THE PAINS AND GAINS OF COLONIALISM: THE PERSPECTIVE ON ORSU CLAN IN IMO STATE NIGERIA

UDENSI, Vitalis Amasiatu
Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State Nigeria.
Corresponding Author’s
E-mail/Phone: vitalisudensi@gmail.com

Abstract
Many Afrocentric scholars have variously opined that the intercourse between Britain and Nigeria by way of colonialism was nothing but exploitation of the latter. According to them, nothing good came out of it. No known people willingly and heartily accept subjugation and domination. Colonialism was foisted on Orsu clan in Imo state by the British who used superior fire-power on the indigenous people in order to achieve their goal. The domination was total - politically, economically and socially. The experience was painful as the people of Orsu clan made futile efforts to rebuff their incursions. Attempt is made in this discourse to juxtapose the pains and gains of colonialism. This shows that though it was an unequal relationship, something good came out of it which should serve as a springboard for further development in the political, economic and social life of the people of Orsu clan. The methods used are library research anchored on analysis and discursive method.

Keywords: Colonialism, Orsu clan, Subjugation, Domination, Nigeria

Introduction
Orsu clan is specifically located in the West of Orlu Local Government Area, East of Ihiala Local Government Area, North of Oru-East, North-East of Oru West Local Government Areas, South of Nnewi-South Local Government Area and South-West of Ideato South Local Government Area. Orsu clan, Imo state is made up of many autonomous communities.

It would not be completely out of place to say that slavery and slave trade especially that engaged in by Europeans with Africans was the precursor of colonial imperialism. According to Offiong (1980), “it is difficult to say where slave trade ended and where colonial imperialism began, because before slavery was extirpated in Africa, colonial imperialism had established roots in the continent” (Offiong, 1980). The colonial masters, it was understood, were satisfied with the inhuman treatment and atrocities they committed in this part of the globe and complimented themselves being opinionated that they were unarguably racially, culturally, religiously, educationally and otherwise superior to Nigerians nay Africans. This belief and position therefore necessitated unequal relationship – rulers and ruled, superior and inferior, subjugator and subjugated, giver and receiver; as well as putting in place a political and legal systems geared towards perpetuating this supremacy, subjugation and domination (Offiong, 1980).

There are people who would subscribe to the view that the indigenous people of Orsu clan benefitted immensely from their relationship with the British, putting into consideration the
far-reaching changes brought in the economic, social and political development of the people by the white man. Attempt will be made in this work to discuss the various negative as well as positive dimensions of the British relationship with the indigenous people of Orsu by way of colonialism.

**The Pains of Colonialism**

The British enterprise in Orsu clan was not based on philanthropy, love, generosity, concern or benevolence. The British were primarily in the clan not because of what they wanted for the people but for what they wanted from the clan. It was as a result of this that they operated a colonial policy that was highly exploitative and absolute. This was aimed at enabling them maximize their profit in their colonial investment and endeavour in the country, Nigeria, which is exemplified in this discourse by Orsu clan.

It should be noted that in pre-colonial Orsu clan, every adult male had at least a portion of land for farming as agriculture was the economic mainstay of the people. This, as a matter of fact, enabled every family to have food on their table. In view of that, the issue of famine was unknown in the entire clan. Even the disabled in the society then depended on their families and extended families and were adequately taken care of. The situation was no longer the same during colonial rule. Colonialism, to a great extent, ushered in individualism.

During colonial rule, agriculture was actually practiced but emphasis was on cash crops – crops produced for their commercial value rather than for use by the growers. The dominant cash crop grown by Orsu people was palm tree. Palm oil obtained from palm tree was in high demand in Europe. Naturally, the indigenous people gave more attention to the economic activity through which they would get income thereby giving little attention to food crops and the consequence was hunger and famine in the clan which further resulted to diseases, sicknesses and deaths in great numbers (Ezulike, 2014). The white man needed palm oil in Europe to produce soap, margarine and other related products as well as in oiling machinery. It was the white man who determined the price he would buy the palm oil. The palm oil, it should be noted, was bought at a very cheap rate. The finished products from palm oil were imported into the country and sold to the indigenous people at a very high rate. The profit made from such sales of the finished products were not re-invested in the country, but was rather repatriated to Europe for its development while the indigenous people continued to endure helplessly the excruciating exploitation. In other parts of the country, similar treatment in the hands of the white men were obtainable: hides and skins were exported and imported boots and shoes, cocoa was exported while chocolate and processed cocoa were imported; rubber was exported and tires were imported; timber was exported while processed timber and paper were imported (Offiong, 1980). It should be stated that in all cases, the prices indigenous people paid for the finished products were much higher than the prices they sold their raw materials. The British never bothered that it cost them so much to transport these raw materials to Europe for processing as far as they gained at the end of the day. Furthermore, the British did not allow the indigenous people to sell their goods to other markets offering better and higher prices and did not also allow them to buy manufactures or finished products from markets offering cheaper prices.
The British economic policy in their colonies was against industrialization of their colonies. This was because the colonies were meant to be essentially markets for the British manufactured goods. The establishment of industries in those colonies would naturally spring up competition between the colonial masters and the colonized. To forestall this, industrialization was downplayed. Not only that, it should be noted that local “initiative where it was likely to endanger the interests of the colonial power was quickly stifled (Nkrumah, 1963). For instance, many men were producing local gin in Orsu clan known as kai-kai. The white man discouraged them by branding it illicit gin and that it was unrefined and as such could be injurious to health. With this position, patronage to the local producers was hampered and this put paid to the local industry.

During colonial rule the British introduced taxation in Orsu clan and the people had to pay in British money (Egeonu, 2014). The implication was that the people had to leave their homes to travel away to far places such as Enugu for coal mining and Jos for tin mining working for the Europeans who had the money acceptable in tax payment. Those who could not pay taxes stood the risk of being arrested, prosecuted and incarcerated. It should be noted that this was a novel experience to the people who found it extremely difficult to adjust to the situation. The kind of labour the people knew was not wage labour rather the mutual-aid labour taken in turns, working for their relations such as parents-in-laws. The indigenous people found it difficult to adjust favourably to this challenge. This caused the Europeans to brand them indolent, uninformed, superstitious, savage, and mistrustful people.

The white man introduced forced labour in the course of his construction of roads, ports and harbours. The resultant effect of the forced labour was the desertion of the villages by able-bodied men which led to the disruption of the normal village life. It should be understood that the forced labour was disadvantageous to the local people as they were paid little or nothing. In essence, the forced labour could not bring corresponding gain to those who went out for the industrial life as they could not take care of themselves let alone taking care of their relatives left behind.

Western education was introduced in Nigeria by the Christian mission. The first Christian mission school was opened in 1842 at Badagry (Nkrumah, 1963). The introduction of western education in Orsu clan was not primarily for the interest and benefit of Orsu people, rather it was for the benefit of the colonialists. The missionaries and colonialists almost reached Orsu clan the same period in 1920. In effect, the indigenous people could not make out the difference between the missionaries and the colonialists because they were all white people and seemed to be scoring in the same goal (Egbuawa, 2014).

Primary schools were built in Orsu clan in the 1920s. People from the area that had primary education earlier, had it outside the clan. The effort of the missionaries cannot be overemphasized. However, the missionaries who were seen as harbingers of colonialism, who pioneered the establishment of schools in the clan only taught writing, reading and arithmetic. The missions should not be blamed because their basic aim was to train those who would become literate enough to assist them meaningfully in the work of evangelization. However,
with the passage of time, the products from mission schools were able to be engaged in the clerical sections of the colonial government service and the commercial firms.

The colonial government had no strong and well-thought out plan and programme for the expansion of education in Orsu clan. Though they appreciated the necessity of western education in furthering their cause in the colony, they initially paid little or no attention to it simply because the missions were already in it. It was afterwards that the colonial administration gave support to the missions in providing education in the area albeit in a low key. For instance, it is on record that as at 1921, out of the 1574 primary schools in the whole of Eastern Nigeria, only 20 were government owned (Falola et al, 1991). Simply put, colonial policy on education was a policy of restricted direct involvement in the building and management of education institutions. In the course of time, after the local people had discovered the importance of western education for improved and better living, the consequence of colonial government’s policy on education was the collaboration of the Christian missions with the autonomous communities in the development of education in the locality. It should be noted that lack of funds adversely affected the range of subjects taught as well as the strength and quality of staff recruited by the missions. The colonial education did not mean well for the indigenous people of Orsu clan and Nigerians in general. That is why the erudite Walter Rodney in his treatise asserts

The main purpose of the colonial school system was to train Africans to help man the local administration at the lowest ranks and to private capitalist firms owned by Europeans. In effect, that meant selecting a few Africans to participate in the domination and exploitation of the people as a whole. It is not an educational system that grew out of the {local} environment or one that was designed to promote the most rational use of material and social resources. It was not an educational system designed to give young people confidence and pride as members of African societies, but one which sought to instill a sense of deference towards all that was European and capitalist. Education in Europe was dominated by the capitalist class. The same bias was automatically transferred to Africa; and to make matters worse the racism and cultural boastfulness harboured by capitalists were also included in the package of colonial education. Colonial schooling was education for subordination, exploitation, creation of mental confusion and the development of underdevelopment (Rodney, 2005, 293)

In effect, colonial education was designed by the colonial masters to train those who would help them in facilitating maximization of profit in the colony. Furthermore, the colonial education, it should be understood, had its aspect of divisiveness it brought on the indigenous people. According to Nwabughuogo (2009)

Western education, itself a missionary activity and colonial governments reinforced the divisive tendencies in African societies. There were noticeable divisions between those who had acquired western education (usually called the educated) and those who had not (called the illiterates). The educated often treated illiterates as inferior and this created enmities between the two. Even among the educated there were still discriminations centered on the type of school
attended, the level of education attained, the type of course pursued and the quality of certificate obtained (Nwabughuogu, 2009, 33-34).

Nwabughuogu went on to pinpoint other areas of division and friction occasioned by western education during colonial rule and perhaps have continued till today – those who attended government schools considered themselves superior to students of mission and private schools. Even among the mission schools, some were considered superior to others and products of such schools regarded as superior to those from schools seen as less prestigious. This development has painfully not led to harmonious, collective and formidable nation-building.

Colonialism brought with it the issue of urbanization, the change in a society or region when its population migrates from rural to urban areas. It is understood that before the coming of the white man, there was hardly any urban center in this entity called Nigeria that attracted the attention of different ethnic groups to migrate to it as was experienced during colonial period. Some urban centers sprang up during colonial era as a result of the activities of the Europeans such as road construction, railway construction, mining among others. The emergence of urban centers in Nigeria led to able-bodied men and women leaving their localities including people from Orsu clan to look for paid jobs and for trade. The desertion of the villages by the young men and women to urban centers for economic activities stripped the villages of their liveliness.

Furthermore, settlement of various ethnic groups in urban centers from time to time lead to conflicts and clashes which result to large scale loss of lives and property. On several occasions, many Orsu people have lost their lives and property to such inter-ethnic skirmishes in some parts of northern Nigeria urban centers. The nature of settlement initiated by the Europeans where we have European quarters and others was copied by Nigerians such as the Igbo quarters in the northern Nigeria; the Hausa quarters in Igboland and so on. This kind of settlement promoted and still promotes racial segregation and discrimination and does not promote nation-building and national integration. According to Thomas Hodgkin, “...breaking down of towns people into physically separate communities different in social origin, language… each largely confined within its own ‘world’, is inevitably a factor making for communal conflict (Hodgkin, 2009). This precisely is what happens in every part of Nigeria which started since colonial era and survives presently.

On the political sphere, the colonial masters could not directly govern the conquered people. This necessitated the issuance of warrants to men the white men thought were rulers of the local people. The white men could not easily identify the traditional rulers of the people. The people the colonial masters gave warrants later became swollen-headed and abused the power given to them by the white man. They became corrupt and unleashed terror on their people, identifying more with the Europeans whom they were accountable to.

It should be noted that the so-called warrant chiefs became stooges of the colonial masters working in tandem to exploit the indigenous people. Sometimes the warrant chiefs were disgraced publicly when they fall out of favour with their employers who regarded them as mere tools to achieve their purpose – exploitation.

Furthermore, the warrant chiefs in the clan were reportedly autocratic and despotic having been given the powers that were hitherto unknown to them. They used this power to
acquire illegal wealth and enriched themselves at the expense of the local people (Ezulike, 2014). It should be understood that the modern day traditional rulers (Ezes) are traceable to the institution of the warrant chief system instituted by the colonialists. In other words, the indigenous people could not return to what obtained in the entire clan before the coming of the white man who brought disruption and chaos in the political system. This further gave rise to balkanization of the former autonomous communities to new autonomous communities fuelled by power-seekers to carve a kingdom for themselves. The implication is that brothers no longer see themselves as one, rather they see themselves as opponents and foes.

**Gains of Colonialism**

The picture painted of colonialism by several Afrocentric writers has been that nothing good came out of the intercourse between the colonial masters and the colonized people as benefit to the latter. Most times, the position has been that whatever appeared to be benefits were not intended to be so. In effect, the benefits were taken to be “crumbs that fell from the masters’ table”. Admittedly, the coming of the white man into this part of the globe was based on self-interest, the assertion of Lord Lugard in his ‘Dual Mandate’ notwithstanding. He posited “that Europe is in Africa for the mutual benefit of her own industrial classes and that of the native races in their progress to a higher plane; that the benefit can be made reciprocal; and that it is the aim and desire of civilized administration to fulfill this dual mandate (Onwubiko, 1973). However, efforts will be made in this discourse to highlight some of the areas colonialism impacted positively in the lives of the indigenous people of Orsu clan.

**Social Factors: Health** The indigenous people had traditional ways of healing and checkmating some sicknesses and diseases before the coming of the white man. The West African coasts were tagged “white man’s grave” because malaria claimed the lives of many white men that visited there earlier, but the local people were living and surviving the malaria with the locally prepared medicine. This should be noted was before the discovery of quinine. However, the Europeans handed down to the local people the scientific methods of healing and preventing killer diseases by way of establishing hospitals and dispensaries, as well as through inoculation and vaccination which in all ramifications could be conceded to be more effective and efficient, for instance, Ebenator Health Centre, Eziawa Health Centre, Ihitenansa Health Centre, Ihiteoweri Health Centre, Ihioma Health Centre and others scattered all over the clan.

According to Egonu (2014), before the coming of the white man in this part of the globe, many women lost their lives as well as those of their babies in the course of child-birth. He further said there were many women that gave birth to many children and could not account for any, but with the introduction of orthodox medicine, many complications arising as a result of child delivery were taken care of. According to him in the olden days, if a woman was giving birth and could not, there was no remedy as the woman and the baby would be lost, but with the introduction of Caesarean Section, such deaths were reduced to the barest minimum. Furthermore, many epidemics such as small pox, chicken pox and other related diseases were subdued or eradicated completely. In view of the fore-going, one cannot fail to give credit to the Europeans in this aspect although the facilities were grossly inadequate considering the
population of the local people. However, firm foundations for future and further development of orthodox medical practice had been laid.

**Western Education:** One of the most lasting impacts made by the Europeans in this part of the globe was on education sector. Through the introduction of western education, the indigenous people were taught English language which is one of the world’s most popular languages. The language facilitated interactions between indigenous people and other Nigerians as well as other peoples of the world. It has been the language of communication in schools and almost every other subject is taught through English language. In Nigeria as well as other Anglophone countries, English language is the official language of communication. The impact of the language on the local people cannot be overemphasized. It should be noted that through the language, the indigenous people’s horizon became widened, they were able as they read books written in the language to reason like the Europeans and also see things in the eyes of the Europeans, knowing the world better. Every community in the clan has at least two primary schools.

**Urbanization:** There is no major urban center in Orsu clan. Colonialism brought about the establishment of new urban centers outside the clan as well as the development of traditional urban centers. It was as a result of colonial rule that towns such as Enugu, Port Harcourt, Aba, Owerri, Onitsha, Orlu and others developed and became known urban centers in Igboland. It should equally be noted that traditional urban centers particularly such as Lagos, Kano, Ibadan, Sokoto among others developed. The indigenous people migrated to these urban centers to seek for job or to engage in one economic activity or the other in order to improve their living conditions. According to Afigbo (1980)

Urbanization proved a powerful catalyst among the peoples of the Eastern Provinces, ranking only second to formal schools as a means of education and enlightening people. Many who had no opportunity to go to school or who went to school but dropped out prematurely went to the new urban centers where they became enlightened by what might be called on-the-job training. It was these men, these “sons abroad” or “abroadians,” as they are called in local slang, who started the movement for the formation of town and village unions. By the middle of forties these unions were starting to make their influence felt in the villages. Apart from helping their members … and providing a forum for helping fellow townsmen in need, the village unions formed a channel by which the “abroadians” brought to their villages the desirable new things they had heard and seen in the urban towns.

The knowledge, enlightenment, and experience acquired as a result of urbanization propelled the indigenous people of Orsu clan to replicate them in their various communities. This gave rise to modern town union halls for social activities; modern markets such as Ekeututu International market in OrsuIhiteukwa, and Afor-Awo market in Awo-Idemili.

**Religion:** The colonial government in collaboration with the missionaries made positive impact on the religious life of the indigenous people. The Europeans introduced new method of worship and relating to God by way of Christian religion. The local people hitherto worshipped and
revered the deity call Chukwu through some intermediaries such as Nnumafor, Ogwugwu, Edemiri, Awamiri, Anyanwuna Ezelu, Agwunsi, Urasi among others. The advent of Christianity revolutionized the local mode of worship and its attendant repugnant and obnoxious practices. Such obnoxious practices include: killing of twins, human sacrifices, burying of a king, wealthy or influential man with slaves, discarding of babies that had upper teeth first, throwing away of people who died of swollen stomach into evil forests, slave trading, discrimination against the so-called outcast, refusal to marry daughters of the land born on certain market days in some parts of the clan and other unwelcome and unwholesome practices. It should be noted that conversion into Christianity was not easy and the white men in their wisdom started by gradually converting the children and the less-privileged in the society. With the introduction of western education where reading, writing and arithmetic were taught, the white men achieved their goal. According to Ezulike (2014), initially, the church served as a place of worship and school. Worship usually took place on Sundays while school activities took place from Monday to Friday.

Initially, the reputable men in the society such as titled men and the wealthy refused to send their children to school because they saw the new religion and western education as evil which had come to turn their society upside down. They rather sent their domestic slaves and wards. Naturally, the new religion was appealing to the less privileged as it preached equality of all men before God. It was ironical that these people who were thought to be worthless, indolent and doom-laden turned out to become fortunate and well placed in the society. These people who were looked down upon later became eminent men in the society occupying important positions in the colonial government as well as in the traditional society even as warrant chiefs.

**Employment Opportunities:** Colonial rule offered job opportunities to some indigenous people through which they earned their livelihood. Some indigenous people were employed as court clerks, court messengers, cooks, interpreters, road workers, miners and so on. The colonial government in collaboration with the missionaries established hospitals, clinics and dispensaries for health care delivery. This resulted to improved health care system and indigenous people were employed to assist the Europeans in these establishments.

The colonial government widened many hitherto footpaths into motorable roads and also constructed new roads connecting various communities in the clan and beyond. Though most of these roads were constructed through free and forced labour, however, the white man employed some indigenous people who were given some stipend in the course of the road construction. It should be pointed out that the indigenous people frowned at the opening up of roads as they said the white man used them to exploit their resources.

**Postal System:** A postal system was introduced by the white man. The indigenous people benefited from the introduction of the postal system. Not only that some of the local people were employed to work in the postal agencies, but messages by way of letters could be sent and received quickly through the postal system. In this way, indigenous people who resided at urban centers could be heard from and vice versa. Examples of such post offices are located in Ebenator, Awo-Idemili, and Ihitenansa among others.
Electricity: It is true that electricity was not yet extended to Orsu clan during colonial period, but the local people became aware of the existence of such source of power as they resided in the urban centers. Following the departure of the colonial masters at the end of colonial rule, in the course of time, they made concerted efforts to replicate what they saw in urban centers in the clan.

Economic Factors: The colonial government introduced some far-reaching economic reforms that revolutionized the indigenous economic system. Long before the coming of the British, the economic system was based on barter-exchange of goods, property, services, etc for other goods without use of money. In view of the challenge the barter system posed, some form of money such as manila, iron bars and cowrie shells were introduced at different times. These also had their own challenges. The British introduced pound sterling which was portable, convenient and easy to handle thereby eliminating the cumbersomeness of other means of exchange that existed before it. This marked a new dawn in the economic system of the indigenous people and by extension the entire country.

It should be noted that the Industrial Revolution in Europe resulted in the need for overseas markets for sale of manufactured goods to ensure decongestion of the glut in Europe. On the other hand, the need arose for acquisition of raw materials to feed the industries in Europe. Therefore, palm produce was needed for the manufacture of such products as soap, margarine, cooking fats, candles and lubricating greases (Usoro, 1980). It should therefore be noted that it was the mass importation of palm products into Britain from Orsu clan and eastern Nigeria that contributed, in the main towards the dragging of the peasantry in this part of the globe generally into the “votex of modern international economic mechanism… a cooperator in the economic commonwealth of the world” (Njoku, 1980). Though the trade, it has been stressed was on unequal basis as the British obtained the local products at a cheaper rate and the finished goods they brought to the indigenous people to buy were sold at exorbitant rates. The point being made here is that through this trade, the indigenous people were integrated fully into the international legitimate trade. To enable the local people get money, the British encouraged both local and international trade in Orsu clan. They encouraged mass production and exportation of palm products through which the local people were able to get money to buy the British imported goods for their consumption.

Banks and Banking: A bank simply put, is a financial institution or establishment that uses money deposited by customers for investment, pays it out when required, gives loans on interest, and exchanges currency. The British introduced their banking system here in Nigeria through the establishment of banks. Though these banks were not built in Orsu during the colonial period, the indigenous people who migrated to urban centers where these banks were located made use of them and benefited by way of saving their hard-earned money. Prior to the coming of the Europeans, the indigenous people kept their money (iron bars, manila and cowrie shells) in earthenware pots which they buried in the ground in their homes. One of the disadvantages of such keeping of money was that in the event of death, if a person who kept such money did not
inform anybody, such money was lost. According to Okolie (2014), such hidden pots of money had been stumbled on in recent times by those digging foundations of buildings.

**Political Factors:** Indirect rule was recommended to the British government by Lord Lugard. The British colonial rule in Nigeria therefore adopted and used the concept of indirect rule in administering the local people. Indirect rule is an administration that made use of the existing traditional political institution. In this situation, the British officials were supervisors of the local administration and so did not administer the people directly. In Orsu clan and Igbo land, owing to the absence of a potentate that controlled or ruled a large area, the British introduced warrant chief system – a situation where some people were selected or appointed and were given warrants in each autonomous community. The warrant chiefs through their activities and association with the white man whom they represented gained some experiences in the art of modern day governance. The warrant chiefs through their relations with the colonialists whom they represented in the communities developed white man’s taste, built and lived in brick and zinc houses thereby bringing houses with fine architectural design to the locality.

**Conclusion**

The pains of colonialism were overwhelming that the gains became almost invisible. The white man tried all he could to derive the much gain that abound in Orsu clan. Whatever gains he made were never invested in Orsu clan but were rather carted away to the metropole for development. The killing of local industries and discouragement of production of food crops in favour of cash crops were among the evils of colonialism. However the experience the indigenous people garnered as a result of the intercourse has gone a long way in reshaping their lives.

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