine their actions with their interacting groups. The colonial state, on the other hand, provided new platforms that succeeded in widening and deepening political contacts and interactions between Sogho and other groups. To achieve their goal of economic exploitation, the British imperialist transformed hitherto autonomous political entities into component parts of a new whole.

In these areas, one of the outcomes of the Niger Delta Women's War of December 1929 which took place at Egwanga, was that it convinced the colonial government to reorganise the political system along clan lines. As Jones (1958,p.1) puts it, the replacement of the Warrant chief system "by a form of government based on the indigenous political system of the region and on the wishes of the people themselves". Following the exhaustive native administrative reorganisation, four clan courts of "D" grade powers; the Ogoni Central Appeal Court was established. The court of "C" grade powers held its sessions at Bori in the Central Council House. By the virtue of his appointment, Chief Job Mmeabe represented Sogho and judged cases along with his colleagues such as chiefs Nwikabari Gbaraka of Ko, Nwikinagbara of Nyo-be Beer, Daniel Fakaen of Kere, David Menete of Taabaa, and Nwikinanee of Luegbo-Lumene. They met monthly to adjudicate on appeals in all class of cases (civil and criminal matters) and those beyond powers of the four "D" grade clan power.

In another striking political development, the prodigy- Chief Job Mmeabe closed rank with Nyo-Khana chiefs and elders to agitate for self-government believed to put an end to the internal colonization to which the Ogoni were subjected. In a meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup>

August 1953 with Mr. J.G. Allen, the Senior Resident of Rivers Province, the people clamoured for "self-government". Selfgovernment seemed to be the recurring political slogan given the Ibo ethnic politics of an undisguised zero sum game. The Ibo, who formed the majority in the Eastern region, took over the commanding heights of the politics of the region. The Ogoni, a minority group, was nearly made strangers in their fatherland. It was also against this Ibo odious domination and abominable discrimination that the Southern Khana chiefs and elders were motivated to send a high worded petition to Captain W.J.W. Chessman, the then Assistant District Officer (A.D.O), Opobo Division which Ogoni was subsumed. (Gbenenye, 1983;1993, Anokari 1986, Kpono-Tornwe, 1990).

Another critical political contribution of Chief Job Mmeabe was his insistence on the formation of an Ogoni umbrella body to promote their agenda. To achieve this, he joined forces with 31 eminent sons of Ogoni to form the *Gbene Bogana Khana* in early 1945. Gbenenye (1993,p.11) opines that the name of the Ogoni apex body was "synonymous with ethnic nationalism aimed at the immediate improvement of socio-political conditions". Members of this noble body comprised seasoned chiefs, dedicated elders and prominent educated elites. Particular mention must be made of chief F.M.A. Saronwiyo of BienGwara, Chief Sam W. Nwika of Kono, Chief Moses Nwikipo Ekeke of Wiiyaakara and Mr.

(now Rtd Rt. Rev.) J.B. Poromon of BeraGokana. The motive of the organisation was anchored on the full recognition and selfdetermination of the Ogoni. In 1948, when the late Rt. Hon. P.N.T. Birabi returned from London, the name of the union that transcended clan boundaries was changed to Ogoni State

Representative Assembly (O.S.R.A). Most significantly, it was through this platform that the Ogoni were introduced to the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, later changed to citizens (N.C.N.C). It was the political party in power at the time in Eastern Region. Truly, the NCNC bestrode the political chessboard of the region as a colossus for quite a long period of time.

### **Military Relations between Sogho and her Neighbours in the Colonial Period**

Colonialism, we must note, was not the only chief accelerator of harmonious relations but also the main cause of antagonistic variables of intra and/or inter-ethnic relations. The colonial situation actually created conditions that increasingly made intra communal and inter group contacts and actions essentially uneasy.

Indeed, the colonial policies of “divide and rule” (*divide et impera*), individualism, exclusiveness, ethnic segregation, selfaggrandisement and capitalism had the effect of generating a land consciousness and recurring land disputes by the interacting villages or communities that jeopardised peaceful coexistence. In point of fact, the colonial situation created socio-economic scarcity due to its export-oriented economy which placed more emphasis and greater commercial value on land. This made intra-communal and inter-group competitions and disputes a fact of life. Under colonialism practically everything, including positions were competed for. Thus, conflicting claims to a portion of land and fishing rights increasingly became the main and recurrent feature in the relationship between Sogho and her neighbours in the colonial and post-colonial eras. For want of space, this work will discuss the following phenomena of disputes.

#### **1. Sogho and Afam Ukwu Dispute**

The negative variables introduced by colonial regime heightened the progressive disputes between Zor-Sogho and Afam Ukwu (Barakorkor) during the crucial stages of food production: bush clearing and planting. There have been more ceaseless claims and

counterclaims over title to land, ownership of fish ponds and other natural resources.

#### **2. Zor-Sogho and Ueken Tai Land Dispute**

The conflict between Zor-Sogho and Ueken Tai in Khana Local Government Area and Tai Local Government Areas respectively was triggered by the claim laid to title of land known and called *Wii Gbaragbaralia* by ZorSogho people which Ueken-Tai supposedly called *Barakpodu*. Evidence from the field clearly proved that the people of Zor-Sogho are the owners in possession of the disputed land. They, therefore, exercised maximum acts of ownership over the large parcel of land by cultivating on it, collecting palm fruits and tapping palm wine without any interference from Ueken people.

In 1950, what was to become a 13-year legal battle over land ownership started when the people of Ueken village illegally intruded on the said land. They embarked on clearing and slashing of the portion for cultivation. Remarkably known for their peaceful disposition and good spirit of neighbourliness, the people of Zor-Sogho led by Chief Ndor Nnangi sued Chief Puigbara Mbaedee for and on behalf of Ueken before the Taabaa Native Court for title and damages. The settlement of disputes was usually done through certain traditional mechanisms, where such disputes could not be resolved by the traditional administration; it was referred to a court of competent jurisdiction for adjudication. The Zor-Sogho claimants who were able to prove their ownership beyond doubt were recognised as rightful owners by the instrument of Taabaa Native Court Civil suit No. 667/50 and endorsed by the District Officer (District Officer’s Review Case No. 220/50).

In September 1956, that is six years after the judgement, Ueken people again trespassed on the land. This illegal action prompted the people of Zor-Sogho to apply violence. They entered the piece of farm land and destroyed all crops planted. The Ueken people led by Chiefs

James Nbueden and Piagbara Nbaede responded by suing the people of Zor-Sogho through Chief John



Nbazika Nyene and other Zor-Sogho sons. In the suit made at the Tai Native Court (Tai Native Court Civil suit No. 65/No.65/1956, Appeal Court Case No. 296/1956), they claimed a fantastic £25 for trespass upon the land in dispute. The action of the Ueken claimants was dismissed. Starkly put, they lost in the suit.

As those who were not satisfied with the ruling reserved the right to take their case to the Appeal Court, the Ueken party proceeded to the court. Chiefs Joseph Mgbii and Thompson Ngati (for themselves and as representing the people of Ueken Tai) sued Mr Pia Ndolo; Meabe Nnaani and Nna Jonah (representatives of Zor-Sogho people) over the same *Wiigbaragbaralia* in the High Court of the Eastern Region of the Federation of Nigeria. This was contained in suit No. P/179/1956. It sought, amongst other things, a declaration of title to all that piece or parcel of land, £300 damages for encroachment and an injunction to restrain the Zor-Sogho people from further acts of interference. Having thoroughly crossexamined both parties and their witnesses, Mr Justice Vincent Akinfemi Savage who presided over the Port Harcourt High Court delivered his landmark judgement on the 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1960 against Ueken.

It must be emphasised that the UekenTai case was dismissed despite the fact that the Ueken people sought and received the legal services of a foremost legal luminary in the legal profession, Sir Dr. Udo Udoma. He was the first West African to earn a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Law from a University in Britain. He later served as the Chief Justice and Acting Governor of Uganda and Chairman of the Nigerian Constituent Assembly (1977/1979), (Ejituwu, 1991). Dr. Nabo Bekinbo Graham-Douglas, an Abonnema born, was the barrister and solicitor to Zor Sogho during the case. N.B. Graham-Douglas, a very brilliant lawyer, graduated in law from University of London, England in 1955, obtaining a Master Degree in 1958 and a Doctorate in 1963 all in law from the same university. He once served as

Attorney General to Eastern Nigeria (1966), to Rivers State (1969-1972) and to the Federal Government of Nigeria (1972-1975). In 1973, N.B. Graham-Douglas together with chief Rotimi Williams earned the prestigious Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) award, (Fiofori, Daminabo & Ayotamuno, 2009).

Not satisfied with the judgement delivered by Mr. Justice Vincent Akinfemi Savage, Udo Udoma, the counsel to Ueken, went on appeal in Appeal No. F.S.C. 441/1961. After three years of intensive hearing, the Federal Supreme Court of Nigeria Holden at Enugu, Nigeria delivered judgement on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> February 1963 against the people of Ueken represented by Chiefs Joseph Mgbii, Matthew Ngbarawi and Thompson Ngati. The verdict signed by J. Brett, Acting Chief Justice of the federation reads in part: "It is ordered that this appeal be dismissed with costs to the respondent (referring to Zor-Sogho) assessed at 35 guineas".

The Zor-Sogho- Ueken Tai conflict caused several obvious multiplier and triple effects. This was serious for a rural people whose bio-material existence and social survival depended largely on cultivation of land. In each case, the affected communities suffered untold hardships resulting from food shortage, huge material loses in terms of destruction of crops, work equipment, seedlings, and even farmsteads. The high cost of the disputes also involved huge financial losses and time. The dispute on the other land produced impressive results. It promoted intra and inter-group relations. The case between Zor-Sogho and Ueken enabled their representatives to travel outside their enclaves for ligations and seek the services of lawyers outside their Ogoni ethnic group. In another significant way, the land dispute heavily galvanised and encouraged the spirit of selfless service, community development, unity and above all the discovery of young enterprising minds. In 1956, at the Bubara town's square late elder Torde Asukupghi, bold and eloquent speaker who always say the truth no matter whose ox is gored, vehemently objected to

the decision of borrowing funds from Late Chief H.M. Dike of Okwali to prosecute the *Wiigbaragbaralia* case. He rather insisted that money for the court case must be generated internally. Without much ado, he set the precedent by donating two pounds which was a huge sum in those days. Late Samuel N-ue the youngest entrepreneur, followed suit when he whole heartedly donated the sum of one pound. The latter's unexpected donation enkindled in all Zor-Sogho adults and youth the spirit of communal progress and development. Those present gave as much as they could, to the extent that the funds exceeded their expectations and target.

### 3. Sogho and Kpong Land Dispute

The Luusue-Sogho and Kpong dispute clearly provides an example of one of the most protracted land disputes in recorded history. It started in pre-colonial times and ended in 2014. Both parties laid conflicting claims and/or definitions of boundary to a portion of land known to Luusue-Sogho people as Wiigon (literarily meaning Gon farm) and to Kpong people as *Wiigbeana* (Ana's farm). The Luusue group claimed that the portion of farmland reputedly known for its exceeding fertility belong to them because it was formerly an old village settlement of their ancient fathers, stating that they deserted from the farm settlement and established a new abode which is where they are residing today. It was when they left *Wiigon* that they used it as a farming land within five years of farming cycle. The Luusue claimants maintained that they had met most of their great forebears such as Kuapie, Ndeedua Akain, Agbarada Gbenedee, Mkpae Nlili and Akawho have farmed on the disputed portion of farm lands before recorded history. They even alleged that the bodies of their progenitors were interred there, adding that there were historical monuments and relics like town square and market places.

On their part, Kpong community also insisted that they are the owners of the land in question, noting that they cultivated the virgin forest of Ataagbara and kpo Yondam. Their great-grand fathers named the place

*Leesuken* (meaning that we have captured and taken possession of the land). They also laid claim that they usually gave out the farmland to Luusue for farming purposes on the payment of liberal token or royalties. By this payment, they also obeyed and demonstrated respect to the Kpong laws and customs.

It must be stressed more particularly that inter-communal conflicts were characterised by greater degree of violence and use of ammunition. The heights of the Luusue-Kpong Wars were normally at the beginning of the farming seasons involving conflicting claims and counter claims on the fertile farmland. Thus, there were series of wranglings, struggles and intermittent wars between these parties. The first war broke out before the European contact. Being well advanced and versed in the use of gun, the Kpong faction forced the Luusue-Sogho group to move from Wiigon. It is claimed by local historians of Luusue Sogho that Kpong emerged victorious due to the Kpong-Babbe allied forces. Luusue-Sogho employed the use of clubs, sticks and bows and arrows. The armed conflict did not end with the defeat of the Luusue party. The Luusue group sued representatives of Kpong in the Sogho Native Court. As the scramble for land increased, there was the recurrent war in 1933. In the inevitable and unavoidable war, both parties indigenously devised different war tactics and mechanisms to defeat their opponent. This was motivated by the obvious fact that Luusue and Kpong were situated on defenceless environment. They are strategically located in their environment without natural barriers and absence of standing army (*Gbo be*) which could be relied upon all the times. The rivals employed a combination of war techniques such as burning of each other's farms, destruction of farm huts, work tools, and seedlings. They were revealed to have also employed the use of flagitious charms, talisman, "juju" and witchcraft against each other. The Luusue party were believed to have indigenously developed their strategies in the form of fortifications like trenches and moats, and hired the services of Kaani

and Tai warriors. Sogho, Kaani and Tai warriors fought valorously and decisively crushed the Kpong military formations. However, since open hostilities which were usually short lived and easily resolved could not be their chief Judge, both parties returned to the Nyo Khana customary court and the Ogoni Tribal Court of Appeal from the early 1940s to 1987. Although this was interrupted in 1958 with another outbreak of deadly war which claimed several lives, destroyed much economic property and caused severe psychological trauma.

Expectedly, all the representatives of the panel of judges in the traditional administration visited the disputed land. The disputants were then invited to prove their claims and where necessary with the support of witnesses. Finally, new boundaries were fixed by the arbitrators. None of the claimants adhere strictly to the boundaries hence the rampant post-settlement skirmishes. For example, in 2014 there was a violent clash between both parties due to issues of encroachment across the demarcated portion.

They inter-cropped on each other's farm lands. All the unhealthy relations caused by competitions over common economic resource vindicate the negative effect of colonialism on the local people.

Investigations however, revealed that the two warring parties put down their gauntlets and arms and cultivated together in 2020. In fact, since the end of the rivalry, there have been considerable healthy and peaceful relations between them. It must be emphasized that the Luusue-Sogho-Kpong communal war also fostered unity among the six villages of Sogho, Kaani and Tai communities. During war times, the people of Sogho sank their individual village differences and put up combined effort to confront Kpong people who were categorized as a "common enemy". The maxim: "injury to one is injury to all" seemed to play out here. More so, the common practice of hiring warriors from Ueken, forming an alliance with Kaani, borrowing their weapons of war and soliciting the assistance of diviners, magicians and others from distant places led

to strong intra-group connections. It is also plausible to note that during these periods both sides learnt each other's war tactics and borrowed other cultural traits to deepen their intelligence gathering and espionage activities.

### **Sogho and Her Neighbours in the PostColonial Era**

On 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1914 Lord (Later Sir) F.D. Lugard lumbed the Ogoni willy- nilly together with the various distinct peoples to form Nigeria at Lokoja. On 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1960, Nigeria attained political independence with a lot of unsettled intense inter-regional, intergroup, inter-ethnic and intra-communal suspicions and hostility. What characterises Sogho intra and inter communal relations in contemporary Nigeria are notions of belonging, inclusion and exclusion which are shaped (and are still shaping) by access to power, party and gan (kindred/lineage) politics, politicisation of religion, political corruption and perceptions of marginalisation by the masses.

#### **1. Political Relations Between Sogho and Her Neighbours**

When Nigeria gained political independence on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960, there were a lot of euphoria and hope, for there will be a rapid future political advancement. It was widely believed that with the departure of the imperialist and colonizer, and with the enthronement of Nigerians at the helms of affairs, there would be remarkable political awareness, rapid social solidarity and consciousness as well as unprecedented progress. It may be fairly understood that with independence achieved, Sogho politicians began to play active role in partisan politics and its vagaries. The materialistic civilization bequeathed to Nigerians by the colonizers conveyed the idea that man needs to pursue activities that would enhance his material profits as an individual or as a member of a group. Similarly, the political climate of Sogho has been saturated with political consciousness. They came to the realization that they have the unquestionable and inalienable right to freely determine their political status and destiny. In all, they embraced politics not only to

satisfy their selfish desires as it were but also to attract development to the people.

Bua-Sogho politicians cashed in on the emerging political trend and embraced the Late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe led National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (later changed to Citizens) (N.C.N.C) which was formed on 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1944 from different youth bodies, clubs, and ethnic unions across the country. The party's primary objective was to achieve political freedom for Nigeria. Article A section

1 of the party's constitution clearly spelt out its philosophy to be "political freedom, economic security, social equality and religious toleration". Its emblem was a cock. NCNC was the leading all-Nigeria political party between 1944 and 1957 and the political party in power in the Eastern Region.

In 1952, the people of Ogoni (Sogho inclusive) were introduced to the N.C.N.C by the Rt. Hon. Paul Timothy Naakuu Birabi and Hon (Later chief) F.M.A Saro Nwiyo (both of the blessed memory). They were both parliamentarians at the Eastern House of Assembly (E.H.A), Enugu. Addressing the mammoth crowd in Bori during the launch of the party, Rt. Hon. T.N.P. Birabi, who passed on a year later, "enjoined the people of Ogoni to identify themselves with the N.C.N.C. which he described as a "the blackman party". He opined that the party had the cock as its emblem meaning that "the Ogoni people would be woken from their political slumber just as the cock would wake the people up when it crew" (cited by Gbenenye, 1993,p.20). The roster of top dependable leaders and members of the party in Sogho included Chief (now HRM) Williams Ziadam Pedogoro Nzidee, Chief Marcus Npianwi of Barakaani, Chief Job Ndeedua of Luusue Sogho, John Peepee of Nuagha, Chief Paul Nnordee of Teka, Johnah Ndoonu, Bakor of Akporo, Chief John Nbazika Nyene and Chief Jonathan NgumYaanwaan both from Zor-Sogho.

Between 1961 and 1962, preparations for the visit of the Late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe further accentuated the

political linkage between the Sogho N.C.N.C leaders and the party's stalwarts like Chiefs Kemte Giadom, B.N. Uruaba (alias "the caterpillar") and S.F. Nwika. Sogho leaders heavily mobilised and sensitized their followers and supporters when Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and his party loyalists such as K.O. Mbadiwe, M.I. Okpara and others finally came to Bori, the traditional headquarters of the Ogoni, for electioneering campaign. The success of NCNC and the popularity it enjoyed throughout Ogoni for a very long period of time was partly due to the contributions of Sogho people.

It is gratifying to note that Bua-Sogho was to play a leading and significant role in the partisan politics of Ogoni with the active involvement of HRM Chief W.Z.P. Nzidee. He contested the North Constituency Seat in the Eastern House of Assembly on the platform of the N.C.N.C. and won in party primaries. The party gladiators rendered the result of the election invalid and re-scheduled another one. When it was held, Hon H.M. Dike of Okwali, won the seat of NCNC. In 1964, when the General Elections was held, Hon. H.M. Dike of Okwali was elected to represent Ogoni North Constituency. Put it differently, Hon Dike defeated a number of independent candidates such as Chief Samuel, K. Yaakoo of TemLueku and Chief W.Z. P. Nzidee, of the Niger Delta Congress (N.D.C) Hon. D.J.K. Kumbe was also elected to represent Ogoni North West Constituency while Hon. Later chief F.M.A. Saro-Nwiyo represented Ogoni South East Constituency. Hon. E.D. Sigaloo won and represented his Gokana people of South West Constituency. As a man whose astuteness and penchant for fame is unparalleled, Gbenemene W.Z.P. Nzidee pinned his tent with the Niger Delta Congress (N.D.C) founded and led by Harold Dappa-Biriye. Recall that the party, which had fish as its symbol, was a minority opposition party in the defunct Eastern Nigeria. Later, Chief W.Z.P. Nzidee left the N.D.C for N.C.N.C. He contested on the platform of N.C.N.C and won, making him to serve as councillor representing



Sogho/Okwali ward in Khana Legislative Assembly. In line with the parliamentary model, His Royal Majesty Nzidee was chosen as the Chairman Khana County Council (K.C.C). He, thus, emerged the third

indigenous Chairman of Khana Local Government Area. He, therefore, opened the flood gate of councillors in Sogho political history. The list of councillors in Bua-Sogho since then include:

S/ No.	Name of Councillor	Party	Tenure
1.	Chief W.Z.P. Nzidee	N.C.N.C	1965-1966
2.	Hon. C.D. Mkpeme	NPP	1977-1980
3.	Hon. Dr. John G. Amue	NRC	1991-1993
4.	Hon. Prince Neenalebari .B.Nzidee	NRC	2000-2003
5.	Hon. Princess Lillian Nzidee	PDP	2004-2007
6.	Hon. Nyonyonee Silvanus	PDP	2007-2010
7.	Hon Prince Abalubu	PDP	2011-2014
8.	Hon. Jonah Bie	PDP	2018-2021

Fig. 1.1 Sogho councillors from 1965 to 2021

Source: Authors field work

Bua-Sogho politicians also played active and enduring role in the Action Group (A.G.) which was introduced into Ogoni in 1964. The prominent opposition political party founded by late Sage Obafemi Awolowo served as a major opposition party in the East where it had the sympathy of the Niger Delta Congress. (N.D.C) The party doggedly contributed and maximally supported the minorities for the creation of a separate state from the existing Eastern Region. In 1957, A.G. made its mark in Ogoni political history by decisively defeating the ruling NCNC party. In the 1957 General Elections, the people of Ogoni overwhelmingly voted for the A.G. candidates into the Eastern House of Assembly (E.H.A) Enugu. The elected representatives were Hon. Matthew Nubeke Yorwika, representing Ogoni East constituency, and Hon. O.B. Naaleloo representing Ogoni West constituency. It was rumoured at the time that Hon. M.N. Yorwika was said to have an intimate relationship with Awolowo (a.k.a Awo) to the point that he named one of his sons

after “Awo”. He was given campaign vehicles, and intimidating public address system. A.G. members in Bua-Sogho such as Mr. Agbozi Ngbarazor, Mr. Israel Ndolo and Mr. Adebue contributed immensely to the electoral victory of A.G. in Ogoni at the time. The point worthy of note is that the Sogho politicians got along with their party faithful at various levels and times across communal boundaries.

On another significant note, the launch of the Afam Ukwu (Barakorkor) Garri industry created an interactive avenue for Tai and Sogho to relate intimately. At the occasion, the people of Sogho and Nyo-Khana were represented by HRM Chief W.Z.P Nzidee of Luusue Sogho and Nyo-Khana people, Chiefs T.M. Mkpae, Josiah Nyegere and C.D. Mkpeme represented Zor-Sogho while HRM King G.N.K. Gininwa of Korokoro-Tai represented TuaTua Tai in particular and Tai in general. Also, during the launch of Zor-Sogho Community Bridge Project organised by the late Chief Job L.

Mkpae led Zor-Sogho Community Development Committee (C.D.C) in collaboration with the Sornataloodum Women Association (S.W.A), all Sogho immediate and distant neighbours graced the historic occasion. The people of Afam Ukwu (Barakorkor) and Afam Nta (Kpaagu) were both invited and they donated generously at the fund raising ceremony. Kpong, Taabaa, Tai, Okwali and Kaani communities were represented by their Council of Chiefs and Elders at the event. All these and many others such as coronation and installation ceremonies, diplomatic missions, peace talks, and so on enabled chiefs, elders, chairmen of Community Development Committees, youth presidents, religious and opinion leaders to broker sustainable peace, healthy trade relations and mutual exchange of ideas among themselves..

## **2. Social and Religious Relations between Sogho and Her Neighbours**

With a passion for soul winning in the post-Independent era, some Bua-Sogho spiritually wired evangelists embarked on highly impactful salvation-driven missionary outreaches in the neighbouring communities. In the early 1970s, the evangelical band of the then Apostolic Church took the gospel of Jesus Christ into the Ndoki area and recently, the Ascension Apostolic church, a break away from the Apostolic Church carried the goodnews of

Jesus Christ to Tai area. By the Lord's leading, their missionary efforts were crowned with the establishment of their assemblies first at Kpite, followed by Ueken, Korokoro and later Koroma. With the creation of a few assemblies, they are grouped under Zone 8, headed by the Ascension Apostolic Church, Zor-Sogho.

The pursuit of western education enabled Sogho to massively interact (and still interacts) with her neighbouring communities and others in Rivers State. It started during the 1974/75 Academic session. Sogho hosted one of the few Government Teachers' Training Colleges in Rivers State. It started by 1976, the institute was replaced with Government Girls'

Secondary School. The Girls' Government School (GGS) was later transmuted into Government Secondary School, (GSS) a coeducational college in 1977. It is pertinent to note the Bishop Humphrey Leber Nnam of Okwali, is a product of Government Secondary School Sogho. From our point of interest, these educational institutions, satisfied the academic appetite of her indigenes and settler elements and those of her distant and immediate neighbours. Apart from the above, the administrative and academic staff of these colleges were drawn from Sogho and her neighbouring communities.

The establishment of Community Secondary School (C.S.S.), Kaani, in September 1979, Community Secondary School (C.S.S.) Okwali in September 1981 and Tua-Tua Community Secondary School (T.C.S.S)

Korokoro-Tai in the early 1980s which are also serving the interests of Sogho contributed immensely to more intricate relations between Sogho and her neighbours. Many Sogho sons and daughters were pioneer students of these great institutions of learning. For example the first medical doctor in Sogho Dr. Dornubari Mkpae N-ue had his secondary school education at C.S.S. Okwali and Kpite while Barr. C.N. James had served as a pioneer teaching staff of the TuaTua Community Secondary School Korokoro, Tai before taken up the legal profession.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has revealed the profound impact of colonialism on the relations between Sogho and its neighbours. Colonialism was a great paradoxical phenomenon that brought about both harmonious and antagonistic vectors of both intra-and inter-group relations. There is, therefore, an abundant truth in Afigbo's (1987, p. 79) thesis that:

Colonial rule in Nigeria had important implications for inter-group relations. It meant, among other things, that people had to take into account deals, interests, and institutions arising not only from indigenous experiences and sanctioned by their traditions and usages, but also others introduce and

imposed new rulers.... By and large, each community brought under effective control by the British learnt that it had lost the initiative to determine whether its relations with its neighbours were going to be peaceful or war like.

In point of fact, Sogho and its neighbours lost their independence and political power to determine how they relate with others. They were meant to take orders from the “new rulers”. Queerly, enough, when colonial rule ended in 1960, they were not given back their autonomy. Despite its unintended benefits, colonialism shattered their sense of selfdetermination and forced them to play a second fiddle in managing their own affairs in the Nigerian state. Saro-Wiwa (1999, pp. 72-73) was absolutely correct when he trenchantly notes:

The advent of British colonialism was to shatter Ogoni society and inflict on us a backwardness from which we are still struggling to escape. It was British

colonialism which forced alien administrative structures on us and herded us into the domestic colonialism of Nigeria. Right from 1908 when Ogoni was administered as part of Opobo Division..., the Ogoni people have struggled to resist colonialism and return to their much cherished autonomy and selfdetermination.

It is, therefore, instructive to denounce those negative variables introduced by colonialism that tend to divide us and improve on the positive ones that tend to put Nigerians together. To make these reasonable internal colonialism, ethnic politics and selfaggrandisement should be eliminated from our body polity while justice, fairness, selflessness and tolerance should be encouraged and promoted. Unarguably, this would help to promote peaceful relations, good neighbourliness, integration, and sustainable development

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