

THE TRAVAILS OF KING OKOJIE AND THE POLITICS OF COLLABORATION AND RESISTANCE IN COLONIAL UROMI, ISHAN DIVISION OF BENIN PROVINCE, NIGERIA, 1919-1931

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Abstract

There seems to be a general understanding that conquered African kings (chiefs) accepted their new status in the colonial period and collaborated with the colonial regime in the governance of conquered African states. Some sampled literature on African resistance and the eventual workings of colonial administration gives an impression of a docile and incapable chieftaincy that served the colonial authorities without any visible form of protestor resistance. This impression is belied by the evidence that some chiefs, such as king Okojie of Uromi, were not submissive to colonial rule. King Okojie of Uromi, Nigeria, was exiled from his community by the British colonial authorities between 1919 and 1931. The circumstances of Okojie's deportation and continued colonial policies to keep him outside Uromi created two opposing forces: a centrifugal force that represented colonial collaborators and a centripetal force created by those who resisted colonial policies as they concerned the deported Okojie. The research here adopted a content analysis approach focused on colonial archival documents, other related literature, and oral interviews to interrogate the nature of King Okojie's resistance to colonial rule in Uromi. The findings reveal that Okojie's circumstances of birth might have influenced his harsh style of governance in the colonial created Native Authority, a fact used as an excuse by the British colonial authorities to depose him. However, the actual rationale for banishment from his land of birth was his continued resistance to colonial rule in the form of civil disobedience. This discussion raises the need for scholars to research the nature of the response of the African chieftaincy to their colonial status and concludes that the deportation of King Okojie should be understood from the broader perspective of the fate of African kings (chiefs) who refused to accept the reality of their tamed authority and powers with the advent of colonial rule.

Keywords: Colonialism, Monarchy, Tradition, Uromi, Deportation

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INTRODUCTION

From their inception in the 15th century, European relations with African rulers were characterized mainly by understanding and cordiality, only beginning to experience tension from the mid-1880s when European interests in Africa changed. Europe's new interest was the complete control of African resources which required taking over the sovereignty of African polities. African rulers adopted various means to resist the assault on their sovereignty and, by extension, power over their territories. They employed either diplomacy or armed resistance, and in some cases combined both. Some rulers accompanied their approach with religious rituals believed to ensure the success of the adopted method(s). For example, in 1891, Menelik of Ethiopia sent an appeal to Queen Victoria of Great Britain to restrain the British army from advancing on his territory,¹ while going to war with the Italians whom he defeated militarily, but attributing it in part, at least, to his Christian faith. Mogho Naba Wobogo, the Mossi king, sacrificed animals and a black slave with the hope it would aid him in his war with the French army, to no avail.² A number of traditional rulers such as Samori Toure Nana Prempeh of Kumasi, Nana Olomu of the Niger Delta, Behanzin of Dahomey, Lat Dior of Senegambia, Oba Ovonranmwun of Benin, the relatively unknown Okojie of Uromi, and others adopted armed struggle without success. By the 1900s, European colonial armies had conquered most of Africa. However, European colonial conquest did not ensure easy administration of the conquered territories as some of the defeated rulers resorted to other forms of resistance, forcing colonial officials to adopt various means to subordinate the rulers.

A general impression that one gets from reading the literature on colonial resistance is the focus mainly on physical armed resistance, their weaknesses and failures as well as the

¹A. AduBoahen, "Africa and the Colonial Challenge," in *UNESCO General History of Africa VII: Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, ed. A. Adu Boahen (California: Heinemann, 1985), 4.

²Boahen, "Africa and the Colonial Challenge," 5.

reconciliation of former rulers to colonial administration. Contributors to the UNESCO sponsored General History of Africa VII with the title *Africa Under Colonial Domination 1880-1935* published in 1985 has only eight of thirty chapters dedicated to African initiatives and resistance to colonial imposition. Terence Ranger's chapter appraised the nature and quality of preparedness of Africans for colonial invasion and showed that their resistance was primarily determined by the need to protect and preserve their territorial sovereignty³. The other seven chapters discussed various regions--North Africa, West Africa, Central, East, and Southern Africa--focusing on various forms of resistance. Methods employed included the role of religion immobilizing Muslims in North and Northeast Africa and education for Southern African elites. These chapters further discuss the phases of resistance in West Africa and the protest and boycotts of policies in East Africa.⁴ Despite showing the heroic but failed attempt by Africans to defend their sovereignty against colonial invasion and domination, none of the discussions concerned African rulers' resistance against their degraded status in the context of colonial reorganization and subsequent changes in power relations.

The other approach towards colonial resistance has focused on administration and African rulers' adaptation to it. Crowder's comparative study of French and British colonial administrative styles argues that French treated African chiefs as mere errand boys without freedom while the British colonies accorded more power to chiefs to govern the population within their pre-colonial traditional boundaries.⁵ Crowder reiterated the position in a later work where he contended that the position and functions of chiefs in the French colonies turned them

³T.O. Ranger, "African initiatives and resistance in the face of partition and conquest," in *UNESCO General History of Africa VII: Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, ed. A. Adu Boahen (California: Heinemann, 1985), 45-62.

⁴Boahen, *UNESCO General History of Africa VII*, 67-248.

⁵Michael Crowder, "Indirect Rule: French and British Style," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 34, no.3 (July 1964): 198.

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into “the most hated member[s] of that community”⁶ while the British “only interfered with [the chief’s administration] ... if abuse of power became too flagrant.”⁷

Crowder and Ikime’s edited volume *West African Chiefs* dealt mainly with the issue of the theory of indirect rule and its operations in the colonial administration of British and French colonies in West Africa rather than the resistance of traditional or historic rulers.⁸ Arguing along the same line of submissive chiefs, Tibenderana’s study of Emirs of Northern Nigeria under British colonial rule viewed the Emirs as mainly concerned with doing whatever would prolong their tenure in Office.⁹ He argued that the British policies so threatened the Emirs’ tenure of office that it became their main concern to execute British administration’s policies in order to escape deposition.¹⁰ Wamagatta’s work on the Kikuyu of Kenya “warrant chiefs” demonstrates how the colonial-created chieftaincy system was a bastion of individual opportunism that ensured the success of colonial administration in Africa.¹¹ Vaughan’s study of pre-colonial Nigerian chiefs showed how they adjusted to modernity under colonial rule and have maintained political relevance in the post-colonial period.¹² These studies of chiefs under colonial rule shows them to have collaborated submissively with the colonial authorities in order to secure their positions in the new colonial administration, bereft of any agency to contest and shape that administration. Nonetheless, efforts should be made to interrogate if and

⁶Michael Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1968), 187.

⁷Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule*, 199.

⁸ Michael Crowder and Obaro Ikime, *West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status under Colonial Rule and Independence* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1970):

⁹Peter K. Tibenderana, “British Administration and the Decline of the Patronage-Clientage System in North western Nigeria, 1900-1934,” *African Studies Review*, 32, no. 1 (April, 1989): 77.

¹⁰Tibenderana, “British Administration and the Decline of the Patronage-Clientage System,” 80.

¹¹Evanson N. Wamagatta, “African Collaborators and Their Quest for Power in Colonial Kenya: Senior Chief Waruhiuwa Kung’u’s Rise from Obscurity to Prominence, 1890-1922,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* Vol.41, No. 2 (2008):296

¹² Olufemi Vaughan. *Nigerian Chiefs: Traditional Power in Modern Politics, 1890s–1990s* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press. 2000) Chapter One.

why some chiefs were not as submissive as portrayed, since this would enhance the literature on African resistance to colonial rule.

This article contends that a submissive position as collaborators should not be assumed as a general behavioral disposition of African chiefs in colonial Africa, with the activities of Okojie of Uromi as a prime example. He not only engaged in armed resistance but also struggled against the whittling away of his powers in Colonial Benin Province.

Uromi is one of the earliest Esan-Edo mini-state communities comprising over twenty villages ruled by an Onojie. It is geographically located in the northeast of Esan. Esan, popularly called and spelled "Ishan," has over thirty-three communities in the region east of Benin City, the capital of Edo State. Edo State today has three major geo-political ethnic blocs—the Bini (or Edo), Esan, and Afemai. As soon as Uromi was conquered by the British colonial forces in 1901, its crown prince Okojie was arrested and exiled to Calabar in Nigeria. According to W. Fosbery (the Political Officer who accompanied the Expeditionary Force), he was expelled because

Ekwoje (sic) [Okojie] had been the prime mover of all the trouble, that he was a *source of danger to the peace and good order of Uromi* [emphasized] and that to effect a speedy settlement of the country his removal was necessary for at least one year.¹³

Okojie was recalled in the same year, as his release was part of a post-invasion peace deal between the colonial authorities and the Uromi people. He was lucky to have been recalled within a very short time for others in his category did not enjoy such privilege. He was enthroned as the Onojie (king) (Onojie singular, Enigie plural) of Uromi and President of the colonial created Native Court as part of the Native Administration. This occurred after he performed the necessary funeral rites for his father, the late Onojie (King Okolo Aitua),¹⁴ who

¹³National Archives Ibadan (NAI), Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO) 1/13/15, No. 131. From Officer Commanding Ishan Expeditionary Force to High Commissioner, Southern Nigeria, 7th April, 1901.

¹⁴C. G. Okojie, *Esan Native Laws and Custom with Ethnographic Studies* (Ibadan: Ilupeju Press, 1994), 378-79.

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had been murdered by the colonial forces.¹⁵ In 1918, Okojie was deposed and deported first to Benin City in 1919,¹⁶ and later relocated to Ibadan in 1925. Justifying the action of 1919, the colonial authorities claimed “as a matter of fact with the exception of his own quarter, the Uromi villages refused to obey any order conveyed through him and no efforts to effect a reconciliation were of any use.”¹⁷

In Okojie’s absence (1919-1931), his heir, Prince Uwagbale was enthroned as the sitting king of Uromi by the colonial authorities in conjunction with Uromi kingmakers. However, Uwagbale’s deliberate collaborative actions to frustrate his father’s early recall from exile remains a point of controversy in contemporary Esan historiography.¹⁸ Okojie was eventually recalled to Uromi in 1931 to continue with his kingship until he died in 1944.¹⁹ Why had Okojie been deposed? Why did his heir apparent Prince Uwagbale violate tradition by acquiescing to colonial demands and sabotaging his father’s struggles? Why and how did Okojie force the British to restore him to the throne and authority that they had earlier violated and resisted?

This study is an attempt to answer these questions and contribute to furthering the understanding of colonial administration in Africa. To achieve the objective, the article

¹⁵ Okojie, *Esan Native Laws and Custom*, 378 and A.P. Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles 1025-2002 History Culture Customary Law* (Uromi: Aregbeyeguale Publishers, 2002), 39.

¹⁶ NAI, Benin Province (BP) 94/19 Uromi Political Papers: Minutes of the Meeting held at Uromi on the 22nd January, 1919, sent by the District Officer (DO) Ishan Division to the Resident, Benin Province Dated 24th January 1919.

¹⁷ NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers: Memorandum from the Colonial Secretary’s Office deporting Okojie from Benin to Ibadan dated 15th June, 1925, and memorandum from the Resident Benin Province, to the CSO dated 22nd September, 1919.

¹⁸ See C. G. Okojie, *Esan Native Laws and Custom*, 380; A.T.A. Okojie, *The Man, The Myth and The Symbol* (Lagos: Kope Investment, 1997), 38; A.P. Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles 1025-2002*, 72-74 and O.S.B., Omoregie, *History of Uromi A Contextual History on the Evolution of Uromi in the Esan-land Section of Benin Empire 1050-1960 A.D* (Benin: MINDEX Publishing, 2004), 164-165, Okojie (Prince) E. K., *HRH Okojie Okolo N’Ogbidi The Myth Behind a Great King*. Benin: Mindex Publishing Company Limited, 2015, 76-80.

¹⁸ Details of the circumstances surrounding the deposition of king Okojie have been articulated in S.O. Ehiabhi “The Old Vs the New ‘King’: The Uromi Monarchy and the Reality of Political Power Shift in Contemporary Nigeria.” *Kaduna Journal of Humanities*, 2017 (forthcoming)

¹⁹ Details of the circumstances surrounding the deposition of king Okojie have been articulated in S.O. Ehiabhi “The Old Vs the New ‘King’: The Uromi Monarchy and the Reality of Political Power Shift in Contemporary Nigeria.” *Kaduna Journal of Humanities*, 2017 (forthcoming)

provides a background by looking at the politics of birth and royal succession in Uromi and its possible effects on Okojie's personality and power, the British conquest of Uromi, Okojie's administrative style, and the complex interplay of centrifugal and centripetal forces in colonial Uromi. The centrifugal forces were made up of Okojie's enemies, including Prince Uwagbale as encouraged by colonial authorities, while the centripetal forces were Okojie's sympathizers, who also included the members of the Uromi royal extended family.

SENIORITY DISPUTATION AMONG PRINCES AND ROYAL SUCCESSION ON THE EVE OF COLONIAL CONQUEST OF UROMI

An understanding of the cultural circumstances that produced Okojie as the eventual Onojie of Uromi may give some insight into why he governed with the high-handedness that provided the excuse for his deportation. According to the oral narrative of the non-professional Uromi historian Ojiefoh, a traditional doctor visiting the palace at the request of King Okolo (Okojie's father) to find a cure for a mysterious illness in the community was ill-treated by the king's senior wife. She served the doctor his meal without some traditionally mandated essential parts of the slaughtered goat used to prepare the meal. In disappointment, the traditional doctor refused to eat until King Okolo called another of his wives, Agboilolo, to prepare another meal. Agboilolo dutifully carried out her assignment and served the meal with the essential parts of the slaughtered goat, including the animal's heart, as traditionally required.²⁰

In appreciation of Agboilolo's services, the traditional doctor who, with his spiritual powers, knew that both women who had served him were pregnant, opted to bless Agboilolo with the assurance that her pregnancy would produce a male child that would be the King of

²⁰Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles 1025-2002*, 32.

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Uromi after Okolo.²¹ The traditional doctor chanted the following words to his calabash of charm (*ukokule*):

The first woman who made us hungry, you and I have become her enemy, she should not deliver the baby she is carrying in her womb until this good woman who has become your friend and feeds you well has delivered her male child.²²

As the narratives goes, it was the intervention of another traditional doctor that revealed to the first wife what had transpired and why Agboilolodelivered her baby first. The two children were named Okojie and Iyoha. The awareness of this intrigue made Iyoha bear animosity against Okojie from childhood, but all his attempts to eliminate Okojie failed. Out of frustration, Iyoha exiled himself to the village of Ekekhen,²³ brooding that Okojie had usurped his position as heir to the Uromi royal throne.²⁴

In accordance with primogeniture, Uromi's cultural practice of succession, the eldest surviving son succeeds his departed father. In the case of the Uromi monarchy, two practices have been identified as determining the right to succession. The first is the seniority of a son's birth by the king's legitimate and culturally recognized wives, and the second is by announcement. Okojie succeeded his late father Okolo because of seniority of birth, just as Uwagbale succeeded his father, Okojie, because he was the undisputed eldest surviving son. However, Uwagbale's successor was determined by announcement and not by seniority of birth. The rules of succession by announcement provide that if more than one male child is born at the royal home within the same period, whichever child's birth is first announced to the

²¹ Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles 1025-2002*, 32-33.

²² Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles 1025-2002*, 32-33.

²³ Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles 1025-2002*, 32-33, also see Okojie, *The Man, The Myth and The Symbol*,.3.

²⁴ Prince Ernest Khuemen Okojie, *HRH Okojie Okolo N'Ogbidi The Myth Behind a Great King* (Benin: Mindex Publishing Company Limited, 2015), 53.

king can be the heir to the throne if the king so desires. Two sons were delivered in the same period by Uwagbale's wives.

A message indicating the birth of the first male child was sent to the king but the messenger delayed in delivering it because he joined in the merriment he met at the palace, forgetting his mission. Another message was sent soon after to the king announcing the birth of the second male child, and the messenger did not delay in delivering his message before joining the party at the palace. As soon as the first messenger witnessed what transpired, he apologized and explained his mission. However, the king pronounced that his second born male should be his heir since he heard the news of the second born before the first born. He named the first-born Ekenhon (meaning "not heard on time") and the second he called Aidenojie (meaning "a king cannot be replaced"). Aidenojie succeeded Uwagbale in 1960 and died in 1978.²⁵

In the case of Okojie and Iyoha, seniority of birth separated them, but Iyoha refused to accept reality. When Iyoha was seen with the British expeditionary force that invaded Uromi, the people assumed, and believe to this day, that it was Iyoha who invited the British to Uromi with the hope "to undo Prince Okojie Okolo and straighten his way to the throne of Uromi."²⁶ Although Iyoha expressed his desire to be king when Prince Okojie was exiled in 1901, his bid was rejected by the kingmakers because it was not in line with tradition.²⁷ If Okojie had not had a male child, the culture would have permitted his brother Iyoha to be considered. However, it is not clear that Iyoha actually requested the presence of the British colonial expeditionary forces to invade Uromi in order to achieve his kingly ambition, even though this is postulated in some of the available literature on Uromi and Esan.²⁸

²⁵ Okojie, *HRH Okojie Okolo N'Ogbidi*, 86-87.

²⁶ Okojie, *HRH Okojie Okolo N'Ogbidi*, 34.

²⁷ Okojie, *HRH Okojie Okolo N'Ogbidi*, 51-52.

²⁸ Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles*, 35-36; Okojie, *Esan Native Laws and Customs*, 377-378; Okojie, *The Man, The Myth and The Symbol*, 3; and Omoregie, *History of Uromi A Contextual History*, 139.

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THE BRITISH CONQUEST OF UROMI

The invasion of Uromi by the British colonial forces remains an issue of contention that has not engaged scholarly research within Edoid historiography. Thus an attempt is made here to briefly explain the Uromi encounter with British colonial forces. The colonial army deployed brutal force to subjugate and finally conquer the Benin kingdom in 1897. Although the Benin invasion lasted for thirteen days (February 2-21, 1897),²⁹ the battle with Uromi lasted for about forty-five days (March 15-April 30, 1901).³⁰ The formidable resistance of the Uromi people was made possible by the military command of Prince Okojie.

Major W. G. Heneker led the Ishan Expeditionary Force, reaching the Ishan region on the 13th of March 1901.³¹ On the following day the commanding officer was introduced to Iyoha, the second son of Onojie Okolo of Uromi and step-brother to Okojie. Iyoha was self-exiled in the Ishan village of Ekekhen in the present Igueben region of Edo State as earlier indicated.³² The chance meeting of Iyoha at Ekekhen by the British Expeditionary Force resulted in Iyoha's guiding the Force into Uromi. Whether or not he was a willing participant in the conspiracy to invade Uromi is open to debate, even if he had thought of benefitting from the invasion. The interpretation of available colonial reports and the circumstances of Iyoha's meeting with the British suggest that Iyoha was the victim of circumstance, and the colonial force was determined to get to Uromi with or without him.³³ The accusation that Iyoha conspired with the British was influenced by the events that had led to his migration from

²⁹P. A. Igbafe, *Benin under British Administration* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1979), 72.

³⁰National Archive, Ibadan (NAI), Colonial Secretary Office (CSO), 1/13/15, Despatch No 131 Southern Nigeria Dispatches to the Colonial Office in 1901.

³¹N.A.I. CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131 From Officer Commanding Ishan Expeditionary Force to High Commissioner Southern Nigeria, 7th April, 1901.

³²N.A.I. CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131, 7th April, 1901.

³³N.A.I. CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131, 7th April, 1901.

Uromi.³⁴ However, long before the Expeditionary Force met Iyoha, Major Heneker had decided to march into Uromi to search for water. In his words:

Although my original intention was to march direct to ULIA and subdue that part, I found on arriving at IKEHEN that on account of the scarcity of water near ULIA and the fact that the only supply which I could get was in Uromi territory I decided to march into the Uromi country first.³⁵

It is probable that the Expeditionary Force did not intend to violently invade Uromi, given the memorandum of instruction circulated by Ralph Moor, the Commissioner and Consul-General of the Niger Coast Protectorate. He stated that:

...the patrol from time to time must do everything in their power to avoid collision with the natives and to establish friendly relations, at the same time convincing them by any determined attitude that the Government is firmly established, and that its orders must be obeyed or certain punishment will follow.³⁶

Ralph Moor further emphasized the need for the troops to employ diplomacy in soliciting compliance and co-operation from the people. In his words,

I should impress upon the political officers and the officer commanding the patrol that the object is to avoid collision with the natives if possible, and to open friendly relations with them . . . [by] explaining the position as regards the Government, and settling any difficulties by peaceable means.³⁷

Ralph Moor's strategy was probably altered as a result of the intelligence report on Uromi gathered at Ekekhen that indicated "Uromi was prepared for war and confident of their ability to repel the Whiteman."³⁸ The intelligence reports from the villages of Igueben, Irrua,

³⁴Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles*, 15; Okojie, *Esan Native Laws and Customs*, 377-378; Okojie, *The Man, The Myth and The Symbol*, 3; and Omoregie, *History of Uromi*, 139.

³⁵N.A.I. File CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131, 7th April, 1901.

³⁶N.A.I. File CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131...Memorandum of Instructions.

³⁷N.A.I. File CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131...Memorandum of Instructions.

³⁸N.A.I. File CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131 Copy of a Report from Resident Benin City to Divisional Commissioner Western Division dated 5th May, 1901.

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Ugbegun, and Opoji heightened the anxiety of the British. From these reports they learned that Uromi was a powerful state that had displayed hostility to most Ishan towns, and had become increasingly coercive and distrustful of the presence of Europeans.³⁹ Without verifying the content of the intelligence gathered at Ekekhen, Major Heneker and W. Fosbery, the political officer who accompanied the expeditionary force, carried out what we now know was an unjustified attack on Uromi. As recorded by Fosbery:

In the face of this information which I had every reason to believe, I decided that it would be mere waste of time to again approach these natives with words of friendship, and indeed it would have been impossible to do so as I could find no one willing to venture into their country.⁴⁰

Therefore, when Iyoha was revealed to the British as an indigene of Uromi and as no other person accepted the invitation to escort the British, he became the obvious choice to lead the British to Uromi.⁴¹ Was Iyoha a willing participant in invading Uromi, or a victim of circumstance? Though any answer provided must be speculative, what is not in doubt is the coincidence of events. Iyoha's sustained grievances against his father and brother coincided with colonial invasion of the Ishan region. However, it seems Iyoha was dragged to Uromi.⁴² He was even said to have vehemently protested the shabby manner in which he was treated when he had committed no offence.⁴³

In order to achieve their political and strategic goals, the British organized an expeditionary force of four hundred and fourteen (414) military personnel, but eventually deployed two hundred and twenty six (226) to invade Uromi.⁴⁴ The British reached the village

³⁹ N.A.I. File CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131 Copy of a Report from Resident Benin City to Divisional Commissioner Western Division dated 5th May, 1901

⁴⁰ N.A.I. File CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131 Copy of a Report from Resident Benin City to Divisional Commissioner Western Division dated 5th May, 1901.

⁴¹ Omoregie, *History of Uromi*, 139 and Okojie, *Esan Native Laws and Customs*, 377.

⁴² Okojie, *The Man, The Myth and The Symbol*, 3

⁴³ Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles*, 36

⁴⁴ N.A.I. File CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131 Southern Nigeria Dispatches to the Colonial Office in 1901, Memorandum of Instructions, and report from Officer, Commanding Ishan Expeditionary Force.

of Ebhoiyi (also Ebhoyoma) in Uromi on March 15, 1901, without any resistance. The bloody clash between British and Uromi forces actually began the following day. The British quickly adopted a scorched-earth military strategy destroying everything in sight. Justifying the strategy, Locke comment that, “. . . a splendid example has been shown of what a small force can do to any natives who will hear of the defeat of the Uromis [sic].”⁴⁵

The colonial forces demanded the immediate surrender of the king and prince as conditions for peace.⁴⁶ The British were surprised that despite the heavy collateral damage inflicted on the people, it did not reduce the spate of guerrilla attacks. Changing their military tactics, they focused on capturing King Okolo, the Onojie of Uromi, with the expectation that his arrest would weaken Uromi resistance. In the course of hostilities, the colonial forces received intelligence reports that Prince Okojie and not the king was the driving ideologue of the armed resistance.⁴⁷ Despite the arrest of the king on March 20, 1901, and even with his death eight days after the arrest, the resistance did not subside.⁴⁸

Unaware that his father had died, Okojie continued to resist the British and refused to disarm. The obstinate disposition of the Uromi soldiers and refusal of Okojie to surrender further provoked the British and heightened their impatience. It made the Expeditionary Force begin a spree of looting, destruction, and burning of Uromi villages and farms that lasted for twenty days from the 21st of March to the 9th of April, 1901. Villages such as Efandion, Utako, Awo, Amedokhian, Onewa, Ivue, Erhor, Ukoni, Arue, and Ebhoyoma were badly damaged. Of all the villages fighting between the 16th of March and the 19th of April, 1901, the village

⁴⁵N.A.I. File CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131 Southern Nigeria Dispatches to the Colonial Office in 1901, Memorandum of Instructions, and report from Officer, Commanding Ishan Expeditionary Force.

⁴⁶N.A.I. File CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131, Copy of a Dispatch from the Divisional Commissioner Western Division to the High Commissioner, by Ralph F. Locke Divisional Commissioner, dated 26th May, 1901, and report from Officer, Commanding Ishan Expeditionary Force.

⁴⁷Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles*, 38

⁴⁸N.A.I. File CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131, Copy of a Dispatch from the Divisional Commissioner Western Division to the High Commissioner, by Ralph F. Locke Divisional Commissioner, dated 26th May, 1901, and report from Officer, Commanding Ishan Expeditionary Force

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of Uromi gave the strongest resistance with the consequence that the British built one of their military forts in that village and requested re-enforcements of “50 more men to replace casualties and slightly augment the Force.”⁴⁹

The wide publicity of the king’s arrest (it was not revealed to the people that he had died) had a demoralizing effect, and most villages began to surrender. However, that did not deter Okojie and his troops. Eventually, the people called for a truce, and the British demanded Okojie’s presence at the meeting as a condition for an effective implementation of the truce. Okojie’s acceptance of the invitation was predicated on the news that his arrested father (King Okolo) would be released to him.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, just as King Jaja of Opobo was tricked by the British in 1887 when he was invited on board a British ship for a parley but was arrested and banished to Accra before being sent finally to the West Indies,⁵¹ so Okojie was tricked. As soon as he arrived at the venue of the purported peace meeting, he was arrested, tried, found guilty of inciting the people of Uromi against the British, and was subsequently banished to Calabar on the 30th of April, 1901. The quality of resistance from the Uromi forces has been attested to in the report of Major Heneker where he writes:

I consider, it was only by the leveling of the towns and cutting the bush on the sides of the roads that the Uromi people have been brought to their knees so soon for they are a *fine manly people*...⁵² (emphasis added).

The treatment meted out to Okojie was not peculiar to Uromi as other African communities that manifested a high level of armed resistance to colonial invasion received their own dose of colonial brutality. The likes of Samori Ture and Nana Prempeh were defeated and

⁴⁹N.A.I. File CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131 Copy of a Report from Resident Benin City to Divisional Commissioner, and report from Officer, Commanding Ishan Expeditionary Force.

⁵⁰Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles*, 136.

⁵¹M’baye Gueye and A. Adu Boahen, “African Initiatives and Resistance in West Africa, 1880-1914” in Boahen, *UNESCO General History of Africa VII*, 135.

⁵²N.A.I. File CSO 1/13/15, Despatch No 131 Copy of report from Resident Benin City to Divisional Commissioner, and report from Officer Commanding Ishan Expeditionary Force.

exiled in 1900 to Gabon and the Seychelles respectively, while Behanzin, king of Dahomey was deposed in 1894. Nonewere recalled to their territories⁵³ like Okojie.

OKOJIE'S ADMINISTRATIVE CONTRADICTION

The nature of the relationship between colonial authorities and the African chieftaincy institution has not been fully addressed as earlier mentioned. However, it is germane to state that colonial rule imposed what is popularly referred to as 'colonial order' in conquered territories. Colonial order represents the deliberate imposition of colonial laws necessary for economic exploitation of the colonized and sustained by the artificially created colonial state. The colonial-colonized relationship could best be described as a master-collaborative servant relationship. The relationship was deliberately structured in such a way that the colonial (master) authority dictated responsibility and also defined administrative limits for the colonized (collaborator). It has already been expressed elsewhere that;

As soon as a society was conquered, the head of the existing political structure was deposed and a collaborative replacement installed...[Those] with political ambition that wished to belong to the class of ruling elite became available instruments in the hands of colonial authorities to truncate concerted efforts of restoring the overthrown potentate. Therefore, the traditional chieftaincy institution was manipulated to serve colonial interest.⁵⁴

This relationship set the boundaries of authority and power for chieftaincy as the British colonial governance in West Africa created the Native Authority system to administer their conquered territories through the Native Administration. The idea of administering through the Native Authority otherwise called indirect rule was that "the administering power uses the local Chiefs to rule the areas in which they were known and respected before the administering

⁵³Gueye and Boahen, "African Initiatives," 126 and 129.

⁵⁴S.O. Ehiabhi, "The Past in the Present: The Fundamentals of Structural Colonialism and the African Contemporary Developmental Challenges," *Romanian Journal of History and International Studies* I, no. 1 (July, 2014): 40-41.

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power took over.”⁵⁵ To achieve that purpose in Nigeria, the country was divided into administrative Provinces headed by Residents and the old Benin Kingdom was made a Province. The Benin Province was administratively divided into four divisions including Ishan (Esan) supervised by District Officers (DO), while traditional kings were appointed as Sole Native Authority and Presidents of the Native Courts in their respective divisions. As soon as Okojie was brought back from Calabar in 1901, he was appointed the President of the Native Court and charged with administratively assisting the DO in overseeing the Uromi territory on behalf of the colonial authorities.

Between 1901 and 1917, Okojie seemed to have lived up to colonial expectations since Uromi had the most primary school students enrolled in Ishan Division, increased revenue generation--especially fines from the native court, and a high level of citizen participation and collaboration in colonial activities.⁵⁶ For his cooperation he was recognized among other Ishan kings and subsequently commended in 1914 and 1916.⁵⁷ However, that did not mean that Okojie submissively surrendered his kingly authority since he continued to exert royal privilege on the Uromi people while meeting colonial goals. Ojiefoh has accused Okojie of governing the territory like a pre-colonial lord administering a conquered property without recourse to stated laws, compelling all to kowtow to his whim so that no citizen dared to criticize him in public.⁵⁸ Omoregie has described him as an

Onojie without inhibitions, ... and a supreme lord without compeers.... he was over-bearing on the people he ruled...he terrorised them ... [as] their lives were not theirs to enjoy. Their wives were not theirs to hold. Their personal effects were not theirs to preserve. The disaffection around Onojie Okojie...rose like stench, so that the colonial rulers became

⁵⁵C..Rex Niven, *How Nigeria is Governed* (London: Longman, Green and Co, 1958), 100.

⁵⁶NAI BP: 330/15 Quarterly Report on the Ishan Division, June 30th 1915

⁵⁷NAI, BP 788/1914 Quarterly Report for Ishan District for September 1914, 1 October, 1914, and NAI, Benin Province (BP) 273/1916, Quarterly Report, Ubiaja Division, 13 March, 1916.

⁵⁸Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles*, 137-138

increasingly afraid of a rebellion in Uromi. To avoid such a consequence the colonial authority deposed him....⁵⁹

That Okojie displayed such levels of authority within the colonial boundaries suggests that he refused to recognize his monarchical limits and remained convinced that he was still in control of his sovereignty--an indication of his passive resistance to the colonial presence in his domain. One of Okojie's direct sons described his father's administration as "a love-hate relationship with his people: loved for his resistance to colonial rule and disliked for his iron fist rule, the latter prompting the people to agitate for his deportation in 1918."⁶⁰The villages of Amendokhian, Awo, and Efandion led the protest against Okojie because they felt they were most affected by his harsh rule.⁶¹ Agitation against Okojie had been brewing for some time, but Mr. A.E Hanson, Mr. E.E. Potter and Mr. H. G. Aveling who were successive DOs seemed not to have considered such agitation as a veritable threat to colonial peace,⁶² until 1917, when W.B. Rumann was appointed the District Officer of Ishan Division.

It is my argument, and as shall be demonstrated, that Okojie's deportation in 1919 (not 1918) was influenced by W.B. Rumann's intolerance of Okojie's monarchical attitude of a sovereign under his colonial watch more than the agitation of the people. There is no serious allegation from the colonial end that Okojie refused to collaborate with the colonial authorities under W.B. Rumann, but there were early indications that Okojie would have some difficulties with him, when as the new DO he queried him in 1917 on an allegation of corruption. Okojie was accused of collecting a bribe to exclude some persons from being recommended to the

⁵⁹Omoregie, *History of Uromi*, 161

⁶⁰Okojie, *HRH Okojie Okolo N'Ogbidi*, v.

⁶¹ Mr. Matthew Oiboh, 75 years, farmer, interviewed on 15 September, 2017 at Uromi.

⁶²NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers, Memorandum from the Resident, Benin Province, to the CSO, dated 22nd September, 1919.

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colonial authorities for services in faraway East Africa.⁶³ Not much is known about Rumann but he is described as taciturn and “always a legal minded man” who was known to oppose any form of challenge or threat of challenge to his authority and he was a “staunch Roman Catholic.”⁶⁴ A combination of Rumann’s social mindset and religious sentiments would have made him a dogmatic adherent to constituted authority. Although Rumann’s predecessors might have tolerated Okojie’s ‘excesses’ as it were, it was clear that Rumann was a no-nonsense man not given to Okojie’s monarchical disposition.

The pre-colonial Uromi royal tradition entitled the king to receive tributes from his subjects, confiscate properties of those who died without an heir, and sanction burial ceremonies before they were celebrated among other privileges.⁶⁵ The king was also entitled to communal free labor. It was not considered exploitation. However, because Okojie’s administration was disliked, his actions were considered untoward in colonial Uromi and his court pronouncements were considered biased.⁶⁶ He was also accused of disrespecting chiefs, only according them respect at his pleasure.⁶⁷ Okojie’s activities were considered as flouting the orders of his pay master, the colonial authorities as represented by the DO. Although Okojie might have been harsh, it was the reports of the protesting villages and aggrieved chiefs brought to the notice of the DO that provided the justification for terminating his administration. Only one authority was allowed in colonial Uromi and W. B. Rumann was that authority in Ishan Division. The Resident justified the sacking of Okojie when he spoke of Rumann:

I know no officer who could have exercised more tact in attempting to make a settlement than Mr. Rumann, but he told me in January [1919] that he felt sure that troops would be necessary to enforce the orders of the Enogie and

⁶³This charge was one of the complaints made by the DO against Okojie justifying why he should be deposed. See NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers covering memo of the Resident attached to the cases against Okojie sent to the CSO on 22nd September, 1919.

⁶⁴Okojie, *Esan Native Laws and Customs*, 592.

⁶⁵Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles 1025-2002*, 68-9.

⁶⁶Okojie, *Esan Native Laws and Custom*, 379

⁶⁷Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles 1025-2002*, 68-9

knowing that the Enogie had been repeatedly warned without effect.⁶⁸

Kings in colonial Africa held their offices at the discretion of the colonial authorities. For example, Abdullah, who was the District Head (DH) of Zamfara in the Sokoto Emirate, was deposed because he refused to obey completely British instructions in colonial Northern Nigeria.⁶⁹ Chiefs in colonial Ghana faced destoolment once they were considered rebellious,⁷⁰ a situation that was not different in Kenya where ‘troublesome’ chiefs were sacked by the colonial government.⁷¹

It is reasonable to argue that Okojie was banished from Uromi in 1919 because either he did not understand the character of colonialism or he decided to ignore it, since he also considered himself a sovereign authority. Be that as it may, an appreciation of the circumstances that produced Okojie as king is germane to understanding why he was tyrannical. Okojie’s kingship was challenged by Iyoha based on their circumstances of birth.⁷² Therefore, from the outset, Okojie knew his enemies and opposition, and was convinced they were ready to devour him in collaboration with the colonial power. One of the ways he thought he could handle them was to instill fear and govern with tyranny. He felt insecure, and like all leaders in world history with an insecurity complex, he used the instrument of brutality as a weapon for asserting authority. However, it should be stated that Okojie, in his bid to secure his throne, pushed his luck too far and in the process collided with the colonial authorities. Okojie’s style of governance created a crisis situation that protest, making it desirable for

⁶⁸NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers, see covering memo of the Resident attached to the cases against Okojie sent to the CSO on 22nd September, 1919.

⁶⁹Tibenderana, “British Administration and the Decline of the Patronage-Clientage System,” 79.

⁷⁰Anshan Li, ‘Asafo and Destoolment in Colonial Southern Ghana, 1900-1953’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 28, NO. 2, 1995, 348.

⁷¹Wamagatta, “African Collaborators,” 296.

⁷²Okojie, *HRH Okojie Okolo N’Ogbidi*, 28.

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Okojie to be taken off the scene in order to avert a rebellion capable of compromising the peace necessary for colonial cooperation and exploitation.

OKOJIE IN EXILE AND THE POLITICS OF CENTRIFUGAL AND CENTRIPETAL FORCES

The exit of Okojie created two different forces in Uromi: the centrifugal and centripetal. The centrifugal forces were made up of Okojie's enemies, the colonial authorities, and Prince Uwagbale, while the centripetal forces were Okojie's sympathizers, including Uromi royal extended family members. As soon as Okojie was deposed, the Resident, who was the head of the colonial authority in Benin Province, announced that Chief "the Oliha [Oniha of Uromi] would act with full powers until the new Onojie was elected... [and that] they must obey the Oliha."⁷³ It would have been culturally acceptable for Chief Oniha to act for a maximum of three months if King Okojie had died. However, the king was only deposed, not dead, which might have made Uromi kingmakers oppose the continued rule of Oliha.

It was the royal family from Ebhoiyi who appealed to the colonial authorities that Prince Uwagbale should replace his deported father pending the resolution of the deportation.⁷⁴ The colonial authorities were anxious to prevent any eruption of violence from the people, so the District Officer (DO) in Ishan Division, W.B Rumann recommended Uwagbale as a fine gentleman to the Resident, mature enough to take charge of Uromi in place of his father. The request for the coronation was sent in February 12, 1919, and approved in June of the same year, once the Resident convinced the Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO) that "Wagbari [Uwagbale] the eldest son of the *Enogie* Okojie of Uromi should be recognised as *Enogie*."⁷⁵

⁷³NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers: See covering memo of the Resident attached to the cases against Okojie sent to the CSO on 22nd September, 1919.

⁷⁴Okojie, *HRH Okojie Okolo N'Ogbidi*, 75

⁷⁵NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers: Reply of the District Officer (DO) to the Resident's inquiry dated 27th February 1919, memorandum from the Resident, Benin Province, Benin City to the District Officer, Ubiaja dated 12th February, 1919, and reply of the DO to the Resident's inquiry dated 27th February 1919.

Uwagbale was installed on 16th June, 1919, ending the tenure of Chief Oniha.⁷⁶ The report of the installation as recorded by the DO and sent to the Resident is worth quoting in some detail because it captures one of the gravest sacrileges committed by Uwagbale against his father and royal practice in Uromi. As reported by the DO, the event took place in the presence of other monarchs from Ubiaja, Ugboha and Irrua, which are Esan towns. He added details of the coronation rites, stating that

the Enogie's family tried to obstruct the ceremony until they were definitely told that chief Okojie would never return to Uromi... Wagbari, first had to make the sacrifice of a bull to OKONOGIE his great ancestor... on returning to the Council chamber the new Enogie was placed on his seat and blood from the sacrifice was brought and smeared on the throne. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the District Officer presented the late Enogie's staff[Okolo] to Wagbari who was admonished to rule wisely and consult his chiefs.⁷⁷

There are some fundamental issues the DO's report brings to the fore, one of which is the opposition of the royal family to the coronation. It seems contradictory that the royal family that appealed to the colonial authorities to accept Uwagbale as replacement for his departed father would then protest the installation. The family knew that the nature of coronation ceremony was wrong with the introduction of the OKONOGIE rite that is performed for the soul of the departed Enogie to seek their permission and blessings to ascend the throne, but in that instance, Okojie was not dead. Besides, the royal family only suggested Uwagbale to the colonial authorities as a regent and not as a substantive king.⁷⁸ The protest against the installation was a continuation of the people's resistance to colonial interference in what they

⁷⁶Ibid., memorandum from the Resident, Benin Province to DO Ishan Division dated 29th May, 1919, and report from the DO to the Resident on the Subject Wagbari Enogie of Uromi Enthronement of dated 18th June, 1919

⁷⁷H.L.M., Butcher, *Intelligence Report on Uromi Village Group of Ishan Division of Benin Province*. Published by the National Archives, Ibadan, 1982, 242.

⁷⁸Okojie, *HRH Okojie Okolo N'Ogbidi*, 75.

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regarded as exclusive cultural practice. Taking into consideration the royal dispute of seniority between Okojie and Iyoha, and given the fact that Iyoha had made several attempts to gain the throne, the elders might have reasoned that Uwagbale's emplacement would prevent Iyoha or his descendants from laying claim to the throne.

The DO reported the event in his quarterly report for that year, dated 30th June, 1919, that Okojie was removed because of "acts of oppression and misrule ... and the appointment of his eldest son as *Enogie* of Uromi. The new *Enogie* is doing well and has the support of all his titled chiefs."⁷⁹ The newly crowned king wasted no time in consolidating his position as he employed diplomacy to reconcile the monarchy with the villages of Amendokhian, Awo, and Efandion. His action so delighted the DO that he informed the Resident that "the whole of Uromi united under the authority of the new Enogie Wagbari who I trust will show himself to be a just ruler."⁸⁰ Therefore, in 1920, the DO sent a request to the Resident that Uwagbale should be appointed to the Native Court to replace his deported father.⁸¹

Colonial structures were successfully erected in regions where collaborators supported colonial rule for selfish motives. These collaborators cut across all walks of life as long as their personal interest coincided with colonial interest.⁸² Uwagbale enjoyed colonial support because he was a willing collaborator who did not allow moral persuasion or family ties to cloud his ambition. Uwagbale's action is typical of ambitious individuals who are willing to compromise in order to attain political and economic relevance in any government. For example, in colonial Kenya, senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kung'u had perfected plans by 1920 to discredit his nephew,

⁷⁹NAI, BP 323/19: Ishan Division Half Yearly Report, 30 June, 1919.

⁸⁰NAI BP 94/19: Memorandum from the DO Ishan Division, W.B. Remann to the Resident, Benin Province dated 2nd September 1919.

⁸¹NAI BP 91/1919: Ubiaja Division Native Court changes of membership, Uwagbale was appointed on 5th January, 1920.

⁸²Wamagatta, 'African Collaborators,' 295-296.

Chief Waweru wa Kanja who was head of the Ruiru region so that he would be appointed to replace his nephew as the new chief.⁸³

Not long into Uwagbale's appointment, the DO received correspondence from the Resident that the Colonial Secretary would grant Okojie freedom on the condition that the whole of Uromi would guarantee that he would relinquish his interest in power. The DO replied that nobody, not even the chiefs wanted Okojie back, and that was the political reality in Uromi. Given the pleasant relationship between Uwagbale and the colonial authorities, it was expected that any request to bring Okojie back would be rejected because Uwagbale was useful in the colonial scheme. Okojie refused to be intimidated and he continued to protest his deportation, insisting that he was needed by his people and accusing Uwagbale of frustrating all efforts to release him, though he promised to be a private man in line with the Colonial Secretary's suggestion.⁸⁴

Okojie's petition and resistance provoked another round of tension in Uromi as the euphoria of the appointment of Uwagbale as Onojie had not died down when twenty important Uromi chiefs from all the villages who led the centripetal forces petitioned the colonial authorities in 1920 about the wrongful enthronement of Uwagbale. They based their objections on four premises:

1. that the purpose of the protest against Okojie had been to draw the DO's attention to his misdemeanor with the hope of reconciling the aggrieved but not to depose their king;

⁸³ Wamagatta, 'African Collaborators', 310.

⁸⁴ NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers: Correspondence from the Resident to the DO on the condition of release of Okojie, dated 31st March, 1920, reply to the Resident's correspondence by the DO, dated 8th April, 1920, and letter from Okojie in Benin to the Resident 20th May, 1920.

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2. that, by Uromi tradition, Uwagbale ought not to be enthroned as long as Okojie was alive and therefore lacked the spiritual sanction to perform any rituals for the well-being of the community;
3. that Uwagbale, because of the two issues outlined above, lacked the authority to impose his leadership on the people and be obeyed, especially with regard to other levels of traditional authority;
4. and that Okojie should be released from exile and be re-installed as the authentic king of Uromi.⁸⁵

The content of the petition challenged the views in various colonial reports that Okojie was hated and unwanted in the community, while Uwagbale was cherished. However, the colonial authority in the Ishan region continued to encourage Uwagbale to hold on to power, even in the face of increased pressure and petitions from the people that Okojie should be re-called.

The people remained undaunted and continued in their resistance, insisting that there would be no peace in Uromi until Okojie was released. In a swift reaction, the Resident organized a meeting with the people of Uromi to ascertain the genuineness of the petition. Records of the meeting suggest that it was meant to intimidate the centripetal forces loyal to Okojie. Most of the chiefs who had signed the petition were absent, and the few present either denied knowledge of the content, or said that their names had been used without their consent. It was only Chief Iyasere and three other chiefs who admitted supporting the petition. To drive home the negative position of the colonial authorities in Benin Province against Okojie, an extract from the meeting is worth quoting. According to the Resident:

the people were then warned again that it had been distinctly laid down on several occasions that the Ex-Enogie should never return to the town as Enogie and that in future, any one, who agitated for his re-instatement

⁸⁵NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers: letter of petition from some Uromi chiefs to His Excellency, the Governor General through the Resident, asking for the Re-instatement of Okojie dated 20th October, 1920.

would be punished... I suspended the warrant of the Iyashare (sic) for three months and warned him most strongly of the consequences which would befall any further agitation against the present Enogie... I would severely ensure the Ex-Enogie for his part in the affair and would inform him that I would recommend his deportation to Calabar if he did not at once cease all intrigues against his son and his attempts to return to Uromi.⁸⁶

The Resident was really determined to impress the implications of ever raising the issue of Okojie again in the District when he remarked that because of “his interference with the administration of the town, he (the Ex-Enogie) would not be allowed to come to Uromi in any capacity for several years, and that anyone, who before another five years began to agitate for his return, would be dealt with.”⁸⁷ The reference to Okojie as Ex-Enogie meant that the colonial authorities thought that Okojie’s absence would calm the community. In Esan cultural ethos, a king is born and not made, and a properly crowned king remains a king whether on the throne or dethroned. The culture assumed that the Onojie moved with the throne as demonstrated when Okojie was exiled. Even in exile, Okojie knew the amount of internal pressure to restore the true king to the throne that was focused on the centrifugal forces that kept him in exile. This sustained his resolve to resist any form of intimidation, including the threat to send him back to Calabar. He continued insisting in all his petitions that he was needed at home to provide leadership for his people.⁸⁸

Okojie continued with his resistance and in 1922 wrote to the Lieutenant-Governor, Southern Provinces, to remind his Excellency on his (Okojie’s) acceptance of being a private

⁸⁶ NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers: letter of petition from some Uromi chiefs to His Excellency, the Governor General through the Resident, asking for the Re-instatement of Okojie dated 20th October, 1920.

⁸⁷ NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers: letter of petition from some Uromi chiefs to His Excellency, the Governor General through the Resident, asking for the Re-instatement of Okojie dated 20th October, 1920, Letter written by people of Uromi to the Resident dated 25th October, 1920. Memo from the Resident to the DO dated 18th November, 1920.

⁸⁸ NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers:., Okojie’s letter to the Resident dated 4th May, 1921.

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citizen if that would free him “from the present state of confinement.” The Lieutenant-Governor refused to honor Okojie’s request, and in a bid to silence him, suggested that more of Okojie’s wives be sent to him in Benin.⁸⁹ The continued agitation prompted the DO to seek protection for Uwagbale, recommending to the Resident that District Heads in Ishan Division, including Uwagbale, should be protected under the Criminal Code Ordinance of 1922.⁹⁰ Similar colonial collaborators in other parts of Africa also enjoyed the special protection accorded to Uwagbale, exemplified by the statement of Governor Clifford in Ghana who said in 1914 that it was the duty of Government to strengthen the power of chiefs so that they could control their subjects.⁹¹

The courage of Okojie to continue his agitation stems from the fact that he never truly accepted the reality that he had lost his rights and sovereignty. He remained undaunted, and at the end of 1922, wrote another letter to the Resident complaining that he had wasted four years of his life doing nothing in Benin. He then pleaded with the Resident to allow him go back to be under house arrest in Uromi rather than remaining in his present state of despondency. However, the Resident sought the advice of the DO regarding Okojie’s request, and W. B. Rumann replied that nobody wanted Okojie in Uromi because his presence would be a threat to peace in the District.⁹²

The continued support and protection Uwagbale enjoyed from the colonial authorities sustained his hold on power, even when he was accused of frustrating all efforts to recall his father. In response to this accusation, the DO reported to the Resident that the allegation was false, that the people and chiefs of Uromi were unanimous in their agreement that Okojie should

⁸⁹ NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers., Okojie’s petition to the Lieutenant Governor dated 20th February 1922, and reply from the Resident to the DO dated 23rd February, 1922.

⁹⁰ NAI BP 128/1922: Chiefs to be protected on the Criminal Code list of 1922, this was sent by the DO Ishan Division to the Resident dated 4th May 1922.

⁹¹ Anshan Li, “Asafo and Destoolment,” 354.

⁹² NAI BP 94/19 Uromi political papers, Okojie’s letter to the Resident dated 21st December, 1922. The DO was consulted on 23rd December 1922 as stated in his reply to the Resident’s memorandum. Reply from DO to Resident, 29th December, 1922.

not be allowed to return to the town. He also added that the people had pledged their support for Uwagbale, but that Okojie had become a significant distraction for the new Onojie. The tension, protests, and demonstration for Okojie's re-call continued to mount even after he had spent five years (1919-1923) in exile. The DO, W.B. Rumman, was convinced that Okojie was responsible for the tension in Uromi and therefore expressed his worry in 1923 to the Resident that he was

convinced that it would be suicide on the part of the present Enogie and District Head to allow his father to return to any part of Uromi and that his mere presence would cause the disruption of the whole District and Native Administration as far as Uromi is concerned. As I have pointed out before, the presence of the Ex Enogie even at Benin City is a certain menace, and it would pay the Administration to raise his allowance if he could only be sent to Calabar.⁹³

In spite of colonial prompting and protection, the people sustained their protest and resistance against Uwagbale, questioning the traditional legality of his kingship. In 1924, the people of Ewoyoma (a royal town) wrote to the Colonial Secretary through the DO that Uwagbale was not the true heir of Okojie and was therefore wrongly enthroned and so demanded that Uwagbale be removed to avert calamity in the town.⁹⁴ The petition was occasioned by Uwagbale's opposition to the return of his father, something the people considered culturally inappropriate, even bizarre, in a son. The DO remarked on the petition before sending it to the Resident, noting that he had interacted with the people of Ewoyoma and their spokesperson told him that they wanted Okojie to come back and swear if Uwagbale was truly his heir. The DO further stated that when he demanded to know from the

⁹³NAI BP 94/19 Uromi political papers, memorandum from the Resident Benin Province to the DO Ishan Division dated 29th December, 1922. Reply to the Resident's Memo from the DO dated 23rd January 1923

⁹⁴ NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers:., Letter of petition from Ewoyoma village to the CSO on the illegality of Uwagbale's enthronement, dated 8th April, 1924, and comments of the DO on Ewoyoma's petition sent to the Resident on the Subject Petition from the People of Ewoyoma Quarter of Uromi, against their Enogie, Chief Uwagbari, Forwards. Dated 16th April, 1924.

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petitioners why they did not raise these issues when Uwagbale was installed, they replied that they had attempted twice in 1920 and 1922, but on both occasions, they had been accosted on the way by Uwagbale. The DO again concluded that the petition lacked merit as it was the brain child of Okojie and should not be given serious consideration. The Resident wasted no time in forwarding the DO's observation to the Colonial Secretary, noting that "the petition appears to be merely a strategic (sic) move on the part of Okojie, the Ex. Enogie of Uromi, whereby he hopes to return home. He was deported to Benin some years ago for perpetrating gross outrage in his town."⁹⁵

It is important to briefly explain the nexus between the people of Ebhoyoma also called Ebhoiyi or Ewoyoma, which was originally called "Eubonaeyomorphie" (the place where the children live) and the monarchy. The tradition holds that when an Onojie (king) dies, his eldest surviving son succeeds him by the law of primogeniture. The deceased king's children and household would have to emigrate from Eguarre, the traditional village where the king resided, to Ebhoiyi, a place designated for the departed king's children and household.⁹⁶ It is this cultural privilege that informed the people to earlier suggest Uwagbale as a suitable replacement for his deported father as the eldest and heir apparent to the throne.

Despite the DO's position, Okojie remained undaunted in his protest, even after six years (1919-1924) in exile. In a petition dated 16th September 1924, Okojie expressed fears and pleaded with the authorities to temper justice with 'British mercy' so that he could be released but his appeal fell on deaf ears. When Okojie wrote his appeal, W.B. Rumann had become the Resident, Benin Province. Rumann maintained his earlier position that Okojie was dethroned for oppression and misrule and was not yet sufficiently remorseful for his crimes.

⁹⁵ NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers:., Memorandum from the Resident, Benin Province to the Colonial Secretariat on the subject of the petition by Ewoyoma village. The memo is dated 23rd April, 1924.

⁹⁶ Butcher, *Intelligence Report on Uromi*, 247.

therefore he should be left in Benin. By 1925, however, Rumann was convinced that Okojie's proximity to Uromi provided him the opportunity to interfere in Uromi's political affairs. He therefore sent a strongly worded letter to the DO to take drastic action against those forces working for Okojie against the interests of Uwagbale. He warned that "should this state of passive resistance' to the Enogie be continued or any sign of active resistance appear, the chiefs responsible... must be prosecuted before the Ishan Council and I have given them due warning."⁹⁷

A new Resident, G. Falk, was appointed in 1925. He also believed that Okojie's proximity was still dangerous to the peace and tranquility of Uromi. Falk therefore recommended that Okojie be transferred from Benin to Ibadan in Oyo Province. Okojie left Benin in June 1925 with the instruction not to return to either Benin or Warri Province unless permitted by the Governor. The Resident, Oyo Province, facilitated Okojie's resettlement and accommodation challenge in Ibadan. The relocation farther away from Uromi neither weakened his resolve to be released nor reduced his vehemence. He wrote to the Resident, Benin Province, that his allowance was insufficient to take care of his needs. He remarked ironically in the letter, perhaps mocking the Resident or scorning his (Okojie) own predicament, saying: "My good friend, since the year 1919, I have been touring here and there by the wave of time, away from my home and families, *yet I have been quite submissive under the political aggression.*" Hethen went onto protest his poor financial status in Ibadan. That Okojie complained about the manner in which he was treated, that is, without privileges, gives credence to the contention that he disliked his situation and demanded he be treated with

⁹⁷NAI BP 94/19 Uromi political papers, Okojie's letter of petition to the Lieutenant-Governor dated 16th September, 1924; Rumann's covering note on Okojie's petition sent to the Colonial Secretariat dated 4th December, 1924; and memorandum from the Resident to the DO dated 9th January, 1925.

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respect. However, Okojie's financial request was approved and by the end of 1925, his allowance had been increased twice.⁹⁸

Okojie's disposition indicated that colonial policy had not really broken his spirit but there were signs that he was homesick as expressed in a letter written on 17 March, 1926, in which he explained that he wanted to go back home as he was growing older and more fragile. He promised that he would not take interest in the position of Onojie, and that he would live a private life devoid of politics. He indicated that he was willing to be, and would encourage others to be, loyal to Uwagbale. He concluded his petition on an anticipatory note, saying that he was waiting "patiently and anxiously" for his request to be granted by His Excellency. However, the Resident, Benin Province, denied Okojie his request because he believed that it was not conducive to peace in Uromi for Okojie to be released from exile.⁹⁹

The denial prompted Okojie to escape from Ibadan in 1926 and publicly show himself in Uromi, without considering the full implications of his action. Villagers came to pay homage and presented gifts to him in the residence of a relative at Ebhoyi—a vindication of his conviction that he was still the authority in Uromi in spite of the colonial presence. There is no doubt that Okojie's unannounced appearance in Uromi posed a major challenge to Uwagbale and the colonial authorities in Benin Province. It is believed that Uwagbale and some of his loyal chiefs drew the DO's attention to the presence of Okojie who was then invited for a brief chat. Okojie bluntly refused to honor the invitation since he considered himself a sovereign in his own territory. This led to an unsuccessful man hunt for him by a detachment of policemen. As

⁹⁸ NAI BP 94/19 Uromi political papers., Memorandum from the Colonial Secretary's Office deporting Okojie from Benin to Ibadan dated 15th June, 1925. There were series of correspondences between the Benin and Oyo Residents on Okojie spanning from 23rd June to 18th September, 1925. Included is petition from Okojie through the Oyo Province to Benin Province, dated 10th August, 1925, reply to Okojie's petition dated 18th August, 1925, and memo from Benin Province to Oyo Province that conveyed increment of Okojie's allowance dated 1st October, 1925.

⁹⁹ NAI BP 94/19 Uromi political papers., Okojie's petition dated 17th March, 1926, and comments of the Resident Benin Province to the Colonial Secretary, Southern Provinces dated 22nd June, 1926.

soon as information got to Okojie that his hide out had been exposed, he left Ebhoiyi for Uwalor, another village in Uromi, only to realize that he was not safe thereeither, and therefore he decided to surrender himself.¹⁰⁰ The frustration of his inability to defend himself in the face of renewed colonial aggression compelled him to plead for clemency from his colonial tormentors, but again his plea fell on deaf ears, and he was sent to Benin for several months before being deported again to Ibadan.¹⁰¹

Shortly after Okojie was arrested and sent back to Ibadan, his son Uwagbale, the usurper, began to fall out of favor with the colonial authorities. The new DO, V.C.M. Kelsy, wrote to the Resident in 1927 that Uwagbale's conduct was becoming a hindrance to the administration. Uwagbale was accused of biased judgments in court, misrepresentation of facts, deliberate misinformation, disinformation, and a proclivity to lies. He was therefore suspended from the Council by the Resident for three months effective from 1st July 1927. In the absence of Uwagbale, the DO took direct charge of the native court before he was replaced by Mr. H. Maddocks. Maddocks sought permission from the Resident to reinstate Uwagbale, and this was granted in a memorandum dated 3rd December, 1927.¹⁰² The actions of Mr. Kelsy and Mr. Maddocks demonstrate that the administrative limits of chiefs were often determined by the inclinations of the sitting DO more than by the performance of the appointed chiefs. This line of thought also supports the earlier position that Okojie was deposed because beyond the accusations of oppression and misrule, Mr. Rumann did not like him personally.

In 1927, the colonial authorities increased taxation for adult males throughout Southern Nigeria, provoking widespread anti-tax riots in the region, including Uromi. As a result of the

¹⁰⁰ Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles*, 72.

¹⁰¹ Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles*, 73–74, and Okojie, *The Man, The Myth and the Symbol*, 12–13.

¹⁰² NAI BP 94/19 Uromi Political Papers, report on Uwagbale sent by the DO to the Resident dated 22nd June, 1927, memorandum from the Resident to the DO communicating the suspension of Uwagbale dated 15th July, 1927, memorandum from DO to Resident, on the suspension dated 10th November, 1927 and memorandum from the Resident to the DO approving the re-instatement of Uwagbale as Onojie in Council dated 3rd December 1927.

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riots, the authorities undertook native administration reforms in the 1930s. Uwagbale's inability to manage the anti-tax riots and political fallout from the tax reforms once again pitched him against the DO. The centripetal forces in Uromi which included Okojie's allies used the issues of tax reform to cause violence, accusing Uwagbale of bringing hardship to the community. In the heat of the uprising, the Resident, Benin Province, Mr. Bewley and the DO Ishan Division, V.C.M Kelsy, met with the people of Uromi, including Uwagbale, the chiefs and elders, where the demand for Okojie's release was repeated.¹⁰³ The colonial authorities decided it would be wise to release Okojie at this time in order to avoid a crisis. Okojie was released from exile in July 1931, arrived in Uromi in August amidst jubilation, and was readmitted to the Council in September 1931.¹⁰⁴ From a political realist perspective, it could be argued that Okojie's recall was the only pragmatic option open to the authorities because Uwagbale had proven to be a disappointment to colonial concerns.

Interestingly, there is no archival or related record to suggest that there was any form of altercation between Okojie and his son Uwagbale before the king was exiled from Uromi. However, the opportunity for altercation would have been limited by the royal practice of separating a reigning monarch from his heir apparent. In accordance with the Uromi royal tradition, the heir apparent stays in a village distinct from that where the king resides. Oyomo village is designated as the village that hosts the heir apparent to the throne.¹⁰⁵ This cultural practice is similar to that of the Benin monarchy where the Edaiken, the heir to the Oba of Benin, resides at Uselu, some distance from Oredo, the seat of reigning Oba.

If Uwagbale had been ambitious, it had not been publicly expressed before he got the opportunity to act as king. Uwagbale's 'kingly' position was supported by a majority of the

¹⁰³ Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles*, 75-6.

¹⁰⁴ Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles*, 75-6. and NAI BP 39/28B, Ishan Division Personnel of Native Court in-memorandum from the DO to the Resident seeking for permission to reinstate Okojie, dated 21st September, 1931 and approval granted to DO to re-instate Okojie, 29th September, 1931

¹⁰⁵ Butcher, "Intelligence Report on Uromi," 242.

people, but his later style of governance, antics and perhaps inappropriate rascality surprised many, so that even his kinsmen rebelled against him. What were the forces that probably influenced Uwagbale's actions and reactions? It has been argued by one of Uwagbale's direct brothers that Uwagbale was fickle-minded and this had allowed a few individuals to encourage him to make a bid for power. It was said that as Uwagbale began deriving benefits from the privilege of kingship, he began collaborating with chiefs and some identified enemies of his father in order to entrench his hold on the people and secure the throne for himself. He conferred chieftaincy on his cronies and supporters and was ruthless with the opposition.¹⁰⁶ It should therefore be understood that Uwagbale's friendly disposition toward the colonial presence in Uromi was part of a grand design to win colonial support, sympathy, and protection, which he enjoyed until 1931. Uwagbale's character and trajectory matches Crowder's observation that willing or created chiefs were imposed on the people by the British colonial authorities for colonial gains.¹⁰⁷

King Okojie enjoyed the support of the colonial authorities from his reinstatement in 1931 until his death in 1944. The authorities refused to act on the series of allegations against him such as the kidnapping of one Mrs. Omokhua from her husband and confiscating the said Omokhua's commercial trees in 1934. King Okojie also threatened to kill James Ologolo's cow in 1935 if it was not removed from Uromi.¹⁰⁸ In 1938, Okojie, his son Iyere, and others were accused of minting counterfeit coins. Although Okojie was acquitted and discharged, though warned, others were punished with various terms of imprisonment.¹⁰⁹ These actions of Okojie further confirm that he resisted the limitations placed on him by the colonial authorities and

¹⁰⁶ Okojie, *HRH Okojie Okolo N'Ogbidi*, 76-78.

¹⁰⁷ Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule*, 226.

¹⁰⁸ NAI Ishan Division (ID) 20A: Uromi Native Court. Letter of petition from Josiah Omokhua against Okojie dated 5th August, 1934 and the reply by the DO to Josiah's petition, dated 13th August, 1934; Letter of petition from James Ologolo to the Resident dated 9th February, 1935 and the reply of the DO to Ologolo's petition dated 28th February 1935; and the DO's letter of warning to Okojie dated 5th March, 1936.

¹⁰⁹ For fuller details see Okojie, *The Man, The Myth and the Symbol*, 17-18 and Ojiefoh, *Uromi Chronicles*, 78

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continued to follow a path of action similar to the one that earlier provided the excuse for his deportation.

The 1941 handover note from the DO, Mr. R.C.H Wilkes, to the new DO, T.B. Bovell-Jones, demonstrates support for Okojie but also smacks of the hypocrisy in colonial reportage. Wilkes praised Okojie and condemned Uwagbale, stating that “the Onogie [Okojie] was the most progressive minded member of the Council and his son and heir a worst reactionary.”¹¹⁰ That Uwagbale who was pampered with colonial support later could be described as a reactionary, and the dreaded and hated Okojie described as friend and ally, shows that the colonial authorities were more concerned about those who could meet colonial demands at any given point in time, and Okojie was equal to the task until his death in 1944. Uwagbale was then properly installed as king with no protest from the people because Okojie, before his death, had forgiven Uwagbale and reconciled with him so that the people would recognize his successor succession blackmail and crisis in Uromi would be avoided.¹¹³

CONCLUSION

The conquest of Uromi by Britain in 1901 introduced a new style of alien governance into the community. Prince Okojie who later became king, was sent into exile after the conquest but recalled to participate in the governmental system of indirect rule in colonial Uromi. Okojie refused to accept the restrictions placed on his traditional rights and privileges, and spent the rest of his life passively resisting the appropriation of his sovereignty by the British colonial government. His resistance resulted in his banishment from Uromi between 1919 and 1931. In his absence, his son and heir apparent, Prince Uwagbale was enthroned as the new ‘king.’ Rather than use the support he enjoyed from colonial authorities to work for the recall of his father, Uwagbale collaborated with others to frustrate the early return of his father from

¹¹⁰ NAI ID 719 Vol I: Handing over notes 1941.

¹¹³ Okojie, *HRH Okojie Okolo N'Ogbidi*, 13.

exile because of personal gain. Uwagbale's friendly disposition to colonial rule in opposition to the wish of the majority of the people created the centrifugal and centripetal forces in colonial Uromi between 1920 and 1931. In the long run, the resistance of African kings to colonial invasion and domination, as demonstrated by King Okojie, was futile in preventing the loss of their sovereignty, rights, and privileges. One of the several impacts of colonial rule in Africa was the collapse of empires and kingdoms and rise of a modern state system built along lines European models. The end of colonial rule in Africa did not undo the state system or bring back the splendor of kingship. Rather, the European state system and subjugation of the monarchy to civil authority seems to remain as an irreversible legacy of colonial rule in Africa.

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Oral interview

Mr. Matthew Oiboh, 75 years, Farmer, interviewed on 15 September, 2017 at Uromi.