

THE AWKA PEOPLE

By

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DEDICATION

This is Dedicated To the Young
Men and Women of Awka Town,
Who ask the Question: Who are We?

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INTRODUCTION

Oyibo ka mmadi,
Ma na Oka kacha mba!

*(The Whitemen is creative above all men,
But the Oka man comes next to him!)
-from an Oka war chant (okili)*

This is the story of the Oka people, the fathers that begat us.

It is the story of the Oka people as they were the British came into their lives and seized control of their country and their destiny, and later merged their city – state with the great body politic known as Nigeria. Oka lost her independence then, and ceased to be a free self-governing nation.

The Oka people, before A.D. 1905 (when the British came), were a great people, resourceful, inventive and courageous. They were a race of specialists, working in iron, copper, brass and bronze; skilled in the carving of the wooden implements and ornaments; in farming; in the practice of medicine; and in the pursuit of wisdom. They did not belong to any known clan in Igboland, neither had they any known relatives. They referred to themselves simply as “Ebe Anyi” – our stock.

This is their story, based on oral tradition.

I have set down the story as it was told to me. The only liberty I have allowed myself is that where there are conflicting versions of the same event I have picked that one which appeared to me to be the most probable.

Numerous persons in Oka town can remember how, at one time or the other, I had confronted them, whether privately, or at social functions, or at burial ceremonies, and had tried to glean from them the much they knew, or had heard, of Oka history. All these people are the sources of information, and my authority. The story is their story. I am merely the narrator. Reading this, they will easily recognize who each had contributed to the story.

I started collecting what is told here long before the Nigerian Civil War while I was still living in Lagos, but during the war the notes were destroyed. After the war, I started collecting again, and this is the result of my labours.

“Onwu anara egbu nti”, the oka people say. “The ear does not suffer death”. Something happens and is told as a story. Then, one day, somewhere, the hearer remembers it, and re-tells it. And so it goes on from ear to ear, from mouth to mouth, down the ages. Exaggeration over the years there may be in any such story, and a whittling down there may also be, but the core of the story remains the same. “Archeological research”, Alexander Horne is quoted to have written in ‘King Solomon’s Temple’, “is constantly demonstrating how dangerous it is to question or deny the veracity of tradition, or an ancient until we know all the facts.”

I cannot possibly mention all those who helped me in the compilation of this story. They are too many. Some have contributed whole nuggets of Oka history, some just a single fact, or even just a name, and some have merely confirmed what others had told. I am grateful to them all.

I must, however, single out for special mention, and of course, thanks, the under-mentioned persons, who, along with many others gave me the inner core of Oka history. It was their patience and understanding, over many sittings, that made it possible for me to piece together a coherent story of my people. They are:-

Ozo Nwokafor Ndum (my father) – ozo Chikwuchil – of Amudo Village
Ozo Chinwuko Okeke – Ozonyilagha – of Umuanaga Village
Nnoneyelu Ebem, of Umuoramma Village
Nwejiofor Nwiyi, of Amudo Village
Ozo Nwanna Nwudozo – Owulubuego – of Umuogbu Village
Louis Ejiofor Okeke, of Umuayom Village
Nwokeabia Anene Nwuye, of Nkwelle Village
Ozo Nwuba Morah – Ozo Ikwodiaku – of Amikwo Village
Emmanuel Nwune Nkwontah, of Nkwolle Village
Ozo Jonathan Nweke Obuekwe – ozo Akalaka – of Umuogbu village
Ifedora Nwamgba, of Umudioka village
Immanuel Onwuemelie Uyanwune, of Amudo Village
Ozo Federick Anaekokwu Onwuemelie-ozo Enechiodo – of Umuenechi Village
Nathan Nwokafor Ibe, of Amudo Village
Nweke Nwikwu, of Amachalla village
Samuel Nwanenye Nwosu of Nkwelle village
Nwabuikwu Okafor Afuzuo, of Ifite-Oka village
Joseph Ekunife Okoye, of Amudo Village
Richard Chikwuneke Anagbogu of Amachalla village
Paul Okafor Aguiyi, of Amudo village
Moses Nwabueze Okeke – Ifite-Oka village
Benjamin Ndubuisi Ndumanya – of Ifite-Oka village
Ozo Nwoguguo Chikwuogor – ozo Jeluo- of Umubele village
Muotoh Ekwunife, of Umukwa village
Ozo Elias Oyeoka Offodile – Nzechimal of Umuayom village
Ozo Nwogbo Okafor – Onukaligbo – of Umuogwal village
Ozo Ikwunne Mbada – ozo Mbada - of Umuogwal village
Ozo Nnaemeke Okafor – ozo Anonivbekwu – of Umudioka village
Ozo Izueke Umesie, of Ndiagu - Obinofia town, Ezeagu Local Government Area,
and The Elders of Agulu Village, Umana town, Ezeagu Local Government Area.

Concerning the proof of the historical facts contained in this narrative, I have left that task to future researchers. My simple aim has been to set down these past events, taken from those who can still remember them, before they are completely lost to us, and to hand some down to our children in a written form.

There has been no archeological work in Oka town yet. No doubt it will be rewarding when it is embarked upon, and the existence of Universities in Nigeria makes it only a matter of time. When that happens, these stories of the past will have physical evidence to support them. Until then, we have only the oral tradition, “the oral transmission of memories from one person to another.”

In the title of the book I have used the current spelling of “Awka”, to make it clear what I am writing about. Thereafter, I have reverted to the older spelling “Oka”, which what some people say is simpler. The change in the spelling of the name from “Oka” to “Awka” was made by the British Colonial Office in 1908. According to the researches of Dr. Nwibe Onejeme, Barrister-at-Law, of Umuokpu Village, the change of spelling was made by the Colonial Secretary, Mr. F.S. James, in 1908, through Government Notice No. 729, published in the Southern Nigerian Gazette of 1908, No. 42, Volume 3 at page 8511.

Oka people have a language of their own, which is variation, or dialect, of the Igbo tongue. One outstanding peculiarity of that Oka language is a sound not found in other Igbo dialects. It is a sound that is made of slightly parting the lips and blowing out air to make a sound that is between “v” and “b”, but without actually pronouncing “v” as “v” or “b” as “b”. This peculiar sound is also found among the Bini, and in the Benin alphabet it is written as “vb”, as in the name “Egharevb”. I have adopted these letters of the Benin alphabet, “vb” for this Oka sound.

The “vb” in Oka dialect would be pronounced as “f” in Onitsha dialect, or as “h” in Owerri dialect. For example, where the Oka man would say:
“Ivbe nkee ivbe kwe!” (This is extraordinary!)

The Onitsha man would say:
“Ife nka ife kwa!”

And the owerri man would say
“Ihe nka ihe kwa.

So, in many cases, where other Igbos use the letter “f” Oka use “vb”. Other examples:
“efe [chance] is “evbe” in Oka
“fe ta” [come over] is “evbe te” in Oka
“Afamefuna” [a name] is “Avbamevbune” in Oka.
And the exclamation, “Unu afukwa nu” (you see my trouble?! Is in Oka language
“ivbilivbivbi!!”

off course, Oka people use “f” in some words, such as “fuo” go, “futa” come out, “fuli ya” take it from him by force.

Another peculiarity of Oka language is that Oka people do not pronounce the final vowel sounds “i” and “u”, like other Igbos, where they occur. For example, in other dialects the word “malu” (know), “ralu” or “rali” (choose) are pronounced as written, but the Okas drop the “u” and “i” and pronounce the words as “mal”, “ral”.

These peculiar Oka spellings and manner of pronunciation of words will be used throughout this book.

Up to 1905 Oka town was a sovereign nation-state, self-contained, self-sufficient and prosperous, with a well defined territory. By their system of government the Oka people were the freest people in the world. They were republicans. No one man ruled over them [Oka enwere eze]. In their society they regarded each other as equals. They were ruled by their laws, in the making of which every citizen participated. They managed

their affairs in the democratic assembly of the whole people, called "Izu Oka", to which every citizen had the right to attend. The womenfolk had their own assemblies.

The nearest thing to kings that the Oka people had was the Society of ozo title-holders. The members of this Society had traditional functions in Oka, and had a part in the management of the affairs of the town. They declared wars and made peace, on behalf of the town; and they settled disputes. But they ruled no one. They were just "primus inter pares" –first among equals.

When the British came, they wanted to make Onwurah Uzoku the paramount Chief of all Oka. But Onwurah declined saying that anyone who allowed himself to be made king of Oka would be struck dead by the gods of Oka instantly!.

The government of Oka could be likened to that of ancient Athens, in the heyday of Athenian greatness; or such other Greek city states as Miletus and Corinth. But whereas the executive organs of Izu Oka were the Age-Grades (Age-Grade being a grouping of people born within three years of one another, counting upwards).

The Greeks were said to be the inventors of democratic government, from whom did the Oka people learn their own? The answer is from no one. They developed their form of government themselves.

Our story concerns Oka when she was truly a nation-state, when she was independent and free, and when she had, by her own initiative and enterprise, created customs, her own system of government, her own religion and view of life, her unique social and political organizations, her own philosophy; and had evolved those other attributes that made Oka so much admired of other people: Umu-Anyanwu! Some called the Oka people, Children of the Sun!!

Chapter 1

What Oka Looked Like, Pen Pictures of Oka

*"Go to Oka the land of the blacksmiths".
-Colonial office charged to Major Moorhouse (1904)*

What was Oka like when the first Whitemen came within her borders? How did the Oka people appear to the strangers? What did Oka look like?

The glimpses one gets of how Oka appeared to outsiders who came into Oka town towards the end of the 19th century, and the beginning of the 20th century the period when European chronicles were able to penetrate the town) are both fleeting and tantalizing. The pen pictures of Oka available are meager in the extreme.

Nonetheless, something has been written of Oka, and hereunder are some excerpts from some of the writings the author has been able to come across.

In one of her works on Igbo History, entitled "Igbo Worlds", Professor Elizabeth Isichei, formerly of Jos University, quoted an account (A pen portrait really) of Oka, written by one Mrs. T.J. Dennis, in the year 1899. Mrs. Dennis, one of the early Christian Missionaries to visit Oka town towards the end of the 19th century, wrote as follows (quoted with the kind permission of Professor Isichei previously obtained):

"About 9.am we drew near to Oka, and were cordially greeted by such of the inhabitants as we met on the road.

Oka is by far the best and largest town in the Ibo country with the exception, perhaps, of the above-named Aro. The Oka people themselves say that it takes from sunrise to sunset to walk through their town, but this is probably an exaggeration. It is situated at about forty to forty-five miles to the east of Onitsha. The majority of the people are blacksmiths, and in pursuance of their craft travel to every part of the Ibo land, and even beyond its borders. There is scarcely a town or village without its small, primitive smithy, in which the Oka smith not only sharpens and repairs, but manufactures from the iron and brass imported by traders, the various weapons, tools, and ornaments in use amongst the Igbo people. They never seem to be molested, and contrive to keep the peace with all neighbours without fighting. They are never accompanied by their wives on their itineration, and are seldom away longer than three months at a time. Before going to any town thy sacrifice to their gods for two or three days that they may be kept safe from all danger, and that they may prosper in their work. Most of the men we saw in Oka wore some English article of clothing. For instance, one man would wore a sailor-hat, another man a pair of trousers, another a waist-coat. We were surprised to see some of the young men carry whips similar to those used by carters in England. A great many were armed with Snider rifles, and all carried themselves with a dignified air, or perhaps, more correctly, a sort of swagger, as though all the world belonged to them.

We were saluted by one young man with a most graceful bow and an English "Good morning", as he raised his sailor-hat. The Oka people certainly seem more civilized said

it will easily be seen that the Oka men would make excellent evangelists for the Ibo country, if only they could be converted to Christ.

The women dress their hair most elaborately. Some whom we saw had fantastic ornaments on their heads, not unlike the comb of a cock in shape, and reaching about an inch from the forehead right over the head to the neck. This erection was covered with some red material, and on either side were fastened six pearl buttons.

As we passed through the town we were struck with its clean, well-kept houses and roads. The people certainly take a great pride in having their homes nice. Each house stood in a compound surrounded by a high mud wall. There were small loop holes in the walls at equal distances, through which a gun could be fired in the event of an enemy attacking the town. In each compound also there was generally at least one high tree with a platform in its branches, from which a good look-out could be obtained. We noticed also two large, square watch-towers, three times the height of ordinary houses.

When we arrived we were at once directed to the house of our host, who seemed proud to entertain us. As he was a chief of very high standing his house was an elaborate one. The walls were beautifully smooth and painted over with all sorts of queer designs. The door, boxes, and other wooden articles were quaintly carved. Here we rested during the heat of the day and in the afternoon went into a large open space, where we preached to the huge crowd which soon gathered around us. We did not disperse till dark. On Tuesday morning we preached in several of the villages, and in the afternoon went to the Oka market.

This market is a very large one. The women from all the neighbouring towns came here to trade. There must have been 2,000 women in the market when we visited it."

Author's comments on this Report:

The oka master blacksmith on his journeys did not carry any load – his apprentices carried their belongings, while each master blacksmith aimed himself with his rifle at his back and his sword tied round his waist. He went in front, and his people followed behind him for their protection.

The confidence and bearing of the Oka man were proverbial, but while the Oka man walked the earth with pride he was not arrogant. Until the British came old Oka was an empire, she ruled no one, and, equally, she was ruled by no one.

The obsession with cleanliness by Oka people in their homes and surroundings has persisted till this day. Not only did people wash their bodies several times a day, but their homes and surroundings were swept and cleaned every day, sometimes two times a day.

The facility for the Oka people for languages has endured. It is no wonder that they spoke some English, because they traded with the English in the Riverine areas. Whenever the Oka person – man or woman-went to live a new place, his first priority was to learn the language of the people; and within six months he would be communicating with his hosts in their own tongue. When the British Administrative officers first arrived in oka one of the things that amazed them was that there was

practically no major Nigerian language – no matter how seemingly obscure – that one would not find an Oka speaker in Oka town. It is common (even today) to find Oka men and women who spoke several languages like the natives. But one would not suspect this from their appearance. Oka people were natural born linguists.

The painting and carving that the visitors observed in Onwurah's compound for it was to Onwurah's that they came – was typical of the house of an ozo titled-man of Oka. Onwurah was an ozo titled-man, and what they saw in his house was typical of all Oka. Oka decorated everything they used. Mud walls were washed with red mud, and rubbed with stones by the women, at least once in five days, and also floors; some used well paintings.

Women had a proud place in Oka society, and while some of their labours differed from men's because of sex, they had equal status with men right from the beginning.

From this account of the year 1899 some aspects of Oka are glimpsed-wood carving, cleanliness, organization, commerce, importance of women, interior of an Ozo-titled man's house, and work in iron.

The report is a tribute to the perspicacity of the early European travelers, because the portrait the writer made of Oka town was quite like the original. The women's hairstyle she observed was called "Ishi-enu", worn on important occasions. Oka people sometimes dressed in the costume of the people among whom they worked to give themselves variety.

Another picture of Oka appeared in a Government publication, called the 'Onitsha Province: Intelligence Book "A", which is kept in the National Archives at Enugu. It is said to have been copied from an earlier intelligence Book – "Asaba Intelligence Book". The report, apparently made immediately after a visit to Oka in 1904 by the British soldiers who came at the invitation of Agulu to put an end to the Amikwo-Agulu war, was reproduced by persons who visited Oka town in 1910 – at the time when it had become the District Headquarters. Part of the 1904 report reads as follows:

- "1. Name of Village – Awka (Oka): Large town situated about 36 miles due east from Onitsha waterside, composed of several large quarters amongst which the principal ones are: (a) Agulu (b) Umuzu-ocha (c) Amikwo (d) Ezioka (e) Isiagu (f) Umudi-oka (g) Ama-Enyi (h) Nwele-Oka (i) Umuokpu
- "...3 Population – The population consists of traveling blacksmiths, farmers and doctors. The C.M.S has a station here.
- "...4 Name of chief or headman – Adu, Ezeani, Onyema, Okolobu, Nwokonye Nwatie and Onwurah.
The water from the spring is excellent. It would be an excellent place for the Sub-District Headquarters and Native Council, as generally speaking they are enlightened people owing probably to the fact that they travel a good deal.
- "5 Type or Race – Ibo, visited in June, 1904, in connection with a feud which existed with two of the quarters "Amikwo and Agulu". Very poor yams and

dwarfed corn-numerous monkeys which the native do not kill as they are sacred.

- "7. Direction of trade – with what Villages – Onitsha, Idah, Aboh, Bendi, Old Calabar, Brass, Opobo.

Again, in a document entitled "Memorandum of Instructions to the Officer Commanding the Onitsha Hinterland Patrol", written by the British High Commissioner in Lagos to the Officer-in-charge of the Onitsha Hinterland Patrol, and enclosed in the 1904, (this document is found in the Public Record Office in England) something about Oka appeared in it as follows:

"The object of this Patrol is to pacify and bring generally under control the country lying East of the River Niger, roughly speaking – the area situated between Ogrugu on the Anambra River, Munankor on the Nigeria and 7010' degree of longitude Separate instructions have already been given for the concentration of the Column, which will leave Asaba on the 15th November by the S.W. "Valiant" and disembark at Ogrugu accompanied by the A.D.C. at Asaba as Political Officer.

- "5. One of the most importance towns in the Hinterland of Onitsha is the town of Oka, commonly called the "Blacksmiths country". A celebrated Juju called "Agballa" still exercise great power at Oka. It is largely consulted by the Ijos from the lower Niger in cases of witchcraft etc. it must be destroyed and its baneful influence brought to an end.
- "6. I think it will be advisable to establish a post in the Onistha Hinterland on termination of the patrol and am inclined to think that Oka would be a suitable centre but leave it to the O.C. to decide.

Next, in his Dispatch to the Colonial Office, dated 22nd July 1905, on the "Field Operations" October 1904 to June 1905, the High Commissioner of Southern Nigeria Sir Walter Egerton, wrote as follows [touching Oka].

- "...4. The most important work done was that the effected by the Column under Major H.C. Moorhouse, R.A, in the Onitsha Hinterland where a stretch of country from 20 to 30 miles wide extending from the Anambra Creek to Oguta, was visited. A great portion of this country was absolutely unknown, the inhabitants refusing to permit either Europeans or Native traders to enter it...

This force started from Ogrugru, on the Anambra Creek, on November 18th. The whole of the country visited is thickly populated, large towns with from five to ten thousand inhabitant's occurring every few miles. The force frequently operated in detached columns visiting, as far as possible, every town and explaining the Government requirements.....

"During the expedition Major Moorhouse collected 1,092 Rifles and 9,170 cap guns in the Onitsha Hinterland. A new station has been established at Oka – 25 miles East of Onitsha" [that is, Awka Government Station]. "Throughout the

whole territory the native Chiefs have promised to abandon cannibalism, slave dealing, human sacrifice and have agreed to the establishment of Native Courts for the trial of all offences.

"Oka is interesting as the Headquarters of a very large community of blacksmiths and copper smiths and men from this place are found in the most distant parts of the Protectorate. They execute wonderfully good work with the most primitive apparatus. I traversed the whole of this District myself a month after the patrol completed its work and though it was deemed advisable that I should be accompanied by a considerable Escort, never met with any opposition. Though I frequently bicycled far ahead along the native paths, I saw no sign of hostility though the unusual sight of my machine caused great consternation to most of the people we met".

During the operations of the Hinterland patrol, Major H.C. Moorhouse himself, its Commander, sent regular reports to his superiors. His first report was in December 1904, but the second report, in which he mentioned Oka, was dated 3rd January, 1905, (available at the National Archives at Enugu). In it he wrote as follows:

"I shall probably move to Oka either tomorrow or the next day; three out of five quarters of that town have already sent deputations to me with messages of submission".

And, in the third report, "Progress Report No. 3", dated January 21st, 1905 (also to be found in the National Archives, Enugu), Major Moorhouse wrote as follows:-

"In continuation of my report of January 3rd I have the honour to inform your Excellency that I moved to OKA on the 5th inst. and was received in the most friendly manner, the women and children being still in the town and huts erected in the place chosen for our camp. I held a big meeting the following day which the head Chiefs of the six quarters attended accompanied by a following that I estimated at between two and three thousand. The majority of the natives were better clothed and more intelligent looking than any others previously met with and the town is undoubtedly a big trade centre". (The surprise of visitors, who encountered, in the heart of "darkest Africa", such enlightened and such intelligent people as the Okas, was always recorded. What there explorers saw was quite flattering to the Oka people. Such a star shining with its won radiance). The report continued.

"I explained to the people that the Government had come to stay that its object was to open up the country to trade with free roads and free markets which could not fail to be an advantage to travelers and traders like themselves: in return the Government insisted on their giving up human sacrifice, slave dealing, casswood poisoning and their "juju" which was only a method of obtaining slaves; also that as the Government now protect them they would be required to give up all their war guns, i.e. cap guns and rifles and guns, anything to destroy, but there were no houses and only the approaches to and exit from it were somewhat peculiar and weird. They expressed themselves as being pleased with the idea of the establishment of a Government station near their town and gave me a considerable amount of assistance in selecting a site; the one I finally settled on is about 1/4 hour from the AGULU quarter of OKA, is high and open on three sides, has an excellent water supply, a spring for drinking purposes in a ravine which cuts into the hills about 100 yards from the site of the European quarters (Okika Spring) and a stream about 1/4 mile away for washing, bathing etc. (Obibia Stream);

the top of the hill is a plateau with plenty of room to build European quarters, it then slopes sharply and again becomes flat the ground falling away sharply and from the second plateau which should ensure good drainage. Lt. Wayling with 2 sections "E" Company who I purpose to leave there as Governor is now on his way back there to start the station and Mr. Boyle Political Officer also returns there as soon as I can spare him which I hope will be in about a week's time. I propose to give Mr. Boyle instructions that, as soon as the buildings are fairly under way, he is to make a complete tour of the District, revisiting all the villages visited by the column and on his return to report himself to the Divisional Commissioner, after which the District shall be considered handed over for civil administration. I have so informed the Divisional Commissioner who has expressed himself satisfied with this arrangement. It will be necessary to provide a relief for Mr. Boyle who is already overdue for leave and I would respectfully suggest that an experienced officer be sent to replace him as I am strongly of the opinion that the District will require a strong hand and constant visiting for some time to prevent it lapsing into its former condition". (It was at this meeting that Okolobu Ezikuno, the spokesman for Oka made his famous statement: "Oka bu onwa, anyi anara egbuji, ma nayi anara egbu ede" (Oka is the moon that neither kills yam, nor cocoyams). The rest of the Report reads:-

"On January 6th I sent messengers to ENUGU, a big town nearly due West of OKA an on the direct road to ONITSHA, to say that I wished to see the chiefs; my messengers were threatened, and an impertinent answer given to my message. I accordingly visited ENUGU on the early morning of the 8th with 5 sections, a maxim and a 2.95 gun, leaving my camp at OKA. Owing I think, partly to out early start, and partly to a sharp shower of rain that fell just before we reached the town we met with no opposition outside, but directly we got inside there were a number of armed men running about among the houses; we soon had them well on the run and chased them through a portion of the town. I eventually collected the troops in an open space at the foot of a small hill. About 9: am, 2 natives came in and said that the town wished to come in but while I was talking to them a crowd collected at the top of the hill shouting defiance and waving their guns. I gave them a shrapnel from the 2.95 and went up the hill after them and got two more shrapnel into them from the top of the hill as they were running away. I sent out parties in all directions keeping the gun and carriers with me. These parties returned about 11:30 and reported the people on the run everywhere. A few people came while we were breakfasting and by 3p.m., I had got in 2 small chiefs and about 100 others. I told them I must see the Chief's at OKA the following day and returned to camp. All the chiefs came in on the morning of the 10th.

"On January 9th Mr. Boyle with 2 sections went back in the direction of OKUZU to visit and collect guns from some villages off the road, he returned on the 12th and reports that he was well received everywhere.

"On January 11, I sent Captain Healthcote with 4 sections and a maximum to open up the direct road from OKA to ONITSHA, which from all the information would get, would pass through the villages of ABAGANA - EZEOWELI - OMANACHI - UMODIOKA - UBENIKE and OGIDI has instructions were, if he met with no opposition, to camp at UMODIOKA and send Lieut Elliott with 1 section to ONITSHA in the direction of OKA, this road is now cut through to UBENIKE and when completed will shorten the distance to that place by from 3 to 4 miles. A similar road has been started from OKA and

should be finished by the end of the month; it will bring OKA within 25 miles of ONITSHA and will I hope form a highway between the two stations.

"I left OKA on January 13th and camped at ENUGU where I found things far from satisfactory and I was compelled to burn a portion of the village. I left ENUGU on the 15th, leaving Mr. Boyle and 3 sections and a 2.95 gun to subdue the place and then move to ABAGANA and joined Capt. Healthcote at UBENIKE the same day; he reported that he had met with no opposition and had visited, explained the wishes of the Government to, and collected guns from the villages of EZIOWELI – OMANACHI – UMODIOKA-ABAJA-ABACHA and UKPO, his party subsequently visited the villages of UMUNIA and NKWELE M and I visited the villages of OGIDI and NSUBI on the 17th & 18th; this completes the villages included in the triangle AGULERI OKA ONITSHA everyone of which has been visited and disarmed".

Then, in the fourth report (found in the British Public Records Office in England, ref. No. C0520/31) addressed to the office Commanding Southern Nigeria Regiment, and dated 20th April, 1905, the same Major Moorhouse wrote a more comprehensive report it formed part of the Enclosures to the Dispatch by the High Commissioner Southern Nigeria to the British Colonial Office) being a summary of his activities from Asaba to Owerri and a definition of his assignment. Parts of that Report which related to Oka, read as follows:-

"..... I left Asaba on November 17th (1904) with a column composed as per margin.

"2. The objective of the Column as defined in the instructions was to pacify and bring under Government control the tribes in the Onitsha Hinterland as far as Longitude 7°10'E. with a view to the suppression of cannibalism, slave dealing, human sacrifice, twin killing and other barbarous customs and also to collect from the natives their war guns, - i.e. cap guns and rifles, and on the completion of this work to proceed to Owerri and open up the OWERRI – BENDE road as far as the River IMO.

"3. The starting point of the Column was OGRUGRU on the ANAMBRA creek which was reached on November 18th. The whole Column moved to ADANI on the 21st. on November 23rd 4 sections, 4 the 2.95 gun and 1 maximum under Captain Healthcote accompanied by the Political Officer to deal with ADANI, OMASHI and ADABA. The whole column reconcentrated at ADABA on December 7th but split up again on December 10th half proceeding under Lieutenant Vassal to OMERUN and half under myself to AMANDIM, where we met on December 14th. The whole column left AMANDIM on December 17th, but divided on the road half proceeding to EBENEBI under Lieutenant Wayling and half to UGBENI under myself. Column reconcentrated at ACHALLA on December 20th. Capt Heathcote with 4 sections moved to AGULERI on December 26th and myself with the remainder of the column to MANDO on December 28th – the whole column reconcentrated at UMULERI on December 31st the following day Lieutenant Wayling with 2 sections and a maxim left for ADANI; the remainder of January 11th Captain Heathcote at UBUNIKE on January 15th, leaving Lieutenant Vassal with 3 sections, the 2.95 gun and a maxim left UBUNIKE for OKA to form the garrison. The column, with the exception of the two sections and maxim above mentioned, concentrated at

OBA on January 23rd, moved to NEWU on January 28th after which it was split up in various directions eventually reconcentrating at OWERRI on February 22nd. From that day until March 18th when the column returned to OWERRI it was under my personal command. The 2.95 gun, "C" Company and a maxim returned with me by March route to ASABA arriving there on the 22nd March, the two sections "F" Company remains at OWERRI.

- "4.. In the Onitsha Hinterland the work was mainly of a political nature, serious armed opposition being met with only at OBUKPA on December 1st at ENUGU on January 8th and at UMOOGI on January 21st.

At OBUKPA a night march of 8 miles and a feint attack on their prepared position which was a strong one enabled me to engage the enemy in the open and inflict considerable loss on them. At ENUGU and UMOOGI the fighting was from house to house. In the OWERRI district though shots were exchanged almost every day there was nothing calling for special comment.

- "5.. Time alone can show to what the column has carried out the objects for which it was sent, but all the villages shown on the attached map were visited, the wishes of the Government explained to them and they all expressed their readiness to carry them out. Mr. Boyle, my Political Officer, has since revisited all the villages North of the ONITSHA-OKA line with a small escort and reports that he met with a most friendly reception every where. The villages between OWERRI and the river IMO have now all submitted and are being dealt with by the District Commissioner".

A Government Anthropologist, Northcote W. Thomas, who had followed the British Government into Oka, wrote a Report entitled "Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria" which he published in 1911. In the Section dealing with "Law and Custom of The Ibo of the Awka Neighbourhood, Southern Nigeria", he wrote as follows, concerning Oka:-

"AWKA is a town of blacksmiths", (by then the spelling had been changed from "Oka" to Awka) "though some of the quarters have taken to farming and none are wholly dependent on others for food supplies, half of the younger men go out at a time, remaining absent for four or more months, according to the custom of their earnings in form of goods, which they forced their neighbours to buy, probably at exorbitant prices. As the aristocrats of the district, they never condescended to carry their own loads; such at any rate is their own account. Their neighbours, however, tell a rather different story, in which they themselves figure as the spoilers and the blacksmiths as the sufferers, for they assert that they set upon the homecoming wielders of the hammer and despoiled them of all their goods. However this may be, it is certain that Awka was and still is, far richer than the majority of its neighbours, as is evident from the fact that the men who possessed two or more wives are three as numerous as those who possess only one...

"We have seen that Awka is rich community consequently it is not surprising to find on an average seven persons per house against four and a half in the other two places; no less than a third of the inhabitants of Awka were gathered in twenty-two houses, the greatest number in one house being fifty-five.. In Agolo and Ododoma only one-thirtieth

and one-twentieth of the inhabitants lived more than twelve to a house. This is due, in part, to the greater number of wives, and consequently of children, in Awka, in part to the greater number of dependants, usually relatives, gathered round them by the more important chiefs.

"In Awka town the Amikwo lies all round the government station. Men own land individually, and the boundaries are marked off by sticks": there is also family land; a woman can buy farm land, but her husband or her son is regarded as the actual owner. House land cannot be sold, but it appears to be possible to break the house down and sell the ground. There is undivided bush from the quarter, but a farm made there cannot be sold, though it may be handed over as a free gift; if the owner of it deserts it, it still remains his property; he may also pawn it; bush of this character can only be sold with the consent of the whole sept. According to the statement made to me, the decisions as to the price to be accepted rests with the head of the family, but the proceeds are divided. I was informed that the usual period for pawning land was nine years...

"In the Ezioka quarter, on the other hand, there is the strongest objection to selling land; even house land, which is usually freely purchased, is begged for, and every morning when a man rises, he spits on the ground and says, "May the ancestors not give us a bad child who will sell the land. "Singularly enough, it appears that a son may sell his father's land behind his back; this would entail the loss of his share of the property, but no further consequences apparently. This quarter is exceedingly poor in respect of land; they have no common bush, and no land belonging to the quarter; yams are grown every three years, and cocoyam in intermediate years. Occasionally land lies fallow for one year. In the garden farm, of course, cultivation is intensive, and a certain amount of manuring is done with the aid of ashes and rotting grass.

"In the Nkweli quarter there is individual land and bush belonging to the whole quarter. This may be cleared and become individual property, but the quarter cannot sell the bush.

"Ivitoka quarter of Awka differs from the other quarters in being widely spread and inhabited virtually solely by farmers. There is individual land, family land, and bush belonging to the quarter. This latter may be cultivated by anyone and claimed the following year. The quarter would never sell it.

"The family land is divided annually, the lots being stepped out by the youngest member of the family, who has put on loin cloth. He counts every other step, i.e.; the distance for yam heaps, and portions are 30 double steps or 100. Each member of the family gets an equal share, and usually the head of the family chooses first....

"As regards the status of the children of a slave, I was told at Awka that they were treated like children of the house, but I was also informed that they did not buy slaves, hence, if both pieces of information are correct, it is clear that slavery proper did not exist...."

Concerning Oka blacksmiths, Northcote wrote as follows:

"I made a good many attempts to see the Awka blacksmiths at work, but it appears that the greater part of their labour is done on their travels and those who had their tools at home, whether from jealousy of trade secrets, or mere indolence, never carried out their promises to let me see them at work.

"A boy begins to learn at eight or nine, mainly by traveling with workers; there are two kinds of training, one for iron and one for brass, the test for a blacksmith is to make small knives and holes, and if they pass muster the man can become a journeyman, probably at the age of 27 or so. He goes on with this work until he has a son old enough to take his place. A brass worker makes small brass plates and then bigger ones, and on passing this test can travel.

"Before a journeyman goes out he prepares food and the head of the family is invited to say, "so and so is going on his journey may all be prosperous, ancestors and good spirits be with him behind and before". Then the sacrifice is performed which is customary, and is described under the head of sacrifice. A doctor "[dibie]" decides where the man is to go, and in some families he only stays out five months and returns in the sixth to make his okwo "[ukwu]" feast, a fine is payable to the family if he overstays his time".

"According to another account a learner first works the bellows, then he makes needles, which were formerly used as currency, then finger rings, razors, chairs.

"Although I saw no man at work I had some opportunity of judging of the skill of the blacksmiths; the strut of one of the legs of a collapsible table had on it a brass shoe fitting with a sort of claw over the strut and further secured by three screws; it was made fast to the cross-piece of the leg by a slot passing over a staple; there was a bend in the middle and this was where it broke. I took the two pieces to a blacksmith, described to him what had to be done, sketched the angle at which the shoe should be, and asked him to bring the result for me to see. A few days later he brought the shoe up, with claw, screw holes and slot it fitted perfectly and no adjustment whatever was needed. It was a piece of work which would be creditable to a European blacksmith".

Finally, Reverend G.T. Basden, who came to Igboland in 1900, in one of his fascinating studies on the Igbo way of life, entitled "Among the Ibos of Nigeria" alias "The Ibos As Seen By The Early Whitemen", had this to say about the Oka people.

The life of Ibo is also greatly influenced by the locality in which he lives. His fellow townsmen may follow an acknowledgement profession, or they may be simple farmers, fishermen or traders. The men of Awka, for example, are renowned throughout the Ibo country, and even beyond its borders, as clever blacksmiths, and they traverse the country from end to end plying their craft. These men make extended itinerations annually, a large number of towns being visited. Again the men of Nri are the priests whose presence is essential for a valid celebration of the ceremonial rites in connection with the coronation of kings, and they travel far and wide in the performance of these priestly functions. The men of Uniu-di-Awka (Umudioka) journey from place to place practicing the art of cicatrization, they being recognized experts in the cutting of Ichi or tribal marks.

"A land brought up in such a town naturally adopts the profession of his fathers.....

"Probably the craft which is the most useful and valuable is that of the blacksmith. It is very remunerative, the more so because it is practiced by natives of certain towns only, and these are able to control affairs almost as effectively as a Trade Union, and yet leave every man independent. The Awka smiths practically dominate the situation, and they hold the leading place in the profession throughout the Ibo country and in many places beyond. They travel to such distant parts as Bonny, Calabar, Warri and even Lagos, plying their craft. About two-third of the year are spent away from their homes. In this work also, great skill is often displayed, especially when the tools are taken into consideration.....

"At one time I followed a regular practice of visiting some of the tiny blacksmiths' shops and saw some clever work done. On one occasion my visit turned out to be one of those apparently unimportant events which often turn the tide of affairs. I was able to show the smith a simple device whereby he was relieved of the task of gripping his tongs throughout the time his metal was heating. We were in a town never previously visited by Europeans and this little incident did much to establish friendly relations with the people. I had strayed from the party and, seeing the smith's shop; I entered and sat down to watch. A crowd gathered round and were greatly interested when we started working together, and the confidence of the folk was won. In return for the professional hint received, the blacksmith there and then took a piece of an old cutlass and forged it into an armlet. He duly chased it with a punched pattern and presented it to me. I then watched him making needles; fine work with such clumsy tools.....

"In another shop I saw a smith make all the essential parts of the lock of a gun. He manufactured his own taps and dies from pieces of old cutlasses. In this instance, indeed, the man had made every part of the gun except the barrel, the stock and fittings being so well executed that one could scarcely distinguish the result from an English-made article. I inquired whether he could construct a gun completely, and he replied that he could as far as the forging was concerned, but that he knew no method for tempering the barrel, and therefore it was no use his making that part. In any case it could never be anything but a failure, as the only material at his disposal was the ordinary trade bar-iron.....

"The smith referred to made me a pair of brass tobacco pipes. The bowls were molded to represent the faces of men, and were furnished, one with a wood, the other with an iron mouthpiece I have never ascertained: up to the present these particular pipes retain their original virginity.

"Chief", (that is, titled men) "as they attain to the higher degrees, receives the right to carry the insignia of their rank. This takes the form of an iron staff, ornamented with wrought and brass bindings; occasionally the whole staff is of brass. These are also the outcome of the blacksmiths' craft.

"The Smiths forge door furniture, chains, hair ornaments' for women, brass and copper bracelets and anklets.....

"In addition to objects of personal adornment, purchasable only by people of means, the smiths manufacture great quantities of hoes and axes. Practically every person is supplied with the former and most households possess one at least of the latter. The axes are wedged-shaped, the top passing through the head of a wooden club-shaped handle; with it and a cutlass most of the native wood craft is executed. The blacksmiths also make bullets from bar-iron, pot-leg, or from remnants of brass of different shapes, square, oblong and round.

"In the blacksmiths' profession there is an intensely rigid system of "Trade Unionism", and any attempt to usurp the privileges of the Awka men was obstinately resisted even unto war.....

"Smiths' work in the old days was undoubtedly the premier industry in the country and it is not surprising that its interests were so jealously guarded. However , denationalization in this respect must inevitably follow the introduction of Birmingham and other hardware goods. Hinges, locks, tools and all sorts of useful articles are now sold at the factories at prices which must compete seriously with locally produced articles: also with the widening of civilizing influences, the old cumbersome and unwieldy brass anklets must be abandoned. English saws are rapidly displacing the wasteful native axe for cutting planks and joists, and the same principle of change is operating in almost every craft".

That was how foreigners saw Oka, at the end of the 19th century, when Oka was still a free nation, and her people an independent people.

Chapter 2

The Oka Man or the Making of a People Amu kene vbe nna.

*(Let the free born thank his ancestors).
- Oka title name*

Oka was an amalgam of people. They came from different places, at different times, and became welded into one people. How long the welding process took, how many centuries it spanned, is left to future researchers to unravel. But the product was real enough – the Oka man of today.

“Nwa Oka” (Nwoka), son or daughter of Oka, was governed by definite rules of conduct from his cradle to his grave. The discipline infused by those rules of conduct, or laws, produced the homogeneity which others saw, and admired in the Oka people.

Those rules of conduct were definite, detailed, and covered by aspect of an Oka man’s life; so that, by their existence, they attested to the antiquity of Oka town-for they must have taken centuries of usage, and of trial and error, before they could have become so generally accepted, and enforced, as law, among the people. The Oka man was a creature of his laws.

From the time he was in his mother’s womb up till he was dead and put in the ground, he was subject to rules – clear-cut and unequivocal. His whole social life, his whole economic activity, his participation in the politics of his town, his religion, had all their own sets of rules, which he must observe. It was this fact of personal discipline and orderliness, more than anything else that made the Oka man somewhat different from people of other culture in Igbo land. Every detail of his life was governed rules of conduct dictated by his laws and sanctioned by his religion.

Pregnancy: when a pregnant Oka wife was eight months gone, she began to make ready for the birth of her child.

As soon as she entered her ninth month the first sacrifice was made for her in Obu (the ancestral Hall) of the husband, to facilitate easy birth. The sacrifice consisted of a fowl, some yams, and palm wine; and the family members (the Umunna) were present. Before the sacrifice was made, the closest relation of the husband (not the husband himself) took the woman aside, and said to her “We are about to make sacrifice to the gods for the well-being of yourself and your unborn child: ‘Iji ivbi?’”, meaning, do you have any act of adultery to confess? If she said no, the sacrifice proceeded; but if she said yes, then she named the person with whom she has had extra-marital intercourse. The sacrifice was postponed, and a day was fixed for the ceremony of cleansing. A message was sent to the man named, and his family, and the cost of reparation named. The cost of reparation, or atonement, depended on the relationship between the two families, that is, what one family had demanded from the other family in similar circumstances in the past. Some demanded a some of money, but generally the production of a chick for the cleansing ceremony was considered adequate. Whatever it was, however, it must come from the man named.

On the day of the cleansing, a palm frond was attached to the leg of the chick and after a religious ceremony; it was taken outside the compound and killed, and thrown away. Evil had been cleansed! The postponed sacrifice then took place; and the woman was ready for confinement, and could be delivered of her baby safely.

A woman who committed adultery and refused to confess was believed to have very difficult labour, and could die in it.

The shame of confession was believed to keep a woman on the straight and narrow path!

When the woman felt her labour coming the midwife was called in. other women went out to help. In ancient days there were no maternities where women went to be delivered. The midwives came to them, and the delivery took place behind the woman's house. The back of a woman's house was known as "mgbuluno".

The child was taken to it's mother's ogbolodo – it's mother's house – not yet to the Obu – the father's ancestral Hall; and if it's mother had no house of her own yet, then to the father's mother's ogbolodo.

In those days men and women did not live in the same house, much less in the same room! Men and their Obu, where they stayed in the daytime, and received visitors; and an uno-nga where they retired at night (their private house which was also called "ovbe"). Wives had each their own house, called ogbolodo or unokwu (or in general Igbo language, mkpuke). A wife went to the husband's house when invited.

The woman lay with her child on mgbo-wooden bed made of iroko planks without any covering on it; the child was placed on some cloth beside the mother, or, where there was no cloth, on some plantain leaves used as a mat.

8th Day: (Izu n 'abo): On the 8th day after birth, after the umbilical cord had fallen, the Oka child was circumcised. In the male it consisted of removing the foreskin of the penis; in the female of removing the clitoris, called "mgbama" (the betrayer). The purpose of female circumcision was to make a girl less libidinous, and, therefore, harder to be deceived by men when grown up, and, therefore, a more independent person.

12th Day: (Izu n'nato nnwa): "Ummune –ime-uno", the inner family,(not yet the extended family) were invited. Palm wine and a quantity of foofoo were provided in the Obu. This was to celebrate the survival of the child for three native weeks. Prayers were said. The mother and the child did not appear.

28th Day: (Izu Asa: Naming the Child): (The extended family (Umunna, properly so called) were invited. Members of the village were also invited. The in-laws, that is, the family of the child's mother, were invited; so were the father's mother's people' and friends. Every one was well entertained with food and drinks.

What happened:

(1) The hair with which the child was born was shaved of. This hair was called "abannya". The abannya was thrown into the avbajioku – which was a small

round fence in the compound made by a male who had taken Chi title. (The umbilical cord had previously dropped on the 5th day, or before, or a little later, that is, between 4 to 6 days. The dropped cord was taken to any land of the child's father, and put in the "ibana nkwu", that is, between the palm branch and the trunk of a palm tree where the palm branch starts growing out. The palm tree was usually a young palm. The palm tree was thenceforth called "Nkwu Ana" of that child and remained the child's property absolutely all its life.

The child owned the palm tree, not the land, (for the land might be communal to the whole family).

- (2) The child was given a name. The mother was called to bring the child to the Obu. The Head of the family (the "Head" of a family in Oka was always the oldest male member of that family) received the child outside and took it in his arms round the Obu house once, and then brought it in.

Previously the Head of the family has ascertained from the father of the child what name he would give the child. He then said: "Our child, your name is Nwudealo" (or a girl's name if a girl). He blessed the child and gave him a gift, and handed it back to the mother. The Head of the family could give a name of his own too to the child; the mother could give a name; and her family could also give a name. They said to the child, now in its mother's arms: "Abuom ghu Nebuwa" (I give you the name Nebuwa), and so on. Each naming was followed by a gift. All these named belonged to the child, and it was thereafter known by whichever was the most popular. All those present gave gifts to the child, no matter how small; - this was known as "mkpo iru oma n "uwa"- starting the child off well on its earthly journey, with joyous gifts.

Before this ceremony, the child could not be taken into the Obu, but after it, it could be taken there any time. For a boy this was his first visit to the Obu which, if he was the first-born, he would later inherit.

On Cutting teeth. The teeth on the lower jaw must come out first. If the teeth of the upper jaw first appeared the child had done an unnatural act, and it was given away to the Nris, or just done away with. This was the second law the child must not transgress. The first law was that it must not come out of the womb feet first; if that happened it was killed. Variation from the known was heavily penalized! Mother tried to help their children by rubbing their lower gums to make the appearance of the lower teeth easier.

As soon as the child cut its teeth that is as soon as a lower tooth appeared, a small ceremony was performed for it. Those who first witnessed the appearance of the tooth rejoiced with the child by giving it gifts. This was the meaning of the saying "Anara agba aka aghu nwata eze "(you don't examine the child's jaw to see if a tooth had appeared for nothing). The child was now reckoned as a person - as an Oka person. Until the tooth appeared the child had no such status.

If a child died after cutting its teeth, funeral ceremonies were performed for it. Otherwise, not. In the evening of the day of the burial the young men of the village went to dance in his honour, if male. But if female, the following morning, the daughter of the

village went to dance a kind of dance called "Egwu Aka" (hand-clapping-dance). No instruments were used. In the night they danced the "Egwu-Udu" dance, in which musical instrument made of earthen pots were used. They danced till cock-crow. And that ended the funeral ceremonies for the child.

If a child had not cut teeth, none of this was done. As soon as the corpse of such a child was buried, everyone dispersed – it was held that he was not yet an Oka man: "Oka aburo mmadi" – he is not yet one of us.

Ishi nwa Oka: Every child that had cut its teeth was reckoned as an Oka man, or woman; and every Oka man must be accounted for.

There was a saying, "ishi nwa oka anara ato na mba" meaning, no Oka man or woman must be allowed to perish in a foreign land, unavenged. And so, if an Oka woman was married away from home and died, the Oka people must go and bring home the corpse; and bury it in Oka if a man on journey died abroad, those who were near him must arrange to convey the corpse home to Oka. If for some reason, that was impossible, then the corpse was buried in the foreign land, but those doing the burial must touch the body with Omu (palm-frond) and bring home the Omu. They entered Oka at night, and hid some where till cock-crow. As soon as it was cock-crow they crept quietly into the person's compound, or if the gate was locked, they used every pretext to gain entrance, and then they fired a gun in the air within the compound, and shouted out the name of the deceased. This was called "mghasu ozu" (announcing a death). There was general wailing.

At day break, funeral ceremonies began, as if the corpse was physically present. At the end of the ceremonies the omu was buried in the ground.

Those who came to announce the death of a deceased Oka man must give a meticulous account of how he died. Everybody listened attentively. Everybody must be satisfied that there was no foul play. If any doubt was created, Oka ordered an investigation, and if the investigation revealed that the Oka man did not die a natural death, but was murdered by some people, then there was war between Oka and the town whose people were responsible, then was why most of the wars fought by the Oka people centered around people killing Oka citizens. It was the capacity for immediate retaliation that made it possible for Oka people to travel safely throughout those parts of Nigeria where they journeyed to make a living before the coming of the British.

When the corpse of an Oka man was brought home, everybody went to see it, for the same reason – to be sure that he was not unlawfully killed; and the relatives must touch the body. Every Oka man who was ill abroad always expressed the wish to be taken home to Oka to die, "so that my people may touch my body" (ka ndu be anyi metum aka).

Agu Ceremony. Some time after the child had cut its teeth the "Agu" ceremony was performed for it. The time for this ceremony depended on the father's circumstances, because the ceremony cost some money. It could be said to be the first Oka "title" for the child. And if it could be called a title, then it was the only one that could be taken by a female in Oka town!

“Agu” was an elaborate ritual, or ceremony, by which a deceased ancestor was identified, or chosen and attached to a child as that child’s guardian spirit, to lead it through its life here on earth.

The child was not perceived as a re-embodiment of the ancestor selected for it, that is to say, the child was not a re-embodiment of its ancestor physically. Both were separate beings; one existed in the spirit-world, and the other in the human world, at the same time. The one in the spirit-world was present, as a spirit, with the one in the human world, and followed him about through all the vicissitudes of life, protecting him from harm not decreed for him. It was the child’s patron.

This ancestor, when identified, was called “Chi” of the child, “Chi-nke-mmadi”, meaning, “patron-spirit who is attached to and looks after an individual and was once himself (or herself) a human being”. The other “Chi” in Oka religion, was “Chi – Ukwu” (Chikwu) – the Creator God the Spirit that created the whole world and everything in it, both living and dead and looked after all.

By means of this concept of spirit-patronage, the Oka child was linked to its ancestors.

Oka people venerated their forbears, and deceased relations. They never forgot them. Through this act the present was bonded with the past. Oka united!!

Oka people believed in the imperishability of the human spirit, or soul. They believed that when a person died it was his physical body that died, but not his soul. The soul, or spirit, the Oka people called “mmuo”. When a person died they said, “o naa mmuo” – he has gone to the spirit world.

They believed that the spirit continued to live after the physical body had died, but that it lived in the spirit-world, which was not visible to the humans.

They also believed that after a time the spirit returned to the human world, and took on a physical body. The re-embodiment spirit then lived on earth again until it’s span of life once again ended, and it reverted to a spirit. After a lapse of time it again returned to earth-life, and again resumed a physical existence in another human body. They believed that a spirit returned to earth in this way, again and again, seven times, in order to gain all kinds of experience. Sometimes, it came back as a very poor person, and sometimes as a very wealthy person. When, eventually, it ceased to come back, it had become no more “mmuo mmadi” (a human spirit); it had become a god, loosing all links for ever with the world of the living.

That was re-incarnation, as the Okas believed it. Hence, an Oka woman would be heard to say, “Uwam uwa asa agam abu oka”, meaning in each of the seven periods of my existence on this earth I will always be an Oka person!

But this re-incarnation has nothing to do with the Agu ceremony. That ceremony was simply discovered the person who was the patron-spirit of a child, its Chi “Onye nolu onye but Chi-e”, was an Oka saying. He who is the patron – spirit of person is his Chi. And when an Oka woman exclaimed “Mu na Chim!”She meant “what my guardian spirit and I have agreed upon”, meaning, it is my luck, it is my destiny!.

Even though it was human beings that made the selection of a patron spirit for a child, the ritual made it appear, during the Agu ceremony, as if it was the Spirit itself that chose the child, and not the other way round!

Oka called being a patron spirit to a child “nno uwa”.

When the Agu ceremony was performed for a child, the child was ceremonially linked, or tied to its ancestors of forbears and in that way the corporate unity of Oka was preserved; the dead members of the family were linked to the living members of the family.

Oka people believed that their community was made up of the living and the dead, co-existing. The dead came back to inhabit their former compounds after the full funeral unseen. From the spirit world they influenced events for good or for bad. The living, therefore, made sacrifices to them with whatever they ate or drank, and called on them for help. Before drinking any wine the Oka man first poured a libation to these departed ancestors, (that is, giving them their share) and he sacrificed a bit of every food he ate to them, by throwing a morsel outside. Thus, in order to preserve the bond between those who had passed away (lest they be forgotten) and those still alive, every child born must have chosen for it a patron, or a guardian, among the departed relatives. The patron spirit once chose for it a patron, or a guardian, among the departed relatives. The patron spirit once chosen took on the task of looking after the child, and guiding it, and protecting it, through life. The ritual for ascertaining who this patron-spirit was the Agu ceremony.

On the day of the Agu ceremony two Dibies were invited.

“Dibie” was what Europeans called “native doctor” or “medicine man”.

There were two kinds of Dibie in Oka, namely, Dibies who gave medicines to cure illness only (doctors simpliciter), and Dibies who gave medicines and at the same time, knew the art of dividing the will of the gods (doctors cum diviners). This latter class of Dibie was known as “diviners” (ndu avba).

Dibies, of all kind, served apprenticeship, just like blacksmiths, for seven years or more.

The Debie-diviners were the most powerful in the community, because they ascertained the wishes of the gods. They used different means to do this: some worked with sand-making marks on a small heap of sand, and finding answers to questions from the marks; some worked with mirrors-they were called ‘ose nabo’-they stared into the mirrors and revealed the wish of the gods; other used “ukpukpa” – the shells of the ogbono seeds – which were strung together on thin rope, and flung on the ground: the gods spoke through the manner in which the ukpkpa shells fell, some falling face up, and some falling face down.

For Agu ceremonies in Oka, the diviners who worked with ukpukpa shells were called.

Before the Debies began their work, kola nut was presented, broken, and eaten.

Those present at the ceremony were usually the Umunna (extended family) of the child, his mother's people (ndu ikwunnie), and the generality of the villagers, including the elders.

After the kolanut, the Debies began their work, to ascertain which spirit had indicated its wish to be the guardian of the child.

First of all, they inquired for the health and well-being of the compound into which they had come – called “avba ndu”.

The techniques of divination, that is, finding out the wishes of the gods, in Oka was called “avba”. Oka people had no illusion about what avba was. They said “avba bu uche”, meaning, divination is nothing but common sense.

After “avba ndu”, the relatives of the child put the question to the recited “onye no-o?”, who sponsors the child that it may live?

The diviners, each working on his own, threw their ukpukpa shells, and recited their incantations, in their effort to discover the patron-spirit.

The child's relatives urged them on, and the Debies prompted the gods by saying such things as:

“Okpukpu na mme, nya nwelu”, let the willing spirit win the child, let the spirit that first indicated its interest in the child, be its guardian come out now and say so, or,

“Okpulu na mme nya nwelu”, let the willing spirit win the child, let the spirit that first indicated its interest in the child, be its guardian, let there be no rivalry, (a dispute among the gods as to who was to be the patron spirit of a child called “nzo uwa”).

The Debies having appealed to the gods in this wise for the true guardian to manifest himself, the child's relatives suggested names to the Debies. They asked:

Is it A? Each Dibie threw his shells, and answered, No. they asked, it is B? The answer again was, No. they asked again, is it C? The same negative answer was given. Then they asked, is it D? The diviners, after consulting the avba, answered, one after the other, Yes! There would be general jubilation. D had revealed himself, or herself, as the patron spirit, or guardian-spirit, and, if the patron had held a title-name before he died, the child was saluted by that title-name.

The clue to the answers given by the Debies was that the ritual demanded that four names should be suggested to the Dibies, and that the fourth name should be the right none. This fourth name was secretly given before-hand to the Dibies by the father of the child. But the whole ceremony was always made very dramatic and impressive. That was why a known thief, or a murderer, never became anybody's patron-spirit – ‘ogara anu uwa’ na Oka.

As soon as the correct name was pronounced (confirming the father's choice), there was general rejoicing and congratulations. A piece of dried fish, dipped in oil, was put

into the mouth of the child, and a bit of an ovbe lead which had been prepared. A fowl was brought, and the first sacrifice was made to the child's patron-spirit – its Chi.

Foods and drinks were served to all those present, according to their group. What was usually provided at an Agu ceremony was plentiful supply of "aku and ukpaka. It was eaten with dried fish. Eight plates of this were provided; two plates went to the child's mother's people, four plates to the villagers present, and two plates to the Dibies. In addition, one gallon of palm wine was given to the Dibies, and they were paid whatever fees had been agreed upon. In respect of the drinks, the child's mother's people were given two gallons of palm wine, and the villagers three gallons.

Agu ceremony was always a joyous occasion at any time among the oka people.

Titles After the Agu ceremony, which could be said to be the preliminary to all title-taking in Oka town, the Oka man moved on in life, taking appropriate titles as he went along.

A boy's father, if he was able to do so, performed for him the next real title, which was "Amanwulu" title. Where the father had not done so for the son, the son did it for himself when he grew up.

"Amanwulu" was the first real title in Oka, the first investment. Apart from being an investment its significance was very great. It was the title that decided the status of every Oka male. A foreigner, or a person not a freedom of Oka, could not take it; and not having taken it he could not take any title in Oka town.

An Oka man who had not taken the Amanwulu title was in the class of people called "Ogbodu", meaning, a mere man, just-a-body-moving-about!

He who had taken the Amanwulu title had proved himself to be a freedom of Oka, not a slave or a foreigner.

The titled in its shortened form, was performed for a non-Oka man, whom Oka decided to honour to make him a citizen of Oka. It was the only method of naturalization used by the Oka people. A person around whose feet the Oka people put the "ona Amanwulu" (otherwise known as "Ona Okpa") – the copper anklet of an Amanwulu celebrant – was made an Oka citizen. For purposes of naturalization it was called "ona-ana-ana", meaning, "the anklet that removes you from a temporary sojourner in Oka to a permanent member of the town, never to return to your former home".

The ceremony of giving "ona-ana-ana" to non-natives of Oka town living in Oka was used at significant periods in Oka history, as will be told in later chapters.

The Amanwulu title was so important that no one considered himself too old to perform it, even though some of the ceremonies done during its celebration more properly belonged to people of younger age. Hence, non-Oka people taunted Oka with the fact, by saying, "Oka nee vu amanwulu na nka!" meaning "Oka people that perform the Amanwulu title even when they have grown old!".

The titles in Oka, and how they were performed, are more fully described in another chapter. It is sufficient to mention them briefly here:

After Amanwulu, the next title was Chi.

“Chi” was a title; but it also meant a festival devoted to mothers, that is in honour of all Oka mothers.

On the performance of Chi title, the Oka man had taken the first step on the ladder of social eminence. He then selected his first title-names, by which he was agreed. He acquired the right to carry as a staff called “mkpalo”, which was the small side-tooth of an elephant, beautifully carved in the Oka fashion.

The next title was “Avbiajioku” (or Ivbijioku). In the olden days money was not used for this title but yams. The young Oka man must have become a substantial farmer before he could afford the title.

Next, came the Ajaghija title – the much sought after title! The Oka man was then among the Nzes. He had arrived! He took four title-names, and carried “Ngwu-Ajaghija” as his staff – an iron staff, much like that of the Ozo men, but without the bulbous middle.

Then the Oka man went for the Ozo title, the highest title of all. He was then on top! He took eight title-names, and carried the “Ngwu Ozo” staff, called! “Ngwu Aghiliga”.

There was the last title of them all called Vbum. But very few people ever performed it. It was for those who were very wealthy, and who had numerous offspring. The requirements for it had no count. It was a kind of sacrifice or thanksgiving to the gods for being blessed with superabundance of material things.

Founding a Family: When the Oka man reached the age of taking a wife and founding his own family, he could not marry before he had undergone the ceremony of “Iwa eze”. It was done by a dioka, who chiseled his front teeth to make an opening between the two upper teeth – a mark of endurance.

After that, the Youngman’s father showed him his own living land to found his compound. He walled it round and built himself a house. But before he moved into it he must first marry a wife, and plant “Ogbu Chi” in front of the house. This was a religious ceremony in the new compound, which was done by planting a cutting from an Ogbu tree, giving shade where future ceremonies were performed in the compound. On the death of the Oka man his Ogbu Chi was cut down during his funeral ceremonies, broken into pieces, and thrown away.

Marriage: Di Oka anara avu avu (Oka marriage is indissoluble).

Marriage in Oka was a contract between families. The couple agreed with each other to marry, thereafter their families took the stage. Negotiations followed, and the two families agreed the dowry to be paid for the girl, and it was paid. Then the different stages of the marriage rite were followed, such as, the girl going to inspect her future home (nne ne uno), and the girl being shown to the husband’s village people (nse nete

ivbe mmia-taking back the empty jar of palm wine). Lastly, came the solemnization of the marriage. It was called "mgbu okuku onye uwa". On that day the family of the bridegroom went with him to the house of the bride, taking with them: one hen, eight big yams, N1.20 (out of which the girl's father took 60k and his extended family took 60k), ten gallons of palm wine, eight kolanuts, one big goat, and a bottle of hot drinks. They were sumptuously entertained.

Then they presented the things they had brought. The hen was taken outside by a senior member of the family of the girl and killed, after he had blessed the bride and the bridegroom. Then the slaughtered hen and one piece of yam out of the eight presented were given to the women of the house to prepare the ceremonial meal: They cooked the yam and pounded it into foofoo, which was divided into two parts. The fowl was used to prepare a kind of soup called "obobo" which no vegetables used, and no other ingredients except salt and pepper, nor any fish, and no oil. One wing of the fowl was put in a dish with some of the soup, and set before the bridegroom's people, together with them for the first time.

The family of the girl took the rest of the fowl and the soup, and the remainder of the pounded yam. They ate this, and every male present took at least a morsel of the food, all dipping their hands into the same dish.

That was the ceremonial meal that sealed the marriage contract. After that meal, prepared with the things brought by the husband's people, the girl became their wife.

The bridegroom and his family then prepared to go. The Head of the girl's family (nor her father) called the girl, and taking her hand in his, placed it into the hands of the oldest member of the bridegroom's party, (not the bridegroom's himself) saying: "Take our daughter, she is your wife, look after her well, and upon the families of the two parties. The oldest member from the bridegroom's side responded, thanking the girl's family. Then they took the girl home, blowing their ivory trumpet – Okike – all the way in joy.

While the procedure for the dissolution of an Oka marriage was quite simple, the actual practice was more difficult. The reason was that both families were involved nothing could be done without them, and the man's family usually refused any divorce.

In law, for a husband to dissolve a marriage, he simply took some of his family with him and returned the girl to her people, with a statement that the marriage had ended, and that his dowry should be refunded if and when she remarried

For a girl to dissolve the marriage, she just went back home, and a message was sent to the husband's people to come and take their dowry; when that was done, the marriage ended. Any issues of the marriage were taken by the husband's family.

If a woman has had children, and was a grown-up woman, it was impossible to divorce her in Oka. The husband's family usually forced him to build a house of her own for her within the compound, where she could live with her children, without having contact with the husband. But they refused that she should be sent back home and abandoned.

A younger woman was more easily divorced, because she had more chances of a re-marriage, but only if the family supported the divorce because of her bad character.

An Oka wife and her husband could live apart for twenty years or more, so that people forgot that they were husband and wife, and still come together again. That was why it was said that Oka marriages were indissoluble; no matter how long the separation, there was always a chance of coming together.

Death of the Oka man: The Oka man did not die when his corpse was first buried: he was said to have gone on a journey! He only “died” when his second funeral ceremonies were about to begin! Then, in the evening of the day before the ceremonies, a gun was shot into the air in his compound. This announced to Oka that the Oka man was officially dead, and that the following day the second-burial ceremonies called “Ogbugba Uta” would begin. The announcement was called “Ndasu”.

“Ndasu” was different from “Ntisu”.

Ndasu was the formal announcement that an Oka person was dead, (even though the body had been buried) and that the second-burial ceremonies were about to start.

“Ntisu” meant the announcement of the death by the wailing of the relatives of the deceased, at the time of the person’s actual death, whereby people knew that somebody had died. Until the family had prepared the body by washing, anointing or dressing it, and sweeping the compound, they did not cry. Any body who gave way to grief was hushed, and told to control herself, “aka etisuro-kwie”, meaning, “Don’t invite Oka into the compound with your wailing, we are not yet ready”. But when everything was ready, then lamentation began, and people rushed into the compound in large numbers. That was what was called “Ntisu”.

Burial: Oka had strict rules for burying the dead. There were rules about how a corpse was prepared and put in the ground; rules for men, rules for women, and rules for children.

An Oka man with Chi title, or a higher title, was buried with “mgbo oji” coffin consisting of iroko planks.

A man who had not performed any title was buried with palm branches shorn of the leaves. Three poles were tied together with tie-tie from the palm branches, one pole to rest the body upon, and two poles to support the sides.

A slave was buried with three planks of soft wood (mgbo akpu, that is, cotton wood tree), and his grave was dug – not with the normal hoe – but with the little hoe called “akakpulu ugu”. There was a saying: Nwa oru na amu nwa oru ibie amu na eji akakpulu enie, mgbe nkie luolu kedi ivbe ge meni? Meaning, the slave that laughs at another slave because he is being buried with the small hoe (akakpulu), what will happen when his turn comes?

Second Burial Ceremonies: the meaning of “second burial” “Nkwa Ozu”, was simply this: Death does not give notice of its coming, “Onwu anara aka agba”. Therefore, unless in

the case of very old person, no one ever prepared for it. Even where a person had been ill for a long time there was always a hope that he would recover.

But an Oka man did not depart to the great beyond without having his social rights and entitlements given to him, particularly in the field of cultural activities in which he had participated during his lifetime (quite apart from the religious ceremonies connected with actual burial).

According to Oka beliefs, the first burial disposed of the physical body; the second burial sent off the spirit on its way. Unless that second burial was done the spirit of the deceased hovered, waiting, in the human world, and could become pernicious or harmful out of frustration. That was why it must be done, "Okwukwa". During okwukwa things were done for the deceased which he had participated in doing on earth, such as games and songs. Okwukwa meant giving to the deceased his due, paying a debt due to him and sending him off content that he could now forget the earthly world.

It was done for all, male and female, except for those who had died by hanging for murder or who had committed suicide. But, even then, the friends of such people could do something symbolically for them. For instance, by reason of the performance of this office by his friend for him, Nwabunwanne was saved from the dead.

Nwabunwanne was a flutist of note. His oja never failed to move people.

He was a native of Okperi Quarter of Amiko Village. He had a quarrel with his family. So, one early morning they propped up a dead woman against a plantain tree and woke him up, asking him to bring out his gun, that a thief was around. He brought out his gun, and shot it in the directions of the corpse. The corpse was that of a woman of Nibo town married at Amikwo. Having shot his gun, his people said that he had killed the woman.

Nibo people came and demanded justice.

Oka met and decided that Nwabunwanne was guilty of murder and was to hang. He was taken to Akpaka - Okwudo at Umuayom village, with Oka and Nibo people present. He was hanged and voided. Nibo people tested and found him dead. He was cu down.

Nwabu had a close friend of the same age-grade as himself, one Nwigwebuike Mgbolo of Isiagu Amikwo Village. Nwigwebuike demanded that he should not be buried till after he had sung to him the songs of their youth. Nwabu had then been tied of akpalata, ready for burial. Akpalata was a contraption of three palm branches tied together; a manner of burial for an Oka man without title

Nwigwebuike then started to sing to him, that is, what Oka called "mma mbem" – a song of lamentation. He called him by his various greeting names, and reminded him of what they had done together in their youth. As he sang, the corpse appeared to him to move.

Nwigwebuike sent for water, as if to drink; and asked people to give him chance. Then he loosened the cords with which the corpse had been tied to the akpalata, and began to sprinkle it with water. The corpse moved again. Nwigwebuike sent for a number of

trusted friends. Other people thought that those called were to help him bury the corpse. (Since he was only hanged, and had not committed suicide, Oka people could bury him). The people called came, and pretended to be getting ready to bury the corpse. At night, in the dark, they took Nwabu on their backs, and going through bushes, brought him to the house of Okolobu Ezikuno at Avbo Mkpukpa in Umudioka Village. They carried him into the inner house called "unonga".

There, Nwakuozo Uzekwe, wife of Okolobu, ground uvbuo – red camwood and continually rubbed Nwabunwanne down with it all over his body. He was put over an agodo – a raffia palm platform – with fire underneath. He was recovering. At the end of another twenty-eight days he was well. His body was then decorated with uli and uli-ogbu. Very early in the morning, on the fifty-sixth day after he was supposed to have died, at the second cock-crow, Nwabunwanne took up his oja flute, and began to flute.

People who heard him, said, "This sounds like Nwabunwanne's flute". By daylight, Nwigwebuikwe, his friend came singing from Amikwo village. Oka went wide with excitement, and stampeded to the house of Okolobu to see Nwabu. Nwabu then came out, and started dancing and fluting and making merry, saying "He who has done nothing, nothing can happen to him". He lived to a very ripe age thereafter.

The send-off events cost money and the higher the position of the deceased person in society the costlier the activity marking his send-off. Therefore, when a death occurred there was never enough time to raise the money for the send-off events, otherwise known as "okwukwa", (nkwa mmadi or nkwa ozu). But since the burial of a dead body could not be postponed indefinitely the idea was evolved of burying the body first, and performing the send-off ceremonies later.

This 'later' might be a matter of days, weeks, months or even years. Where the person whose responsibility it was to foot the bill was a small boy, and there was no one able to come to his aid, his parents' send-off was postponed till the boy had grown to manhood, and was able to do it himself.

Whatever time it took, however, this send-off or demonstration of respect at the departure of a person or "okwukwa", must be performed for every Oka man or woman. And when it was done, it was called "second burial" in the English language or "okwukwa" in Oka. The funeral activities marking the "okwukwa" of a man were called "mgba egwu - Idine", meaning, burial dances. And unless and until the second burial ceremonies were performed for a man, his relatives did not share his estate "akwacha ozu, elivbe ekpe. And if only one person did the ceremonies for the deceased, whereas he had sons and other relatives able, but unwilling to do it, that man controlled the estate, until such time as his expenses were fully reimbursed him.

The closing ceremony of the second burial of an Oka man was the Abia dance. After the general songs and dances, games and masquerading, that ritual took place in front of his compound, performed by members of his village who had no fathers living. They alone could dance to the Abia drum.

Hoe and cutlass, Oshiama and otutu, implements for carving were all displayed. And the ram was fettered and standing.

A dancer came out and took up a hoe; he made the motions of hoeing a ridge. The Abia drum beat out its wired music. Then he put down the hoe and took up the cutlass; he made motions of cutting the bush. Next, he took up the anvil and the hammer and made as if he was smithing. Having danced that, he took up the plane and pared away a piece of wood, ready for carving. Lastly, he carried up the ram and hoisted it upon his shoulders and danced round a bit with it. Then the music stopped.

Another person took the floor. All those who danced did the same things. As they danced they shouted: Isugada, Isugada, Isugada!!

At the end of the dance, the ram was killed and cooked there in the open and eaten by the participants; nothing was left over, every scrap of meat must be eaten. And that ended the second burial ceremonies of a man.

The Abia drumming was called Egwu Isugada. Only those who had lost their fathers could dance to it. There was a saying that originated from that dance, which went as follows:-

“Nwatakili ana akul egwu isugada ona agba, omara na egwu isugada bu egwummuo”? [The child that hears the music of the abia drum and begins to dance because it is sweet, does it not know that egwu isugada is a dance meant for the dead, which no human can dance to and live?].

Nsete N'uno: Twenty-eight days after the burial of an Oka man and after the second burial ceremonies had been performed for him, on a day called “boshi izu assa”, the final ceremony concerning the dead took place.

First thing in the morning of the 28th day, whoever was the Head of the family, went out and procure a bunch of palm fronds; he came back to the Obu or ancestral Hall of the family, and while the other family members looked on, he pointed the bunch of palm fronds in the direction of the east, and intoned:

“Nwokoye” (if the deceased’s name was Nwokoye),
You went away with the setting sun,
Now, come back with the rising sun!”

He then solemnly took the palm fronds into the Obu, and laid them down on the Ikpo Mmuo. An altar (uluchi) was then fashioned for the deceased from the wood of an ogilisi tree, giving it its own shape for ease of identification. Then a fowl was sacrificed on the altar for the deceased Nwokoye – for the first time. He had now become a god, one of the family gods. Thereafter, sacrifices to the family gods, and libations poured to them, included him.

The deceased Nwokoye had returned to the compound of his fathers, as a spirit and to his ancestral Hall, and had become a benign spirit. The ceremony was called “nsete n’uno”, meaning bringing back home the spirit of a deceased relative.

The above rules are but a sample of the laws and customs of the Oka people, called “Omenana Oka”, which made the Oka man, and to which he adhered; they guided and guarded his life from its beginning to its end.

Chapter 3

The Characteristics of the Oka Man

Amu na ato na ulo na ulo:

(People joke with members of their age grade and not other wise)
—Oka saying

The Kind of Person: One Oka man was very like the other. They reacted in the same way to many situations, and showed characteristics evidencing the fact that they came from the same environment.

All Oka people had the same intense pride in their town, and in themselves. And when an Oka man (or woman) bent slightly forward, touched his breast, and said, or asked, was impossible for him as an Oka man to do, or tolerate, it was unthinkable. I, a son (or daughter) of Oka!!

To tell an Oka man “inara eme Oka”, you don’t act like an Oka man!, was to insult him gravely; but to say to him “ime zi dee ka oka”, you have acquitted yourself like an Oka man!, was to give him the highest praise, most satisfying to him. To encourage a young person, one said to him “ina emezikwe ka oka?”, meaning, do you think you are behaving as an Oka man should, or, try and behave like an Oka man, or, try and endure the pain as Oka man should, or, try and behave like an Oka man, or, try and endure the pains as an Oka man should! For the Oka man always acted bravely!!

What kind of person was the Oka man when the British met him in 1905? What kind of person did his environment produce? What kind of characteristics did he pass on to his descendants of today?

The Oka man was above everything else a resourceful man, self-reliant, quick-witted, and a diplomat. As a traveler he made use of these qualities to penetrate with ease the wildest parts of Nigeria, and beyond. He was a natural born linguist, and spoke with fluency the language of the people he came in contact with during his working life. The Oka man believed in himself, and walked the earth with pride. As Mrs. T.J. Dennis observed in 1899, “he carried himself with a dignified air, or perhaps, more correctly, a sort of swagger, as though all the world belonged to him”.

Although the Oka man believed in himself, he never allowed that self-confidence to degenerate into arrogance, lest he aroused hatred against himself.

As he was always traveling, alone, and working alone in alien places he developed those qualities of courage and self-dependence which every Oka boy was enjoined to possess. And wherever he went, he saw to it that the dignity of the Oka man was not trifled with, because that was his best protection. As the saying went, “ebube agu nche” (the personality of the leopard).

There was a story of one Emenogha, called “Emenogha nwa Oka” (Emenogha the Oka man) which illustrated this point. Emenogha was a master blacksmith working in the town of Aguleri Out. He was a specialist in making hoes, which meant that he must work at nights to avoid the intolerable heat of the day.

Emenogha used to begin smithing around 1.a.m.

The people of Aguleri Out had a powerful and dreadful and dreaded Masquerade called Adaka that came out only in the night.

Adaka, must see no light; and it did not like smithing. So, whenever it was about to come out Oka smiths were warned not to work.

On the occasion of this story the warning went out as usual – Adaka was coming out, no smithing!

On that night, Emenoghaa went into his smithy, lighted the fire, and told his apprentice to work the bellows.

The Ogene of the Masquerade began to sound.

The Masquerade said to its followers, “I hear the sound of smithing”. They told it that Emenogha had been warned, but had insisted on working.

Adaka said, go and tell Emenogha to stop work, and get inside his house.

To those who came to give him Adaka’s message Emenogha said, “Death does not kill a man who is fighting for his daily bread, I am fighting for mine” (Onwu anara egbu onye na achu nkie, nkem ka nna achu).

Adaka took this as a challenge. It specially prepared for the outing, and hung all its charms around its body. It then stepped out, and the ogene sound, and the followers sand its praises.

Near Emenogha’s workshop the Masquerade began to dance about, shouting defiance. Before then Emenogha had warned his apprentice never to show fear. He put an “aba” (a charm) under the boy’s seat and told him to sit on it, which the boy did. It gave the boy courage.

When the masquerade stopped in front of the smithy, Emenogha gave it the Oka blacksmith’s salute: he struck his anvil with his hammer – tam!tam!tam! tra-ra-ra-ra-ra, three sharp blows and the fourth trailing off to an end. It was smithy. It was called “mbuche otutu”.

The Masquerade said, “Emenogha, nwa-Oka, my masquerade greets you! Emenogha replied “Great Spirit”! (Nnekwu mmonwu).

The masquerade asked, “Emenogha, nwa-Oka (Emenogha the Oka man) do you know me? “Emenogha replied, “God forbid! I do not know you. The dead and the living do not mingle”.

The masquerade danced away, and then came back.

The masquerade asked “Emenogha, nwa-oka, are you not afraid of me?

Emenogha replied, "I am not afraid", and he went on working, hammering the red-hot iron and making the sparks to fly.

The Masquerade stood for some time with its head to one side, listening to the music of its ogene, and the chants of its followers telling it that it was above all masquerades, and the most powerful of them all. Then, with a spring, the Masquerade rushed into the smithy, and held Emenogha right hand as he raised it to strike the anvil. Emenogha left the hammer in the grasp of the Masquerade. The masquerade stand rooted to the floor. It could not move.

Calmly Emenogha took out his snuff-box and leisurely took a pinch of snuff, and inhaled deeply. He courteously offered the snuff-box, and inhaled deeply. He courteously offered the snuff-box to the Masquerade, which paid no attention to him. Both continued to stare at each other for a long time.

The followers of the Masquerade began to feel uneasy, and they intensified their dancing outside calling on the Masquerade with their ogene to come out. But the Masquerade could not move.

Then the followers began to throw their own charms about, and their own medicines. But none had any effect. The masquerade stood where it stood. Lastly, they were reduced to begging. They appealed to Emenogha to release their Masquerade. They reminded him that it would be a tragedy if the light of day should meet it there.

Emenogha said, "I say, live and let live" (Egbe bel ugo bel). He then gave his conditions for the atonement for the violation of the sanctity of an Oka man's smithery. The followers of Adaka were too happy to comply.

Emenogha then made a sign to his apprentice, and the boy got up from his seat. Immediately, the hammer the Masquerade was holding dropped to the floor. The masquerade bounded out of the workshop, as if it had been shot from a catapult!!

Outside the smithy, the Masquerade turned and cried out: "Emenegha now listen to mine: 'Igabu ejeghejeghe elugh uno!' (You will be a wanderer on the face of the earth; you will never see Oka again). It then danced off with its chanting followers.

And so it happened, according to the story, that year, and every year following, when Emenogha prepared to go home, he would stop mid-way to Oka and say "Oh! I have forgotten such-and-such in my workshop" then, he would turn back to Aguleri Out, and not go home again that year.

He did this several times, and no matter how people tried to persuade him to forego what he said he had forgotten in his workshop he was still a bachelor. But that did not help him. The wife bore him a son, and he called the son "Eluom" (I have reached home), but still he did not reach home.

At last a group of Oka people waited for him on the way, and when he wanted to turn back they seized him physically, and brought him home to Oka. But he did not stay long; he left after a few days, and returned to Aguleri Out. He died in the foreign land, and was buried there. But his descendants returned to Oka.

Emenogha was a typical Oka man; he was brave, fearless and self-reliant.

Hardwork: The Oka man's love for making things was proverbial. He had the same passion for other form of work. The Oka man had a total dedication to work; no one was allowed to be idle in Oka town unless he was sick; the child was taught from the very beginning that if it did not work neither should it eat.

Oka people took joy in their work, and whether working alone or in groups, they sang. In Oka town, girls returning from the stream sang; women going to the farms sang; men doing blacksmithing or other form of economic activity, like tying yams in the barn, sang or whistle. The Oka man saw his work not as a drudgery but as a joy.

Blacksmith Obuekezie of Amikwo Village was well-known for his songs at work. One of his songs went as follows:-

“Vba shil na Obuekezie amara akpu ona,
Ma na Obuekezie shia vba
Nwunyem Nwavbulenu,
Ina anuzikwa ivbe ekom n'ekwu?”
(They said, that Obuekezie could not talk in brass
But,
Obuekezie has now become their champion
My darling wife, Nwavbulenu, are you listening to
The music of my bellow?).

Play: The Oka man worked hard and played hard. Wrestling was the most popular past-time. There was a particular kind of drum music called, Igbe Mbe, played during wrestling matches, and which used to excite young men to feats of valour.

Oka dances, both men and for women, were athletic, intended to exercise and develop the body for men, and grace for women.

Okas loved competitive games, such as foot racing and mock battles.

Humour: In Oka town there pervading sense of humour, which touched every facet of life. The Oka sense of humour, of making fun of things and people, was disconcerting to strangers. Strangers could not understand how Oka people could endure what one Oka man said to the other. But the fact was that people of the same age-grade (ulo) could say anything they liked to one another. They abused one another (in fun), they ridiculed one another, they taunted one another. But it was all in fun, there was never any hard feelings involved. This banter was limited to people of the same age-grade.

The law was that you could not make fun of a person above your age-grade or below your age-grade; that would be considered insulting. But with people of your own age-grade there were no holds barred; you could say anything as a joke. Amu na ato na ulo na ulo (Joking is for people of the same age-grade) .This was one of the social levers in Oka town, to galvanize young men to great efforts. One who could not bear the taunts and ridicule of the members of his age-grade must make every effort to reach the height other members had reached, to be like them.

If a person was not gifted with a sense of humour then he could not stay in Oka town, because he would be fighting with people everyday of his life. The only panacea for age-grade taunts, and banter, was never to get angry. If somebody told a person that he looked like a slave who had escaped from his master, or, like a fowl that had been beaten by the rain, the person didn't just turn his thoughts inwards and began to wonder why his dress was all that bad; he simply gave his tormentor back in his own coin, and found something funny to say about him, such as, "I am in mourning for your dead mother"; to which the assailant, not to be outdone, could quickly reply, "But my mother died a long time ago!!" if a person had no ready answer, then he must endure his opponent's victory, and go to think of what to say to him the next time they met.!

The author's father (Nwokafor Ndum) and Nwogbo Eto (father of Ozo Charles Nwogbo) were famous in their-life-time for their friendship, and their humorous banter, that is, their playfully teasing language-for they were exactly of the same age. Any time Nwogbo Eto would reply, "But I heard he was dead, about time he died!", and the bye-standers would burst into laughter. And when Nwokafor Ndum met any of the sons of Nwogbo Eto, he would ask, "How's your father? Has he returned from prisons yet?" the son would reply, "Our father has not gone to prison, and he is well at home!" and people hearing the thrust and parry would be greatly amused. Such was Oka! A place of fun and laughter!!

Respect: The Oka man had great respect for age. Age was the only recognized distinction among the Oka people. The Oka man gave respect to anybody above his age-grade, he must be speaking disrespectfully to him, otherwise he would draw the retort, "Imakwal ulo ghu?" (Don't you know your age-grade)? Or, "Ina akiam anya na anya", meaning, you are behaving towards me as if we are of the same age-grade, but we are not, be careful!!

It was a serious social offence to insult an elder, even in play; a person guilty of such conduct was severely dealt with by the community, and was forced to make amends immediately.

Sense of Equality: Despite his respect for his elders, it was the characteristics of the Oka man to consider himself the equal of any man on earth. "Ishi akara ishi", the Oka people say. No head is more valuable than the other. One man might be poor and the other rich, but as long as both were men they were equal, in the eyes of the Oka man.

That was why it was not in the character of the Oka man to genuflect to people. The Oka boy was brought up in that tradition; he was always told to stand up straight, otherwise he was asked, "Ibu zikwa nwoke?", are you not a man?

The only people to whom the Oka man traditionally bent the knee were his mother's people, where he was "nwadiana", and the married daughters from his family (Umu-Okpu). But these two sets of people had a religious significance in the life of the Oka man.

Impartiality: One characteristics of the Oka man was his great love of justice. That was characterized by the Alo which every Oka man, who was Head of a family, must have in his Obu; along with the Ovbo. Ovbo symbolized "Truth", Alo symbolized "Justice" – the

power to give to each according to his deserts; the sovereignty of the Head of the Family over his household. Alo represented the power of the Head of protect and to keep in order, and to decide disputes and do justice to all.

Alo was both the name of a god of that name, and the name of staff, whose body was made of wood, and the end forged in the shape of a pointed iron spear. Alo, the staff, was not carried about, like title-staffs, but remained in every man's Obu. And when the Oka man died, the last rite before he was put in the ground was for his Ovbo and Alo to be put into his hands, and taken from his hands, and put into the hands of his eldest son – the inheritor of his Obu – to guard and dispense truth and justice in his father's compound.

Whatever the Oka man might do elsewhere, with Oka town he tried to be upright and just. Since Oka people controlled themselves and were not ruled by any Kings, it was their sense of impartiality and justice that held them together. Whether in his home, or within the body politic, the Oka man tried to act with justice. And in the relationship between the villages there was never any imposition; no matter how small a village might be in population its views must count. Its autonomy was respected. The Oka people in their political decisions among themselves acted on the basis of consensus. Therefore, in the "Izu - Oka", the meeting, or consultative Assembly of the Oka people, every Quarter must have at least a member present before the meeting could take off.

It was because of the Oka love of justice that strangers found themselves very much at home in Oka town. For it did not matter where a person came from, the Oka man acted justly towards him. In fact, the Oka man was more likely to ill-treat fellow Oka man in Oka town than ill-treat a stranger. He said of himself that he was a traveler – he and his children and, therefore, he must not make enemies, Ojemba enwe life.

Tolerance: The first thing an Oka man did every morning was to pray to his gods with a kolanut. He prayed for the well-being and prosperity of his household, and he prayed for the prosperity and well-being of everybody else. He believed that; "Oganyala ovbu onye but ubiam", meaning, that one rich man in the midst of very poor people was himself a poor ma. Therefore, he prayed for every one's prosperity.

One of the frequent prayers of the Oka man was "Egbe bel, ugo bel, nke shil ibie ebene, nku ka nya "meaning let the eagle perch, and the crow perch; which ever says the other should not perch may its wings fail it; meaning, live and let live! If a person lived, let him permit others to live also, but if he didn't want others to live, then may he suffer failures in his own.

The oak man tolerated people and tolerated views, and that was why when the Christian Missionaries came, the Oka man readily gave them land, helped them to build their own houses and churches, and generally advanced them in their enterprise, even though he and the strangers had different ideas on how to approach God. This characteristics of the Oka man has continued to this day.

Being in the nature of the Oka man to accommodate other people's views and beliefs, he practiced the apophthegm "to each according to his needs to each according to his beliefs. "Therefore, he did not impose their ideas on him. He did not bow to any man. Neither did he want any man to bow to him.

Adaptability: Notwithstanding her antiquity, Oka town always managed to continue to grow and develop. This was because of the vitality of Oka institutions and the adaptability of Oka inhabitants – the Oka capacity to try new things, new people! Oka did not circumscribe themselves. They were “the most apt to adopt foreign way”, and whatever they saw on their wide travels abroad that appealed to them, they adopted; be it a proverb, a style of dress, a sound of music, or a form of dancing.

Up to the present day Oka men married from every corner of Nigeria and beyond, wherever they could find a good wife. That practice freed their minds, and increased their vitality.

The ancient Roman said: “Ex Africa simper aliquid novi” (Out of Africa there is always something new). In Oka, there was always something new to be found.

Trust: Another characteristic of the Oka man was his trust-worthiness. You could always trust him. When one agreed with an Oka man over something, the Oka man carried out his side of the bargain to the letter. He did not try to over-reach the other, nor to resile from his agreement.

That originated the saying: “Okwu Oka bu boshi izizi”, meaning, the Oka man agrees with you on all the details of an agreement on the first day, thereafter, he stuck to it, come rain, some shine.

That was why other people trusted Oka people: the Oka man’s word was his bond. And that was why, also, they saw in the Oka man a contented person, because he gave thanks for what he had achieved, and did not pursue with mindlessness what he had not got.

Love of Wisdom: The Oka people loved wisdom, and pursued it in all its ramifications. They loved wise sayings, and quoted them, and gave credit to their originators. The Oka man would say: “As one Achalla man once said.....”, or, “as Nwude Mgbeke said” or “the Urhobos have a saying.....”

In all they did they showed insight and practical wisdom. They gave expression to the accumulated experience and knowledge of their people in their utterances and deeds.

A man was a proudest when his son acted with wisdom and discretion. He would say “that is my son! but he was sorely disappointed if he found that his son was shallow or frivolous. Mal ivbe!” have knowledge, have understanding, was their daily exhortation to their sons.

In the Assembly of the people – Izu Oka – oratory was at its best. A person could come out and make his point, in proverbs and figurative speech, without once using ordinary language. Even in private conversation, illustrating a point with anecdotes and analogies was a common practice of the Oka people.

Oka loved short pithy sayings with deep meaning. When the Okas talked among themselves a stranger would find it hard to follow.

Chapter 4

Ifiteana People: the Progenitors of Oka

“Okike kel Oka,
Owuwa wa! Oka!”

*(The elephant tusk
In search of which
Oka was founded
The creator of Oka wealth!)*

— an ancient Oka invocation

The Oka people believe, up to this day, that in all Igbo land they are the most ancient nation, and that no other nation surpasses them in antiquity. They believe that others took the names of their gods from them, as well as the names of the days of their week – Eke, Oye, Avbo, and Nkwo.

Whether their claims can be made out, is for future researchers to settle. Suffice it to say that Oka as a town is very long in history. When the Onitshas came, the Okas were there. When the Nris came, they were there.

In the days when Benin City was acquiring, in British propaganda, the name of “the City of Blood”, Oka people were quite safe there. They went in and out safely. Igbuala (or Ugwualla), the legendary warrior of Benin, had his famous sword made for him by an Oka blacksmith from Umukwa Village.

Where communities were at war, and the road was closed, Oka passed, by having their bellows hoisted on poles over their canoes. When the combatants saw the sign they knew that Oka people were passing by, and they gave them safe passage.

Other people have stories of where they came from, but Oka have none.

There is indeed a mystery with regard to the origin of the first Oka people – that nuclear group around which other people attached themselves to form Oka town. These first Oka people were known as Ifiteana. To them others came, and joined themselves, and all fused together to become a civilized and technological society.

Who they were, where they came from (if they came from somewhere), who their own ancestors were, are not known. Oka simply said of themselves that they were of Ifiteana stock – Ebe Anyi (our stock).

At the bounded as follows:- On the north, by the towns of Okpuno and Mgbakwu; on the east, by the towns of Amansea and Ugwuoba (Ugwuoba having one bank of the Ezu River and Oka the other); on the west, by Enugwu – Agidi (formerly Osunagidi) and Nawfia towns; and on the south by Nibo and Nise towns.

Within those boundaries this race of people, called Ifiteana, had developed a way of life all their own.

They were skilled in iron work. (Where and when they learned those arts is not known).

They knew how to smelt iron from iron ore, and to make steel. They had the knowledge of the mixing of metals. They worked in iron, brass, bronze and copper.

They made knives, axes and hoes.

They knew foundry works

They made ornaments of iron, copper and ivory with great skill.

They were porters and wove cloth.

They made their own war implements – matchets, swords, diggers and above all, the ubiquitous “Alo” the spear, used for throwing, thrusting and stabbing. When it was used for throwing it was called “ube”, javelin.

These early Oka people lived in villages of thatched houses of intricate design and beauty.

The aju-grass roofs were particularly skillfully made. The mud walls were decorated with paintings, and the floors were washed with mud water and rubbed with large smooth pebbles until they shone like mirrors. The wooden pillars, called azu, holding the sides of the houses, were beautifully carved.

They invented a calendar of their own, which was not very much different from the Julian and the Gregorian calendars.

They did not know writing.

They developed their own style of architecture, and while other people around them lived in “Odo” round huts, they built modern oblong houses, like samanga.

Their men carved exquisite sculptures of man and nature, and the women painted vivid wall pictures: some of the women were specialists and earned their living by the means.

They made music and invented musical instruments. They manufactured the ogene (gong) and its big brother alo. They had wind instruments, such as the ntule, and ozimgbomgbo. And string instrument like the une. They had the all-pervading oja, a flute (piccolo). Oja was a short wooden flute, which holes for fingering on its two sides and the bottom. It was the symbol of Oka musical culture. Its then sound floating haunting in the air moved the hearts of both the young and the old. It was the omnipresent instrument without which instrumentation was not complete!

The Ifiteana, otherwise called the Oka people, had no story of the time when they did not know the arts of metal working, of wood carving and of the practice of medicine, for which they were famed.

But they had a story that their earliest god was called Okika-na-ube, the god pre-eminent with the spear!, who had come out of Outer Space and taught them (or inspired them with) their skilful knowledge and their crafts. So that, till this day, the Oka

people have a saying: "ivbe na eme! Oka ivbe shi na ikuku abia", meaning all good things that come to Oka come from outer space.

Like the other gods of the Oka people, Okikia-na-ube had a movable alter. But his alter was the elephant's tusk.

Okikia-na-ube (shortened to Okanube) gave Oka her name. The Ifiteana people called themselves "worshippers of Okanube", Umu-Okanube. Then Umu-Okanube became shortened to Umu-Oka; and their town became Oka. Just as Umuikenanunwa and Umuokpandu families, because they worshipped a common goddess called "Ayomgbovbe", called themselves Umu-Ayomgbovbe, worshippers of Ayomgbovbe, and so became "Umuayom" people, who today live in Umuayom Village, the Head village of Oka town.

Okanube was the god that inspired the Ifiteana in war, who taught them to hunt and fight with the javelin – the throwing spear – who taught them to work in iron, carve in wood, practice medicine, and till the land. While others were still relying on "mgbolo" alone, wooden staff or pole, as their weapon of war, the Ifiteana, worshippers of Okanibe, invented the iron spear-ube or alo and became invincible to their neighbours. They worshipped and venerated the god that inspired them, and called him "the god that is pre-eminent with the spear!" – Okikia-na-ube – Okanube, for short

Metal work was as old as the first Oka man. It was their proficiency in working in metal that gave the Ifiteana the pre-eminent position they held among the several nations surrounding them.

Oka very early in their history discovered the art of smelting iron, and themselves supplied their own needs. They hammered metal into useful shapes and made tools, agricultural implements and weapons for themselves and others.

An area of Oka town, called Nluana, now part of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, was, until recent times, filled with heaps of iron slags, the result of iron smelting by Oka. The art is slumbering, but has not died out completely. Where they procured the iron ore was said to be from Agbaja hills.

Oka supplied their own needs of iron products and served others, but the era of the "traveling blacksmith" began with the coming of Agulu. Oka's internal markets could not sustain all the smiths practicing there; therefore, people moved out, and with their traveling organization into guilds took shape, and, also, the division into journey route ezi ije or owali ije.

Yoruba and Hausa peoples were smiths, but Oka had a different style of smithing up till today.

Binis were specialists in foundry work, but Oka were specialists in iron and steel, in hammering and hitting.

It was gun-smithing, however, that enabled Oka to penetrate Yoruba land. While Yoruba used nails, and riveted their gun parts, Oka used screws. Oka guns could be taken to pieces and re-assembled.

Screw was called “nvbolo” in Oka, and was fabricated by Oka and threaded by them. Threading was done by “nna”. The screw-driver was called “Ishi-ka-arū”. Oka used the Big Vice – mkpa mvbolo – attached to a stand, as well as Hand Vice – mkpa aka – with which things were put in the fire and taken out.

When Oka smiths came in, they superseded others, because of their precision, and the durability of their products. Oka smiths called themselves “Okwanka”, specialists.

Oka manufactured all their tools for smithing and never used imported implements, even at the present time. They preferred their own parts.

In 1925 Oka smiths were taken to England, in an exhibition at Wembley, England. They showed the British how Oka smiths worked, and what they made. Afterwards, the British initiated them and flooded the African market with cheaper machine-made goods. Oka blacksmithing fell, and has never risen again.

Oka smiths fashioned implements to carve the wood for gun parts. They made the “Nso” – chisel, and “Nlacha” – cursafe, for shaving wood to smoothen it.

The Oka man looked at a thing – a metal object or wood. He examined it carefully and with great concentration. He then went home and reproduced it. That was Oka.

Oka smithing was dying until the Nigerian Civil War, then Oka came back briefly into her own, in fabrication, foundry work, and so on. Oka flowered for a time, and then sunk back into ordinariness. Oka blacksmiths had great honour wherever they went. Their usefulness was always appreciated. In Yoruba land they were not required to do what others did. “Agbede” (the blacksmith), they said, “does not cut the path to the stream, nor cut the path to the farms, nor go to war. He is in his smithy fashioning the implements of war or of farming.

Urūeri, Amaenyiana and okpo, the three Ifiteana communities, who called themselves Umu-Oka, or Oka began their entry into remembered history on the banks of the Ogwugwu Stream, in what is now Nkwelle Village. They all lived there.

During the period of expansion, Urūeri remained in the original habitation near the Ogwugwu Stream, from which they drank; while Amaenyiana moved to the hill-top overlooking the elephants trail. They settled on what later became known as “Okpuno Ochu”, and got their drinking water from the Ovbia stream. From there, a man called Ndu, took his family and some companions further east, on the same plateau, to found a smaller community of Amaenyiana, distinct from the man body of Amaenyiana, still living at Okpuno ochu, near the Ring Road to Nibo.

A people called Nkwelle came to live with Urūeri. They comprised four families— Achllaoji, Agbana, Umunamoke and Umudiaba. They later merged with Urūeri and all became known as “Nkwelle”. But Nkwelle proper had different Ajana from Urūeri, a sign of different identity, for in Oka related people had one Ajana. Moreover, the Urūeri people always performed the ceremony of “mma ogbu” – planting the ogbu fertility and long-lived tree – for any Nkwelle man founding a new compound, showing that they

were the original inhabitants of the land. Nkwelle man founding a new compound, showing that they were the original inhabitants of the land. Nkwelle, Uvume and Umuokwa formerly took the Ajaghija and ozo titles together, until Uvme and Umuokwa were driven away by war, indicating that the three peoples were of common stock and culture.

It was from their new settlement that Ndu brought his people down to the present-day Umuayom Village site, to start the Ayom-na-Okpala community, after the unfortunate disasters that befell Amaenyiana. And it was from Ayom-na-Okpala, from the Umuoramma family, that a warrior group (anya) went out to the boundary of Oka and Nawfia and founded Umuokpu Village; and from Umuokpu Village they founded Umuokpu - Obunagu Village, which was later re-named Amikwo-Obunagu.

In their own expansion, the okpo people settled on the hill-top opposite Amaenyiana, near the Ovbua and Nwanna Streams. They supplied Priests that gave food to and ministered to the god, Obe. They were therefore, also known as the Obe people. They founded the villages of Amachalla, Amudo and Umuzocha.

While all Ifiteana were still living at Nkwelle, an okpo man, called Ikwodiaku, a doctor, while hunting for herbs, discovered near Udide lake another luscious and fertile land, where he settled with those who would follow him, and thus founded Amikwo Village, which took its name from him - of Ama - Ikwodiaku, or Amikwo.

Eri, an Amaenyiana man, was a palm wine tapper, the first to make it a profession. He settled on the outskirts of Oka in order to near the numerous palm trees that were the sources of his palm wine production. Later, he was joined by his two friends, Ogbunu and Ogwa. Their settlement was known as settlement on the outskirts "ezi agu or iku agu, Oka", from which was derived the name Ezi-Oka as the name of the Quarter where they settled.

Amaenyi-na-Amachalla (Amaenyi and Amachalla, that is, Amachalla-na-ato) and Urueri were the original Oka people. From okpo of the Amachallas Amikwo emigrated to where they now live and from Amaenyi the components parts of Ezioka also moved. Agulu came later to live with Amikwo, and Umudioka came to live among the Ezioka people. Umuokpu went out to settle on the border with Nawfia town from Amaenyi, whilst the different peoples making up Ifite-Oka settled with the Okpos, and the Nkwelle people merged with Urueri. That in a nutshell was the composition of Oka.

The Ifiteana people – Urueri, Amaenyiana, and Okpo – were not skilled metal workers, farmers and doctors, but were enthusiastic hunters. They were said to be generally tall and muscular.

Apart from individual hunting at odd times, they organized community or mass huntings that they killed the elephants that were the source of their wealth.

Small animals killed were shared in the bush. But big animals, when killed were shared at home, such as Ene, Ocho, Atu, Ezi-Ovbua, Uvbala (also called Ishi-aba-ovbia, having long twisted horns used for Amanwulu ceremony: on the day the Amanwulu celebrant put on the Amanwulu headgear or cap (abo), it was the horn of the uvbala that was

blown, and the celebrant returning from Udo Shrine answered back “o-o-o-o-o”). Such big animals were strapped to poles and carried home amidst the hunting chant.

“Kwenu olima-o
Olimanja!
Olima-o
Olimanja!
Kwenu olima-o
Olimanja!
Olima-o
Olimanja!

When people at home heard the chant they rushed out to rejoice, knowing that a big animal had been killed.

The laws of hunting of the Ifiteana were as follows:

1. Before setting out for mass hunting, the people should examine themselves and exclude all those who would bring them bad luck. Those who would bring them bad luck were classified as follows:-
 - (i) Onye pa alu nta, meaning, the second burial ceremony of his father, mother, wife or brother and
 - (ii) Onye lulu ulu anu, that is to say, a person guilty of taking an animal he did not kill, for example, if somebody's snare killed an animal and he took it out and, instead of carrying it to the owner, appropriated it, or if somebody shot an animal and it fled and died some distance away, the person who saw it within one native week of its being killed and took it himself without looking for the owner.
 - (iii) Onye kpul aga n'ishi, meaning, at the start of hunting any one who put the bamboo trap (aga) on his head.

The belief was that if any of these categories of people joined the hunt there would be no game, no animals would be killed.

2. The laws of the chase

- (i) Those with guns must, under no circumstances, shoot at man's level-ogo mmadi. The shooter must point the gun downwards, unless the animal was so near that he saw all round it, so that he could not miss it, and if the bullet penetrated the animal there was no human being behind it likely to be affected.
- (ii) When a person grappled with an animal, or an animal was very near, he must not use a machet, because he would either hurt himself or another person who came to help.
- (iii) If a person machetted an animal first, and another killed it afterwards, the animal belonged to the man who first struck it.

(iv) If a person shot an animal and wounded it, and subsequently another person shot it dead, the animal belonged to the first man.

(v) Where there was a dispute as to who owned an animal that had been killed, the "ikpo nkita", the bell on the neck of a hunting god – was put on the animal, and the disputant was asked to swear on it that he killed the animal. If he swore falsely, the belief was that for two or three months thereafter he would be unable to kill any animal, even if the animal was within one metre of him. This was called "mgba ikpo". But if he was the lawful owner, and swore, the belief was that he would be the first to kill at the next hunting expedition, it was then said, "na ogoli ya" – he is vindicated.

(vi) **Division**

(a) An animal killed in a hunting expedition was shared as follows:-

The killer took the head; then the body was divided into two, the killer took one-half, and the rest of the hunters took the other half. This was so, whether the animal was big or small. If nchi (grass-cutter) was driven out of its lair by a hunting-dog, the dog's owner was given one leg, and the animal was shared into two, as above. The boys who carried the animal were given the intestines.

(b) All the halves of the animals killed in hunting expedition were put together and shared generally by all those who took part in the hunting both those who had killed the animals and those who hadn't. It was then said, "eke-e anu nta" – the proceeds of hunting have been equitably shared. The dog was given its share which was taken by its owner.

There was a saying: "Egbute eke ghi eke na avu nta", meaning a person who refused to share his killing with others would not be allowed to join any future hunting.

(vii) **Nru (Tribute to old age):**

before the division of a big animal the "inti na ana", alias "ishiko", that is, the chest from the neck of the 5th rib, was taken out. This the killer of the animal gave to the oldest man in his family, together with one leg. This was called "nru", or tribute to the elders (who could no longer go hunting).

3. **Time:** The month of Ede Mmuo festival, the last month of the Oka year, was the month for mass hunting. Then bush fires (agu oku) had taken place, and the round was being prepared for the next farming season.

4. **Elephant hunting:** Before the day of the hunt, the diviners (Dibies) were called and they gave the go-ahead. Then medicines were prepared. If spears (javelins) (ube) agana was preferred. If guns were to be used the agini, were also smeared with the medicines.

The recipe for the medicines was passed down from generation to generation. It was said to have originated from Okanube, the first Oka god.

There were two kinds of medicine – (a) otolo and (b) ada-ngene. If otolo medicine was used the elephant hit with it would stool until it weakened and

died. If ada-ngene was used, the elephant would keep going on until met a stream, or any body of water, and as soon as it drank from it, it died – it was never able to cross the water. Modern example: 1910 elephant was killed by the sue of ‘ada-ngene’ by three hunters – Nwole, Odogwu and Nzekwe Onuorah of Umuayom Village. The elephant tried to cross the Oji River but died on its banks. Its head decorated the Government Station, Oka, for many years.

5. Okike: Okike, the stuffed elephant’s tusk, differed form the ivory trumpet used on social occasion.

The stuffed elephant’s tusk was a sacred object of the Oka people. “Mgbe eji apatu Okike bun a onwa ise Oka”. The time for the celebration of Okike was the fifth month of the Oka year, that is, towards the dry season, when hunting started. Once a year the Okike was brought down. It was the “nkwu” or altar of the god, Okanube. Sacrifice was made near it but not over it. Yams were brought for foofoo, a chicken or a goat was killed for soup. The slaughtered animal was dissected and the parts for sacrifice were taken out. If it was a fowl, the parts for sacrifice were the head, the feet, and chest cage. These were buried in the ground in front of the Okike. An “Obie” a stout stick with sharpened end – was struck in the ground, once, to make a hole into which the sacrificial parts of the fowl were put and covered up. As soon as the sacrifice was made, the Okike was re-wrapped and taken away to its hiding place. Thereafter, food was prepared and feasting began.

The Okike, kept in every Oka ancestral Hall, was the repository of the medicines Oka used for hunting elephants. Therefore, the medicines were protected by religious sanctions. It was believed that an unauthorized person who looked at the Okike before its yearly outing would have hysteria, until the diviners were called in, who would find that he had seen Okike (“ashi na ovbulu Okike”). The Okike would then be appeased with an appropriate sacrifice, and the person would recover.

Urueri were the Head of the Oka people, but when they almost died out, Amaenyiana took the Headship from them, and have retained it till today.

In course of time there developed thirty-three villages in Oka town, each having its own land, and each autonomous in everything except in what concerned the whole population, grouped themselves into Quarters, according to their historian origins. Each set of ancestors formed a Quarter, thus, Ifiteana set of ancestors form Ifite Quarter, Amikwo set of ancestors formed Amikwo Quarter, Ezioka set of ancestors formed Ezioka Quarter, and Agulu set of ancestors formed Agulu Quarter.

Ifite Quarter was counted as one Quarter, even though, it did not contain only one set of ancestors. In fact, it contained four sets of ancestors, namely, Ayom-na-Okpala (Amaenyi, properly so called), Nkwelle, Amachalla (called Amachalla-na-ato) and Ifite Oka. Each became a sub-Quarter of Ifite Quarter. The Quarters were themselves grouped into two larger units called Ifite (the original habitation of the Ifiteana, and Ezi (the outskirts-iku agu or ezi agu). That was how the name “Ezi-na-Ifite” came about in Oka. When things were being shared Ifite took the first share, and Ezi the second share.

When things were shared, Quarter by Quarter, they were taken in the following order:

Ayom-na-Okpala took the first share, because of Umuokpandu family (a branch of Amaenyiana) within it who became the Head of all Oka after Urueri.

Nkwelle took the second share, because of the Urueri family who had become part of Nkwelle.

Amachalla-na-ato took the third share because the three villages making it up, namely, Amachalla, Amudo and Umuzocha were Okpos and the Okpos were next to Amaenyiana.

Ifite-Oka took the fourth share, because of Irunnebo family, who were part of Ifite-Oka Quarter, and were themselves part of the Ifiteana-Okpos.

Amikwo took the fifth share, because they were an offshoot of the Okpos, and formed a settled community before Ezioka.

Ezioka took share number six; because they went to settle where they settled from Amaenyiana (they absorbed Umudioka who were the last to arrive in Oka).

Agulu took the last share, because although they were senior to Umudioka, with regards to dates of arrival at Oka, Umudioka had become part of Ezioka.

Inside Ayom-na-Okpala, the order of seniority was as follows: Umuayom Village (because of Umuokpandu family forming part of it), Umunnoke, Umuoramma and Umuokpu.

In Nkwelle, the order was as follows:- Amachallaoji (because of the remnant of Urueri attached to them), Enuifite, and Agbana-Ifite.

In Amikwo, the order was as follows:- Umudiana, Okperi, Igweogige, Isiagu and Obunagu.

In Ezioka, the order was Omuko, Umueri, Umuogwal, Umuogbunu Nos. 1 and 2 (that is, the two Umuogbunus, namely, Umunzobe and Umuogbunu), and Umudioka.

In Agulu, the order was as follows:- Umuogbu, Umubele, Umuanaga, Umuike, Umujagwo, Umuenechi and Umuoruka.

The order of taking shares in Oka, village by village, was, therefore as follows:

1. Umuayom
2. Umunoke
3. Umuoramma
4. Umuokpu
5. Achallaoji
6. Umunamoke
7. Umudiaba
8. Agbana
9. Amachalla

10. Amudo
11. Umuzocha
12. Ezinato-Ifite
13. Enu-Ifite
14. Agbana-Ifite
15. Omuko
16. Umueri
17. Umukwa
18. Umuogwal
19. Umuogbunu No. 1.
20. Umuogbunu No. 2
21. Umudioka
22. Umudiana
23. Okperi
24. Igweogige
25. Isiagu
26. Obunagu
27. Umuogbu
28. Umubele
29. Umuanaga
30. Umuike
31. Umujagwa
32. Umuenechi
33. Umuoruka

The Ifiteana, who called themselves Umu-Oka or Oka, had an advanced culture that was totally different from that of the people around them. Their manner of living, language, customs and rules of conduct and social organization were different.

They said of themselves that they were the original inhabitants of the land. The original Igbo. Ifiteana: ndu vbili ana, ndu kulu ana.

Ifite firi fi (the she-goat lies where she lies, unmoving). Ifiite, she-goat, mother of goats.

“Ifi-te anara eli na nnigheli”, the Oka people say, the she-goat does not thrive on being moved. Their name, Ifiteana, meant, The Immovable Ones! The rearers of goat! The domesticators of animals!!

Whatever their origin, these people had been living on Oka land from time out of mind. The present Oka people are their descendants. Oka people always referred to themselves as “Ebe anyi”. When Ok a people greet themselves collectively they say Ibe-anyi” or “Onye-ibe”. When Oka people greet themselves collectively they say Ibe-anyi. Although the ancestry of Ifiteana is so remote that no one can remember it, people, however, sometimes wondered whether they could not be an offshoot of the fabled Atlantians!

The Ifiteanas tamed the inhospitable forests of what is now Oka town, and hunted the wild animals that abounded therein, such as ene, ocho, mmolo, atu, and above all they have no memory.

Animals of various kinds roamed therein, particularly the elephant (enyi), whose trail criss-crossed the entire area. Up till recent times there used to be at Agu Oka (at a spot now part of the former premises of the Anambra State College of Education) at Nluana a pond known as Iyi Enyi (Elephants' Pond) where elephants used to congregate to drink and slake their thirst.

But the elephants have completely gone from the area, with the steady encroachment of man. The last elephant that passed through Oka was pursued and killed at Oji-na-ato in Ugwuoba in 1910, and, as has been stated, its head was used to adorn the walls of the District Office, Oka, for many years.

The Ifiteana, who were the early Oka people, organized mass hunting as one of their most serious occupations.

During the dry season the Oka huntsmen went out in large groups to hunt wild animals. They killed their game, dressed the meat and carried same home to be used as food or sold. But their real wealth came from the elephants – the tusks of the

“ivbe eji achu nta”, say the Oka people,

“bu maka ezie, oburo na anu ya ana atokazi uto”,

[The reason why Oka hunt the elephant is for its ivory,
not because its meat is very sweet].

In the dim and distant past the window of the Oka people to the outside was their ivory trade. The elephant's tusk was the oldest Oka item of foreign trade. It, “Eze enyi”, has been a very valuable commodity in Oka for far beyond human memory. It was an article of trade with people who came from distant countries in search of it, bringing with them for exchange, the products of their own native lands.

The Oka people had always defended their territory with tenacity throughout their long history. And until the arrival of the British in the 20th Century, they were constantly fighting. Their games were warlike games, their dances were intended to exercise the body and inculcate self-discipline and attentiveness. It was always drilled into the ears of their children, from very early age, that they must always act bravely, and with discretion. Implements of war were always stacked within reach in every Obu, or ancestral Hall, and whenever an alarm was raised every able-bodied man (and sometimes boys) came out to do their duty. Ozo Nwanna Nwuduozo (Owulu-bu-ego) of Umuogbo Village could remember the start of the Amikwo – Agulu war. “I was about fifteen years of age then”, he said “on the day the war began. I took my bow and arrows from Hall, and went out to the battle-front; but I was driven back by my elders, they said I was too young.

Some of the ancient people in the vicinity of Oka who menaced Oka security, and kept Oka constantly fighting were Umuezekwu, Nwolu, Uvume, Abo-Enugwu, Umuokwa, Amantogwu, Inyi, Ntoko, Norgu. But these peoples are no longer there; they were effectively repulsed and driven away.

Umuezekwu war appeared to be the first remembered war of the Oka people. There was a daughter of the Oka people called Nومه, a most beautiful girl. She fell ill, and the Umuezekwu people, who were mostly native doctors, but not of Ifiteana stock, undertook to cure her. They failed, and Nومه died. The Oka people charged that

Umuezeukwu had murdered the girl. They attacked Umuezeukwu and war ensued. Umuezeukwu were eventually defeated and scattered, and they left the neighborhood of Oka. Nomeh was buried in what is now Shrine of Imoka. Other Okas began to be buried there, and it became the burial ground of the Oka people.

After some years the spirit of Nomeh began to haunt her Oka relatives. She was angry because her life had been cut short, and she was not spared to marry and beget children. To appease her, the Okas went to Akpoto – to the land of the Idoma people, who were famed native doctors, and got a group of them to come and do a medicine for Oka. The Akpotos came, and the medicine they made for Oka was Akwali-Oda-Omumu Umuoka, an akwali to bring Umuoka children and ward off evil.

This akwali was sited at the spot where Nomeh was buried. The akwali became known as Akwali Umuoka or Imoka. When it got very powerful the Oka people worshipped it as a god, and celebrated its festival once a year. Hence Imoka was sometimes called Imoka Nomeh!

After the akwali was made, the diviners (native doctors who specialized in ascertaining the wishes of the gods) had to determine who were to serve it and give it food. The job, or honour, fell to a family called Umu-Ofunu, in Amachalla Village. They served it for sometime, and then grew careless, and could not keep the rules and taboos and so died off. Umu-Eleke family, also in Amachalla, succeeded them, and have been serving the god up till today, enjoying both the prestige and the proceeds from sacrifices made to the god.

The Akpoto native doctors were not allowed to return to their native land. The medicine they made was of such importance to the Oka people that it was feared that if they were allowed to go home they might do something to reduce its potency, or else, do a similar medicine for other people who could then become more powerful than Oka.

For that reason, they were persuaded to settle permanently in Oka town and carry on their trade of native doctors. But after living for sometime in Amachalla Village, on a piece of land along what is now G.I. Nwigbo Street, at the front of the present compound of Nwaforka Nwoka (Chinemeaku), the Oka people became apprehensive of them, because of their powerful medicines and so moved them to a place behind the habitation of the Okpos, called Okpuno, and settled them there. The Akpotos occupied the site, progressed and multiplied in numbers, and eventually formed a large community of their own – a Village, called Okpuno-Okachi, meaning, Okpuno settlement brought about by the Oka people.

The author went to Nnobi to find out if there was any support for the theory that the first Okas could have come from Nnobi. He found none. He could not even find anyone of Nnobi origin who remembered any tradition of their people linking Oka with Nnobi. But the Ugwuoba people have a saying of their own which goes like this:

“Oka Nnobi!
Ugwu-o Nnoshi!
“Ha nibo ka bukana ohu”.
(Oka (Nnobi, Ugwuoba Nnoshi,
The two have the same origin).

But “Oka Nnobi” was a mere saying, which have arisen because there was a town, in fact, called by the name Awka-Nnobi, which was later changed to “Awka-Etiti”. Even in respect of that other Awka (Awka-Etiti) no link could be among the traditions of the people themselves connecting them to the Oka of the Ifiteanas.

Nevertheless, there is a story among the Oka people that Awka-Etiti, formerly called Awka-Nnobi, comprised descendants of Oka people who came to that area to work as blacksmiths. When the time came for the annual return to Oka they failed to go home. They did this several times, and people began to call them “Oka Nkakwu” that is, foolish Oka, who refused to go home. Later on, their neighbours, the people of Nnewi changed the intonation and began to call them derisively “Oka Nkakwu” – that is, Oka of the smelly rat! When other people in glee began to call them by that name, Oka of the smelly rat – the people concerned decided to change their name to Awka – Etiti. Formerly Awka Etiti was part of the town of Nnobi. But as soon as they changed their name to Awka Etiti, they secured their separate existence from Nnobi town, governmental and otherwise.

It is believed that the existence of Awka Nnobi, as a part of Nnobi, gave rise to the theory that Oka of the Ifiteanas might have come from Nnobi, and that both were the same. Available evidence has not proved this to be so.

The author did notice, however, on his journey, that the carvings on the gates of the compounds in Nnobi town were almost as if they had been lifted bodily from Oka; and were quite different from the carvings, whilst Nnobi carvings were deep and severe, like Oka carvings, and the motif was similar. Moreover, the manner of covering the compound walls with palm branches and palm fronds, and the holes made through the mud walls for that purpose, were all like Oka and were quite distinct from the manner of the other towns which surround Nnobi.

There may be nothing in this slender piece of evidence, other than mere cultural similarity, which could occur as a result of intercourse between peoples, but it is a point worthy of future examination.

Similarly, Ikolo, the traditional wooden drum of most Igbo communities, was used to summon people in times of emergency and war, and in religious observances connected with the protection of the community. When the Ikolo of the Oka people at Nkwo Imoka Square, called Oka, it said:-

“Igbo ukwu, Igbo ukwu!
Nnamenyi!
Igbo ukwu, Igbo ukwu, Igbo ukwu!
Nnamenyi!”

“Igbo ukwu”, or Igbulukwu, was the traditional praise-name of Oka, used in times of stress and acts of power. What the Ikolo said was:

Mighty town of the Igbo people!
Mighty town of the Igbo people!
Your ancestors are great like the elephant!
Your ancestors are great like the elephant!

And whenever this was heard, all Oka quickly assembled to deal with whatever had arisen. But there is no historical evidence of any connection with the other town of that name.

Three separate tributaries, in course of time, flowed into the main stream of Oka culture to enlarge it, the dictionary meaning of culture being “the sum total of ways of living, built up by a group of human beings, which is transmitted from one generation to another.

The first tributary was the Agulu factor. Nnebuza, a master blacksmith, came from Agulu Village in the town of Umana, Obeleagu, in the Agbaja country, to earn a living among the Oka people. His son, Agulu, became naturalized Oka citizen. Agulu introduced the practice of “the traveling blacksmith”, and by that means his descendants spread the fame of Oka far and wide. (The coming of Agulu will be dealt with in another chapter).

The second tributary was the contribution of the Nri.

According to the tradition of the Nri themselves, a man of Igala stock from Idah called Eri, son of Achado, a native doctor and hunter, came down the Omambala River in search of the River at a place later called Aguleri (Aguleri Igbo), and begat a number of children, to whom he passed on the secrets of his arts. His eldest son, who succeeded to the paraphernalia of his trade, was called Nriifikwuanim.

This first son moved farther into Igbo land and settled among the Ugbene people, who showed him a portion of their farmland called “Agu Ukwu” to live and farm upon.

Nriifikwuanim prospered and became known not only for his powers to cure diseases, but also for his readiness to assume the risk of cleansing people of abominations. He was able to do this because abominations were sins against the Earth goddess – Aja Ana, and being a non-Igbo person he was not subject to the power of any Aja Ana in Igboland. What was “Alu” (abomination) to the Igbo was not Alu to him, and what was “Nso” (forbidden conduct) did not concern him. He came from a different clime. He could, therefore, perform ceremonies to cleanse people of abominations attaching to them, and so make them acceptable to their communities once more. He took things – clothes, property – for his own use which the Igbos regarded as unclean or prohibited from the Igbo gods. He got rich thereby.

From removing the stains of abomination from people, Nriifikwuanim developed the technique of sanctifying things in general, by rituals which he devised; for example, driving away evil spirits from or around people (exorcism).

When he became famous, he decided to move from Ugbene to the more populous areas of Igboland. He came and dwelt near Oka, on the land of another Igbo community owners of the land where he settled, by giving them a percentage of his earnings, in cash or kind; hence the saying “Ivbe Nri evbe Adama” (What you pay to Nri Nri pays to Adama’s people).

Adama was the Head of Umudiana Village of Adazi, owners of the land, who gave the first land they settled upon to the Nris. Later on, the Nris expanded by buying more land for themselves.

From the time they lived at Ugbene, Nriifkwuanim and his followers were referred to as "Ndu bun a Agu Ukwu" (dwellers in Agu Ukwu land of the Ugbenes). From this reference to their locality the name "Agu Ukwu" identified Nriifkwuanim and his people, and even when they had left Ugbene town, they were still known as "Agu Ukwu" people. Also the title-name of Eze of today – Udene is but the corrupted form of the name Ugbene.

So, when they came to live near Oka to work, the community of Nriifkwuanim was known as Agu Ukwu, and their place of habitation Agukwu town. In modern times, the name has been changed to Nri town, after the name of their ancestor – Nriifkwuanim. But the Ikolo drums of the Nris still call them: "Agu Ukwu Ugbene Agu Ukwu Ugbene!"

What Nriifkwuanim (Nri in shortened form) was able to do was most welcome to the Oka people. Previously, an offender who had committed an abomination – alu - which was a sin against Aja Ana, the Earth Goddess, and was in fact a grievous offence whose tendency was to disrupt the solidarity of the society or affect the corporate existence of Oka, such as a person having carnal knowledge of the person's father's wife while the father was alive, or committing incest, could only be killed or sold into slavery. Such a person must, in any case, be excluded from the society which he had tried to tear asunder. There was no way of bringing him back, for no one could forgive offences against the gods.

But then there came a stranger, whom the Igbo gods could not touch, who said he could cleanse abominations by taking the risks upon himself.

So, a second alternative opened up. An offender could be re-integrated with his community (after suffering whatever penalty was imposed on him by the community) by making his peace with the gods, after being cleansed of his abominable stain through a ceremony by Nriifkwuanim.

Nriifkwuanim and his descendants were, therefore, very much welcomed in Oka town. Their services were required wherever sanctification was called for. They were invited where evil spirits were to be driven out of a household, or when people must purify themselves to take a particular title (so as not to die in the midst of the ceremonies), or when a house must be cleansed because a man who had committed an abomination had died within it, or when unknown gods must be propitiated.

Contrary to popular misconception, Nris were not Oka people, and Oka people were not Nris; for whereas Nris were of Igala stock, Okas were original Igbo. There was no blood connection between them. But the two groups of people co-operated with one another, and worked harmoniously together. Both traveled extensively throughout Igboland. And while the Nris looked after the spiritual needs of the people they served, the Okas looked after their economic well-being. That could be the meaning of the Ogene song, which went like this:-

":Etu vbe, etu vbe, gbavba-a-gbavba
Oka na Nri bu ovbu, ebe-ne-be!"

(If you look deep into history,
You will find that Oka and Nri are one).

The two sets of people certainly complemented each other.

Because of the Nris ability to sanctify things, by removing the religious pollutions attached to them; and their ability to propitiate the gods, known and unknown, they were credited with the unique power of communicating with the gods. Therefore, wherever an Nri man was present in Igboland, he broke the kolanut, whether his elders were present or not. He did this, however, if no Oka man was present. If an Oka man was present, it was the Oka man that broke the kolanut, provided he was older than the Nri man. There was an ancient saying:

Nri anara awakpo Oka oji”

(No Nri man takes precedence over an Oka man in breaking the kolanut).

The reason for the rule was that Oka people asserted that since it was they who manufactured the “Otonshi” – the metal staff or wand – with which the Nri performed their magical rites, it was not proper that the Nris should claim precedence over the creators of their source of power. The Nri themselves called their tool “Otonshi Nri ji eli Igbo”, meaning magic to Oka culture, and the cleansing of abominations – “nkpu alu”.

The third tributary that enlarged the stream that was Oka culture was the Dioka.

Body ornamentation, Ichi, mbubu, circumcision, tribal marks, these were the specialties of the Dioka; he was a surgeon from the town of Umudioka – Akpom. Hence he was called Nwa – Dioka (a son of Umudioka). But the surgery he practiced was not for curing diseases but for ornamentation. With his nimble knife he deftly cut intricate patterns on the human body, and, using herbs which he alone knew how to use, he sterilized the wounds and ensured speedy recovery.

The work of the Dioka was so important to the Oka man that, like the Nri in spiritual sphere, he became intertwined with the fabric of Oka social life.

A Dioka was also what Oka people called “Okwanka”, a skilled craftsman, a specialist.

Dioka came from Umudioka town in Dunukofia. A branch of them got established at Nneni, but those who came from Umudioka – Akpom.

When a child was to be circumcised it was the Umudioka man that did it.

When an Oka man grew to manhood, and was ready to found a compound of his own, and to pregnate women, he was forbidden by custom to do either, until he had undergone a ceremony called “Iwa eze”. It was the Dioka who, with his chisel, came to do it: he chiseled the front teeth into the required shape; and a feast was made for the occasion.

When a man who is to take the highest title in Oka, that of Ozo title. He could not do so until he had been given the “ichi” marks by the Dioka, that is, cicatrisation. It was an elaborate proceeding, infact a celebration, and the Dioka with his knife cut hachure on

the face of the candidate, making parallel lines all over the face of the person, from the forehead to the chin. This scarification of the face was a mark of endurance and a test of manhood. The wounds later formed cicatrices which were considered a mark of manliness and distinction.

On the day of the ichi-making ceremony (mgbu ichi) there was feasting and merriment, and people made music in order to distract the candidate and prevent him from showing signs of pain, which would have been considered unmanly. In the olden days every Oka Ozo title holder had ichi marks.

Likewise, when a girl was to enter into womanhood, there was a ceremony performed for her called "Iru mkpu". It was a ceremonial outing after a period of seclusion. All celebrants must have had the "mbubu" marks made on them by the Dioka. "Mbubu" were intricate patterns made on a girl's body, starting from the neck and going down her belly to the beginning of the public hair. The patterns could be figures of butterflies or some other interesting objects, depending on the ingenuity of the Dioka. Inside the cut skin the Dioka inserted a pigment which gave the lines a dark colouring that remained so till the person's death. Without "iru mkpu" there was no entry into the marriage state, and without the "mbubu" there was no "iru mkpu".

In the days when tribal marks were vogue, when people of one tribe gave marks to themselves to distinguish themselves from others, Oka had a tribal mark of their own. It was called "nvo ngwele". (Lizard's foot). Every Oka man from the 1920 age-grade backwards had it. Those born after that date may or may not have it. It consisted of three short horizontal lines, parallel to one another, on either side of the face, a few millimeters from the corner of each eye. Anyone meeting an Oka man, and looking closely at his face, was likely to see the mark.

Apart from the ceremonial cicatrization called ichi, mbubu, and the tribal marks, people ornamented their bodies by cutting into them decorative designs of their choice, like rings round the neck (called "nki"), flowers on the arms or legs, or patterns on the breasts.

The Diokas came (like the Nris), gave their services, received their payments, either in cash or in kind, and returned to their homes.

With the coming of the British, however, the work of the Dioka fell into desuetude. The social conditions that gave rise to the demand for it changed. Apart from circumcision, which is now been done by people other than the Diokas, no one ornaments his body in the old way anymore. Nevertheless, the existence of the Dioka played a very important role in the life of the Oka people in the days gone by.

A "Dioka" was the founder of the present Umudioka Village of Oka town.

The Ifiteana called themselves Umu - Okanube, after Okika-na-ube, the god they worshipped, and they established a market in his honour, which they named Oye-Okanube (popularly called Oye-Oka). The market was always called Oye - Okanube (Oye Oka) even when. The market was always called Oye-Okanube (Oye Oka) even when the village where it was established came to be known as Nwelle.

The Oye-Oka market square was the centre of Oka life of old, until 1928. There the Ifiteana people held their assemblies, and took decisions on war and peace; there they performed the ceremony of admitting a stranger to Oka citizenship; there they brought to a fitting end the performance of Ozo title; and there they tried cases of murder and other heinous offences. Nearby, not far from the market Square, was "Ukpaka Okwudo" – an oil tree on which condemned persons were hanged.

By 1928, the British had come. And when the Oka people assembled there in that fateful year and took a decision to oppose taxation in Oka town, all the leading members of Oka community were arrested by the British and prosecuted. They were all jailed and sent to Asaba to serve their sentences.

The Oka people often recalled the memory of that traumatic experience by a crack they made about what they said the trumpets of the soldiers at Asaba (or Araba) were supposed to say on their morning parades; which sounded as if it was directed specially at the Oka prisoners. According to them, every morning the trumpets used to say

"Oganyala me mma, oganyala anolu bie,
Oganyala emegh mma, Oganyala eje na Araba tal avbuvbu
na avduvdu dun a Araba erike, rike, rike!
(If the rich man behaves himself, the rich man will stay Asaba and suffer,
and the suffering at Asaba is great, great, great!).

After that incident, the Oka people no longer held their mass meetings at Oye Okanube., they moved them indoors, to the compound of the Head of all Okas – the oldest Oka man alive at any one time, who was called "Otochal Oka".

Also, near the Oye-Oka market place, in the same Nwelle Village, was the Shrine of the god Okanube himself, whose praise-name was "Ube-ful-na-Oye", meaning, "the spear that pierced through to the Oye Market Square", which was an allusion to the cave that began at Ogba stream, near what later became known as Awka Government Station, and opened out at Oye-Oka market place. This cave was used by the Ifiteana people for trial by ordeal, to try anyone accused of witchcraft, or other crimes which only the gods could find the truth of. Anyone who entered the cave at Ogba stream and came out alive at Oye market Square, was adjudged not guilty of the crime for which he was standing trial; but a guilty person never came out. A person entered the cave on the directions of the Ogba priest, whose home was in Amikwo Village.

In the ancient days, the Shrine of Okanube in Nkwelle Village, (in a grove of trees), was a very large Square, which was always scrupulously swept and kept clean. It was large enough to accommodate all the Ndichies of Oka – the very old people, of 70 years and upwards – who came to perform its sacrifice. These Ndichies were the oldest persons from every village; no young person attended.

During the sacrifice, the "nkwu" of the god (his altar), which was a piece of ivory (Okike) was brought out from its wrappings and displayed in the Shrine, and after the sacrifice it was re-wrapped and taken away. Those who ate the feast of the sacrifice were those Ndichies. They alone knew and protected the mystery of the celebration.

Okike meant an elephant's tusk, or a piece of ivory. The elephant's tusk was an integral part of an Oka man's life, both his social and religious life.

Okike, as the name of a thing, had many meanings in Oka.

There was Okike, which was a commodity sold for money, ordinary elephant's tusk. From it ivory ornaments and jewelry were made by the Oka people, such as odu-okpa, oduaka, mkpalo – odu enyi – ivory trumpet and so on.

There was Okike, which was the ivory trumpet (odu enyi) used by the Okas on social occasions. It was the same elephant's tusk but dressed and hollowed, with an opening at the top for blowing. It was used for Ajaghija title-taking, for marriage celebrations, and for burial ceremonies.

There was Okike, however, which was the movable altar (nkwu) of the god Okika-na-ube, as has been previously described. This Okike, (same elephant's tusk, but decorated with carvings like the one used in the annual sacrifice) was a religious object, and had its replica in the ancestral Hall of every Oka family. It was kept very secret, as has been stated and was always wrapped in folds of cloth. On the day of sacrifice, the Umunna or the extended family, assembled in the Obu or ancestral Hall of the family (as the Ndichies assembled in Nkwelle). The compound gate was shut, and the Okike was brought out from its hiding place. No one must touch it but the oldest member of the family, in whose custody it was. He alone unwrapped it and set it down. The sacrifice was then made. In all sacrifices to the gods the sacrificial animal was always killed over the altar of the god, but in the case of Okike it was near it, not over it. This family Okike, which was the replica of the altar Okanube, was, like the original, a piece of ivory beautifully carved. It was hollowed inside. In the hollow was a stuffing, which represented the secret the Oka people were guarding. It was believed to be the preparation which the Ifiteana used in hunting the elephant – the source of their wealth – the recipe for which was passed down to them by their god, Okika-na-ube, the god that came out of Outer Space. After the sacrifice, the Okike was put back in its hiding place in the Obu, the gates of the compound were thrown open, and the animal killed in sacrifice was cooked and eaten by everybody present.

This sacrifice by families to Okanube – which was a private worship similar to that at Nkwelle at the Shrine of Okanube by the Oka Ndichies, which was a public worship – was made at yearly intervals: it was known as "nli Okike", the feast of Okike, and was observed, up to the present time, by every Oka family.

Today, the once large Square at Nkwelle Village where the general sacrifice to Okanube was made has shrunken. The Ndichies no longer come there to make sacrifice to Okike-na-ube. The Shrine itself is now marked by a single iron staff topped with a small bell, in a small ticket of bushes. People have built houses around, and have encroached on the ancient Square, and so, only this little patch of bush now remains to mark the spot where the oldest of Oka gods was once worshipped, the god that gave Oka her name. (For identification, it is situated behind Emmanuel Nwune Nkwonta's father's compound in Agbana Quarter, Nkwelle Village, Oka).

Achallaaji people were the last to give food to Okike-na-ube, in place of Urueri, and the name of the last Priest of the god was Nwammuokwelozi, an expert uvbio drummer.

The life of the Oka man (otherwise known as Ifiteana man) was surrounded by religion; and everything was devoted to the worship of the gods, and seeking comfort and help from them. The strong belief of the Oka people in their gods and in their laws has enabled them to develop a firm standard of behaviour, which has carried them through the centuries of their existence. These their laws and customs, their technology, their skills in carving, their philosophy and view of life, were all indigenous to them, and were their own exclusive creative product.

As the men so the women! The women of Ifiteana, otherwise called Oka, were as independent, resourceful and wisdom-loving as their men. In Oka town men and women were equal, the only difference being that of sex. In their affairs the Oka people had no special consciousness of women as women: they took them for granted as equal partners.

The love of wisdom by the men also characterized the women.

The women's mourning songs and dances, for example, showed their versatility and depth of thought.

When a daughter of the village died, married to another town (or another village in Oka), the men of her village sent out a town-crier with a cracked gong (which made no musical sound) announcing.

Chime! Olegh!

Anyi g eje ga pata ozu nwa ada-ora echi nine-o-o-o!

We shall to tomorrow to bring home the corpse of a daughter of our village].

That meant no one was to go to work. All must go to bring home the corpse.

The daughters of the village, for themselves, wherever they were married, congregated at the home of the deceased's husband. They spent the night there, watching over the corpse, and awaiting the coming of their brothers and their wives on the morrow.

The married women of her father's village, for their own part, went round Oka in the night, singing and beating on either a calabash or a wooden drum – ekwe- announcing the death of the daughter of the village. At every village Square they came to in Oka they made the following announcement (for example).

Announcer: Inyem Umuzocha-o-o
Onye je ne kwe ivbe echi-o-o
Ivbe na emee olu avuru-o-o
Na nwamgboye Obunyamel shil onye je ne ivbe echio-o-o
Onye jel ivbe echi-o-o
Onu na ukwu nese-o-o!

Chorus: oo – oo – oo – oo”

Then the beating of the calabash or ekwe followed.

What they said was:

Women of Umuzocha Village!
Let no one go to work tomorrow!
For something can happen that could prevent all work,
And Nwagboye Obunyamel (the deceased) has said that no
One should go to work tomorrow,
And one that goes to work tomorrow,
Forty

Very early in the morning, on the morrow at about 5a.m. the same women assembled in the Village Square and sang and danced four funeral dirges to the deceased. They sang:-

1. Eze di ibo-e-e, ezi di ibo,
ezi ogbie aduro iche, ezi di ibo,
ezi amadi aduro iche, ezi di ibo
E-e- ezi di ibo-e-e-e ezi di ibo!
[The road to death is only one road,
There is no road for the rich and one for the poor,
Rich and poor go by the road
There are no two ways but one!].
2. Uzu egbe, uzu egbe,
Onwu du na mpoto ede,
Uzu egbe,
Onye gajie ojutulu ya,
Uzu egbe
Onwu du na odudu igu,
Uzu egbe
Onye gajie ojutulu ya,
Uzu egbe!
3. Ayam me - e - e - e - e - e - e - e - e - e
Ayam mme - e,
Ogoli mutal nnwa ra,
Odonye ga amul ya nnwia?
Ayam mme - e
Odonye ga anulia die,
Ayam mme - e!

[A woman that dies and leaves her child,
Who will mother her child for her?
A woman that dies and leaves her husband,
Who will be a wife to him?]

Meaning: the woman should not have died yet!!

4. E - e - e - e iye - e!
E - e - e - e iye - e!
Uno buo lina ya abia ino, lye - e!
N aonwul onwu keshi anwu, lye - e!
N a omere ivbe ana na aso, iye - e!

E - e - e - e iye - e!

[Distance the four funeral dances for her!
For she has died as we die!
She has committed no abomination,
She has died a good death!
Iye - e!].

After this, they got ready with the men to go and bring home the corpse

While the men preceded them with their single drum and a gun, the women followed behind singing their marching songs:-

(i) Iwo na ewo anyi
Iwo-o-o-, emelio, Iwo
Iwo na ewo anyi,
Na anyi avburo nwa Ada-ora
Ma anyi vbulu nwa Ada-ora.
Ma Iwo adoru anyi na obu-o
Iwo!!

We are angry,
We are very angry,
We are angry
Because we have not seen our daughter,
If we had seen our daughter,
Our anger would have abated,
We are angry!!].

Then they addressed the dead daughter of the village thus:

(ii) Nwa Ada-ora, ebene!
Ebe ne na anyi abia -o!
Nwa Ada Ogbul-agu ebene!
Ebene na anyi abia-o,
Ebene, ebene, ebene na anyi abia-o!

Don't cry our daughter!
Don't cry, for we are coming to take you home!
Don't cry!
Daughter of Amudo Village, don't cry!
Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry, for we are coming!!].

And when they got near to the deceased's husband's house they sang a warning song:

(iii) Shi enine, shi enine-o! Shi enine o!
Shi enine Nwa Ada, Shi enine-o!
Enie nye anyi avo-o! Shi enine-o
[Don't bury her, don't bury her!
Don't bury our daughter, don't bury!
If you bury her, we'll exhume
Don't bury!!]

When the women entered the husband's compound, they went straight to where their daughter was lying in state, and wailed over her. After that, they came out and formed dancing lines, and danced to her the funeral dances called Egwu Idine.

The husband's family then brought out the entitlements of the men, and the women, according to custom and gave to each group. Having satisfied themselves that their entitlements were correct, the men took up the corpse, and shot their gun into the air. Then singing.

Nwa Ada ana,
Iyom!
Nwa Ada ana,
Iyom!

They circled the husband's compound with the corpse carried on their head and then went straight home at a run, beating the lone drum they carried. The women ran after the men, singing in chorus:

Nwa Ada ana,
Iyom!
[Our daughter is going home!
Yes!
Our daughter is going home!!
Yes!].

At the father's compound, the coffi was opened for her relatives to see deceased daughter for the last time, and to cover her with their own cloth. Then was buried.

Oka, land of the Ifiteana was unique in Igboland and unique in history.

Chapter 5

History of Origin

“Oka bu ijite kul ana, bu dada ana ura,
Oka fulefu, aburovba nnanna,
Onwere ika eshivbe bia”.

*[Oka is the ijite plant that grew with the soil,
Oka is the dada-ana-ura plant (which you cannot
uproot without carrying the whole earth
around you),
Oka grew out of the soil of Oka,
Oka did not descend from one father
There is no history that they came from somewhere else].*
— from the saying of Nwokafor Afuzuo

The origin of the first Oka people is lost in the mists of time.

But it is known that Oka people began their life in Oka on the banks of streams. Those early people lived beside streams.

Because streams gave life, Oka people dedicated them to the gods. And one of their earliest gods was Ngene, the god of waters.

The original Oka people – Urueri, Amaenyiana and Okpo – lived together in what is now called Nkwelle. They were served by Ogwugwu stream. But they drank also from two other streams nearby, Enie and Nnia-Oku.

During the period of expansion, while Urueri remained at Nkwelle, Amaenyiana and Okpo separated from them.

Amaenyiana went to live in a location exclusive to themselves. Their choice of site was dictated by the nearness of a stream called Ovbias (Ofiaa) for which they drank.

Likewise, the stream, Nwannu. Drew the Okpos to their new place of abode, Amachalla.

Of all the streams, the Ovbias stream was held the most sacred. All Ifiteana joined in cleaning it. Women who had given birth went there on the 7th native week with braided hair, and a small water-pot, to cleanse themselves in its waters, and to take home some quantity.

Originally all Oka were farmers and metal workers, as well as hunters. But in course of time they began to specialize. Whatever a person could do best he was allowed to do. Hence, groups tended to specialize in one form of economic activity or the other.

The Amaenyiana were specialists in smithing. They were by no means the only smiths, but they specialized in it; both men and women were smiths, the women helping the men in their endeavors.

Amaenyiana were short-lived in history, because of a tragedy which befell them and cut short their existence in Oka town.

What happened was that after they had left Nkwelle Village, and were living at the site later called "Okpuno Ochu", and had already split into two groups – Ndu's group and the main group killed another in a quarrel.

As was the inflexible rule of the Ifiteana people of those days, the murderer and his kith and kin must leave Oka. So, the entire Amaenyiana of the senior branch (that is, excepting Ndu's Amaenyiana) left Oka bag and baggage. They scattered to places of which there is no account. The site they left behind (now the junction of the old Enugu road and the Ring Road) came down in history by the name of "Okpuno Ochu", meaning, old habitation abandoned because of murder.

Some of the old Amaenyiana people managed to survive in Oka today, comprising three house-holds only, namely, Okwuerike Madubuko, Okoludo Obukwelugo and Nwokafor Onyionu. These people have attached themselves to Umuokpandu family.

Until the 19th century, it was the law of Oka that whoever killed a fellow Oka man, intending to kill him, must pay for the murder by being hanged, and by his kith and kin, that is, his close blood – relations, leaving Oka for ever. If he did not intend to kill him, then he was not hanged, but he must leave Oka, together with his people.

Oka believed that "murder will recur", and that the only way to prevent recurrence was to extricate the tainted tree, root and branch.

Driving away a number – him and relations – was a religious exercise, to purify and protect the society as a whole.

As soon as a person ran for murder he was not only considered dead, but he lost all rights to property and any Headship he might have had.

But through the years the loss of so many families became intolerable. So, Oka changed the law. They decreed that only the individual guilty of the crime of murder should suffer the consequences.

Shi agbazina oso ochu,
Ishi na ishi tana", became the law.
"Ogbul onye na onye naa,
Obodo akwafuzina",
"Onunu ochu naa,
Ogbul onye na onye tana".

Put in this various way, the law was the same, it meant:-

He who killed, should perish with the person killed,
Let no families be driven off because of that;
Head for head, let no community run again;
Sacking a community because of murder should stop,
Let the murderer alone perish with the murdered.

From that time onwards it was only the individual who committed murder that was punished in Oka, his relations were spared. "Onunu Ochu", or "nkwankwa ochu", stopped, that is, the sacking of a whole family or community and the looting of their properties. As soon as a murderer was hanged his sins were expiated, and no reference was made to his relations anymore.

The law of the crime of murder in Oka was as follows:-

1. Onye Oka gbuo onye Oka,
ekpe nye ikpe n'iru ndu ozo:
Obul na okpachal anya gbuonye, Okwuo odo;
Obul na omara uma gbuie, ogbaa oso ochu,
Nyabu orafu ana Oka, ganye na onwuru.
Onwuru, apanata ozuie, kedo ya udo n'uno, wefuie,
Tulfu enie nye – nkanwa bun a okwugo udo.
2. Onye mbana gbuo onye Oka,
Oka ezukoo, cho ana ivbe mel ni
Obul na onye Oka chol okwu, ma Oka ejene obubo;
Ma obul na oburo onye Oka chol, Oka ezie ndu gbul
Mmadi ka vba kwal Oka ochu:
Ele eshi akwa ochu bu:-

Ndu be vbe edufute onye gbul mmadi, okwuo udo
N'iru ndu be vbe na n'iru Oka – ishi nishi anata,
Okwu ebuo;
Vba ewefutegh onye gbul ochu, ikekwe na ogbal oso,
Vba dechie mmadi – nwoke na nwanya – maghi
Tukwashi kwuo nye ivbe nishi – ma obu ana, ma obu
Ego, ma obu enunu;
Obul na onye gbul nwa-Oka ofutara kwuo udo, ma na
Ejire mmadi dechi anyia, Oka awa be ndu anwa, nufu
Vba – nyabu, agha ndu anwa na Oka ebido.

[The meaning is:

1. If an Oka man killed another,
He was tried before the members of the Ozo title Society:
If it was found that he intentionally killed the other,
He would be hanged;
If he did not intend to kill him, he would only leave
Oka for good, until he died.
When he died, his body would be brought home, a rope would
Be put round his neck and taken off again, before he was
Buried – he was taken then to have been hanged.
2. If a non-Oka man killed an Oka man,
Oka would meet and find out what had happened-
If the Oka man was at fault, Oka would do nothing to revenge
But if the Oka man was blameless, Oka would send to the

Family of the murderer and demand reparations:
What was usually demanded was:-

The family of the murderer brought him out and he
Was hanged in the presence of his people and of
Oka – the murderer had perished with the murdered!
The matter was at end;
If the family could not produce the murderer, say,
Land, or money, or animals;
If the murderer of an Oka man had not come forward
To be hanged, and no persons were substituted for
Him by his people, Oka would invade their town to
Drive them off, and war between them and Oka would begin.

When the main body of Amaenyiana was dispersed, Ndu continued to live where he was, alone. But another tragedy struck him and uprooted him from there. Thirty of his grandsons were undergoing the ceremony of taking the “ichi” marks at the same time, as befitted a man of distinction and wealth like Ndu. A group of warriors from a neighbouring town hostile to Oka took advantage of that fact and attacked Ndu's compound in the dead of night. They fell on the grandsons of Ndu lying in their grandfather's Obu waiting for their ichi marks to heal, and killed them all.

When Ndu recovered from the shock of his loss, he left what is now the Industrial Estate site, and moved down to the present Umuayom Village site, and built his new Obu. But the tragedy made his descendants, the Umuokpandu family, small thereafter.

The life fate suffered by Ndu decimated the otherwise populous Urueri. History does not record the name of the hostile tribe that attacked them. But it was said that Urueri had been expecting this attack, and had prepared for it, but when it did not materialize they relaxed. Then, unexpectedly, the attack came, and caught the Urueri unawares. They suffered such heavy losses that they were reduced to a shadow of what they were before. Urueri never recovered. They, therefore, gladly accepted the influx into their village of another people called Nkwelle-Awulu, who crossed the Obibia River from Nibo, in the wake of pressures in their home of origin by the Urungwu (now called Ifite-Nibo) who drove them out in a war and occupied their territory.

Nkwelle, comprising the families of Ahallaaji, Umunamoke, Agbana , and Umudiana settled with the Urueri, and became one with them, and gradually became the dominant community; for while the Urueri became smaller and smaller in numbers Nkwelle increased.

When these Nkwelle people were made Oka citizens they were given their own Ajana shrine. Urueri still had their own Ajana. The two communities intermarried. But Urueri performed the mma-gbu ceremony for all Nkwelle (planting the ogbu tree in a new compound), showing that they were the original owners of the land. Agu Oye, and all surrounding lands, which formed the core of Nkwelle Village, and the former lands, like Odo-Nkwelle, on the boundary with Ifite-Nibo, belonged to Urueri, whilst the rest of Nkwelle people owned only towards Uvume and Umuokwa of old.

When Urueri became too small in numbers, they attached themselves Achallaoji family, and Achallaoji took over some of their functions, such as giving food to the god Ogwugwu, to whom the Ogwugwu stream was dedicated. And in respect of the leadership of Oka, Umuokpandu family took the Headship from them.

The only surviving Urueri family of today is that of Nwokeabia Anene, whose father, Anene Nwuya, was the last priest of Oye-Okanube. Anene Nwuya was a renowned wrestler, and there was a song about him that went thus:-

“Onye ga gba mgba’
Ka Anene Nwuya
Onye ga agba Anene Nwuya mgba?”
(Who can wrestle with Anene Nwuya
who can face Anen Nwuya in wrestling)?

While Urueri remained in the original home of the Ifiteana (now Nkwelle), and Amaenyiana had moved to “Okpuno Ochu”, the Okpo people moved to near Nwannu stream, on a hill opposite that occupied by Amaenyiana. They founded the three villages of Amachalla, Amudo and Umuzocha, which together were called “Amachalla-na-ato” (the three Amachalla villages).

Everyone among the Ifiteana worked in iron and carved in wood, but carving the speciality of Okpo, just as blacksmithing was the speciality of Amaenyiana.

It was said that in the olden days Oka began their iron work with “uzu mkpume” that is to say, the Oshima – the hitter – was a block of stone, while the hammer – was made of iron. The bellows were not of leather, as they later became, but were made of dry plantain leaves, and they were drawn by hand and not by elongated sticks, so that they made a kind of chapu, chapu, chapu sound, not the singing sound of modern bellows. Eventually, the iron hitter and leather bellows came to replace them.

Native doctors were found among many families, but Amikwo made the practice of medicine their main occupation. They were also the surgeons. When Umudioka became a community in Oka they dropped cicatrisation, and practiced medicine following the foot-steps of Amikwo, their “grand-father”.

Ndu begat many sons but only three of them had surviving descendants. These were, Okpanyifa Eto, the eldest son, Odaa and Okpalagbuji. He had many daughters.

Okpanyifa Eto called Okpala-Ndu (that is ‘Diokpala’ of Ndu) (Ndu’s first born) was one of the richest men in his time.

It was his thirty sons that were killed by a raiding party while undergoing the “mgbu ichi” ceremony at one and the same time. But that tragedy did not exhaust his children, though it made Umuokpandu small in comparison with other families.

The children of Ndu was said to be tall and imposing and warlike, and so also were his grandchildren. And when they assembled in the Village Square they made an imposing picture, hence they were called “Ama-enyi” (elephants), just like their place of abode.

In the olden days people married many wives and begat many children, and in two generations their descendants could form a village or a community of their town. Okpanyifa Eto was one such man. Okpanyifa Eto was called Okpala-Ndu, or, in its shortened form, Okpandu. His descendants, therefore, became known as "Umu-Okpandu". They were the Head of Oka, after Urueri and because of them Umuayom Village became the Head Village of Oka.

Odaa's descendants became so small that they went under the umbrella name of Umuokpandu.

The youngest son of the Ndu was Okpalagbuji, whose title-name was Okpala – Edebulu.

Okpalagbuji begat a son called Nnoke (Nnekwu nwoke – Big Boy). The descendants of Nnoke became known as Umu-Nnoke. Nnoke's praise-name was Emebie (Emebie Edozie) which meant, "I will do what I will do – if any damage is done thereby it will be repaired later!"

In the olden days when Oka had a murder trial a representative from Umuayom, from Umuokpandu family, must be there to preside and pass sentence; the sentence was executed by Umunnoko.

Nnoke begat three sons, who founded the three families of Umunnoka Village.

Umunnoko originally comprised Umuobu, Umunpondu and Umuokpenuvbe. Later, by reason of settlement, two other families were added to them, namely Umuejim and Evbi-na-ozu. Formerly, the last family intermarried with the first flour, but now they are more closely integrated. Evbi-na-Ozu people lived near the Ovbias ravine – hence they were called "Ndu Ishi-Ovbias" (that is, dwellers at the source of Ovbias), but later they moved to what is now the Ring Road, and then finally into Umunnoko Village proper.

When the Uvume people were conquered and driven off by Oka, their lands were left to Umunnoko Village, but the palm trees therein were inherited by Nwobuda Nwosu, the lone survivor of the Uvume people.

Umuejim family comprised the various peoples who came to live with Nnoke Emebie. As mercenaries, they fought against Uruana people in Aguata (a place in Agu-Oka) and drove them off. Part of Aguata was given to them to own.

People came from different places to live with the Umunnoko people for protection. They formed distinct families, although they became part of Umunnoko Village, such people as Nwolu, Aguaba, Umuokwa.

To people who came to live with him Ndu readily gave land. One such person was Obodo-Udala, a friend of Nnoke Emebie. His origin is lost to history, but he is thought to be related to the Uguwoaba people. Ndu not only gave him a place to live and farm, but gave him one of his daughters to marry, after the Okas had given him "ona-anana" that is, performed for him the act of naturalization, as an Oka citizen. Obodo-Udala had sons, and the descendants of these sons formed a Village which was previously Umuoronwu, but was later renamed Umuoramma.

The story was that Umuoramma at first went by their proper name, Umu-Obodo-Udala, but death became so frequent in their midst that the “nwokpus” (married daughters) of the Village cried out: “Have we become a village of death?” – “Anyi buzini umu ora onwu – e-e?”. Others assented, and said it looked like they were! The name “Oraonwu” stuck, and the people called themselves by that name by way of defiance to death, peradventure death might leave them alone. And it worked! for children began to arrive and survive and population grew; and the people changed their name to “Oramma”, “blessed village”, which it bears till today. But when the gong-man called a Village meeting it called them by their original name, Obodo-Udala! Obodo-Udala!

Umuoramma consisted of two families, Umuikannwa and Umuifedumma.

It was from Umuoramma Village, hardy and patriotic people that a group of warriors (Anyia) went out to the border with Nawfia to settle, in order to end the raids on Oka homes from that quarter whenever Oka people had gone on journey; and also to enjoy more land. They succeeded so well that it was only after the first Norgu war, when the Norgus had been driven away from their town, that the raiders could find another route through Norgu territory to Oka. To counter this new threat, another group of warriors from the parent settlement was called Umuokpu - Obunagu. The leader of the group was Okpalanochie (Okpalanochie) grandfather of Andrew Okeke. He led the Obunagu people to their present site. Okpalanochie was of the family of Umuomife in Umuokpu village, same family as T.C. Okoli other leaders that went with him were the founders of Umuagojii and Umueri families. Omesu was also one of the settlers; he was a young man then and unmarried. But he married in Obunagu, and got a daughter whom he named Nwamuluoana. Nwamuluoana. Was the first birth in Obunagu. Omesu was the father of Dibo, who was of the same age-grade as T.C. Okoli, who gave the approximate date of his birth as between 1888 and 1890. T.C. Okoli died in June 1986.

The Umuoramma people who had settled at the Oka border with Nawfia always pursued the raiders to their homes and invariably recovered the life-stock stolen from Oka from them. They were therefore, given the praise-name “Okpu-na-ngwulu-dike” by Oka, meaning, “the daring ones who beard the lion on its den”. They became known as Umuokpunangu” because of their nearness to Amikwo Village, with whom they did many things in common, and on whose land they had settled.

Umuayom Village consisted of four families, namely Umuokpandu, Umueghumene, Umuokpalanwoshiw and Umuezendevbe. The last three families, Umueghumene, Umuokpalanwoshie and Umuezendevbe, had a common ancestry. They descended from a man called Umuikenanunwa, or Umuike for short. Ike came from near Ifite-Oka Village at a place in Agu-Oka called Aguata, but now known as Agu-Ike. His people had been attacked and scattered by Oka because of their activities in slave dealing. Some followed the Aros and settled at Ndikelionwu (which had sprung up) and a few, under Ikenanunwa, came to live among Umuokpandu. Ike was given a daughter of Ndu family called Ikiligidi, to marry. He was also given the “ona-ana-ana”, which made him an Oka citizen. He begat three sons, Eghumene, Okpalanwoshie and Ezendevbe who founded the three families of Umueghumen, Umuokpalanwoshie and Umuezendevbe.

Umuikenanunwa (Umuike) joined Umuokpandu to form Umuayom Village. They worshipped a common deity called Ayomgbovbe; hence both communities were

collectively called “Umu-Ayomgbovbe “worshippers of Ayomgbovbe” (Umuayom). But whenever a village meeting is called, if the gong-man called Umuike! Umuike!, then only the Umuike section would attend, but if he called Umuayom! Umuayom! Then both Umuokpandu and Umuike sections would attend, that is to say, all Umuayom people.

The people of Umuayom (Umuokpandu and Umuike), and the descendants of Okpalagbujii (Emebie – Edozie) known as Umunoke, were called Ayom-na-Okpala. Umuoramma, and their off-shoot, Umuokpu, came later under the same umbrella-name. So, four communities made up Ayom-na-Okpala, namely, Umuayom, Umunnoke, Umuoramma and Umuokpu. Umuokpu became a separate community from Umuoramma when they got their own Ajana Shrine. Hence the prayer:-

“Ajana du na Oka du teghete,
Nke Umuokpu me vbe ili,
Aja-Oka chikotazia vba bia wel oji.”
(Ajana Shrines in Oka town are nine,
That of Umuokpu makes them ten,
Aja-Oka collect them all and come and take this kolanut).

Before the expedition (Anyia) from Umuoramma went to settle permanently on the Nawfia-Oka border, there were incessant raids from Enugwu-Ukwu and Nawfia towns into Oka for the purpose of looting and carrying away whatever they could get hold of, particularly cows and oxen and goats which used to graze at large in the bushes around. The raiders would grapple with the animals and hoist them on their backs, as a mother would carry her child, and carry them away. Oka called them “Ndu na akwo evbi na azu”. To discourage these raids, Oka decided to carry their own raid into Nawfia town for a change. A day was fixed, and the age-grade designated for the expedition were ordered to assemble and start off before day light. The expression used to them was “Onye odu nwulu okwa na aka”, for Oka people always talked in parables at their mass meetings. Literally, it meant, “let every one of you hold an Okwa bird in his hand”, but the real meaning was “let everyone be as early as when okwa begins to cry”, which would be around 2 a.m.

The morning came, and all assembled except the contingent from the Ifite-Oka Villages. As the others could not wait for them, the expedition took off, and successfully completed its mission by the afternoon. The warriors had returned home and were giving an account to the Oka Assembly when the Ifite-Oka contingent arrived, holding a live okwa bird in hand.

On being asked why they had not turned up for the expedition they explained that as people were ordered “to hold okwa bird in their hand”, they had spent all the morning trying to catch an okwa, which being a wild bird, was difficult to catch! The Assembly of the Oka people were very angry with Ifite-Oka, they decreed that since they could not understand a simple Oka expression they should no longer participate in Oka meetings. And so from that day forward, so ran the story, Ifite-Oka Villages began to do many things by themselves, including such things as having their own Imoka feast; and it was only in the 20th century that they rejoined Oka in deliberations and festivals.

Eri Onwa was an Amaenyiana man. He was a farmer and palm wine tapper. He was the first person to make palm-wine production a profession. He went and settled on the

outskirts of Oka, in order to make use of the abundant oil-palm and raffia-palm trees that grew there. Where he settled was called Ezi-agu (or Iku-agu) Oka. In later years it was simply called Ezi-Oka. A distinction came to be drawn between this suburb, Ezi and the heart of the town where all Ifiteana lived – Ifite. Thus, came into being the expression Ezi and the Ifite as a geographical division of Oka.

Eri Onwa begat three sons – Onwatigo, Onwanwammbee and Onwaatigo. The descendants of these three sons formed Umueri Village of Oka.

Eri was joined by Ogwal and Ogbunu, both also Amaenyiana people. They practiced the same profession – palm wine production. The descendants of each of them later formed villages of their own, Umuogwal and Umuogbunu respectively. Ogbunu was a hard drinker, and no one could match him. There was a saying, “who can drink like Ogbunu?”

Ukwa was a brother of Eri, and he joined his brother at his new habitation. Later, he branched out and took to blacksmithing. He discovered the Issele-Ukwu route and made a comfortable living there, and grew rich on that route. His descendants, called Umukwa, followed him and eventually discovered the Benin and Yoruba routes as well.

As was the custom in Oka, during funeral ceremonies the various peoples of Oka sang the funeral chants (mbu okili) in the tongue of the people among whom they journeyed. The Oka man appreciated, and displayed the culture of the people among whom he worked. Visitors to Oka used to be extremely surprised, during funeral ceremonies, to hear funeral songs in their own native language, not sung as learners, but as the natives. An Urhobo man would hear “Okili” in Urhobo; an Igala man would hear Oka women singing dirges for the dead in Igala; and an Efik man would be surprised to hear Oka people not only speaking fluently in Efik among themselves, but singing Efik songs as well. Oka people said of themselves that they were like akidi plants that akidi plants when they start growing know no boundary (akidi amara oke). This quality in the Oka man made Oka town never a dull place, but always interesting. The Oka man had no inferiority complex about other people whatsoever, he reached out to people, and appreciated what others could give, and he took whatever was good for him from wherever he could find it; and scrupulously gave credit to the originators of what he had adopted. Thus, Umukwa praised themselves thus:-

Umukwa! Umukwa!
Isele – e, Isele – e gboji!!
Ndu ji abana akpochi uzo oba,
Eghu eme taa ji ocha du na imie!!!

(Umukwa, journeyers to Issele-Ukwu,
Issele, yam producers, who are so rich in yam
Barn,
To draw off the goats from going in to eat the white
yam within).

Nzovbe was a brother of Ogbunu, both having the same father called Dunu, an Amaenyiana man. Nzovbe had numerous descendants, but they later became small in

numbers. What made them small was said to be due to the handiwork of the Umudioka people.

The story went that when Umudioka were consolidating as a community in Oka there were conflicts between them and Umuogbunu and Umunzovbe, but particularly with Umunzovbe, over where to live. The Umudioka felt that Umunzovbe didn't want them in Oka at all, and where making their say difficult for them. For that reason they decided to settle scores with them once and for all.

Therefore, on an appointed night, the Umudioka men took positions outside the compounds of the Umunzovbe people, one Umudioka warrior hiding at the gate of one Umunzovbe man. At dawn, when people began to come out of their compounds to go to the farms, the Umunzovbe people began to come out. But as each stepped out of his compound, he was attacked and hewn down by a lurking Umudioka man. Thus, taken by surprise the Umunzovbe would have perished completely were it not that some heard the commotion in their compounds and escaped with their lives through some other means.

This act of Umudioka so enraged Oka that they determined that Umudioka must be expelled. So Izu-Oka (the Oka Assembly) was hastily summoned at Oye-Oka. Umudioka were asked to show course why they should not leave the town for the crime or murder.

It happened that Okponyiora (or Okponyara) ancestor of the Ofodiles of Umuayom Village, who was presiding, was connected with Umudioka, because his mother came from there in other words, he was in Oka custom "nwadiana" of Umudioka. For that reason he determined to save his mother's people. He advised his mother's people that when they came before Oka they should speak truculently, as that would cause a commotion, since every body would want to take a floor to condemn them because of their arrogant attitude. He said that when that happened they should leave the rest to him. He said he would adjourn the meeting, and allow tempers to cool before the next Assembly was summoned. He said that if Oka were to hear the case to conclusion there and then, nothing could save the Umudioka in the heat and anger of the moment.

Everything happened as Okponyiora had predicted. The truculence of Umudioka when the case came up was such that many people were incensed, and rushed out angrily to speak to condemn them. There was, therefore, pandemonium. In the temporary disorder, Okponyiora adjourned the meeting. He simply rosed and announced, "Isu akari ni" (the meeting is ended), and he picked up his staff and walked away. Every one dispersed without any decision being taken about the fate of Umudioka.

In the interval between that day and the summoning of a new Assembly, intensive campaign was carried out by friends of Umudioka, so effectively that at the next Assembly they were not condemned for murder, rather, the Assembly was persuaded to take the view that this was a war between family and family against which Umunzovbe should have taken precautions, and, besides that in a war no one knows who kills whom, and so no murderer can be identified.

That was how Umnunzovbe became small, whereas, before they were just as populous as other families. They were the people who later became known as Umuogbunu No. 2.

After Eri's descendants had become a settled community in what became known as Ezi – Oka, a man from Umuokpandu Family in Umuayom Village, whose name is lost to history, married a daughter of Umueri, called Umuko. Umuko begat an only son (again, whose name is lost), and when the diviners announced that he was to be the Priest of the goddess called Nnemuloka (Mother of Oka) his mother panicked. It happened that for sometime past anyone who became the priest of this goddess died within a short time of assuming the office. So, when the diviners announced that it was Omuko's son that the goddess chose to be her next Priest, Umuko was greatly worried, because he was an only son. She persuaded her son to flee with her to her home at Umueri; perhaps he would not die like the others, as her father's gods would protect him. Omuko's son followed her and went to sojourn among his mother's people, taking with him the "nkwu" (the movable altar) of Nnemuloka.

Omuko's son did not die, rather he prospered and begat many sons, whose descendants formed a community, called Umoko in the land of Umueri. Because Omuko's son was an Umuayom man, from Umuokpandu family, who were the Head of Oka, he was given precedence by Umueri; and since Umueri were the Head of Ezi – Oka, Omuko became the Head of Ezioka people.

After several generations and during the time of Ofodile Nwamalevbi, Oka decided that the same people who provided Priests for Nnemuloka (Mother of Oka) should also provide Priests for Nnamuloka (Father of Oka). And that was why Omuko had the "nkwu" of Nnemuloka, as well as the "ovbo" of Nnamuloka. They served the goddess and the god from that time on whose shrines were, therefore in Omuko Village.

Why Omuko became small in comparison with other Villages in Oka, was said to be due to the action of Nibo people.

Previously, Omuko Village was large and populous. Being descendants of Ndu their men were tall and handsome. For this reason they were arrogant. Whenever the Nibo people passed through their Village (for the former habitation of Omuko lay on the route through which the Nibo people, who were traveling native doctors, must pass to get to Nkanu country) Omuko's young men would waylay them and extort tribute from them.

These conducts reach a stage when it became unbearable to the Nibo people. So the Nibo people decided to retaliate. When they were returning from one of their journeys they made some medicine which they cunningly mixed with roasted oil-palm nuts, making the nuts look very attractive. They packed the palm nuts in a bag. When they got to Omuko, the Omuko young men came out as usual, many of them and demanded gifts before they could allow them to pass. The Nibo man holding the bag of palm nuts let the nuts spill on the ground, as if by accident. The Omuko young men picked up the nuts and ate them laughing. They all died.

This was a bitter blow to Omuko Village and to Oka. Because of the incident, Oka declared war on Nibo; and for many years the two towns were at war. It was in the course of that war that Agulu, the ancestor of the Agulu people of Oka, performed that feat that made him an Oka citizen. (This is related in another chapter). But the tragedy made Omuko small in numbers.

When Umudioka became a community they completed the seven villages that made up the Ezioka Quarter of Oka, namely; Omuko, Umueri, Umukwa, Umuogwal, Umuogbunu, Umuzovbe (Umuogbunu No. 2), and Umudioka.

Ogwa begat three sons whose names were Eze, Obe and Ekweaneke. These sons had their own sons, whose descendants became known as Umuogwal. Umuogwal thus comprised three families, namely Umueze, Umuobe and Umuekweaneke.

A prominent member of Umuobe family was called Dunuoruchili. He was very wealthy, and had many children. His mother came from Amachalla Village, and Amachalla provided the Priests for the god, Imoka. When Dunuoruchili was growing old he said he could no longer travel to Amachalla to participate in the sacrifices to Imoka. He, therefore built a shrine for Imoka in Umuogwal Village, on the land of Umuobe, and had an altar fashioned for the god there. His family presided over the sacrifices to the god. And that was how Umuogwal came to have their own Imoka Shrine in their Village.

It was this same Dunuoruchili who befriended Nwa-Dioka, progenitor of the Umudioka people, and gave him a place to live at Umuogwal Village when Ogbunu ordered him to leave his compound after he had impregnated a daughter of Amikwo, called Nwanyanwu.

Ama-Udo (Amudo) and Ama-achalla (Amachalla) were place-names of the Okpo people, while Uzuocha was a trade name.

Okpalaunamma (shortened to Okpalanama) was the father of Amachalla, Amudo and Umuzocha. He was an Okpo man. His feast is celebrated every year up to the present day by his descendants.

Ama-achalla meant, people who lived in "odo" achalla, that is land prone to produce tall achalla grass; Ama-Udo, meant people who lived behind the Udo Shrine – Udo was one of the earliest gods of the Ifiteana; Umu-Uzuocha, meant people who descended from a blacksmith.

The Ifiteana were generally tall, powerfully built, and warlike. And so were the branch of them called Okpo.

Okpalaunamma married three wives. The first wife bore him two sons, namely, Okpala (No. 2) and Diaba. The second wife had for him two sons, namely, Okpelekpe and Oleghi. The name of the second wife was known, she was called Omada. The third wife bore him a son, Ogbogu.

When Okpalaunamma died, his young wife, Omada was remarried by his youngest son by his third wife, Ogbogu. Ogbogu remarried Omada, that is, inherited her from his father, and had a son by her whom he gave the name Uzuocha – for he himself was a blacksmith. Uzuocha was light-complexioned.

Okpala (No 2) and Diaba were the ancestors of the present-day Amachalla Village people whilst Okpelekpe and Oleghi were the ancestors of the present-day Amudo Village people. The descendants of Ogbogu's son, Uzuocha, formed the Umuzocha Village of today.

So, while the same man – Okpalanama – was the progenitor of Amchalla, Amudo and Umuzocha Villages, Amudo and Umuzocha were brothers of the same mother.

The two families in Amachalla Village were Umuokpala (descendants of Okpala (No. 2) and Diaba (descendants of Diaba).

Okpelekepe begat Irugochime (Chime for short). Chime begat Okpalaeze, Nwagbiligba and Omeji whose descendants formed the Chime Family of Amudo Village.

Oleghi begat Eghumodulu, and Eghumodulu begat Eze, Kwakpovbe, Awanwele, Omam and Okpechikwu who became the ancestors of the rest of Amudo and whose descendants formed five sub-families within that village.

In oral history the remembered generations are usually few but the forgotten generations are many.

How Amudo became traditionally farmers, and Umuzocha their brother, became traditionally blacksmiths, is told in the following story:

The father, Okpalanama sent his three young sons to a master blacksmith who would take them on journey and teach them the craft of blacksmithing. On the way the boys heard Kpanakwukwu singing. Kpanakwukwu was a bird that heralded the dawn. The bird was singing:-

“Kwukwu, kpanakwukwu,
“kwukwu, kpanakwukwu.....”

Okpelekepe and Oleghi were immediately attracted to the song and they began to listen; but Ogbogu was not interested. From listening, the two brothers, began to form dance steps from the rhythm of the bird's song. Then highly excited, they evolved there and then a new dance. Their brother, Ogbogu, left them and went on journey and became blacksmith. The two dancing brothers remained at home and became farmers.

That was how Amudo people got the nickname.

“Amudo omu egwu amu ogu”!
{Amudo, expert in dancing but not in fighting!}.

The place of residence of the Ifiteana acted as a magnet to other communities, for as makers of iron war implements and agricultural implements, protection and advantage were found near them. Thus, communities gravitated towards them.

There was a people called Inyi. They lived in scattered hamlets. Coming to live among the Okpo they grouped themselves with a part of Okpo into the Quarter of Oka called Ifite-Oka. They formed three sections called Enuifite, Ezinato and Agbana .

Enuifite consisted of three families, Amaokpo, Ogonogoezi and Umushii.

Amaokpo were of the same stock as the Okpos of Amachalla, Amudo and Umuzocha. Within them they had three sub-families, namely, Umuezegwu, Umugo and Umuazu.

Just as Umuofunu and later Umueleke family, of Amachalla Village were given the privilege of ministering to the god, Imoka, so Umuazu sub-family of Amaokpo were given the privilege of serving the god, Obe. Their name became synonymous with Obe and they were called Obe people.

Obe was one of the early gods of the Oka people. It was the god of farming and of the seasons. Next to him was Udo, Udo-Obe, the son of Obe, and the god supervising morals and peaceful co-existence. The third was Okanube (the god from whom Oka took her name) the warrior god who taught Oka their marital arts.

The Shrine of the Obe was at Ezi-Nwannu, the path leading to Nwanna stream in Amudo Village. There it was worshipped, until his priests, the Umuazu people, were attacked and dispersed and the Umugo family entrived its Stone used for sacrifice and took it to their home in Ifite-Oka Quarter where it now rests.

The cause of Umuazu's dispersal was that the family became arrogant and exploitative. Every year before they declared the calendar they demanded exorbitant gifts from the rest of Oka. If they were not satisfied with what they were given, they deliberately disarrange the calendar, so that either people planted too early and their crops died of drought, or too late and much rain drowned their crops. When the Oka people could no longer endure their tyranny they rose against them and also Okpos. They were also given the duty to serving Udo-Obe of all Oka.

Umuazu dispersed and some of them migrated to Nise, where they formed a village of that name. The worship of Obe ended; and the and the functions of declaring the calendar were transferred to Okperi people of Amikwo, who where also Okpos. They were also given the duty of serving Udo-Obe of all Oka.

While the worship of Obe endured Obe was a very powerful god. Being the god of farming and of the seasons he held in his hands the entire well-being of the people. In every year Obe must first eat yam before the Alo festival was celebrated for all.

The beginning of Ok a year, when compared with the English calendar, corresponded to the month of May, or, sometimes, April, depending on the reading of the seasons. In Oka year a month may be jumped over, that is, not taken into account, so as to synchronize farming activities with the fight of seasons, that is to say, with the most propitious times for growing of crops; for sine life depended on agriculture, proper knowledge of times of planting and harvesting was vital.

Strict rules were observed for the eating of the new yam. The "hunger month", onwa ise, (fifth month of the Oka year) ended at about the first week of September. The Oka sixth month – onwa ishii – then began.

During onwa ise, also called Chi month, there was no more corn in the fields, and no more akidi beans and no yams. The sole meal consisted of dried beans, dried maize pounded into flour and made into igbagwu, also cooked and mashed breadfruit nuts (aro).

Then onwa ishii came, onwa Alo. It was hailed as soon as it was sighted – “Onwa – me – e – e!” – throughout Oka. There would be jubilation everywhere. End of ugani or hardship was near!

In Umuokpu village this was the order in which the new yam was eaten:- (1) on the last day of the second native week of onwa ishii (sixth month of Ok a year) new yam was roasted for all the gods in general, called “ji ngu Alo”, (2) at the end of the third week yam was roasted and thrown away, called “ji ogodu akiliko”, a kind of sacrifice; (3) the next day after ji ogodu akiliko, yam was roasted for the dead or departed Ozo title-holders, called “ngu Alo ndu chili Ozo”, (4) at the end of the 6th week, the generality of the people celebrated Alo, and ate yam.

The science of setting the calendar was a secret science passed on from fathers to sons among the priestly family of Obe, and later of the Udo keepers, that is, Amikwo. The ancient Oka people worked out their own calendar. Only the initiates knew their method and studied it.

The Oka people knew that the earth went round the sun and that it took a certain number of days to do that. That number of days constituted the Oka year. They knew also that as the earth traveled round the sun itself rotated at the same time, so that as one time it faced the sun and at another time it turned its back to the sun; the time it took the earth to complete the turning from face to face, constituted one day: when it turned its face to the sun it was daylight and when it turned its back to the sun it was night for that part of it.

They knew that the journey of the earth round the sun produced the season – dry season, rainy season and harmattan.

The Oka people knew that the moon moved round the earth just as the earth moved round the sun. And they knew that it took the moon twenty-eight days to circle the earth. This number of days they called one moon (ovbu onwa), a month. The 28 days they divided into seven parts of four days each, which gave one Oka week, or native week (as opposed to the seven days making up the English week; for while the English week (as opposed to the seven days making up the English week; for while the English lunar month had four weeks of seven days each, the Oka month had variable days.

In calculating the year the Oka people sometimes skipped one month (which they called ‘onwa nvbulumanvbu – ‘month without a name’) in order to gain accuracy of the seasons. When this could be done was part of their science; Oka year they had thirteen months.

The knowledge of the heavens and the seasons. The movement of the earth, sun, and moon by the Ifiteana was guarded for them by the Okpo.

When Umazu dispersed, the reading of the heavens was entrusted to another group of the Okpo people – Amikwo.

This was how Oka divided their day:-

(1) Uzo ututu – equivalent to 6.a.m

(2) Mgbasa chi, or Chi mgbasa – early morning – 6.a.m. – 7.a.m

- (3) Otutu – equivalent to 7.a.m. – 12. noon
- (4) Nwusa ete – equivalent to 9.a.m – 10 a.m.
- (5) Ebbibe – equivalent to 12 noon to 4.p.m
- (6) Anyanwu kwul n'ishi or onyunyo ba n'obu okpa – equivalent to 1.p.m.
- (7) Anyanwu chivbiofu ishi – equivalent to 1.p.m to 2.p.m
- (8) Ebbibe Mgbede – equivalent to 3.p.m to 4.p.m
- (9) Mgbede – equivalent to 5.p.m to 7.p.m
- (10) Mgbede anashi (or chi ntuchi – you can't see your palm) –
equivalent to 7.30p.m to 8.p.m
- (11) Anashi – equivalent to 8 p.m

And their right:-

- (1) Anashi – equivalent to 8 p.m
- (2) Onodu mbala – equivalent to 9. p.m
- (3) Ula izizi – equivalent to 10.p.m to 12 midnight
- (4) Ndeli, (or edi odudu na ana) – equivalent to 1.a.m
- (5) Okuku izizi – equivalent to 3. a.m
- (6) Okuku nkwananata – equivalent to 4 .a.m
- (7) Chi ovbuvbo (you can just see your palm) – equivalent to 5. a.m
- (8) Uzo otutu – equivalent to 6.a.m

English historians inform us that the English calendar we use today was worked out by astronomers late in the 16th century when Gregory XIII was the Pope. Up to that time the calendar in use was that introduced by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C. The year was always 365 days, but it was divided into months by Julius Caesar. According to these historians the calendar introduced by Julius Caesar made a year 11 minutes 14 seconds longer than the actual year, which was the time it took the Earth to go round the sun. So, said the historians, after more than 1,600 years the calendar was 10 days ahead of the seasons! Pope Gregory XIII, through his astronomers, corrected the error. And so we came to have the present Gregorian Calendar.

When Umazu misused the power entrusted to them they were punished by being driven out of Oka town. When the priests of a god are driven away, so say the Oka people, the god is driven away also. If followed that, as Umuazu left Oka, so the worship of Oba ended. The power of reading the skies and of deciding the calendar, together with their associated ceremonies were then given to the Okperi family of Amikwo Village.

Umuazu lived up to Nwanna stream and had the Obe shrine in their midst. When they left, their land came into dispute between the Okpos of Enuifite, and the Okpos of Amudo Village. Amudo won. This was in the time of Anufa, father of Nwude.

Umuaze, who were sometimes known as Obe, from the god they served, scattered, and while the bulk of them went to Nise, some took refuge among the Okpos of Umuzocha, Amudo, and Ifite-Oka. Umugo, the other Okpo family in Ifite-Oka Village, saved the Stone of Obe from its Shrine, and placed at Ifite-Oka Village Square where it now is. But no one worships Obe anymore.

Obe, as the second known god of the Oka people had the first market established for it, for the exchange of produce. It was called Eke, Eke-Obe. After Umuazu had gone, Eke-

Obe ceased to function, and only the stately Akpu tree, beneath which the market took place, was left to show the site of the habitation of the ancient priests of Obe. The Akpu tree itself was cut down only in the 20th century.

The same Umuazu who ministered to Obe ministered to Udo, and when they were driven away the ministrations to Udo was handed over to the same Amikwo and the Eke market was moved down to Amikwo too, this time in honour of Udo and was called Eke-Amikwo.

The second market at Oka was Oye, established at Nkwelle in honour of Okanube and it was called Oye-Okanube or Oye-Oka.

The third market was Avbo - Ovbuvbe, established at Mkpukpa Square in Umudioka Village.

The fourth market was Nkwo market, established for Ovbuvbe at Umuoramma Village, where Ovbuvbe Shrine of all Oka was first sited. Later the market was shifted from there to its present location in honour of Imoka, and hence became known as Nkwo-Imoka.

The four market days formed the Oka week.

Other people that came and lived with the Okpo of Amaokpo in Enuifite and were later assimilated into the Oka community were the Umushii people and Ogonogoezi people. Umushii were called Umushii because they originally comprised six families namely; Eziam, Uvuluana, Umueze, Urudunu, Aguleri and Oruana. Only two, Eziam and Uvuluana remained in existence. Eziam now consists of two households - Onalukwe and Ichoku. In Uvuluana only the household of Achakpo is left.

Umushi owned the whole of Nnolu land, up to the old Enugu - Onitsha Road. One of the extinct peoples - Oruana - lived at Aguata which ended in Ovbua stream. Umueze lived behind the present Enuifite habitation, immediately behind Moses Nwabueze Okeke's compound. Aguleri lived near the original habitation of Eziam before they moved up to their present location. The "Edo-Mimili" Aguleri, the Shrine where Aguleri made rain, still exists. The last Aguleri man before he died gave the secret of rain-making to his "nwadiana" (his blood relation) from Apitiana, hence Apitiana took over as the rain-makers of Ifite-Oka every year they (the Apitiana people) sacrificed a ram to the spirits of the Aguleri people who taught them the art of rain-making.

Ogonogoezi consisted of four sub-families, namely, Umuezeoshie, Eziakpaka, Awudi and Okwe. But of these sub-families Umuezeoshie was the most famous, because out of that family came Ikelionwu, who founded Ndikelionwu town in Orumba Local Government Area.

The story was that Ikelionwu, a member of Umuezeoshie family, as a young boy went to the farmland of the Amantogwu people - a town near his home at Ifite-Oka, to set a trap for animals. The Amantogwu people kidnapped him, and sold him to the Aros, despite the pleas of the Oka people. A childless woman, Ufere Mgbokwa, bought him as a slave and used him as a son. Ikelionwu grew up to manhood, and achieved his freedom. Then he began to retrace his steps back to his native land.

He journeyed to Omogbo town, and lived in the house of one Ogenti. While there, he joined in a war between Omogho of Ogeni and Ifite-Omogho. There Ikelionwu used a gun for the first time, which he had brought from Arochukwu. Ogenti's people won the war. Ikelionwu was rewarded with thirty male slaves and thirty goats, all of which he kept in Ogenti's compound.

He continued his journey, and got to Oka, and to his village of origin, Ifite-Oka. He joined in the war against Amantogwu which had been dragging on for years since he capture. For when Oka found that instead of releasing him the Amantogwu people had sold him to the Aros as slave, they had attacked Amantogwu in retaliation.

That the continued for so long was because Oka lost the element of surprise with which they had hoped to win quick victory over their adversary. What happened was that after Oka had decided on a war with Amantogwu town, one Oka man called Okpalaopu, whose mother came from Amantogwu sought for a means of warning his mother's people without breaking the oath. So, in the evening of the attack, he ran to his mother's people. They were just preparing the evening meal and were pounding yam foofoo in a mortar. Without a word to anybody, he took the pestle from the person pounding the foofoo and himself began to pound the foofoo, singing.

“:Agha agbaghi ta ogba echi”,
Kpom, Kpom!
“Agha agbaghi ta ogba echi”,
Kpom, Kpom!
(If there is no war today, it will be tomorrow,
Kpom, Kpom!!)

As he sang, he pounded the mortar, Kpom, Kpom!

After a few minutes he put down the pestle and left for home, abruptly, without saying a single word to anybody. His mother's people puzzled over his strange behaviour, and then it dawned on them that their relation had given them a message. They cancelled the festival which was to take place the following day and instead, prepared for war. When Oka attacked the following mourning Amantogwu was ready. And so the war dragged on for many years.

Ikelionwu joined the war – now for him a war revenge – and used his gun. He helped to bring victory to Oka and Amantogwu town was sacked, and the inhabitants scattered.

Again, he was rewarded with thirty male slaves and thirty goats which he took back to Ogenti's house in Omogho. He now had a household – “Ndibe”. He prospered in Omogho and founded a clan – Ndi-Ikelionwu – which developed to the Ndikelionwu town of today.

Ikelionwu settled in a part of Omogho which came to be known as Umuoha or Umuchukwu. He begat eight sons as follows: (1) Ufere (2) Okoli (3) Kanu (4) Akpaka (5) Ijoma (6) Okafor (7) Ikelionwu (No. 2) and (8) Nwafor. There were known as Umu-Ikelionwu, within the larger group called Ndi-Ikelionwu.

The blood descendants of Ikelionwu recognized that they came from Oka and whenever, any of them died, who was a male, his widow came to Oka to perform the final Ajana funeral ceremony. This was performed for them by the Head of Umuezeoshie family of Ifite-Oka. When Chief Mbonu was alive, he frequented Ifite-Oka Village.

Of the descendants of Ikelionwu (Ikelionwu meant lke-emeli-onwu) [no one can conquer death], the most famous was Okoli son of Ijoma – Okoli No. 2. He was the son of Ijoma, the fifth son of Ikelionwu. Okoli Ijoma was a warlord, who fought with Ada mercenaries. He waged war against Oka – his own people and so it was called “agha gbal ibenne” [which is described in another chapter]. He died in 1905.

Ijoma had three sons, Okoli (No. 2) [Called Okoli Ijoma], Nwenne and Ike (No.3). Okoli Ijoma begat Oji, who begat Chief Mbonu. Nwenne begat Chief Sabastian Nwene, [one of the author’s informants]. Ike (No. 3) begat many important sons.

Victor Okoli Oji of Umudioka Village, who died in 198887 aged 105, said that he knew Okoli Ijoma. At the end of the Ada war which was waged by Okoli Ijoma with Ada mercenary soldiers against Oka, Okoli Ijoma made peace with Oka by marrying Nkoma Oji, a daughter of Oji Nwemeluwa of Umudioka Village, father of Victor Oji and oldest Oka man of his time.

Victor Oji’s mother was a plaiter of hair. During the Ikeji Festival of the Aros, Nkoma used to send for Oji’s mother to come and plait the hair of Okoli Ijoma’s wives numbering about one hundred. Being an only child, with no one to look after him, Victor Oji used to be taken along by his mother. He was then about eight years old. They used to stay long in Okoli Ijoma’s compound, sometimes up to two months at a time.

Okoli Ijoma was living at Umuochu, part of Ndikelionwu and Omogho. There was a big Square in front of his compound, with plenty of ogbu trees. The Square was swept every morning. His relations lived around the Square. At the entrance to his compound, one stepped on a high-sounding board, so that Okoli Ijoma could hear the sound of one’s entry inside the house. On the entering the compound, on the left, one saw a big iroko tree to which several cows were tethered. In front of one was the Obu, a big Obu, thatch roofed and measuring some two hundred feet in length. Inside it the ceiling was decorated with human skulls – heads of enemies killed in war. The Obu was very long and wide.

Okoli Ijoma was tall, and very light complexioned and handsome. He always dressed in loin cloth and Mbamili gown, and a hat. He carried a walking stick. When seen, he would be about 50 to 60 years, Nkoma would be between 30 to 39 years then, and would have been married fifteen years or so. Victor Okoli Oji must have gone to Okoli Ijoma in about 1902 two or three years before Okoli’s death. According to him the Ada War would have been between 10 to 15 years before their journey that would be between 1887 and 1892.

Next to Enufite was Ezinato-Ifite, comprising Abochime family, Ofiana family, Iruanu family and Ishioli family. With the exception of a sub-family in Ishioji called Irunnebo, all these various peoples originally lived near Ogbu-Osampe, on the way to Amansea town. They all moved up to live with Irunnebo, who were Ifiteana people.

Next to Ezinato was Enu-Agu called Agbana-Ifite. It comprised heterogeneity of peoples, namely, Iruakwa, Apitiana and Anocha. Some of them were remnants of Inyi, who owned Ajana Ifite, but had disappeared from history. What they all had in common was a desire to live near the Okpo people of Ifiteana. Eventually all were assimilated into Oka culture and became Oka people.

Inyi, who owned Agu Inyi land in Ifite-Oka Quarter, disappeared in history because of a quarrel over "Idime Atu". "Idime" was the leg of an animal between the knee and the waist.

The story was that the Inyi people went a-hunting and killed a bush cow, called Atu. It was a big event. According to custom they must present the Idime of the Atu to the community of Ifite-Oka as a whole. They failed to do so, but shared the whole animal among themselves. They gave no satisfactory reason for this breach of custom; and amicably settlement having failed, war ensued. The rest of Ifite-Oka attacked Inyi, defeated them, and drove them out. Inyi scattered. The bulk of them migrated to Inyi town near Achi, and there formed a community called Umuome, after the name of their leader - Ome - who led their exodus.

Okpo people were a musical people, like all Ifiteana.

The time of the end of farming was the season for learning new dances for both men and women, and new tunes were churned out during that period.

Some of the Oka popular musical instruments were, apart from the ubiquitous oja (flute), ubo (zither), uyo (maracas) and opu – an elongated gourd blown when held in a horizontal position – it sounded like a trumpet, and was used in important ceremonial occasions such as title taking and the burial of title men. The Opu could call a person or give a message. The blower was called "Okwa Odu", and underwent a period of apprenticeship.

The Oka man was moved by the Opu, and it usually galvanized him into action, into an impromptu dance, solo.

Opu was calling a cripple. The cripple out: "O! Opu, you keep calling me; what do you want of me, is it that I should run or that I should walk?!!" (Ovbu ka mgba vba oso, ka ovbu ka njevbe ije?).

Onye nwul anwu shil na ya nul ka opu na uyo na eku ye, mana aja upa ekwerie binyi (the dead man said that he heard the opu and the uyo calling him, but that the weight of the earth on him would not allow him to get up!).

Uvbio was another musical instrument. It was a wooden drum, made of a block of wood, oblong in shape, hollowed inside, and slit at the top; the two lips sounded differently, one lip was known as the male, and the other lip was known as the female. This wooden drum was beaten with palm branches (shorn of the fronds) held in each hand; and it produced a peculiar sound that was deep, pleasing and dignified: Uvbio music was the dance of the Ozo title-holders.

Ikwodiaku, the Okpo man, as has been told, settled on a very large expanse of land which he had discovered and which he shared among his sons. his sons were:

Diana
Okperi
Igweogige and
Isiagu.

Their descendants formed the important Amikwo Village of Oka town.

Chapter 6

The Coming of Agulu

Oka na eje mba, mana mba anara eje Oka

*(You see Oka people,
but you don't know where they come from)
- what people said of Oka.*

Nebechi Uzo, whose name were later shortened to Nebuzo, a blacksmith from a community in Umana town, called Agulu, came to Oka to trade, and ply his craft of blacksmithing. He bought and sold elephants tusks. It was the trade in elephant tusks that brought him to Oka, where the commodity was in good supply.

Nebuzo used to stay in the compound of a man of Igweogige family in Amikwo Village, Oka, (whose name is now lost), where he also built his blacksmithing workshop.

He became so friendly with his hosts that he desired to marry one of their daughters. the father of the girl agreed, and he married her. Her name was Imedegwu. He begat a son by her and named him Agulu.

it is said that Nebuzo had other sons by the same wife, but that they perished in a raid by a hostile tribe near Oka, and only Agulu was saved because he was very young then and his mother had carried him on her back at the time of the incident.

After marrying Imedegwu, the Amikwo people showed Nebuzo a piece of land near the Ofiamazu Stream to make his compound. This spot came later to known as "Akpunu Agulu" – ancient habitation of Agulu.

When Agulu grew up, he took to his father's profession, and became a trader and a blacksmith. He was also a hunter. He inherited his father's compound after his father's death and lived there.

How Agulu became an Oka citizen is related in this manner:

A war broke out between Oka and Nibo because of the dastardly murder of some Omuko young men by some Nibo medicine men.

In the course of the war a certain Nibo warrior called "Opa-ikpo" - ikpo carrier used to raid Oka with "ikpo" in his hands. "ikpo" was a wooden board to which were attached rows of small gongs which when shaken made a terrifying sound.

Whenever Opaikpo (also called Obikpo) came to the war front people would start running away, because it was believed that his ikpo carried charms which made him unconquerable. He became a source of trouble to Oka, as he used to capture people at times and take them prisoner.

Oka people went and consulted a Dicie (a native doctor who was also a diviner who discovered the wishes of the gods through "avba" – a process of divination). The Dicie told Oka that the person who would kill Opaiko was not an Oka man but a stranger living in Oka.

The Debie was called to Oka to determine the stranger who was to kill Opaikpo.

The Debie put his medicine pot on the fire, and asked that the seeds of the alligator-pepper (ose ora) be thrown at the medicine pot from a distance, and that names of strangers in Oka should be called out at the same time. He said that any stranger whose pepper fell into the pot would be the one.

This was done and the pepper of Agulu, son of Nebuzo fell into the pot.

Oka told Agulu that he was chosen to kill Opaikpo.

Agulu agreed and followed them to the war. He asked to be shown the route through which Opaikpo used to take. He was shown. He hid himself there.

Opaikpo came, shook his ikpo, and people ran; but Agulu did not run. he watched his chance.

after chasing people for some distance, Opaikpo turned to go back. as he turned, Agulu jumped on him from behind, knocked him down and cut off his head.

he took the head, and showed it to the Oka people. The Oka people raised shouts of joy, and fell on the Nibos and chased them out.

But a friend advised Agulu not to say anything there at the meeting, but to return home. At home the friend advised him not to accept the offer of thirty slaves, but to tell Oka to give him "Ona Anana", that is, make him a naturalized Oka citizen.

Agulu then told Oka at the meeting to reward him by giving him "Ona Anana", Oka people readily agreed. They said to one another: "this man is wise!" (nwokee new! uche).

On the appointed day, at Oye Okanube market-place in Nkwelle Village, Oka people gathered, bringing their different Ovbos. They struck their ovbos on the ground, and told Agulu, that he was now an Oka citizen, able to perform all ceremonies of a freeborn Oka citizen. And they tied on his ankles the copper anklets of an Amanwulu celebrant. And they gave him a ring which he buried in his compound. An Ogbu tree was planted for him in his compound also. He was told that he and his children would constitute a community in Oka (onuku) with the same rights as other communities.

After these ceremonies, Agulu became an Oka man.

Later on, the Amikwo people who gave him the land on which he lived, went and performed the final ceremony for him, called "ike egho", a ceremony which was meant to give him many children.

Agulu married many wives, and begat eight sons. The eighth son was said to have migrated to Omo in Uzo Uwani and settled there as a result of constant quarrels between him and his father's eldest son, Ogbudeze.

Like his father, Agulu was a hunter, and during one of his hunting expeditions he discovered what is now Avbo-Agulu site, near the Obibia Stream. He liked the place so much that he asked for permission from the Amikwo landowners to settle there. He was given permission and he built new compound there and moved his family there.

Agulu begat the following seven sons (in order of seniority) whose descendants from the present Agulu-ebe-nasa (Agulu of the seven families), the eighth son having left Oka town:-

1. Ogbudeze
2. Onaga
3. Belanwunya
4. Ikeagulu
5. Enechi
6. Jagwo
7. Orukaenwe

These children multiplied and formed a community in Oka town (onuku) with equal rights with the other communities according to the promise the Oka people had made to their father, Agulu.

The following is the story of where Nebuzo came from, the father of Agulu: He came from Umana, in the Agbaja country, Ezeagu Local Government Area.

There was a town in Ezeagu Local Government Area, in old Udi Division, called Umana. Its inhabitant's descendants of an ancestor called Naa. Two sons were begotten by Naa and were named Obele-agu and Awo. These two sons' begat numerous offspring who constituted the town of Umana.

Obele-agu's descendants formed the villages of Agbor, Okpudo, Ugwuakulu, Amaaji, Ovuazi and Osonu.

The descendants of Awo formed the villages of Isigwu, Okunito, Owerre-mba.

These ten villages were called Umu-Naa (children of Naa), the present Umana town.

It was to Amaji village of Obele-agu that a blacksmith and his family came many centuries ago. The man was not of the same blood with the people of Umana, nor did the inhabitants of Umana know exactly where he came from. He made a covenant with the people that he would concentrate on his smithing, and would never compete with them by putting a seed into the ground by way of farming; but that they, on the other hand, must not beat one piece of iron on another. The compact was kept and the stranger became part of the community and formed a clan of his own within Amaji Village. They were known as "Agulu", meaning smiths.

The surrounding people, among whom he lived have a tradition that this first blacksmith came from Oka. "A man from Oka", so narrated Ozo Izueke Umesie of Umuawo in Obinofia-Ndiagu town, "settled in Umana and taught blacksmithing. He and

his descendants formed a community of Agulu in Umana. They alone were blacksmiths.

In the folklore of the Agulu-Umana people themselves, their ancestor was said to be a man called Enealiagu, a blacksmith. Where he learned his trade they could not tell. Ene-ali-agu is in another dialect, Ene-ana-agu. It could have a reference to "ene", an animal that roamed the savannah lands. In bygone days, people used animal names as their names, an example being Obele-agu (little leopard). On the other hand, going by the second alone, the name could possibly be a corruption of Oka title-name "Ana-eli-aku" (ana eli aku. aku ana abata). This appears probable because of another name Enealiagu gave to one of his sons, namely, Okokwu. Now Okokwu was a name of a locality in Amikwo Village of Oka. It was the battle of Okokwu (Okokwu) that was the turning point in the civil war between Agulu and Amikwo in 1902. So, if Enealiagu's son's name was the as this Amikwo place-name, then there is a connection which could strengthen the story that this ancestor of the Agulus of Umana came from Oka. Amaenyiana were all blacksmiths, and they were dispersed to no one knows where.

Just as a pocket of blacksmiths as found in Umana town, so there were similar pockets of blacksmiths in Amokwe, Ngwo and Eke, all with characteristics different from their neighbours. All the pockets of blacksmiths were of a different stock from the communities among whom they lived. This could be the result of the same wave of dispersal or migration.

Enealiagu begat five sons, whose names were Ozoekweshi, Ozoonyia, Aniene, Okokwu and Agulunta. These were the progenitors of Agulu of Umana.

An analysis of the name of the first two sons were certainly title-names which they took at the conferment of their ozo titles. Their proper names must have been lost. The first son's name Ozoekweshi, could mean Ozo-kweshili-mu (Ozo title befits me). This is an Oka name. The second son's name, Ozo-onyia, could mean Onyia-uke, which again is certainly an Oka name. The third son's name, Aniene, could be the same as Anenechukwu (ka-ana-ene-chukwu-anya) (we trust in God), this is an Oka name. The fourth son's name – Okokwu is as has been said, a place-name of Amikwo Village, Oka. The fifth son's name, Agulu-nta, simply means "Young blacksmith" (I have begotten a young blacksmith).

Inside Umana town, in Amaji Village, the Aulus lived in a sub-village of their own, a separate entity in an enclave. Apart from following their peculiar profession of smithing, they had customs different from those of the people around them. They had no other trade, did no farming, and didn't climb palm tree. Any male child born had a small otutu, oshiana and mkpa – blacksmithing tools – placed in his hands on his naming ceremony. And a dead male had similar tools placed on his grave – examples of which abound all over Agulu-Umana Village.

In Agulu, smithing (working in iron) was called "Uzu" while those doing it that is, blacksmithing were called "Agulu". Women didn't actually beat the iron, but they participated by working the bellows and doing some processes connected with foundry work.

The Agulu of Umana smelt iron in a building like a mud oven. The product was called "igwe-aga". With this igwe-aga they fashioned their tools of trade – oshiana (called by them iruama), otutu, obele-otutu, mkpa and eko. Their eko (bellows) was made from nvulu skin or goat skin placed over a hollowed piece of okwe tree-trunk. They obtained their iron ore from okpogho and other Ezeagu hills.

The Agulus of Umana made hoes, machetes, axes and musical instruments, like ogene, and later guns. But their speciality was foundry works.

The Agulus of Umana practiced their profession at home, serving the communities around them. They were not traveling smiths at first, and only began to move out to other places after the coming of the British Government; even so, they did not travel far, but only to the areas of Nkanu country and Ebenebe.

Not until after the 1918 war did they go as far as to the Cameroons, and then, they restricted themselves mostly to Calabar. They had no other journey routes.

When a new set of people (after apprenticeship) were about to begin going on journeys, a ceremony was performed for them called "igolu vba ukwu ije, kaa vba je ije awele" (blessing their feet that their journey may be fruitful!).

Agulu-Umana called a master-blacksmith "nna-uzu", (father of smithing) but Oka called him "nne-uzu" (mother of smithing).

In Agulu-Umana the slags of iron, 'avbulu uzu', refuse from smithing, was called "akputakpu", and it could be seen lying all about. A god of smithing, also called Akputakpu, was worshipped by them.

That was the place where Nebechi Uzo, alias Nebuzo came from.

When the sons of Agulu in Oka grew to manhood their father encouraged them to seek their fortunes outside the town, as competition to make a living by smithing inside the town was acute; and in order to avoid conflicts among themselves to have different journey-routes, or "ezi - ije". So, the sons moved out and began the tradition of "the traveling blacksmith", who earned their living outside Oka town and who carried the fame of Oka far and wide.

The coming of Agulu that means, of course, his father, Nebuzo can be estimated by the number of generations that have elapsed from Nebuzo's time. The Umuike people, descendants of the 4th son of Agulu can remember twelve generations of their ancestors; the other descendants of Agulu remember less. Taking Umuike, therefore, as an example and calculating from Nebuzo to the present generation, the number of generation is twelve. This is how the Umuike people reckoned it.

Nebuzo begat Agulu
Agulu begat 7 sons of whom Ikeagulu was one (ancestor of Umuike),
Ikeagulu begat 2 sons, Nnebuike and Ogbata
Nnebuike begat Abi and Okolo
Abi begat 3 sons of whom Ikeanwunya was the eldest
Ikeanwunya begat 3 sons of whom Akabueze was the 2nd son

Akabueze begat 3 sons and Asomugha was the eldest
Asomugha begat Nwobu and Nwora
Nwobu begat Nonyelu and 6 others
Nonyelu begat 6 son, the 2nd son being Uba
Uba begat Okezie and 4 others, namely, Ikechikwu, Ifeanyi, Nnamdi
and Obinna.

So from Nebuzo to Okezie are 12 generations.

There is no doubt that memory being what it is, some generations must have been forgotten, or jumped over. Moreover, the usual sacrifices to ancestors, because of the changes in religion are no longer being made, which used to be the means by which Oka people carried their genealogy in their head.

If the Oka people married and begat issue at the age of 30, on the average, then one generation can be taken to be 30 years, $30 \times 12 = 360$ years. Add 3 or 4 lost or forgotten generations - $4 \times 30 = 120$. $360 + 120 = 480$. Add 20 years to make it a round figure = 500 years. 500 years from 1985 when this information was obtained = 1485. Therefore, Nebuzo was likely to have come to Oka around 1485 A.D.

In 1987, exactly 500 years after, the people of Agulu Quarter, Oka, in a colourful ceremony, for the first time celebrated with pomp and pageantry and with feasting and dancing, the remembrance of the day their said ancestor, Nebuzo came to Oka.

Dr. Azuka A. Dike in his book - *The Resilience of Igbo Culture: A case Study of Awka Town* - at page 21, estimated the coming of Nebuzo to be around 1020 A.D.

The cluster of smiths found from Amokwe to Umana as has been stated, shows a pattern of migration which might not be unconnected with the dispersal of the blacksmiths of Amaenyiana of Oka town many, many centuries ago.

The Agulu-Umana people themselves had no recollection of where they came from, but the communities around them, with whom they lived, had a tradition that they came from Oka.

If that theory of history is correct, then the title of this chapter, namely, "The Coming of Agulu" should not be "The Coming of Agulu", but should be, as Thomas Hardy wrote, "The Return of the Native."

Chapter 7

Umudioka

Achalla da na ana nwel ana.

*(They are as numerous as the locusts).
- praise name given to Umudioka*

Body ornamentation was very much in vogue among the Oka people of old. Rubbing of ground red camwood mixed with tender orgilisi leaves on the body to make the skin soft and smooth was practiced by young and old.

Among the youths, on ceremonial occasions such as festivals or wrestling contests, the body was decorated with uli, another mixture from the leaves of the uli tree, which women used to make pleasing designs on young men's bodies – they drew black-coloured patterns which coloured the skin and could not be washed off for many days.

But a more permanent ornamentation of the body was that made by the artists with the knife – the Diokas or Nwa-Diokas. These experts were called Dioka or Nwadioka because of their town of origin. They came from a town in Idemili area called Umudioka-Akpom. Their subject was the human body.

These Diokas were skilled in scarifying the face, a procedure called “ichi”, which was a mark of distinction among the Oka people. The Diokas also carried out other useful functions, such as the circumcision of male children; decorating the bodies of young women about to leave girlhood by carving into their skins patterns called “mbubu”, and the chiseling of the teeth of the young man about to become a man; and some other things.

A branch of the Diokas settled in Neni town and carried on the same profession. The branch at Neni was founded by a man called Akikpo, who, while living at home in Umudioka-Akpom, had borne for him a child which brought fourth the upper tooth first. This was an abomination in the community and the penalty was the death of the child and the banishment of the mother. Rather than lose his family, Akikpo took both mother and child and fled to Neni, where he settled. His descendants formed the Umudioka Village of Neni town.

The Dioka came to Oka, sold their services and returned to their home. But one of them decided not to go back home. He decided to settle permanently in Oka. His name was Ichide. He was the progenitor of Umudioka Village of Oka town today.

The Dioka, apart from working with their knives, also practiced medicine. They were native doctors, and Ichide was also a naïve doctor.

it happened that a man of Okperi Quarter, Amikwo Village, whose name was Ogbee, had a daughter, Nwanyanwu, who had a disease of the bones that crippled her. The disease was called “nchiche” (tuberculosis of the bones).

Ichide, the Nwadioka guaranteed to cure her. He treated her and succeeded and she was cured; but she remarried a cripple. In his joy at the feat he had performed, Ichide put Nwanyanwu under pregnancy.

Ichide's base, whenever he came to Oka, was the house of Ogbunu, a man whose name was the same as the village to which he belonged – Umuogbunu.

When it became known that Ichide had put Nwanyanwu under pregnancy, Ogbee sent to Ogbunu to complain about what his guest had done. Ogbunu asked Ichide.

It was so, Ichide said yes. Ogbunu then told him that he had done a very serious thing and that he, Ogbunu, would not like to be involved in what Amiwko would do to him, and that, therefore, Ichide should leave his compound.

Ichide went and confided in his friend from Umuogwal Village, one Dunuoruchili a very wealthy and influential man.

Dunuoruchili told Ichide not to be afraid: that according to Oka custom no one was ever killed because he had put a woman under pregnancy. That, "utu" anara egbu ochu" (the penis does not commit murder). That even if the woman died in labour it was no murder in Oka. He advised him that when the Amikwo people began to put pressure on him, he should offer to marry the girl. He advised him to move to his, Dunuoruchili's own compound; and Ichide did do.

When the Amikwo people began to show anger over the matter, Dunuoruchili went to Ogbee and on behalf of Ichide offered marriage.

Ogbee agreed on the condition that Dunuoruchili would guarantee the safety of his daughter and that Ichide would not take her from Oka.

After negotiations, Ichide paid the high bride-price demanded of him and married Nwanyanwu, who was also called Ada-Ogbee. He at the same time gave an undertaking that he would not remove the girl from Oka town nor any of her children.

The matter having been satisfactorily settled, Dunuoruchili showed Ichide a small piece of land near him upon which to live. Ichide and his wife built a house and lived there. This their compound, in generations to come, became the "Ndichie Umudioka", a sacred place to all Umudioka people.

So, Ichide lived among Umuogwal people, as part of Umuogwal community though he was not as yet an Oka citizen.

Having properly settled in Oka, Ichide sent for his elder brother to come and share his good fortune. His elder brother was called Udeke. Udeke came and stayed with him; he also prospered in Oka town. He later got his own separate compound, which his descendants, Umudeke, revere as their ancestral Obu.

Ichide's wife, Nwanyanwu (Ada-Ogbee), bore him a son, whom Ichide named "Anyavbulu", meaning, "anya-bia-vbulu-ivbe-ngwulo mul", that is to say, "Oka, come and see the wonderful baby boy that a cripple has borne"!

When Anyavbulu grew up and took titles, one of his title-names was Eze-anyakudolu. And that title name is proudly borne by every Umudioka man of today.

Anyavbulu begat four sons, Ezechiedo, Ichide (No. 2), Majuo and Ezeudu.

These four sons begat numerous offspring. The descendants of the four sons, and the descendants of their uncle, Udeke made up the five families of Umudioka Village of Oka, hence that village was called "Umudioka-Obu-nese".

Because they came late to Oka Umudioka had no "ezi ije", or journey-route of their own. They therefore began to go to Nkanu country instead, where they practiced medicine. They were not blacksmiths. They took wives from Nkanu and assimilated some of their characteristics, such as the readiness to use the matchet to settle arguments. This gave the wrong impression that they originated from Nkanu.

At first Umudioka lived as part of Umuogwal community, intermingling with Umuogwal. In due course, they began to multiply so fast that they surpassed their hosts in population. Umuogwal began to fear that they would be swamped.

Okolobu Ezikuno, the oldest Oka man at the coming of the British in 1905, who died aged over 100 years, a native of Umudioka Village said that in his youth there were not more than thirty "dimkpas", that is, matured men able to carry guns; that it was during his lifetime that Umudioka exploded in population to become a mighty village in Oka.

The fear of being swamped by Umudioka made Umuogwal go to Oka and plead that Umudioka people be constituted into a separate unit of their own (onuku) within Oka town, with their own rights and duties. In other words, that they should be made Oka citizens.

Oka acceded to their plea. Umudioka was constituted into a separate community apart from Umuogwal; and the ceremony of naturalization was performed for them collectively. Thenceforth all descendants of Ichide and Udeke became Oka men, with the rights, duties and privileges of Oka men. They became seventh village of Ezi - Oka Quarters of Oka.

Umuogwal people were so relieved by their stratagem of avoiding being submerged by their stranger-elements, that they originated the saying: "Obial ga oghogbu Ogwal, Ogwal ghogbuo nye", meaning, "he who came to trick Ogwal, Ogwal has tricked him instead"!

All Ezi - Oka people, being Ifiteana in origin, were blacksmiths, with the exception of Umudioka, who earned their living by doctoring. The Umudiokas have become the most populous village in Oka town.

It is estimated that Ichide Nwadioka (Ichide the Umudioka man) came to Oka about the year 1615 A.D. almost two hundred years after Agulu. This estimate is based on the following calculation founded on the genealogy of Ezeudu, the fourth son of Anyavbulu: Ichide begat Anyavbulu; Anyavbulu begat three sons and then the fourth, Ezeudu. Ezeudu begat Ezenwaka; Ezenwaka begat Ude; Ude begat Mbada; Mbada begat Okeke; Okeke begat Nwora; Nwora begat Ikwunne (author's information). These are nine

remembered generations. If 30 years is taken to make one generation then $9 \times 30 = 270$; plus 2 or 3 forgotten generations = $3 \times 30 = 90$; $270 + 90 = 360$ years. 360 years from 1985, when the information was given; equals 1625; minus about 10 years from the 1st son to the 4th son = 1615 A.D.

Chapter 8

The Religion of the Oka People

Olisebuluwa ta oji
Anyanwu na Agbala ta oji
- an Oka prayer.

There could be no understanding of the Oka people without an understanding of their religion. Oka people lived their religion; their life was permeated with it.

Religion is defined as “the recognition on the part of man of a controlling superhuman power entitled to obedience, reverence and worship”. Religion is said to be derived from the Latin word “religio”, meaning, fear of the gods.

The acts, rites or ceremonies connected with religious worship stem from that fear of the gods.

Oka religion was called *Ovbuve* (Oka pronunciation of the word “Ofufe”). It meant Worship. To work, to play, to eat, the Oka man observed religious rules. He lived always with his gods. His life was perpetual prayer.

Before he ate any food at any time the Oka man threw a morsel outside as a sacrifice to the gods. And before he drank any wine, he went outside the room and poured a libation on the ground to the gods. Every morning, before starting the day’s activities, he offered a kola nut in sacrifice to the gods, and prayed to them to make his day propitious. Always, in his speech and behaviours he remembered the gods.

Although the Oka people had many gods they recognized one who was Supreme. They called Him *Chi - ukwu* (Chikwu). He was the Creator of all things, and the most powerful of all Gods. They called Him by many names: Chikwu-Okike, God the Creator; *Olisebuluwa*, He from whom all blessings flow; *Amashiamashi*, the Unknowable.

The Oka people had no altar for Chikwu, for they did not sacrifice to Him, neither would anyone swear by Him. But they prayed to Him at all times.

The following was the world view of the Oka people:

There is a Power called Chikwu, *Eze-uwa-nine*, Lord of the Universe. He started the world; both co-existed. Because He created everything He was called Chikwu-Okike God.

Chikwu first created *mma-ndu*, Life.

He then created Man and gave him *mma-ndu*.

Because man received *imam-ndu* from Chikwu, man was called *NNA* (father), (*onye nnata*), “*maka na onatal Chikwu ndu*”.

So, Chikwu created all fathers.

Nna asked Chikwu, "What am I to do with mma-ndu you have given me?" God then created woman, Nne, and said to him, "this is the person to look after mma-ndu I have given you. She will be the keeper of Life – nne-do-nye-anya.

So, God created all mothers, Nne.

Then He said to Nna and Nne, "I will make your life on earth everlasting".

So, He created Nnwa, the child, for them. He directed that one child should produce another, and so on down the line, to eternity, nwa muta nwa, nwa amuta ibie. He told them, "I have given you everlasting life on earth, one child will beget another for ever and ever".

He created the earth and all the nice things in it, and put Nna, Nne, and Nnwa in it to enjoy it and populate it.

he made rules of conduct for them to follow – the laws of God. He placed the knowledge of the laws in their hearts.

he told them that if they followed the laws they would remain happily on earth, but if they broke the laws they would have punishment and death instead.

In order to make sure that they kept the law, God (Chiwku) created Alushi to enforce the laws. To superintend his creatures and see that they kept His laws, He created the lesser gods, and set them over His creatures; they were called Aluna-mu-ashi, meaning don't break my law. The name was shortened to Alushi. Alushi said to men: "igbaghana ivbe Chikwu kwul", meaning, do what God says and you will be happy.

Those gods saw to it that the humans did not break God's laws. They punished the breakers of the laws, either by inflicting misfortune on them or death. They were superintended gods.

When a person took an oath, he put himself before the judgment seat of the lesser gods: if he did not break God's law, nothing would happen to him, the oath would not kill him. But if he had broken God's law, the punishment followed, and he suffered. That was the meaning of the saying - 'Alushi anara egbu na nkiti', meaning, the gods do not kill a person who is innocent of an offence.

Each of the gods was given responsibility for overseeing particular aspects of life on earth. For example, Ajana goddess oversaw the laws of cohesion – nso and alu; Udo oversaw the purity of life; the goddess Ovbuve had general superintended, and so on. Ngene saw to it that all drinking waters were not polluted.

Such was Oka view of the Universe.

Of the lesser gods recognized and worshipped by the Oka people the following were the principal ones:-

- (1) Okika-na-ube (Okanube) – God of war and of hunting, the inspirer of the Oka people.

- (2) Obe – the god of seasons and of agriculture.
- (3) Ovbuvbe – this goddess solved all human problems (ona ara mkpa). She was a goddess next in rank to Chikwu
- (4) Ngene – son of Ovbuvbe – also solved problems. He controlled all streams, all bodies of water. Ovbuvbe was female, Ngene male. Every Ovbuvbe must have her Ngene, that is, every female must a male.
- (5) Udo – god of purity and holiness. He controlled the Amanwulu celebrants (the first Oka title). His priest was called Eze-Udo.
- (6) Aro – He was the messenger of Ovbuvbe. His shrine was always at the border of the town. He was a god that indicated when hostile people were around and who gave early warning of the approach of enemies.
- (7) Agwu – the god of confusion and of madness. He brought hardship on humans for their misdeeds. He was the Executioner or punisher of the gods. At the beginning of any farming season a small patch of land was farmed and sown with crops and was said to be for Agwu. It was a sacrifice. Then the farmer could farm his own without being afraid of a bad harvest. “Agwu na akpa”, meant that a person was visited by Agwu, everything was scattered for that person, including his senses. The companion god to Agwu was called Eso, or Uke. Eso, or Uke, was the personification of evil, bad luck, and misfortune. He was the Devil in Christian religion. He was also a punisher of the gods. But he was not revered or worshipped.
- (8) Akogheli – the strengthener. Before the community went to any competition with another community that was not of Oka, the young men went to the shrine of Akogheli and took some feathers from his Ovbo and Okuku (calabash) and pinned same to their hair. When they got to the opposing community, it was believed that if any person wised to do them harm, by means of “nshi” (poison projected at a person without physical contact), Akogheli would manifest its power, and the “nshi” would be turned back on the body (or person) of its projector.
- (9) Imoka – the avenger. Whenever an Oka man was going on a journey he took a piece of chalk from the shrine of Imoka, and wrapped it in a piece of cloth, and put it in his luggage. At his destination, he hung this wrapped-up piece of chalk in his workshop or place of residence, as a protection against evil and hostile people. Imoka was known as “ogbachi obodo”, the avenger and any person who harmed an Oka man had himself and his whole family wiped out by Imoka.
- (10) Ajoka – god of the territory of Oka. He was male. He watched over territorial integrity of Oka town.
- (11) Ajana – female, goddess of the earth. Her shrines were ten. She saw to the cohesion of Oka people. She punished the infringement of those rules of conduct which were made to hold society together. The priest of Ajoka was called Eze-Ajoka, and the priest of Ajana was called Eze-Ajana. In Oka ‘Eze’ meant

'priest' of god, or servant (minister) of a god. When a woman's husband died she could not have sexual intercourse after the period of mourning without first going to Ajana shrine to perform the ceremony of untying herself. This rule was to ensure orderly succession to property. At some point in history, women going for this cleansing ceremony (the ceremony was done at the dead of night) were sometimes kidnapped. To prevent this, many villages took the shrine to their locations. That was why there were ten Ajana shrines in Oka.

The rules of conduct of the Oka people, religious and secular were collectively called "Omenana" or "Ona-eme". They were divided into three categories. Two of them having religious sanctions. They were:-

- (a) Iwu – ordinary regulations made to regulate ordinary affairs. They had no religious sanction or religious penalty.
- (b) Nso – prohibitions or weight rules of conduct. They were rules which grew with the people and were part of Oka life. A breach of Nso could only be expiated at the instance of Eze-Ajana, in a ceremony for that purpose.
- (c) Alu – abomination. these were acts absolutely prohibited which touched the very existence of Oka, by being disruptive of society, such as a man having carnal knowledge of his blood relation or betraying his town and so on. Any one committing Alu was not forgiven but was visited with severe punishment including death. Alu could only be cleansed, after the person had suffered the penalty, by a ceremony conducted by Nwanri. Nwanri meant "Nwoke-Nri", which meant "a man from Nri town". The Nris did all the cleansing ceremonies of Alu in Oka town.

In the worship of the gods one ever-present tool was the Ovbo. Ovbo was nothing but a movable altar for sacrifice, but it differed from all other altars by being universal, that is to say, it could be used for sacrifice to any god. Any god for which there was no special altar could be sacrificed to on the Ovbo.

Every god in Oka, every Alushi had an altar made for him. No sacrifice was made to a god except on his particular altar. Ovbo was an exception; it was used for all gods.

This was how an Ovbo (Ofo) was made: You get a branch of the Ovbo tree. If you cannot get a branch from the Ovbo tree itself, because the tree is rare, you use some other sacred tree, such as the ogilisi, a tree favoured by the gods. You cut the stem of an ogilisi tree. You also dig up the roots of the tree. You get a wooden bowl, called Okwa. You scrap the bark of the ogilisi stem into the okwa; you also put the roots into the receptacle. You get a bit of a plant, called 'Ofo-ishi' (not the same as the Ovbo tree). You get ose-ora plant (alligator pepper) and scrap the back of the stem into the okwa, you also add it leaves. Then you get a quantity of chalk (nzu) and add to the contents of the wooden bowl. You pound all the ingredient together with a pestle until the mixture is drawn. When the mixture is drawn, you get akwala rope (rope procured from the raffia palm tree).

You begin to paste the mixture onto the ogilisi stem, which is already shaped. Round and round you put the paste. As you paste round the ogilisi stem, you hold the paste in

place by tying it with the akwala rope. You go on doing this until you have the layers to the size you want. A part of the wood is left as a handle. You then leave to dry.

On the day of sanctification, people assemble in the Obu. You get an ose-ora fruit (alligator pepper) and tie it to a palm frond. You then cleanse the Ovbo with it, saying: "ivbe ashil ya bulu, ka oga abu". All those present will answer, "e-o-o!" What you've said "let it be what we say it should be", that is, an Ovbo (Ofo). The response of those present "e-o-o!" means, "so be it".

Then you say, "Emeghene, esughene, bu ishi ovbo", and the people respond "e-o-o" what you've said is, "not to do wrong, not to leave the guilty and attack the innocent is the quality of the Ovbo", and the same response "so be it" is given.

Finally, you say, "Mgbologwu (root) mal ile, ma gu amana nso", the same responses is given "e-o-o!" it means, "Root! Be effective and powerful, but not partial!".

After this ceremony it becomes Ovbo and could be used for sacrifice to all gods, as their altar.

Thereafter, blood of animals and fowls killed in sacrifice would be smeared on it, which acted as a preservative against insects, and saved it from decay for generations; blood helped to preserve wood. Feathers of fowls killed in sacrifice would, for the same purpose, be pasted on it after smearing it with the blood of the fowls. That was why an Ovbo that had seen many generations was big in size.

Ovbo meant truth. Because it was the altar of all gods it was a very holy instrument and anybody holding it must act rightly. There was a saying: "Onye ukwu shil nia ji ovbo, onyenta shi nia ji ovbo mazi kwal onye jie ni", meaning, "Both the high and the low claim to be upright, but only the gods will know who is upright". Ovbo was a witness of the agreement of man with the gods to act righteously at all times. One broke the argument at one's peril.

Ovbo was passed down from father to son; and one Ovbo could last for many lives.

The repository for the Ovbo was the Obu of the family.

Obu was the first house in an Oka man's compound, which one encountered as one entered the compound. It might be a large house or a small house, but it was the centre of the government of the family, and the place where the family gods were worshipped and where all the paraphernalia for that worship were housed. Every Obu contained a specially raised platform on one side of it, set apart for religious worship, on which the movable altars for sacrifice were set. It was called "Ikpo Mmuo", or Shrine.

Oka religion was the view Oka people had of themselves and their universe. Their gods had no shape or form, but were a mental concept. Oka deity existed in the mind. It was "Mmuo", Spirit, and could not be seen. But there was a tradition that sometime in the history of Oka, such Spirits took human shape and were seen of men. But that was a long, long, time ago! Oka people, unlike people in other cultures, never carved or made images or their gods. Their religion was not anthropomorphic at all.

What people saw in the practice of Oka religion was not effigies of their gods, or images in the likeness of their gods, but the movable altars upon which sacrifices were made to each named god. Oka people built no temples or houses for their gods, and therefore, had no fixed or built-in altars. Their altars were said to be "Okwa mmuo", that is receptacle, or dish, for the gods. Each god had no altar of his own.

In Oka religion there were four classes of gods. The first was Chi-ukwu, standing alone. He was the Creator of all things. The second were the gods who had never been human before – Alushi; they were gods worshipped by the generality of the people; these gods had existed from the beginning of time. The third were the gods who were human beings before, but had become gods after re-incarnations through death, and had ceased to come to earth. The fourth were the dead ancestors, called "family gods", who had not finished the cycle of re-incarnation any human being who died became a Spirit mmuo. All gods in Oka mythology, excepting Chikwu, were collectively called either "Alushi" or "Ndu Mmuo". Oka believed in many gods or multiple deities.

Oka religion was based on sacrifice – appeasement of the gods. Sacrifice was the pivot of the religion; it was the point of contact between gods and men. One did not approach the gods empty-handed, one must take and offering with one, no matter how small; and if one had nothing to offer one made a promise, which must be kept. Oka people believed in quid pro quo, you ask favour of the gods, you give them something in return – that is a sacrifice.

KOLANUT (Oji), the Igbo variety, was the smallest item of sacrifice. It was offered to the gods at all times, and everywhere. It was pleasing to them. That was why prayer to the gods in Oka language was "ngo oji" – offering the kolanut. All prayers are wishes, and "ngo oji" of the Oka people was no exception. When the kolanut was broken, the breaker dug up the cotyledon from each piece of the kolanut – the productive organ in the kolanut (ile oji) – and threw them outside. That was the part of the kolanut eaten by the gods; the humans ate the rest of the kolanut.

When a visitor, visited an Oka man, joint prayers were said in the form of a kolanut presented to the gods and good wishes bestowed on the visitor. Without that ceremony you've "not welcomed him" you've not prayed with him for his well-being". Kolanut was not regarded as food when used ceremonially. It was a sacrifice. With it in hand, one asked for favours from the gods.

The Priests of the gods did not constitute a separate class in Oka. Anyone could be chosen by the gods to minister to them and give them food. It was an honour that is, making sacrifices to them. "Onye na agodo mmuo", the person authorized to give food or make sacrifice to a god had a lucrative position. In respect of the deceased ancestors, or family gods, the Head of the Family, that is, the oldest man of the family was the authorized priest to minister to them. He alone could take down onto Ikpo Mmuo (the domestic shrine) the altars of the family gods; and he alone was permitted to perform the rituals of worship and sacrifice.

for gods in general, called "Alushi" worshipped by the community as a whole and not by one family only, it was the person identified by divination, by the Deibes or by an extraordinary sign (called omuma) from the gods – such as, a cluster of bees suddenly appearing in his compound or a tortoise of a particular but known shape visiting his

compound – that became the priest of the particular god. When that priest died, a successor was identified by similar means.

Whenever the correct altar of a god was put down by his priest, and the god, whose altar (or nkwu) it was, was invoked, it was believed that the presence of the god was drawn down to earth, ready to receive the sacrifice, and that his power was made manifest.

Altars of the god, their receptacles varied. One did not take the altar of one god and make sacrifice on it to another god. That was why altars were many, and were fashioned in various shapes and sizes for purposes of identification.

The altars of the family gods were called 'uluchi', those of the general gods 'nkwu'. Some Okas called uluchi 'okpenshi'. They were kept in the Obu of the family and were used for sacrifice there.

The altars of the gods, worshipped by the community as a whole, were called 'nkwu', each god having its own nkwu, and each nkwu being different in shape, size, and form from the other. An nkwu could be made of iron, wood or stone.

The nkwu of god (not a family god) was kept in a small hut built for it, to protect it from sun and rain, and to avoid the necessity of making a new one each time for sacrifice. The hut was called its "Okwu" (okwu meant house).

The general gods (as distinct from the family gods) were worshipped in the open, under shady trees, in a place set apart for such worship. The place was called "Olulu", which meant, the Shrine. It was there the god was worshipped, that is, invoked and appeased; and it was there that its nkwu, or altar was brought by the officiating priest. The shrine was usually in a grove of trees, or under one big tree. The trees or tree which gave shade, were often decorated with a white cloth to indicate that it was a holy place, not to be defiled. It was there that people went to make sacrifice to the god. In doing so they were not sacrificing to the tree but to the god whose sacred place or shrine or place of worship it was.

When a sacrifice was made, a bit of the food or meat was put on the uluchi – if in an Obu or on the nkwu, if it was in the open. It was taken off by small children and eaten – it was called "nse nli mmuo". One of the reasons the worship of ancestors declined was because children went to school and became Christians, and when the father of the house made a sacrifice there was no child to take the offering off the altar. Unless that was done, the gods had not accepted the sacrifice and had not been appeased. There was a connection between little children and the gods. The rest of the sacrificial food was eaten by those present. If an animal was killed it was the blood that was accepted by the gods. The entrails were thrown outside, in general sacrifice, or to a distance for vultures to consume. The rest of the animal was cooked and eaten by the participants at the ceremony. Every sacrificial ceremony had its own ritual.

Oka made Udene, vultures, the messengers of the gods, and used them as an index of whether their sacrifice was accepted by the gods or not, like children in the Obu. If the vulture came to eat the offal from a sacrifice, the sacrifice was accepted; but if they did not come, then it was not accepted. If a sacrifice was being made, and animals were

killed, and the vultures did not appear, the officiating priest would beat a gong (a resonant bell-shaped metal) and call out "Uku! Uku!!, meaning, messenger, messenger, and the vultures would appear. There was a saying, "Agbavba aja ma shi avburo Uden, lbe mel be mmuo". When there is a sacrifice and no vultures appear, something wrong must have happened in the land of the gods. That was why when the white Missionaries came to Oka and said that they were messengers of God, Oka people called them "Ukwu-Chikwu", later corrupted to "Ukuchikwu".

The nkwu of the gods – the movable altar (or uluchi for domestic gods), was what the early Europeans who came to Oka saw, and gave the name "idol" or "juju".

Juju in French was said to mean toy! They said the Oka people worshipped juju, or toy!! But that was a misunderstanding. The Oka people did not worship toys; the god they worship were invisible, "mmuo", Spirit.

One uluchi or altar of the family gods that had a peculiar shape, and was almost the same wherever one went was the uluchi of the god called *Ikenga*. Ikenga was a god whose full name was "Ike-nji-aga", meaning "my strength that leads me on; that pulls me through all obstacles".

Whatever success an Oka man achieved in life he attributed to his Ikenga. Ikenga was a god of industry and achievement of strength and enterprise. It was a conception, in concrete form, by the Oka man of the qualities of manliness and survival in a competitive world.

The uluchi (or altar) for sacrifice to Ikenga, was made for a person when he was on his own, when he had launched out as a farmer, a master blacksmith or into any other economic endeavour, as an independent person. The uluchi was, generally, shaped like a squatting human being, with curved horns (like those of a ram) on its head, and with hands and legs.

The Oka man carried his Ikenga (the altar of the god, its uluchi) on his journeys, so as to be able to sacrifice at once to the god, Ikenga and give thanks to him whenever he achieved a notable success.

The Oka man worshipped strength, power and self-reliance. When the Oka man raised his right hand with the first clenched he praised it and called it "aka-ikenga-m" meaning, "this is my strength".

Another god of the Family that was all-pervading in the life of the Oka people was Chi, the guardian spirit, a person's god, personal to himself. Every one had his Chi. It was the making concrete or conceptualization by the Oka people of the totality of a person's tendencies, actions and reactions, as well as his qualities, which inexorably determined the way he would go in life, his destiny. "What a person is", they said, "is determined by himself and his Chi".

The knowledge of the wishes of the gods, their likes and dislikes when they were angered and when they were appeased, was imparted to the people by the Dibies – experts in their line. A Debie with his "avba", that is, his tool for divination, was a very important person in Oka. a Debie was a diviner, medium and prophet rolled into one, as

well as a doctor or healer. The Debie gave expression to the collective wishes, yearning and anxieties of the people, and proffered solutions which resulted in spiritual release.

The Debie was a man with great experience or knowledge of human nature, who could read and analyse people appearing before him at a glance. He concentrated hard on problems put before him. He pushed back all conflicting thoughts by chanting and by some such means. And then came the revelation! The solution to the problem or the answer to the question became clear to him. He delivered the message of the gods!

“Avba”, said the Oka people, “bu uche”, meaning “all divination is nothing but common sense”.

A Debie was native doctor who had healed with herbs and sometimes with the knife – surgery; he was also a diviner of the will of the gods. He worked with the mind and spirit. The human mind and the human spirit were his arena, his sphere of action. Through them he healed the person. The Debie was a doctor who healed bodily diseases and at the same time a psychiatrist who healed mental diseases. To him the two were not separated (unlike the modern medicine where the science of healing the body was separated from the science of healing the mind). To the Oka Debie, the body and mind were interlaced; he healed the body by touching the mind.

The Debie served an apprenticeship (like a blacksmith) of seven years; it could be more, up to twelve years, depending upon the age at which he went in. He made himself a specialist in his field.

His rituals and peculiar technique and his dress were designed to inspire respect and to protect the secrets of his trade.

The Debie helped to hold Oka society together by making people stick to the laws and customs of Oka, by stating when the gods were angry and over what and when they were not, and by giving conditions for the appeasement of their wrath. He was an effective arbitrator in the affairs of men, in the name of the gods!.

How many centuries it took the Oka people to develop their peculiar but indigenous beliefs, called their religion is not known.

One of the beliefs, firmly held by them, however, was that the gods of one people had no power in the territory of other people, unless over those who chose to worship them. That was why a total stranger in Oka could join Eze Imoka to eat the meat of the animals sacrificed to Imoka, but not an Oka man; or join Eze-Ajana to eat the sacrifices to Ajana goddess, but not an Oka man. The Oka gods could not touch strangers within Oka town. Oka people believed that “if you worship as people worship, you will think as they think, and they will control your mind”. There, the Oka people steadfastly refused to worship foreign gods other than their own.

And that explained why, at the turn of the 20th century, when the Missionaries came to Oka they found it very difficult, on their own, to convert the Oka people to Christianity.

In the practice of their religion, the Oka people aimed at righteousness at all times.

They were also pragmatists. They made covenants with their gods. They were always under contract with them. They would say “make my journey this year successful and I will give you a goat in sacrifice when I return”. If his journey was indeed successful he did not fail to sacrifice a goat to the god to whom the promise was made.

The Oka man constantly staked his life on doing what he considered to be right. The common expression “ejeli ngu ovbo”, meant, I speak to you, or I act towards you, with ovbo in my hand. It was a might oath, and meant that if what he, the Oka man had done was wicked or deceitful may the gods visit him with instant punishment or death.

“Jide ovbo!” was a powerful evocation in Oka. Do what is right, or else suffer the consequences!.

Igwe Osita Agwuna, Igwe of Enugwu-Ukwu and Eze of Umunri, explained this contract with the gods to the author in this way, he said: “Ovbo was always made from the branch of an ovbo tree”, (or from some other tree favoured by the gods). “When a person said, ‘ejim ovbo!’, he meant, if what I am doing towards you is not right and proper, may the gods make me like the ovbo tree, whose branch I now hold in my hand; let my whole life be useless and barren. ‘Because ovbo tree was a useless tree. it served no purpose. it did not bear fruit. Its leaves were not eaten by men or beasts. Its wood did not burn well, and was therefore not used for firewood. it was a tree that was useless and barren. To hold the ovbo and act rightly was the only way to escape a terrible fate.

The Oka man strove to be just and upright in all his ways. He did his best to live according to the dictates of his religion; and he regulated his entire moral code according to its tenets. to know him well, you must know his religion.

Chapter 9

The Dance of the Gods

(Oka citizen! walk with pride!!)

- the message of Opu-Eke Drum

Every month of the Oka year had a Feast attached to it, by which the month was known. The only month that had no Feast was the 4th month. All others had one Feast or to other attached to them.

Oka year had variable months, because of the need to follow the seasons for farming; hence “ngu aro” system arose, the “counting of the year”, meaning, arranging the calendar for the coming year.

The Feasts were festivals in honour of the gods. Like everything Oka did, their Feasts were tied to their religion.

A Feast day was a day of rest; it was also a day of worship to a named god.

The Festival were called “Egwu Alushi”, the Dance of the Gods.

1. The First month of the Oka year was Onwa nvu, (onwa, month, nvu, first) and the Feast attached to it was ‘Egwu Imoka’ hence the first month of the year was also known as Onwa-Egwu-Imoka.

Egwu Imoka was the most colourful of all Feasts.

The Feast was celebrated in the 5th of the lunar month (Izu-onwa-nese); and it started on an Avbo day. (Four days made the Oka week- Eke, Oye, Avbo, Nkwo).

In the Oye evening before the Avbo day, the announcement of the coming festival was made late in the evening between 7.p.m and 8.p.m.

The announcement was made by the Opu-Eke, followed by the beating of the Ikolo drum (the huge musical wooden drum of the god, Imoka) beaten only on ceremonial occasions or in times of danger. The drum was housed in a small hut in the three trumpets and the abia made up the ensemble called “Opu-Eke”.

A week before the festival day, a message was sent to Umuokpu Villagers living on the border of Oka town that Egwu-Imoka was one native week away. Masqueraders and young men wielding sticks took the message to Umuokpu; and were entertained by the Umuokpu Villagers. Expectation was heightened thereby.

In the evening of the Oye day, the leading trumpet started off with a blast, calling.

‘Okeke Ukozu - e - e - e - e

Iga agbakwa Opu Eke - e - o - o!

[Okeke Ukozo,

Are you ready to dance to the gods, Imoka?)

Okeke Ukozo was the father of Adibe, and was the Imoka Priest (Eze – Imoka) at the time the Opu Eke musical instruments were captured from the Uvume, in the Uvume War and dedicated to the god, Imoka.

In the olden days, when Opu Eke was being danced to, the dance took the form of a mock battle (called “nro ota”) performed exactly in the same way as when the Opu was captured from the Uvume people. Village was pitted against Village, all dressed in battle dress. Matchets and ‘mgbolo’ (staves) were used, and also Ekpeke (shields) for defence. Because it was a mock battle, no one cut to kill, but blood could flow. Only four fingers without the thumb were used in grasping the matchet, so that it could not deal a mortal blow. Everyone was expected to cut, but to pull his blows.

When Udenabo of Amachalla Village, however, was killed in one of those encounters, Oka banned fighting with matchets. What happened was that in that year, Amachalla was fighting Umunnoke; Amudo was pitched against Umuayom, and Umuzocha against Umuoramma, when the incident occurred. Udenabo was cut in the stomach, and he died of the wound. The person who did it was never known, or he would have been hanged. Hence, Amachalla invoked one of their gods and said: “Whoever killed Udenabo and will not confess, may the god kill him, and kill his household and all his extended family! “Fighting at Egwu Imoka was stopped from that time forth and ‘anyachu’ sticks were substituted for matchets.

‘Nro ota’ at Egwu Imoka, was a test of strength and of endurance of pain.

as soon as the Opu Eke began sounding, all work ceased. Whoever was in the farms or anywhere else must stop work. And work was not resumed till after the festival, which lasted one whole native week – Avbo to Avbo.

At the sound of the Opu Eke, everyone would begin hailing the god. There would be exultation everywhere. People would begin shouting.

Ogbo – o, Ogbo – o, Ogbo – o! (Hail, hail, hail)
Ogidi – o, Ogidi – o, Ogidi – o! (Power, Power, Power)

That was the style of greeting to the god by men, women and children; whether in the farms or at home.

Opu Eke would play for about an hour and then stop.

After the announcement the music makes repaired to the Obu of the Eze-Imoka and ate and drank; and would stay there till the end of the festival period, playing morning and evening.

1st Day: The day following Oye, that is, Avbo day, the festival began. The Obu Eke resumed at about 5 a.m.

All roads and Squares and compounds were thoroughly swept to look spick and span. All utensils for food were thoroughly washed and cleaned.

After breakfast, the preparation of the food for the feast began. Plenty of yams were cooked. Then avbulu soup, made up of squeezed bitter-leaves and rich ingredients, and plenty of fish (but not meat) were prepared by the women of every household. The preparation of the food took the whole morning. Because the bitter-leaves used were plentiful, they were usually crushed at the streams in order to conserve water at home.

By 2.p.m the food was ready. Before then, the invitees to the feast, friends and neighbouring towns, began to arrive, each to his host. Those who went to purchase palm-wine came home, and those who went hunting, because hunting was the only activity in the nature of work allowed during the festival returned. The food was served and eaten with no religious ceremony.

After food, the drinking of palm wine. Whoever came in was served.

From 4.p.m people began to move to the Nkwo Market place, where the Shrine of Imoka was situated; taking with them gifts and offerings for the god. Men took along money or yams; women took along pieces of white chalk.

When the woman got to the Shrine they laid the chalk down at the altar of the god, and prayed the god to give them their desires; they would say: "Nnanyi, mam nzu", "our father, cleanse me with chalk, give me your blessing".

The Imoka Priest would receive the yam of the man – the yam had its bottom sliced off a little – touch the man's forehead with it, his left and right breasts, and pass it over his head, and then put the yam tuber in front of the god's altar. The man would tell the god his desires and would ask the priest to intercede for him: "nya gba dozie! Imoka", (speak to him in the way acceptable to him!). The Priest would reply: "Our father (nnanyi) you have heard his request". After making the offering, the man took a piece of chalk from the front of the altar and dabbed his eye-lids. The women dabbed their breasts and their feet. They then left the Shrine, rejoicing.

After the offerings at the Shrine, men and women, and children went to the open Square where the Opu Eke was being played, to dance. (A woman under menstruation would not do any of these things, but would stay at home, or, if she came to Nkwo at all, would stay far away from the Shrine).

People dance with great enjoyment, beneath the iroko tree to the music of the Opu Eke with the peculiar steps of the Imoka dance.

To close the day's celebrations, after all offerings had been received, the Eze – Imoka took up the Ogene of the god (his gong) and striking it invoked the god by name several times, giving him his praise-names. After the invocation, one of the assistant Priests (not the Eze Imoka himself) pulled up the altar of the god, called "uvbo Imoka" (his nkwo or altar), and proceed to the Opu Eke Square for the dance of the god.

'Uvbo Imoka' was the 'nkwo' or movable altar of Imoka, for making sacrifices to him. It was always at the Obu or Hall of Imoka at Amachalla Village and was only brought to the Shrine for purposes of sacrifice. It was an iron frame with folds of white cloth and a sprinkling of red, swathed round it. The Chief Priest, Eze Imoka, dressed for the occasion in white loin cloth and decorated his neck with coral beads. He wore on his

head 'Okpu-nwagwali (war cap) with an eagle feather stuck in it. he dabbed both eyelids with white chalk.

When the assistant Priest got to the open Square, from the inner sanctum of the Imoka Shrine, he raised the "Uvbo Imoka" aloft, and began the dance of the god. this was the high watermark of the day's celebration. The dance-steps were peculiar to the dance and were learnt by every Oka person from his infancy.

All men and women, young and old, joined in the dance. The men begat their sticks together over their heads to the rhythm of the dance, while the women dancing, repeated:

'Aroni mgbaghi, aroni mgbaghi'.
[I will dance to you every year, Every year I will dance to you].

And the abia drum would keep saying:
'Mgbavbulu elie, mgbavbulu elie'
[Eat when you have it, feast when it is the time].

The three Opu trumpets would then weave in and out with their own music.

After dancing in front of the musicians for some time, the assistant priest would change his steps; and the music would also alter; and he would begin to dance round the iroko trees beneath which the Opu Eke was being played, followed by the crowd of men and women, each taking three short steps forward, striking the left foot on the ground two times in a stationery position, and then raising the right foot and taking three steps forward again.

As the trumpets sounded: vbum! vbum! vbum!, the abia drum would say:
Oka abia cha - a!!
Trumpets: Vbum! Vbum! Vbum!
Abia drum: Oka is good!!
Trumpets: Yes! Yes! Yes!
Abia drum: Oka is great!!
Trumpets: Yes! Yes! Yes!

The men and women, young and old took up the refrain and answered back;

Oka amaka: [Oka is good]!
Oka erike [Oka is great]!!

They would repeat this over and over again, as they danced round and round the iroko trees, following behind the assistant priest.

after dancing round the iroko tree a number of times, the assistant Priest stopped dancing altogether and began to race round the whole length and breadth of Nkwo Market Square, again followed by the concourse of men and women, shouting praises to the god and greeting him with his praise-names, such as:

Okpu Orimili! (ancient sea),

Mgbagha nyilazi! [he whose mystery can not be fathomed]
Omuta onezuo anya! [he who looks after his offspring]
Onia ovbu na anya! [If you doubt him you will see the result with your own eyes].

As soon as the assistant Priest completed the course, he dashed off, this time alone, at top speed, still holding the Uvbo aloft, to the Obu of Imoka in Amachalla Village, where he deposited it.

as soon as he left the market – place, the crowds no longer followed him, but returned to the front of the Opu Eke. Shortly thereafter, the Opu Eke would stop playing. The ceremony had been completed. And that marked the end of the first day's celebrations.

The crowds dispersed, back to their eating and drinking, but each man and woman having deep within their consciousness the message.

Oka is good!
Oka is great!

2nd Day: The second day was Nkwo. Early in the morning, the Opu Eke started again.

The oldest woman in Ifite Quarter of Oka went to Nkwo market, alone. She carried her wares in her basket. at the market-place she swept her portion, and displayed her wares as if there were a real market going on.

she gave praise to the god.

Then, after about half-an-hour, she re-packed her wares in her basket and went home. This meant the market had been had for the god. The significant being that markets must never close come rain, come shine.

That day there was feasting as before.

After lunch masquerades went to Nkwo market-place to pay their respect to Imoka. Before then, they moved from house to house, receiving presents. Then they converged at Nkwo market-place.

all masquerade in Oka came. It was the day for masquerades! There they came, gentle ones, fearful ones, beautiful ones, ugly ones. Each with its followers of young men and boys, wielding anyachu sticks. As they danced along the streets of Oka town they sang the Egwu-Imoka anthem.

Okolo agbaghi azi,
Nya jene n'egwu Imoka!
Ajem mmem hem!!
Alo – o – oja ta eme!
Ajem mmem hem!!
Olo – o – olo – lo!
Ajem mmem hem!!
[The young man with an empty stomach
Must not go to Imoka dance,
Today is today, trial of strength if today!].

They converged in front of the Opu Eke. Then the abia drum beat out the special rhythm of the masquerades' dance; and they danced, hoping first on one leg and then on the other.

Kpom kpom, i - yam!
Kpom kpom, i- yam!
Kpo - kpo - nkpom, i - yam!

as they danced, they beat one another mercilessly with their sticks. All around one heard the swish of whips descending and the thwack of them. If a masquerader spied an ordinary person of its age-grade in the audience not dancing, he would go up to him and whip him. But the law was that he must raise his visor at the same time to be recognized; and he must throw down his whip for his victim to retaliate with it.

The dancing lasted into the evening.

3rd Day: The third day was Eke day. People moved from village to village getting entertained. Masquerades ran about, causing excitement everywhere. There was merriment till night fall.

4th Day: Oye day. People relaxed in their homes.

Elders who had consultations to do, held same, for it was a holiday and the opportunity was taken to settle affairs.

Masquerades continued to move from house to house, accompanied by their followers. They were entertained, and given coco-nuts, cooked yam and avbulu soup.

it was the time when young boys, who had not yet been initiated into the mysteries of masquerades, were initiated in the Obu of their fathers. Their mothers provided the coconuts for the entertainment of those who had come to initiate their sons.

During the initiation the boy was tested in various ways, the purpose being to infuse in him the necessity to keep secrets, and never to reveal the nature of masquerades. For instance, he would be shown a strand from a spider's cobweb. He would be told to take hold of it and climb it. Of course, the thread would break in his hands and he would be embarrassed.

Then a handful of raw bitter leaves would be given to him, and he would be asked to chew it, and to laugh at the same time. This used to be an impossible feat, because the bitter-leaf, as its name implied, was very bitter, and it was impossible to smile, much less to laugh, while eating it; one was bound to make painful grimaces: but the boy was urged to go on laughing, until he munched the whole handful. The comic appearance of the candidate's face, as he strove manfully to overcome the bitter taste and laugh at the same time, provided the spectators with their amusement.

But the most alarming test was usually the last. The masquerader raised his visor, and the boy was asked: 'Who is this?' if he answered truthfully, 'it is Okonkwo, (a person he knew), the whole audience would shout in dismay. The masquerade would slump down

as if dead, and the audience would reproach the boy with 'killing' their masquerade. he would be ordered to carry up the masquerade he had killed, through revealing its secret. While the hapless boy strove to lift the fallen masquerade, the spectators would sing:

"Nweke", (if the boy's name was Nweke)
egbuo mmanwu,
ewu - o - o, ejem mmem hem!
Nweke egbuo mmanwu,
ewu - o - o, ejem mmem hem!
[Nweke, has killed the masquerade,
What a pity!].

At last after the poor boy had been sufficiently punished, the masquerade would get up, to the boy's relief. But the boy would be warned to learn a lesson, never to say that a masquerade was a human being; that masquerades were not men but Spirits (mmuo).

After that ordeal, the boy was initiated; and he could pick up his own whip, and follow masquerades about in Oka town. It was said: "Oba go mmanwu" - he has been initiated.

5th Day: Avbo was the last day of the Feast. There was the same eating and drinking until after lunch.

After lunch, people went to the Nkwo market - place for theatrical displays.

Three traditional masquerades closed the celebrations. They were Didimbanaka, from Amudo Village.

They held a mock trial, making a case against one another.

As each came out to speak, it satirized the foibles of its village of origin; it made people laugh at the idiosyncrasy of its village. For instance, when Onyekulie came out to speak, it would say sly things and act with cunning, and cause a lot of fun, for Umunnoke people were reputed to be trickish and crafty; Didimbanaka would intersperse its talk with dances, for Amudo were noted for dancing; and Onwobolo would show anger, draw its sword to fight and stretch its bow to shoot at the slightest provocation, just like Amachalla, ever ready to fight!

All these masquerades were clowns and caused lots of fun and laughter. Egwu Imoka ended on that note - fun and laughter.

Opu Eke then played for the last time for that year.

The following day, Nkwo, the market held in the normal way. That day was called "nkpo ngu" day. The women dressed in their finest, same with the men. They went to the market and bought and sold as usual. On the next day, Eke, people went to the farms, and worked very hard. It was called "mgbo nli emem" - paying for the days of idleness!

II. *The Feast of the Second month* (onwa ibo) was Ukwu. The god 'Ukwu' was a god of good fortune and the patron of travelers.

Onwas-ibo was a very busy month, full of activities. It was the month when candidates for the Ozo-title began their initiation and took the first steps. It was also the month when Amanwulu celebrants, the first Oka title, began their own ceremonies. Above all, it was the month when girls of a particular age-grade left girlhood and entered womanhood; and when newly married wives went permanently to the homes of their husbands.

'Uku' Feast was celebrated on an Nkwo day, in the seventh native week of the lunar month. It was celebrated in 'ishi onwa', that is, when there was no moonlight. Should the Nkwo day fall on a day a new moon had risen, it was pretended that the new moon was not seen, and the people performing the sacrifice to Ukwu (nlo Ukwu), fixed their gaze on the ground so as not to see the new moon, because that new moon would be the third month of the year, and Ukwu was a Feast of the second month.

On Ukwu day, in the afternoon, people took akidi beans and yam for lunch. Those who had no agidi used plenty of vegetables and yam. Against Ukwu festival women usually preserved their akidi from its period of plenty.

Lunch was taken early and then those who could afford it, and those who had married new wives who had not come home, killed a goat. It was usually a fat goat. The person invited his relatives and friends and they shared the meat, and drank palm wine.

That day, the fat from the goat killed was taken to the new wife, who used it to have her hair dressed in what was called "ishi enu" – cox-comb style, for her Mkpu dance. A girl who had not enough hair for the style borrowed hair from others to supplement. The girl's hair was decorated with bright buttons and pieces of glass which sparkle in the sun as she moved.

Late in the afternoon, the young men went to bring out those girls whose age-grade was to perform the "Mkpu" dance that year. Girls acted by age-grades. Those whose turn it was for the outing ceremony, called, "iru mkpu", would from that day ceased to be "agboghobia", that is, maidens, whether or not they had husbands and became women.

Before "iru mkpu" day girls of the age-grade, in their different homes, went into seclusion. They did no work from morning till night, but were fed well, and their bodies constantly rubbed down with "uvbio", that is, camwood made into an aromatic paste. They were fed on all foods except cassava or such other foods as would make them fat. At the end of the period they looked very well, but not fat.

Where a girl was of age, but had no husband, and her parents were poor, she did what was called "Adigh" – an abbreviated form of Mkpu. She spent no time in seclusion, and when she went to Nkwo she did not go with a group of young men clearing the way for her, and no songs were sung for her. Her only consolation was that when she got to Nkwo she met other girls in similar straitened circumstances.

With girls who performed the full Mkpu, they were given their own apartment in their fathers' compounds. Girls gathered there to prepare 'uvbio' for them by grinding on stone camwood mixed with the tender leaves of ogilis trees, and palm oil; this was used for rubbing them down in mkpu seclusion; it made the body smooth and glistening.

There they learnt the songs for the outing.

On the day of the outing, called "mfuta na mkpu", 'coming out of Mkpu', or "iru mkpu", this was how the girl was dressed: Her hair was dressed in the 'ishi enu' style, like a cock's crest (similar to Bini women's ceremonial hair-do) with sparkling ornaments. (This was the hair style noted by Mrs. T.J. Dennis in her Report). On her neck she had strings of coral beads. She tied a head tie around her middle to hold up her breasts, much as modern brassiers do. On both arms she wore bracelets of ivory, called, 'awulawu', from her wrists to beyond the elbows.

Round her waist she wore a narrow rolled cloth, made in a peculiar pattern, about 5cm wide, and attached to it, at regular intervals, were little brass bells, called 'ijele'. In her front she wore a short rectangular piece of cloth, which hung down from her waist to shield her private parts; this piece of cloth was called "ntuchi" and was about 20cm long and 15cm wide.

On both leg, the girl wore bronze or copper rings, spiraling from ankle to thigh. It was called "okpogh", and was very light, much lighter than the equivalent "nja", which was made of brass and was heavy.

Her body was otherwise bare, only decorated with uli (a kind of vegetable dye).

She carried in her hands two mirrors set in wood, which were beautifully and artistically carved. As she danced, she looked at herself, first with one mirror and then with the other.

And she moved slowly and gracefully.

When she was ready to set out for Nkwo market, the young men who were her escort, ran in front of her with their sticks, clearing her way, and singing their songs; the young maidens followed her behind, singing their own songs which they had learned.

The young people led the dancing girl round Nkwo market-place, after which they took her back home.

At Nkwo, people gathered to watch the celebrants. The girls did the "ije mkpu" or "ntu unyaka mkpu", the stately walk, or stately dance of the Mkpu celebrant. It was a gentle, flowing movement of the legs and body – showing off the girl's beauty of body, and her poise.

After the return from Nkwo, relatives and friends gathered to congratulate the celebrant. There was feasting and drinking. The girl was congratulated for successfully passing through girlhood into womanhood without a stain. A girl who became pregnant in her father's house never did the celebration.

Ukwu was a one-day feast. The altar of the god, on which sacrifices were made, was a bundle of ogilisi rods tied together. Ogilisi was a sacred tree among the Oka people, and its leaves were used in almost all religious observances. Echichili tree was used for boundary marks because it had no seed and could hardly die – like the cockroach! But it was not a sacred tree.

Ukwu was celebrated throughout Oka on the same day. But each Quarter had its own selected Square, where the girls performed the Mkpu ceremony. Thus, Amikwo did theirs at Ogbugbankwa Square, Ezioka at Avbo Mkpu market place, and Agulu at Avbo-Agulu market Square.

Ukwu was the time from the ancient days when all those who went on journey, such as blacksmiths and doctors returned home. When Agulu came they made the seventh month – Otite – their own time of return.

On the night of Ukwu day, girls just married left for their husbands' homes, finally. Hence, the saying: "Dig a aba, ovbu na onwa ibo, oga avu avu, ovbu na onwa ibo", meaning, if the marriage will hold we shall know in the Second month, if it will fail we shall know in the Second month. The allusion was to the goat killed on "iru mkpu" day, for the expenses were run by the prospective husband; and a man who failed to do his duty thereby could not be said to value his future wife, and she was justified in breaking off the engagement.

III *The Third month* of the Oka year, onwa ito, was known as "Onwa obubu amanwulu", that is, the month for the ending of amanwulu ceremonies, which began in the Second month.

The feast for this month was in honour of the god, Udo – the god that superintended Amanwulu celebrations, and was the patron of all Amanwulu celebrants – the god of purity.

Because of the scarcity of yams at this time of the year (called "Ugani") ("Ugani" began when a person's stock of yams was finished in his barn, hence the saying, "ugani na afu n'uno", meaning, the period of scarcity and of hunger, varies from household to household). The feast consisted mainly of akidi beans mixed with "abacha mmili" – cassava cooked and made edible by being sliced and saturated in water over a length of time and then washed repeatedly.

On the day of the feast, the Amanwulu celebrants ended their one month-old activities, and threw into the Udo bush of their Quarter the "nkpo Amanwulu", the Amanwulu staff – which they had carried about everywhere they went for the past one month. [Amanwulu will be described fully in a later chapter].

This third month was dominated by activities relating to Amanwulu celebrations.

IV. *The Fourth month* was called "onwa ise", was the month of Chi Feast. It was the feast for mothers – mother's day! On the day of the festival, every adult male with a compound of his own, and every married woman, worshipped their Chi. Unmarried men and single women, did not worship, because they had no Shrines where to do so. They might have the uluchi, the movable altar of their Chi, which was fashioned for

them at the time of their Agu ceremony, but they had yet no Shrines for them, for the reason that they had not their own households.

Whenever a young man had built his own compound where to live and had founded a family, there was a ceremony performed for him there called "imam ogbu Chi". Ogbu, a long-lived tree with evergreen leaves, was a favourite tree among the Oka people because it thrives on all soils, including the driest. When it was ceremonially planted in the young man's compound, it was a prayer for his long life and prosperity. The Ogbu was usually planted inside the compound, near the Obu; so that immediately one entered the compound one saw it. The Ogbu-Chi endured until the man died, when it was cut down as one of his funeral rites.

For a married woman, her Ogbu-Chi was planted in front of her own house. A married woman's house was called "Ogbolodo" in Oka. Every man must build a separate house for his wife in his compound.

Ogbu-Chi for a man was one Ogbu tree, but for a woman, the Ogbu was planted along with three other trees, namely, ora, ogilisi and echichili. The four trees were planted in a rectangular form to make an enclosure, over which, during Chi festivals, uluchi and "Oku", - earthen dish - to receive parents.

It was at the Ogbu-Chi that offerings were made to the god.

Chi was another one-day festival. Ozo title-holders celebrated theirs on a cleaned.

Before preparations for the festival, food could be made; however, a girl who had not yet menstruated was called in. She was given "akilika", a dried twig, or piece of grass or dried palm frond taken from the thatch of the roof of the house, with which she cleansed the married woman's house: it was called "akilika mgbaro", and was regarded as something sacred, with which harmful things were driven out of the premises.

All those in the woman's house were asked to come out. The girl went into the house with the twig in hand. She touched objects in the house with the twig, saying Orakwu fuo nu!

"Orakwu fuo nu - Orakwu fuo nu!" (all impure things, all base things, leave this house!). If no akilika was available, the bone of a bush cow, any part of the bone, could be used.

After she had done this, she took the "akilika" to the gate of the compound and threw it away. Evil had been exorcised!

The preparation of the day meal then began.

What was cooked for lunch was usually akidi beans and old yam (if any could be obtained), or in the alternative, plenty of vegetables and akidi. In the night, yam foofoo was prepared for sacrifice (with old yam) while any other kind of foofoo was prepared for general consumption. The soup was usually enini, or egusi soup with dried cocoyam leaves and dried meat or fish.

The woman of the house celebrating Chi invited her sons-in-law, and they came bringing gifts to her – money, yams and so on. Her daughters brought offerings to her too, whether married or not; and also her grand children. All male children made offerings to their mother.

Chi was principally the mother's day. It was their feast.

As for the man, he only trimmed his Ogbu-Chi, brought out his Chi's altar and prayed to his Chi with a kolanut, or, if he had promised to kill a fowl for his chi, he killed the fowl.

The woman for her part had her Ogbu-Chi trimmed, together with the ora, ogilisi, and echichili trees, standing together with it. She made (as has been stated) a platform of bamboos across the middle of the four trees. She bought a clay dish, or Oku and a piece of molded chalk. She put the chalk into the Oku, and placed it under the platform already made. It was inside, or beside this earthen plate or dish, that her children, grandchildren and in-laws, put their gifts of money and things for her. With the chalk in the dish the men dabbed their eyelids and the women their feet.

The man of the house made the sacrifice at the Shrine of the woman's Chi for her. He used kolanut for prayers and then poured libation with the palm wine. After the foofoo had been prepared, he sacrificed a part of it on the altar of the woman's Chi

With the evening meal, the feast ended.

However, the following day, young men of every village staged public wrestling match in their village Squares in honour of all mothers.

VI. The Sixth month of the year, "Onwa ishii", had the Alo Feast attached to it. It was called Onwa Alo. Alo was celebrated on the 12th day of the new moon, on an Avbo day – the 3rd week of the month.

In the evening of Oye, before the Avbo day, the householder went to his farm and dug up yam for the first time in the year.

The following day, being Avbo day, he cut some palm branches and made a fenced enclosure with them, called "Avbajioku". (Ozo titled men used cuttings from the ogilisi tree for this purpose). The women swept every part of the compound and outside it, clean. (Cleanliness of their surroundings was a fetish among the Oka people!).

In the centre of the compound, near the Obu, the women roasted the new yams which had been dug up the day before, in a fire.

The man brought out the uluchi of the family – the altars of the deceased relatives – including the Alo and Ovbo and broke the kolanut. He prayed, and gave thanks to his ancestors for sparing his life and that of his family and for protecting his household until the new yam was eaten. He then killed a fowl over the uluchi, set in a row and the Alo and the Ovbo.

The woman then mixed the roasted yams, now sliced ukpaka (sliced and prepared fruits of an oil – bean tree) and palm oil in a large wooden bowl, called "Okwa". The

householder took a handful of this and made offerings to the gods. Then, all those present ate the new yam, therefore was eaten for the first time in the night. The good life had returned!

Alo had three meanings in Oka. it was a god of that name. it also meant the Spear – the ubiquitous spear – used for war and hunting, which formed an integral part of the Oka man's life. And it also meant the movable altar of the god, Alo, and was the symbol of authority in every man's house.

The Alo, as an altar of the god, was shaped like a spear. It had a long wooden shaft tipped with an iron head shaped like a sword. The Alo was always in the Obu of the man, along with his Ovbo, and was the sign of the power and headship of the family.

in the evening of the Alo festival day, families gathered in the Obu which linked in extended family and a fowl was sacrificed to the god by the Head of the family.

The following day, the family gathered again to share the fowl and drink palm wine.

The peelings from the new yam were not thrown into the bush, but into the enclosure called Avbiajioku.

Alo festival lasted two years.

On the second day, after the ceremonial sharing of the cooked fowl in the morning, there were organized wrestling matches everywhere. Later in the afternoon, there was a dance called "Nke ikpo". It was for young men and was the equivalent of "iru mkpu" of the girls. It was outing for young men. After "nke ikpo" they passed into the ranks of men.

Young men of the particular age-grade whose turn it was to perform the ceremony, dressed up in narrow folds of fine cloth, neatly folded, and hung round the body, until the whole body was covered. No one person could possibly have all the cloth which, folded in such a narrow folds would cover his body and so it was the custom to borrow cloths from women relatives for the occasion. Because during the dance a woman might spot her cloth, and whisper to her neighbour: "look that is my cloth", the young men satirized the occasion, while dancing, by singing under their breaths in tune with the music:

Kovba lu vba, kovba lu vba, kovba
N'njim o kodugh eke ikpo, iyam!
(Tell them, tell them, tell them!
That I am dancing with your cloth!!).

In addition, each had strapped to his back a thin plank studded with small cup-shaped metals, like gongs, (hence the name "ikpo") which had leaden tongues hanging in heir midst that struck the sides as they were lifted up and down: these metals cups sounded in unison when the body of the dancer moved.

The young men, lined up at the village Square, and then danced, in measured tread, to Nkwo Imoka market-place. The kind of music played for them was called "igba mbe". At Nkwo they broke rank; and ran about, each showing off his prowess and his manliness.

At the end of the show, they reformed, and danced back to their village and to move merrymaking.

There was strict order in which new yam was eaten:
"Onwa ishii tuo kwe izu" (in the first week of the Sixth month)
Obe priests would sacrifice new yam to 'Obe, and they themselves would eat the new yam.

In the second week, Ozo title-holders would eat.

In the third week, the generality of Oka people would eat new yam. The day was the Alo festival day.

VII. "*Onwa Asaa*" or the *Seventh month* had the Otitie Feast attached to it. Otitie was celebrated by the Ifite Quarter of Oka on the 13th day of the seventh month (izun'ato), while Ezi Quarter celebrated it on the 21st day of the new moon (izu n'ese).

Otitie was a festival in honour of the patron gods of the individual Oka people called their Chi. On that day the Head of the family made sacrifice to each patron of each member of his family. He sacrificed a fowl to each patron god, or Chi (provided Agu ceremony had been performed for the child so that the patron god was known, and an altar fashioned for it). If he had one child, whether male or female, he killed one fowl. If he had ten children, he killed ten fowls, one for each child. The patron god was "Onye nolu-onye". A cock was offered to the Chi of a male child and a hen was offered to the Chi of a female child.

The festival meal consisted of roasted yams and ukpaka (similar to what was done at Alo). The ukpaka (prepared oil-bean fruits) was ground with pestle in a mortar (Okwa) and mixed with palm oil, salt and pepper. The roasted yam was then sliced into pieces and mixed with this sauce. A small part of it was placed on the altar or uluchi of each person's Chi in sacrifice by the Head of the family; the rest was eaten by the family. If the Head of the family had promised the deceased god a goat, he killed it at this time, over his father uluchi or altar. The goat, called "eghu mmuo" was shared the same day by the males of the extended family.

Next day, the fowls that were killed and cooked the day before, were brought into the Obu and ceremonially shared and eaten. The Head of the family was given the "nru" from every fowl, namely, the neck, a single part of the fleshy covering of the breast bone and the gizzard. The Head gave the gizzard to the person to him in rank.

What was done in a person's Obu, was also done in the common Obu of the extended family. The Head of every branch of the extended family brought a fowl to the Obu of the common progenitor. After sacrificing the fowl, that is, ritually killing it over the altar of the common ancestor, each person took back his fowl which he dressed, cooked and brought back to the common Obu the following day. All the fowls killed were then

shared together and eating. After that there was drinking of palm wine, and general merriment till night fall.

Otite feast was a period of taking head-count or census of the family. Those who had gone on journey and who had not been able to return at Ukwu festival returned. Those families whose numbers had not diminished by death, but rather had increased by new births, since the previous Otite festival, gave special thanks to the gods for that. And that might persuade the Head of the family to sacrifice a goat, and not merely a fowl to his Chi.

The feast ended with the participants greeting one another with the valediction: "Otite du vbal aka nine", meaning "till next year, it will meet again!"

VIII. The Eight month of the year, Onwa Asato, was called "Onwa Mgbuweji". It was a festival in honour of the god Ngwu. It was also known as "Onwa ji Alushi". The lesser god ate their own new yam.

The Shrine of Ngwu was always a tree of that name- the Ngwu tree. Ngwu tree was for that reason a sacred tree in Oka religion.

At Mgbugoji celebration, the householder brought to the entrance of his compound one seed yam of a large size, which he cut into two, lengthwise. He sacrificed these to the gods by placing them on cocoyam leaves, and pouring palm wine on top. Thereafter, he carried other seed yams in a basket with which he went round every Ngwu shrine the community had; and laid one or two seed yams, without cutting them up, at the foot of the Ngwu tree. The ceremony was called "nru Ngwu ji", that is, making an offering of yam to Ngwu. As he went round, the householder was followed by crowds of young boys, who struggled for the seed yams as they were sacrificed to the god. The children took the yams home, and either cooked or roasted them to eat.

During this period, the people of Agulu Quarter celebrated their Akputakpu feast, which they brought from their home of origin in Umana town, Agbaja.

IX. Onwa-teghete, the Ninth month of the Oka year was called "Ede Onwa Sel ukwu". The feast, as its name implied, was celebrated by the eating of cocoyam (of the Igbo variety).

Women began preparing the cocoyams for eating on the Eke day, against Oye day, when the festival actually took place. Its preparation was completed on Oye day with the mixing of the cocoyam with the vegetable used in eating it, namely, the leaves of the cocoyam, dried in the sun, which the woman pounded into powder, and preserved aromatic spices and the cocoyams.

The dressed cocoyams were then dished out and distributed to relatives, friends and well – wishers of the women-folk.

Just as yam was the staff of life for a man, so cocoyam, ede, until the coming of cassava, was the staff of life for a woman. So, the feast of the yam, Alo, had an equivalent feast of the cocoyam, called "Ede Onwa Sel Ukwu". New yam festival for men, new cocoyam festival for women!

X. The Tenth month of the year was called "Onwa - Egwu - Ovbuvbe". Ovbube, one of the principal goddesses of the Oka people, was very often invoked, and was one of the gods most frequently sworn by. She was female. Her festival was an Egwu-Imoka in miniature; the same yam and avbulu soup were eaten. But the difference was that at the Shrine of the god, during the celebration, ubio music was played, throughout the day. It was a one-day festival, and at the conclusion of the celebration, an able-bodied man took up the "Okuku", gourd of the goddess, and danced round the village, chanting war songs, - mbu okili - joined in chorus by the crowd of men who had gone to sacrifice to the goddess at her shrine.

Offerings made to the goddess included yams and kolanuts. They were handed to the priest, who prayed for the giver.

The celebration of Egwu-Ovbuvbe was staggered, so that people could go from one village to the other, enjoying hospitality by eating and drinking. Some villages might celebrate it on an Avbo day, and some on an Eke day.

XI. Agbala-Imoka was the name given to the Feast of the Eleventh month Onwa ili n'ovbu. It was a feast for men only. The feast was held at the Nkwo Imoka market place, where the Shrine of the god, Agbala was situated in front of Imoka Shrine itself.

Five days before the festival, a gong - man went into every nook and corner of Oka town, announcing:

Oka Nnomeh, Oka Nnomeh
Aga elikwe Agbala Imoka
Izu nte - o - o".
(Oka people, Oka people,
celebration of Agbala Imoka is a week hence).

On the day of the feast, all males repaired to the market-place with their pots and pans, their mortars and pestles and their firewood, and water. No woman was involved in the feast.

Every section of Oka had its appointed place in the market place. Villagers could club together and purchase one goat or more and kill same in sacrifice, and share the meat with which they prepared their soup. They pounded their foofoo themselves.

Everything cooked must be consumed at the market - place, for nothing was taken home. It was a real feast! They drank the palm wine which they brought.

The women had an equivalent feast, called "Ntakwu Imoka". It was held at the same Nkwo Imoka market-place, but at a different area, on a separate day. It was an all-women affair. They brought their own food items, and cooked and consumed them there.

There was nothing in Oka town that was done for men that was not done for women. Apart from peculiarities of sex, men and women are completely equal. Just as men and their assemblies, so women and theirs; and just as men took part in the governance of Oka town, so women had their own share in government. At times there was joint consultation between men and women.

When a woman got married in Oka she took her maiden surname with her to her husband's home. She was known by her father's name, as her surname, through out her married life. Where she was not called by her father's name, she was called by the name of the village of her origin. Thus, a girl married from Umuayom Village, was called "nwa-Umuayom". And one married from Inyi town was called "nwa-Inyi", meaning, "daughter of Inyi". The sub-merging of a woman's maiden surname in that of her husband came with British.

Because of the polygamous nature of Oka marriages, it was easier to identify a person by his mother's name. Thus, in Oka town, until the coming of the British, children were known, not by their father's names, but by their mother's names. For example. Nweke was called Nweke Mgebeke, Nwachukwu was called "Nwachukwu Nwinyi".

Where it was necessary to refer to a person's father on former occasions the possessive adjective "be" was used as a prefix. Thus, Nwogbo-be-Ndum, meant,

Nwogbo whose father is Ndum, and so on:

'be' is a possessive adjective, meaning, belonging to
'in the household of'. It had the same meaning as "ndi"
in some igbo dialects.

In the feast of the year, where there was a feast predominantly for men, there was also an equivalent feast predominantly for women. For example, "Egwu Imoka" was mainly for young men, so "Ukwu" was mainly for maidens. And while Egwu Ovbuvbe was mainly for men, Chi was the feast for mothers, and so on. Thus, men had the feast of "Agbala Imoka", where they ate and drank all by themselves, so women had "Ntakwu Imoka" where they also ate and drank to the exclusion of the men folk.

Women in Oka had separate property, which they dealt with as they liked intervivos, and when they died their children succeeded to the property, the girls to her clothes and trinkets and other personal properties, and the boys to her lands.

XII. *The last month* of the Oka year, the twelfth month, was called "Onwa - Ede - Mmuo". It was very busy month, full of activities.

The feast was honour of all gods. And what was eaten was cocoyam prepared with dried cocoyam leaves called "ukpo mpoto", with cooked sliced oil bean seeds added to it. it was simply distributed to friends and well-wishers.

This was the month when the ceremony of "ngu aro", arranging the calendar for the coming year, was made. the family entrusted with this responsibility was the Okperi family of Amikwo village. they alone kept the secret of deciding the seasons and how many months would constitutes the coming year, and whether one month should be ignored or retained and which month was to be called the first month.

On the day of the ceremony, all Eze-Udo in Oka assembled at Ogbugba - nkwa Square in Amikwo Village, but no one was allowed to enter the inner sanctuary where the reading of the seasons was done. it was only after they had determined the calendar, that the priest of Amikwo came out, and announced to the assembly what months would constitute the coming year; and every Udo priest - Eze - Udo - took the vital

information back to his village, where he summoned immediately a meeting of his people and announced the calendar to them.

In the night of Ede Mmuo feast, masquerades that went by night, called "Osulu" went round the town singing and cutting down trees that had no palms fronds tied round them for protection; damaging things in their path; and blocking roads with tree trunks and other rubbish and generally causing senseless destruction all around.

From the next day of this festival, anybody who saw unharvested yam anywhere could legally harvest it without being called a thief. Ground was thus prepared for the next farming season, which began in the following month, called Onwa Nvu or Onwa Egwu Imoka.

Chapter 10

Title – Taking and Citizenship

Amu kene vbe nna.

(The freeborn must thank his ancestors)

- An Oka title name.

The dictionary defines title as, a descriptive or distinctive appellation, especially one belonging to a person by right of rank, office or attainment. And appellations, a name or designation, the act of naming. Title has to do with name that is, taking a special name, on a special occasion. Title-name, thus, means taking a special name by right of attainment or achievement.

There was a saying connected with the Ajaghija title in Oka which went as follows: "Onye anu Ajaghija aluro aka, oshi na ovbu anu aja aja" (he who cannot get attain, the Ajaghija title that ridicules it, meaning again, a man who is unable to take a title finds something wrong with title-taking).

The Oka people of old had no banking system. Title-taking took the place of Banks for them. It was their way of saving money.

The instituted the system for two purposes. Firstly, to enrich the members of the title group; and secondly, to feed the public. Hence, the celebration of the title, when once it was taken, was compulsory – the cooking and the eating. Oka people belied in communal sorrow, and shared joy!

Except in modern times, no title was completed at once. People who completed a title in one day were rare. And they took the title-name "Omechel ovbu uboshi". Title taking was usually a drawn-out affair. A farmer, for example, who had an extra goat to dispose of, said to himself: "Let me put it to something" [ka ntie nye na ivbe]. That "something" meant a title. He called the members of the particular title-group he wanted to enter, and offered them the goat. They assessed it, and agreed on the value. The goat was then killed and shared. The farmer had paid the equivalent in money by the goat.

Next time, say, a year after or six months after, he gave something else, and the value was it was again credited to him. He went on like that until he completed the amount at which his particular title was set. Then, when he was ready, a day was fixed for the ceremony of initiation, or conferment of the title – the celebration. On that day he cooked for the public. Titles, such as Ajaghija or Ozo, took many years of thrift and husbanding of resources to be completed.

In title-taking there was always a sum of money which was the heart of the title, in fact, it was the title. That was the sum of money that was shared by all members of the particular title-group, dead or alive. A person who was absent on the day of sharing had his share set aside and sent to his house. it was his investment, from which he could not be excluded. A dead person received his share through a living representative.

It was another matter on the day of the ceremonial conferment of the title – the day of celebration. On that day, whatever was put before the members, whether money, drinks or food was regarded as things for the celebration and was shared only by the members present; nothing was reserved for those absent or dead.

Title in Oka was used as a measure of one's standing in the community. A person who had no title had no title – name, and therefore, had nothing by which he could be saluted. He was a person without a name (onwere avba).

The Oka people had no special salutation for morning, afternoon or evening such as Good morning, Good afternoon or Good evening. They only had Good night – bochi. Their salutation at all times; and in all places was the exchange of title-names – You give me my title-name and in return I give you yours. For that reason, every strove to have a greeting name by taking a title.

Sometimes, people saluted one by one's father's title-name, but that was only a mark of affection, to remember the father through the son. It was, however, known that the son had no name.

Title was also, a measure of achievement in Oka town. One must work hard, try hard to save, before one could take a title. It was one of the yard-sticks of his success in life, and a measure of his thrift and carefulness with money.

Title was the Oka man's old age pension and his gratuity!

A person without a title could talk in an assembly of the Oka people, for all Oka people were equal, but he could not hail the assembly (nkua, that is, collective salutation) and if he did, nobody would answer. For, by what title-name could he be saluted in return?

Titles were known as Emume, meaning, that which is achieved.

Title-holders of a particular title were divided into groups. The division cut across villages and families, so that in any one title-group one found people from different villages and different families represented.

The groupings were made a very long time ago by the ancestors; and the practice was that a person who wanted to take a title took it within the group to which his father, or grandfather, or great grandfather belonged. Custom did not permit him to chose a new group to which to belong, lest he be enriching members of a group that had done nothing for him, and impoverishing the group which had enriched his father or grandfather or great grandfather, or some other member of his family.

A title-group was called Ogwe or Odo-Ogwe-emume, or Odo-emume. The name had reference to the sitting arrangement at title – taking ceremonies; people sat group by group.

The rationale behind the division into groups, was to have a manageable number of people to share the proceeds of title-taking at any one time, so that one's share could be somewhat substantial; for if all title-holders of a particular title were to share from

the same money paid by one entrant, everybody's share would be very, very small and would serve no useful purpose.

All title taking fell into two parts. Firstly, was the payment of money, being the amount the title-group had fixed for their group. That constituted the actual title. It was called "mpa ego".

The payment was made, and the money shared, without fanfare. It was done privately, among the title holders only. The correct amount was just produced and shared. There was no ceremony connected with it. That was the title-taking itself. Then came the conferment of the title. That was the celebration the public saw. It was a public acknowledgment that a title had been taken. It was at this stage that the celebrant sent out invitations to relatives, friends and well-wishers, to come and rejoice with him. He feasted his guests. That was the expensive part of title-taking. The celebration was always done in the open; so that the public would bear witness that a person had taken a particular title. This celebration, conferment, initiation, or enthronement, differed from one title to the other. In some titles it was an elaborate affair, but in some other it was modestly and quietly done.

"Nzu avbia", or going to the markets, - Eke, Oye, Avbo, Nkwo - which was a method of showing oneself to Oka, proclaiming that one had taken a title, ended the celebration of the two highest titles - Ajaghija and Ozo. It was called "mgbaghali" meaning, dancing about. The celebrant went with followers with drumming and dancing, to the nearest market to him, showing himself in his title regalia. People through where he passed, invited him to come in and "take a kolanut", called "mmekwe". The celebrant and his followers move through Oka, accumulating gifts as they went along.

The most important thing that distinguished a title-holder from a non-title-holder was that a title-holder had greeting names, that is, names taken on conferment of a title. They were praise-names or greeting names, and were very carefully chosen to reflect the celebrant's struggles to take the title, or his struggles in life generally, or a 'swipe' way in life. Examples of title names:

- (a) Okee-ovulu-uzo, meaning, a leader of men, he who comes out first, a person who volunteers himself first if anything is to be done;
- (b) Ezeamal, meaning, the man whom everybody knew would take a title sooner or later, because they knew he had the means;
- (c) Chikwunwego, meaning, God is the distributor of wealth, He gives to each what He likes;
- (d) Ana emenyu oku - oku ana enwu, meaning, he whose determination to survive cannot be dampened by any adversity;
- (e) Mmegbu-ana-eze, meaning, no persecution can stop a person destined to be a king from being a king.
- (f) Anu ana agba egbe - ona ata nli, meaning, he who does not give a care even when people do their worst to him;

- (g) Aja eme eme, meaning, he who people said could never take a title, but has now taking one.

Title-taking in Oka was called emume. Emume was that which was made to be shared – ana aria ara. What was not shared by its members was not emume.

For instance, Agu, a ceremony by which a patron spirit was ascertained at one's birth was not a title, because "anara aria ara" - no money was shared in it. It was the ability to pay the money that was required to be shared by those who had taken the title that was the achievement that constituted the title. The public acknowledgment of this feat, its celebration and the taking of a name, were the adjuncts. The kernel of the system was the investment or commitment of a sum of money.

A title holder took shares from payments made by new members until he died, and then his direct sons succeeded, not to his title-name, but to his investment. They received his share until they themselves died out. After them, the investment lapsed, and the grandsons must take their own titles. There were five titles generally recognized in Oka town. (The sixth, Vbum was not generally taken). They were taken one after the other; they could not be jumped. They were:-

- (1) Amanwulu
- (2) Chi
- (3) Avbajioku
- (4) Ajaghija
- (5) Ozo.

In three of these titles greeting names were taken, namely, Chi, Ajaghija and Ozo. No title names were taken in Avbajioku and Amanwulu.

Titles were taken by males. Females took no titles in Oka, but among themselves they took praise-names by which they greeted one another.

1. Amanwulu: The Oka people say: "Amanwulu bu ishi emume", meaning, Amanwulu is the beginning of all titles in Oka. He who had not taken Amanwulu title could not take any other title. And a person who was not an Oka man could not take Amanwulu title!

Because of this, Amanwulu was used as a means of naturalization; whomever the Oka people conferred Amanwulu title upon became an Oka citizen.

Ok a title was intertwined with Oka citizenship. That was why every Oka man strove to take at least one title in his lifetime. Without it, he was like a stranger.

Being the first of all titles, and the one that made one an Oka man, Amanwulu was generally taken in one's youth. Parents made the money payment for their sons, leaving them to perform the celebration. When parents paid the title money they ennobled their sons; they made them truly Oka men – hence the title-name "amu kene vbe nna" [let the freeborn thank his forbears].

Social changes, and the lack of leisure time anymore, has made Amanwulu title taking not what it used to be. It has been abbreviated to a mere money payment; the celebration has been cut off. Originally the celebration used to be very picturesque.

Amanwulu did not confer a right to take the title-name. That was left to the next title, Chi. The celebration of Amanwulu in the days gone by was like a miniature Ozo-title celebration; except that for Amanwulu, there were more exciting events.

There were some sayings connected with Amanwulu title:-

“Amanwulu – onye meche ochezo”, Amanwulu, that fills the life of the young man, but when he has performed it he forgets all about it;

“Onye shi na Amanwulu aburo ivbe, nya mel nwa du bie”,
he who says that Amanwulu is nothing let him perform it for his ward.

Amanwulu started in the second month of the Oka year, onwa ibo, and ended in the third month, onwa ito.

It began on the first Oye market day of Onwa ibo, which was the same day that Oka people settled their calendar for the coming year (ngu aro).

On that day, while the “nkwa” drum was being beaten at Amiwko Village to mark the ceremony of calculating the calendar, all those who intended to take the Amanwulu title that year in each village of Oka, gathered at the house of the oldest man or Head of the village.

The Head, after prayers, broke the kolanuts brought by the candidates and they were shared by all; and then the ‘ado’ (spices) brought by them. Ado was like the garden egg (avbuvba) but spicy, it was a fragrant vegetable seed. The Head spread the ado on the “ekpeke”, the shield used in war; only those who had performed the Amanwulu title could take from it. Each took the ado.

Next, the money which was the real title was paid and shared by the members entitled to it.

Then, the ankle-cord (a copper anklet) – called nkpu-(or ona anana or ona-okpa, when it was used for the process of naturalization) was put on each candidate. The first step to the title had been taken.

There was feasting on the occasion. Ukpaka (oil bean seeds) was ground and prepared as a sauce, and yams were roasted over a fire made with the dried stumps of palm tree branches (ishi ogbogili). After the roasted yams had been eaten with the sauce the remaining ishi-ogbogili were taken outside and cut into pieces.

The candidates then went home and made preparations for the celebration in the following month.

He first had carved for him the Amanwulu cap, called Abo. It was a cap made of wood from egbu, udala or aseaga wood. It was shaped like a blacksmith’s bellows, with the front part elongated into a handle. It was taken to a blacksmith for a ceremony called “nra abo”, which consisted in the blacksmith piercing the body of the cap with little

holes on all sides, to give ventilation to the wearer. The blacksmith was given food on the occasion.

The candidate then bought or made for himself, a container, or bag called "okpulu", which was hung over the shoulder. Okpulu was oblong in shape, with rounded corners. It was from the bark of the aji tree.

Finally, to complete his preparations, the candidate fashioned a stout pole, sharpened at both ends, from the branch of the udala tree. It was this pole that he used for dancing, and for carrying heads of breadfruit, coco-nuts and other foods the Amanwulu celebrant was allowed to take. Any of these things that he pierced with his pole became his, even if the owner was present.

In the third month-onwa ito, called Onwa Ukwu, because it was also the month for the Ukwu festival – the celebration of Amanwulu began. It was called "Ovuvu Amanwulu".

In the night of the day before the celebration, the daughters of the family – the extended family –kept a wake. They went from house to house, to all the young men of their family taking the Amanwulu title, to members of the family and friends of the family, receiving gifts and announcing with songs the impending Amanwulu celebration the following day. As they went along, they sang:-

Ogbo - o - o ogbo Amanwulu
Ogbo - o - o ogbo mgbodo,
Aka nwel ego na evu Amanwulu
Ogbo - o - o ogbo mgbodo,
meaning,
Hail to the Amanwulu celebrant,
Hail! Hail! Hail!
Only the well-to-do can take Amanwulu title!
Hail! to the celebrant!

When they came to a compound and the gate was shut, and no one came out to attend to them, they sang:

Lead singer: Onye na onye madolu nze Obu na onwae – e-e?
Chorus: A – a – e – e – e
Lead singer: Nweke (if the name of the householder was Nweke),
madolu nze Obu na onwae – e – e – e.
Chorus: A – a – e – e – e
Lead Singer: Oga egbu egbu mmuo ekwenekwe
Chorus: A – a – e – e – e
Lead Singer: Oga egbu egbu mmuo ekwenekwe
Chorus: A – a – e – e – e

If still there was no answer to them, they sang, impatiently:-

Lead Singer: Imal eme ana do be kweghi ndu,

Chorus: A – a – e – e – e

Lead Singer: Imaghi eme ana do be kweghi ndu,

If the householder was still reluctant to open, or was fast asleep, they would sing angrily.

Lead Singer: Nweke, kpoghelum uzo oba,

Chorus: mgbabaga wel ji liem – e

If the householder was a woman, it would be:-

Lead Singer: Nwaku kpoghelum uzo ede,

Chorus: mgbabaga wel ede liem – e.

The householder was forced to get up and open the gate, and give them something. Then they moved off to another compound, singing:-

Ogbo – o – o ogbo Amanwulu,

ogbo – o – o ogbo mgbodo,

Aka nwel ego na evu Amanwulu,

Ogbo – o – o ogbo mgbodo.

In the afternoon of the first day of the Amanwulu celebration, between 3.p.m. and 4.p.m, the male relatives of the Amanwulu celebrant dressed him up for his journey to the Udo Shrine of his Quarter. Udo was the patron god of all Amanwulu celebrants.

They put on him the “Okwa-Amanwulu”, that is, the Amanwulu cap, called “Abo”, which he had previously made. It was then said that “Amanwulu apal abo” – the Amanwulu has put on its cap. From that moment the Amanwulu celebrant was no longer the same person, he became holy – no one could fight with him or touch him angrily or make him bleed.

They covered him with the “Okwa Amanwulu”, that is, the Amanwulu cap, called “Abo”, which he had previously made. It was then they said that “Amanwulu apal abo” – the Amanwulu has put to cap. From that moment the Amanwulu celebrant was no longer the same person, he became holy – no one could fight with him, or touch him angrily or make him bleed.

They covered him with a new loin-cloth [called ofoko] from head to foot. The celebrant held up the cloth in front of him so as to see; and the man leading him held the cloth up from behind, so that he could walk.

They left the house and the person leading him began shouting:-

Oru afutanakwa, ogbodu ban u uno!

[Let no slave come out,

Persons without Amanwulu title get inside you're your house].

The two classes of persons mentioned kept clear; they must not see the celebrant, on pain of death, or so it was in the olden day.

The celebrant went to Nkwo Market place, to the Udo Shrine in front of the market. Other celebrants in other Quarters of Oka went to their respective Udo Shrines.

The Eze-Udo, the Udo Priest for the Quarter, waited there for the celebrants. He gave them the rules – nso – that is, what they could do, and what they could not do. Then he touched each person's cap in turn, saying: "You will not die within the abo-Amanwulu period" (that is, while you are wearing the Amanwulu cap), "anyaghi avbuna mmuo" (You will not meet evil). You will take what Amanwulu is permitted to take and nothing will happen to you; no poison put on fruits will have any effect on you; you will go for one month".

From the Shrine the celebrant returned to the market-Square and danced. All those doing Amanwulu would dance: the celebrant suck his sharpened pole in the ground, and grasping it firmly with both hands at the middle, danced, half round it, facing the direction of Amikwo Village, where the Nkwa drum was being beaten. Nkwa being beaten at Ogbugba-nkwa Square in Amikwo Village, in those days, was heard at Nkwo market place.

The person leading the celebrant also danced, singing. The celebrant did not sing or speak. He was holy; he only danced.

After the dancing, the celebrant was led back home in the same manner, the leader shouting: Oru afutanakwa, ogbodu ban u uno!

Any man without a title in Oka was termed "ogbodu" – a mere man (mmadi nkiti)!

The following morning the celebrant decorated his body with uvbio (camwood) and uli, and rubbed his pole with uvbio as well. He procured a small boy who acted as his "nwa-oral", that is his attendant, to help him carry what he could get. He was then ready to roam about, taking fruits from any tree, and getting tributes from people. He was now sacred and could not be attacked. What he did was not unlawful, provided it was within the rules. He carried his okpulu hung from his shoulder, into which he put monies and other small gifts made to him.

The celebrant was in this state for seven native weeks.

The last day of the seventh week of the Third month was the ending of Amanwulu. It was called "Obubu Amanwulu". On that day the celebrant put on the Amanwulu cap – abo – again, and went to the Udo Shrine. The Eze-Udo took off the abo finally from his head, and used an egg to make a pass across his eyes, saying: "Nso afuo!" meaning, You are free, you are now ordinary! The Eze – Udo then threw the egg into the Udo bush – Ovbua Udo- and the celebrant threw in there also his staff or pole.

The celebrant went off to a stream and bathed. On his way back home, he did not enter his father's compound through the gate, but climbed over the wall. Where he was to climb over he first knocked at the wall, and a hen was brought to him; he climbed over the wall with the hen in hand; and then left it at large. The hen became his property thereafter.

Three native weeks after throwing away the Amanwulu staff – nkpo Amanwulu – the celebrant performed the final ceremony. It was called “mkpukpu Amanwulu”. The celebrant went to salute the gods of the markets. He dressed in rags and acted like an old man, walking haltingly like an old man, with an artificial beard, and carrying “ngwu Ajaghija” – the Ajaghija Staff – which he had borrowed. On his way, he enacted scenes with people he met. When asked for title-name, he might say “Ite-anu-shil-na-oku” (when a pot of meat is on the fire); and when he saluted by that name, he would reply, “Ma ula tuna umu nwanya!” (no woman is able to sleep). This would cause laughter among the bye-standers! He would then enumerate before the person he met; what he had done in his youth: how he had taken the Ozo title, had married three wives, was the best blacksmith in Oka, and had been a champion farmer and so on. As he spoke, he drew lines in the sand with his Ajaghija staff. These lies were called “Akala Amanwulu”.

After moving round the town in this manner, in his disguise, and causing laughter wherever he went, he ended up at Nkwo market.

The next day, he was free from all the requirements of Amanwulu title-taking.

2. Chi: The next title to Amanwulu was Chi. Its celebration was simple.

The members of the title group were invited to the house of the candidate. The stipulated sum of money was produced and shared.

Then a fowl was killed and food and drinks were provided for the members.

After eating and drinking, the members of the title-group asked the candidates what his title-names were to be.

He told them. Then, standing up, they saluted him by one of the title-names- the first time in his life.

A gun was shot into the air, signaling that a title had been taken.

Relatives rushed up to congratulate him and to greet him by his new names. From that time onwards the celebrant had a name in Oka. A Chi celebrant was entitled to two names.

3. *Avbajjoku*: Next to Chi, was Avbajjoku title. In modern times this title had been commuted to money payment only.

Previously, it was a title paid for in yams.

To be able to take the title originally, the candidate must have established himself as an effective farmer.

On the day of the title, he took the members of the title-group into his barn. They checked the rows of seed yams being offered for the title, and if satisfied, they accepted same and shared them among themselves.

There was then entertainment by way of eating and drinking as for other titles.

No title-name, however, was given on the taking of an Avbajioku title.

4. **Ajaghija:** The most prestigious of the titles, after Ozo, was Ajaghija. It had special regalia, consisting of a red cap with one eagle feather stuck upright on the left side of it, an iron staff like that carried by Ozo men but without the bulbous middle, and a fan; also an ivory trumpet – an elephant tusk carved into a trumpet. Above all, the regalia included a special three legged stool, which was exclusive to Ajaghija title holders, on which no one but a title-holder could sit in Oka town. Whenever Ajaghija title-holders went to a meeting they carried these stools under their armpits with them, and they set on no other seat but on the stool.

Like other titles, the performance of Ajaghija title fell into two parts – the payment of the money that was the title; and the celebration of the taking of the title.

A candidate intending to take the title went to the Head of his father's title-group, and fixed a date for the event. Then he sent an initiated title-holder to all the members of the group, individually, inviting them to his house. On the day fixed, and they had assembled, he brought out the sum of money constituting the title. The group shared the money among all members, dead or alive. They took the refreshments provided.

From that date, the candidate had the right to participate in the sharing of future title proceeds from other people coming into his title group.

The celebration then followed. The celebration of Ajaghija titles was colourful. It was called "nsu oru na oche" – enthronement.

The evening before, the members of the celebrant's extended family (Umunna) constructed temporary sheds for the coming event in the village Square; they then cordoned off the area with palm fronds. Thereafter, no one who was not an Ajaghija title-holder could enter the enclosure, on pain of being fined or being forced to take the title for which he had not bargained.

In the night, there was a wake-keeping at the residence of the celebrant (nda abani); there was dancing and drumming, eating and drinking.

In the morning of the red-letter day, all the Ajaghija title-holders of the Quarter, not merely of the particular group to which the celebrant was to oblong, repaired to his house for an early-morning ceremony called "n-we oji", that is, taking the kolanut. Every title-holder who came was given a kolanut and a laid down sum of money. Then they went home to prepare for the outing for the village Square later in the day.

At about 10 a.m; the Ajaghija title-holders of the entire Quarter converged in the village Square. They came in all their pomp and pageantry. Each man was richly dressed, wearing his red cap having its eagle feather proudly displayed on top. Each carried his title-stool in his left armpit, while he held his decorated fan in his right hand, to take salutes or his iron staff.

Members sat according to their respective groups.

In the centre of the Square was placed a large table, around which the members appointed to act as stewards grouped themselves.

The candidate then brought in the required things for the celebration. These included a required number of kolanuts (Igbo variety), a required quantity of drinks, and a stated sum of money. This sum of money, though substantial was just for the celebration, and was to be shared by all the title-holders present; it was different from the money for the actual title, which had been shared already, only by the title-group. When all the items had been checked and found correct, they were distributed to the groups. Then each group in turn shared them among its members.

When all had got their correct entitlements, the candidate who had positioned his stool outside the enclosure, with his red cap placed on it, the cap having its single eagle feather stuck on the side of it was called forward. He was made to sit on the Ajaghija stool, outside the enclosure, and the most senior member of the title group present place the red cap on his head. He was asked for one of his title-names for Ajaghija, and when he had given it, the most senior member, aforesaid, called him by it, and he answered. a gun was shot in the air. then other members crowded round him, greeting him by the new name, and saluting him ceremonially by striking their fans against his fan, three times with one side of the fan, and the fourth time with the other side, and both raising up their fans simultaneously.

He was entitled to four titles – names.

The musicians, waiting on the wings, then struck up their music and the new Ajaghija title-holder danced. Others danced with him. The concourse of people followed him to his house.

From his house the celebrant set out on his rounds to show himself to Oka. He went, accompanied by his wife, his drummers, and his musicians, first to his mother's people, then to his wife's people, then to his friends and acquaintance who had invited him, receiving gifts. It would be night before he returned to his house.

Ajaghija time was a hectic time. Ajaghija was a highly regarded title in Oka. Everybody had an ambition to perform it.

Ajaghija was useful in the governance of Oka town too. Whenever Oka people were in sudden and desperate need of money, for which there was no time to make levies, the cost of Ajaghija title-taking was lowered throughout Oka, for a short period. A percentage of the monies paid during that period was given to the title-groups, while Oka took the rest. People rushed to take advantage of the reduced cost, and in that way, a sizeable sum of money, enough to meet the mergence that had arisen, was realized without tears, and without any loss of time. it was a very useful mechanism for raising money.

5. **Ozo:** The highest title usually taken in Ok a Ozo title. It was also the most expensive, not so much because of the title-money itself, as of the entertainment connected with it. It was an occasion for rejoicing, and all those who came to rejoice with one must eat!

Because of the cost, one could hardly take it in one's youth. That was why it was a title for matured people. Anybody who was lucky enough to take the title while still young, because of help from relatives, or otherwise, commemorated his luck by taking the title-name of "Ochinanwata" – he who took the title while young. But it was a rare occurrence.

Five stages led up to Ozo title.

The first stage was Ozo Uno, which was Ozo title performed only for one's Village.

After that came the second stage, which was Ozo Amaenyi (or Ozo Amikwo or Ozo Ezioka, or Ozo Agulu, depending upon one's Quarter). This was the title performed for the Quarter. Many people stopped there. They had no means to proceed further. Ozo for the Quarter was called "Okpololo Ozo".

The third stage was Awia Ozo, Nkpongu Ozo, and Mgbu Evbi Ozo, which were grouped together, and were an entertainment and feasting for Ozo titleholders of the particular section of Oka, either Ifite or Ezinato – a wider circle than the Quarter – to which the candidate belonged. It was the beginning of the Ozo-Oka title proper.

The fourth stage was Nka Ozo that is, fixing the date for the Ozo-Oka title taking. it was done for one's Section – Ezi or Ifite. After eating and drinking, the date for Ozo-Oka was decided. Transport money was given to the title-holders, and they went from house to house, to all other Ozo title-holders of Oka, inviting them to the title-taking ceremony to take place on the named date.

In Oka Custom, the invitation to a title-taking, any title was made by members of the title-group. Any outsider, who out of jealousy extended the invitation, did a null act, such invitation meant nothing. That was why it was not the candidate himself who invited people to his title-taking, but others on his behalf. And each title-holder must be visited in his house personally. Any omission to do this was a serious offence by the candidate on whose behalf the message was being sent.

The fifth and last stage was Ozo-Oka proper – the putting on of the ankle-cord all the preliminary stages having been successfully passed.

Having got all the requirements ready, in the second month (onwa ibo) of the Oka year, the candidate entered the initiation into Ozo-Oka title. It was called "Mba na Akwu Ozo", or entering into Ozo Retreat. In the morning of that day he paid the title money which was shared. The night before that there was a waking, that is, watching over the money to be used for the title the following day.

All Oka entered Akwu Ozo the same day, on the day of the Ukwu festival. Every Quarter of Oka had a spot called Akwu Ozo, where the ceremony of initiation took place.

On the night of the Retreat, an Nwakanri (Nwoke Nri, a man from Nri town) who had been engaged before hand came to the compound of the candidate. He solemnly stated to him the rules of an Ozo title-holder-matters allowed to, and matters prohibited of, an Ozo man.

Then he went in front of the candidate, his wife (or the Head-Wife if he had more than one wife), the little girl to carry his wooden bowl containing chalk, called "Nwokwanzu", and the immediate members of his family, to Akwu Ozo. A male member of the family, with a gun and a flaming torch, led the way.

At the Akwu Ozo the candidate changed his clothes. He put aside the clothes he wore to the Akwu Ozo, and put on a white loin cloth. His wife did the same. The old clothes were taken by the Nwankanri as his property.

The Nwakanri once again stated the rules governing an Ozo man to the candidate.

From that day he must be above board in all his dealings.

Then he and his wife were gently pushed down, and the man laid full length on the ground. The ankle-cords were tied to his feet and also to the wife's feet; never to be taken off till death.

The candidate was then told: "If you are called three times don't answer," (because he was supposed to be dead) "but when you are called the fourth time you should answer", (because he was supposed to have come alive again, a new man).

The Nwakanri then called him three times by title-names he had not chosen, and he did not answer. Then he called him, by the title-name he had chosen. The candidate answered, e-e-e-o, and rose. He shouted that he had taken the title. The gun boomed; and the man became an Ozo man. His wife rose also, an Ojievbi, that is, wife of an Ozo-titled man.

The sound of the man heralded to Oka that the candidate had been initiated. If more than one person were taking the title that night the sound of the gun decided the seniority of one to the other; the person whose gun went off first became senior to the one whose gun came after.

As soon as the man rose, and the gun boomed, his wife and all those attending to him, hailed him by his praise-names, and gave him all his titles. And Ozo man had eight numerous titles he kept answering, e - e - e - o! e - e - e - o!

At his house, merrymakers would be massed in his compound singing and dancing. But he did not enter. Instead, he ran to the house of a relative; then came out of there (to confuse Eso or Uke) and ran to the house of another relative; where he settled down.

He remained in the house of this relative for three Oka weeks (12 days) during which time there was merriment there. He and his wife rubbed themselves from head to foot with chalk everyday and were maintained by their host.

After three weeks, he went to his own house. He then ceased to rub his body with chalk, but rubbed it with red ubio, or ground camwood. Before entering his house he gave a hen to the Umuokpu (married daughters) who used it to purify his house before his entry.

He stayed four Oka weeks at home [16 days] celebrating after which he was out of Akwu Ozo, which he had entered 28 days before. He had then completed the Ozo title.

Before entering Akwu Ozo, the Ozo candidate usually went to all the gods of his people – known and unknown – to sacrifice to them, so that they might keep him safe and sound, and not allow him to die before completing his 28 days. Any body who died within that period had committed an abomination, and was likened to now who had committed suicide. That was why sacrifices were made to all known gods and to those not known to appease them.

And that was why at the end of the Akwu Ozo period the joy was so great, that the new Ozo man went round from the shrine of one god to another, giving thanks to them and making appropriate sacrifices to each.

From the day he entered his own house, there would be eating and drinking in the Ozo man's house. The Uvbio drum played continuously and a stream of visitors came bringing gifts to him – gifts of all kinds, live animals, such as cows, and goats; hot drinks, food items or money. And he entertained them all.

The celebration of the Ozo title is like a mini-festival. Anyone who came in must eat and drink. That was why there was a saying: "Agan aghal ika ana echi ozo, je vbe ika ana alu agwu?" meaning, should I leave the place where Ozo title is being celebrated to go to Agwu ceremony where there is no food?

The closing ceremony of the title celebration was the Patanuo. The word literally meant "bring and drink". It meant that when you were coming you were expected to bring your own drinks.

Patanuo was the method of auctioning off surplus stuff that was leftover during the Ozo ceremony. It marked the last day of the celebration.

At cock-crow, on the morning of Patanuo, the helpers of the Ozo title man began to prepare the food and meat to be sold later in the morning. Pounded foofoo was prepared and set in lumps in big pans; egusi soup and ogbono soup were prepared by the women; men brought out big yams and cut them into measured sizes for sale.

Depending on the size of the Ozo man's connections, a cow, or more than one cow, was slaughtered and carved into shares according to tradition. When the time came, the Ozo man's mother's people were given one leg of the cow, his wife's people took the other leg, other close relations took the hand, and so on. The generality of people who attended the Patanuo paid money to buy meat, yams, prepared cassava and foofoo with soup. The Uvbio played for the last time on the day of Patanuo. And that ended the Ozo title celebration.

What remained was for the Ozo man to show himself to Oka. On the next market day, he went to market with his followers, playing and dancing to ordinary music. He dressed richly as an Ozo man, with his long red cap with its two eagle feathers on each side of the cap, and with the Ozo Staff in his left hand, and his fan for taking salutes in his right hand. Guns were shot in the air, as he danced along. Having gone round the

market, receiving gifts, he moved to other parts of Oka that appealed to him, and then returned home. People greeted him everywhere with his new Ozo title-names.

That was Ozo title celebration, as in the days of our fathers.

In modern times the celebration has been much altered. The pageantry is still there, but instead of 28 days the ceremony of celebration now takes seven days, and no more. the feasting is still there, and the Uvbio drumming; but “mgbaghali”, the dancing about to the market places, has been cut out, though some people, who are Christians, go to Church to give thanks. The wake-keeping (nda abani) is still observed, but the Nwakanri no longer appears, the most senior Ozo title-holder performs the functions of the Nwakanri, and those senior Ozo title-holder performs the functions of the Nwakanri – an those functions are made less mysterious. There is no selected spot, called Akwu Ozo (Ozo Shrine) anymore: the putting on of the ankle-cords now takes place in the celebrant’s compound in full view of the whole Oka attending, and he and the wife are not pushed to the ground anymore, rather, the man sits on carved Ajaghija stool, and his wife on an ordinary stool during the act.

Patanuo, or Auction sale, is still the closing part of the celebration.

One ritual, however, in the celebration of the Ozo title that has remained ever the same is the massed blowing of ivory trumpets, Okike.

When an Oka man performed his Ajaghija title, he carried an elephant’s tusk, carved into a trumpet for the ceremony. He either bought one himself, or borrowed from others. and on all ceremonial occasions thereafter he was expected to carry this ivory trumpet with him, as part of his paraphernalia; either carried on his own shoulders or was laid on a table in front of his seat.

In attending an Ozo title celebration, the Oka man brought this ivory trumpet with him. at such functions one saw these elephants’ tusks laid upon tables, row upon row.

After the ankle-cords had been put on the Ozo title celebrant and his wife, and after the Ozo cap had been put on his head, and he had handed his Ozo staff, the new Ozo man was led, dancing, by the other Ozo title-holders to the entrance of his compound. There, they saluted him ceremonially with their staffs, each Ozo man striking his staff four times, and congratulating him individually and giving him their individual blessings, beginning with the most senior Ozo man to the youngest. After that, they led him back into his compound, and to his seat, still dancing.

As soon as the celebrant was seated, all the Ozo title-holders did a victory dance of their own. Each Ozo man took up his elephant’s tusk and blew it in unison with the others. Then hoison same on the shoulders, they danced round the celebrant’s compound, chanting:-

Enyio – o – o!
Enyimba enyi!
Enyio – o – o!
Enyimba enyi!
Enyi aga vba!

Enyimba enyi!
Enyio – o – o!
Enyimba enyi!
Oka aga vba!
Enyimba enyi!
Enyio – o – o!
Enyimba enyi!
Obodo ukwu – o!
Enyimba enyi!
Oka – o – o!
Enyimba enyi!
Oka – o – o!
Enyimba enyi!
Oka aga vba!
Enyimba enyi!
Enyio – o – o!
Enyimba enyi!

As they danced, they halted from time to time to blow the trumpets. And the massed blowing of those ivory trumpets – Okike – was an impressive spectacle; the sound itself was like that of the trumpeting of a pack of elephants!

When they had thus gone round the compound a number of times, the ozo men returned the tusks to their places on the tables.

That was the origin of the “EyimbaOenyi” victory dance in Igboland.

The meaning of the chant was:-

Oka is like an elephant
Among Igbo towns!
Oka elephants are moving,
Oka is moving on!
Great town, Oka!
Oka is the elephant
Oka is on the march!!

6. **Vbum:** The greatest and the last of the titles of Oka was called Vbum. Its other name was Aja-Chi.

But Vbum was in actual fact not a title at all, as titles went, but a gigantic offering, a sacrifice. There was no payment of any sum of money in it that people shared; and it had no members. It simply comprises the sacrifice of one’s fellow-townsmen to come and share in one’s blessing. That was Vbum.

Every body participated in its performance; no special title-name was taken in it. The person who had performed Vbum was just greeted with the name Vbum!

A person wishing to perform Vbum title went round all the thirty-three villages of Oka, collecting the names of the gods the people worshipped. Then he went to each village

in turn and made sacrifices to all gods one by one. He killed a goat or a fowl to each god, depending upon the guidelines given to him by the diviners (Dibie).

After that, the person invited to his compound, and entertained the people of each of the thirty-three villages, aforesaid. Each village had its own day. As many of the people as were willing to come were given plenty of food and drinks to their satisfaction. People were not selected, but came at their wish. Uvbio musical drum played throughout the period. And people brought their own dances as well.

That was all there was to it. But only an extremely wealthy man could do it.

A person that had taken the Vbum title no longer went to the diviners to ascertain the wishes of the gods with a view to appeasing them with sacrifices. He had done that once and for all. He had made the final sacrifice. That was why Vbum was also called Aja-Chi. The person had sacrificed to the gods, and he had sacrificed to men once and for all. Throughout the remainder of his life the Vbum title-holder would make no more sacrifices to the gods.

There were only four Oka people who were known to have taken the Vbum title in modern times. They were Ozo Ofodile Ndigwe, alias Nwamalevbi of Umuayom Village; Ozo Nweku, of Nkwelle Village, Ozo Nwokoye Onwuje of Amudo Village; and Ozo Dike Nwancho of Amikwo Village.

Chapter 11

Amikwo – Agulu War, Or the End of An Era

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

"Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother
Seeing, shall take heart again".
- Henry Longfellow

Okafo – Amari had six sons – Molokwu, Mora, Ezekwem and three others. But of all of them Ezekwem was the most famous. He was the future General of the Amikwo fighting forces.

Ezekwem's house was opposite Eke Iyokpu of old, and was the battle ground in the war with Agulu. The compound is still there, but his Mkpenu (house with Watch-tower) has been pulled down. Ezekwem was by profession, like most Amikwo people, a doctor and a blacksmith.

Amikwo was related to Ezioka and Agulu by blood. A daughter of Amikwo bore the ancestor of the Umudioka people of Ezioka, and another daughter of Amikwo begat a doctor and a blacksmith.

Amikwo was related to Ezioka and Agulu by blood. A daughter of Amikwo bore the ancestor of the Umudioka people of Ezioka and another daughter of Amikwo begat the progenitor of the Agulu people.

Amikwo was known as Amikwo-ebe-nano, because the village was made up of four sub-villages or Quarters, namely, Umudiana, Okperi, Igweogige and Isiagu. But only three of these sub-villages, namely, Umudiana, Okperi and Igweogige were involved in the Amikwo, Agulu war; hence they called themselves "Amikwo-Akanato" or "Akamanato". Isiagu stayed aloof in the war. Amikwo used to say to Agulu: "If three fingers of the hand can do this to you, what if all the four fingers were involved?"

There were several causes of the Amikwo-Agulu war, including the well-known one. A distinctive specialization of Agulu, when Agulu came into Oka smithing, was foundry work-ivbe owuwu-making of a mould and pouring molten metal into it to make a metal object. Agulu made molten brass or copper. they did this, but Amikwo, whose original specialization was medicine, also did work in foundry; but they did not pose any danger while they confined themselves to Oka town, but when they began to combine brass and copper work in the Ijaw country – the ezi-ije of Umuogbu and Umanaga Villages – competition arose and friction began to build up.

Secondly, the area of land where Agulu people lived was small, and as their population increased there was need for more land, particularly where their women could farm when the menfolk were away. Since Agulu were living on Amikwo land, their expansion could only be at the expense of Amikwo. That was another area of friction –pressure of population. Women said, give us land where to farm and grow vegetables. And Amikwo land was very fertile and produced luscious fruits and vegetables!

Thirdly, a generation of Agulu had grown up which held that the blood relationship with Amikwo was too distant and thin to be hindrance to their desire for expansion. They demanded that Amikwo be moved to give Agulu room.

The first flaring of the smoldering fire concerned an Amikwo deity, called Mkpu Agadinwanya, which Amikwo worshipped in common with their guest, Agulu. The Agulus accused Amikwo of polluting the Shrine. Amikwo denied it. Despite their denial, Agulu prepared to wage war against them. At this juncture, the rest of Oka intervened and brought about an amicable settlement; and the war was averted.

What finally brought matters to a head, however and caused the physical collision of the two Quarters, was something that happened far away in the Ijaw country.

Okeke Egbe, a native of Igweogige Quarter of Amikwo, was both a blacksmith and a doctor. As a blacksmith, he was an expert worker in brass and copper, thus giving keen competition to the Umuogbu and Umuanaga smiths in the Ijaw area. As a doctor he treated a woman of Agela near Brass. In Ijaw land and the woman died. Okeke Egbe ran back to Oka.

This is how Ozo Chinwuko Okeke Omeligbo – Ozo Nyilagha – told the story, as he said it was told by his people, Agulu to Major Moorhouse, when he came to stop the war:

“The Amikwo man made medicine for a woman at Agbela in the Ijaw country and the woman died, and the man ran away to Oka. They looked for the man and asked him to come back to settle the matter and pay compensation, He refused. The Ijaw people of Agbela then attacked Umuogbu people. Agulu said, “this medicine man has closed our ‘ezi-ije’. So Agulu told Amikwo not to go on journeys again. Amikwo refused. Amikwo said no one was killed; their compatriot did not kill, but only tried to save the sick woman and failed, and now he was asked to go back and be killed himself; they would not agree to that”.

Agulu felt that since Okeke Egbe had refused to go back to Agbela to face the consequences of his failure to cure the Ijaw woman, he had antagonised the Ijaw people, and that journey-route was effectively closed to them. They therefore insisted that unless Amikwo agreed to stop going on journeys altogether, there would be war.

When the rest of Oka, Ifite (popularly called “Amaenyi”) and Ezi-Oka saw that a war was really threatening and that the two sides could not settle the matter between themselves, they again intervened. There were peace meetings; and the last meeting

was at Avbia Mgbede [Evening market – as Eke Nwida was then called – where Nwokoye Nweji had his workshop] and Oka tried to find a peaceful solution. But it was in vain. Agulu held on to their position that Amikwo must stop going on journeys, that they had other means of livelihood, as they were farmers and doctors as well, whereas they, Agulu, depended solely on their journeys to foreign lands to live. If their ezi-ije was blocked they would die of starvation.

Agulu therefore, sent a final warning to Amikwo, “stop all journeys or else there will be war”.

Amikwo met to decide to how to avert the war. But they found it hard to accepted Agulu’s condition; Amikwo said Agulu were strangers, and they, Amikwo had been journeying before Agulu came. Nevertheless, they racked their brains to find an honourable way out.

Ezekwem addressed them: “Amikwo”, he said, “This war has been brewing now for long. On two previous occasion it was about to break out, but was averted. Now that it is brewing in my time we must meet the challenge and know what answer to give”.

Amikwo deliberated.

They decided that they would send back a message to Agulu, agreeing no longer to go on journeys; but demanding that no Agulu man should thenceforth plant any seed in the ground by way of farming; otherwise, they would see what Amikwo could do.

The message was sent.

Agulu laughed.

Okeke Omeligbo of Umuanaga, father of Chinwuko, Ozo Nyilagha was elected War Leader by the Agulus. Ezekwem Okafor Amari was elected War Leader by Amikwo Akamanato. Each side prepared for war.

When the dispute first started, all Amikwo, Amikwo-Ebenano, spoke as one. But when war became imminent, Isiagu pulled out. The leading men of Isiagu Quarter, at that time, were all journeyers among the Ijaws, and none of them had returned. He was afraid that if war broke out and Isiagu participate, they could all be killed so he succeeded in persuading his Quarter to stay neutral.

The coming conflict therefore concerned only three subvillages of Amikwo Village, to wit, Umudiana, Okperi and Igweogige. That was why they had members from all Agulu-Ebenasa. They comprised within them two age—grades in fact. At the head of the struggle was Umuanaga Village, who where rich traders to the Rivers areas.

It was the Egbema Age-Grade that sent the ultimatum to Amikwo – agrees to stop journeying or we attack you. And Ezekwem then called on Amikwo.

Chienye, mother of Ibe Nwankili of Amudo Village, was the first daughter of Okafor Amari. Okafor was ‘nwadiana’ to Ojiako of Nkwelle Village, and gave food to Ajana-Nkwelle.

Amikwo met in the Hall of Okafor Amari, where they decided on the message to be sent to Agulu.

When war became inevitable the women of Aguli, married to Amikwo men, went to their people, Agulu and asked for audience. They were, Nwanede from Umuike and Uyanwune] from Umubele, Nwamaka of Umuike, Nwayadone from Umuanaga, Nwume Ezego from Umuike, they appealed to their fathers and brothers not to wage war against Amikwo, for their sons would be killed and their husbands. They said that Amikwo would be alone, as their relatives in Ezioka were sure to help them, and the fight would be costly in lives. They implored them to forbear because of them, their daughters.

But Agulu men gave harsh answer: they said that anybody who was afraid should come home and bring her children with her. That what they said about Ezioka coming to help Amikwo was not to be feared. That any fight against Ezioka was a fight of one morning and a fight against Amikwo was a fight of one evening. That the fight will soon be over:

“Ezioka bu egbe ututu
Amikwo bu egbe mgbede”.

The daughters left, depressed.

Amikwo sent a last desperate message to Agulu. Amikwo said, that they were few, and that Umuanaga alone was larger in population than the whole of Amikwo put together, how much more Akamanato – three little fingers of one hand! They could not hope to match Agulu. Therefore, they proposed: that at the end of any journeying year, as soon as the journeyers returned home, after taking off their hat and cover-cloth, all their earnings for the year should be divided into three parts, the journeyers should take two shares and Agulu one share.

The Ndichie of Agulu met over this proposal and recommended acceptance, provided oath was taken by Amikwo that they would disclose all their earnings. The young men were called and informed of the recommendation of the elders.

The young men not only rejected the recommendation, as having been influenced by the fact that the elders had already got established households, but they went further to fine them, saying, that they, the youths were determined to drive out Amikwo.

The elders said: “You have fined us, but remember that the coming war will not be a war fists and sticks, but of guns”.

Message was sent back to Amikwo: their proposal was not accepted, they should cease to go outside Oka town to earn a living.

Amikwo refused.

Then taunting began.

Okeke Ndawa (Ndawaoku) of Umudiana was the oldest man in Amikwo then, followed by Adu Nwokolo of Igweogige and Nwankwo Umeadu of Okperi. These were the heads

of the three Quarters. But there were other prominent men. Onyejekwe Ebonu of Umudiana (maternal grandfather of Nwanaekeokwu Onwuemelie) was one of them. He was an Ozo titled-man. Amulu, another Ozo man of Umuanaga Village, sent him a message, saying: "Tomorrow your Hall will go up in flames".

Onyejekwe sent back his own message: "Say to Amulu, if my Hall goes up in flames, another person's Hall will also go up in flames"

Oghevbelu of Umuanaga, another Ozo man, sent to his counter-part, Molokwu of Igweogige: "Tell Molokwu, tomorrow the waves of the sea will wash over him (iji ga eru ya)". Molokwu sent back saying: "I have heard you, wait for me, I will send you my answer. "Later, he sent his own message: "Tell Oghevbelu, that if the waves come to me I will bale them dry with a broken gourd".

Just before actual fighting began, one of the warriors of Agulu, coming within hearing distance of the Mkpenu (tower) of Ezekwem, cried to him: "Egbe jel mba, aka ejidego ye", referring to Mora, who had recently left to take back some Calabari clients who had come to consult the Oka oracle, lest they be injured. What the man meant was the Mora had been killed by Agulu warriors.

Ezekwem answered and said: "Mgbako bu ma nwoke me ivbe okwulu, chete na mu chi ugu Amikwo", meaning, What makes a man a man is that he does what he has promised to do; even if you have killed my brother, remember that I am leading the Amikwo fight (and I will retaliate).

But actually, the villagers were greatly distressed and depressed by that piece of propaganda, for Mora was a prominent man. Luckily, just as the fighting began, Mora returned home safe and sound.

The following day, the Agulu invaded the Amikwo at Ofiamazu Stream, the source of the drinking water for Amikwo. They beat the women, and drove them off, intending to occupy the Stream. There were shouts, and Amikwo men ran to the scene and met them, and hand to hand fighting ensued; but no weapons were used.

At the end of the fight the Amikwos found that one of their men was missing. The Agulu had kidnapped Nwuba Okonkwo Obu, whose father's compound lay between Ezekwem's compound and Dike's compound. They took him away through what is now Government Technical College area, in Agu Egbe. Amikwo men pursued them and met them at Ugwu Gama and fighting continued.

But Agulu succeeded in taking Nwuba away.

An Amikwo man, however, captured Nwabueze's father, Amulu, took up his gong and went round Agulu-ebe-n'asa. He told Agulu to let his son be released; that his son, Nwabueze must not be killed because of worthless man they captured from Amikwo: they should leave the Amikwo man to go, so that Amikwo people might leave his son; otherwise the war would start from home.

Amulu was an influential Ozo titled man. So Agulu met and sent to Amikwo to bring out Nwabueze and they would bring out Nwuba.

Amikwo agreed.

Agulu brought out Nwuba to the Square in front of the compound of the father of Nwokoye Nweji, and Amikwo brought Nwabueze to the front of Onyejekwe's compound, next to the compound of Okeke Adunkachi. Agulu said: "Leave Nwabueze and we will leave Nwuba". Amikwo said: No, leave Nwuba first".

Agulu let Nwuba go; and when he reached Amikwo lines, Amikwo left Nwabueze. as soon as Nwabueze got home he went on journey, and never came home again till the war ended.

As war became certain, Amikwo began to construct Ekpe walls, or ramparts, round themselves, that is, raised earth-mounds- which they made very wide and fortified same with upright stakes fixed in the ground (ndapo). Men, women, and children took part in the work. In front of Ezekwem's compound they built one ekpe, and behind the ekpe they made tunnels which could take a man without his head showing. Holes were pierced through the ekpe from which people kept watch.

Iyoku was to be the battle-ground, up to Ezekwem's compound wall. (Now his son has built a long row of shops along that wall).

Amikwo made a law that any Amikwo man who first killed an Agulu man, and not that Agulu had first killed an Amikwo man, would pay the penalty by being hanged. And if war began, any one who wasted gun powder by shooting at targets he was not sure of, would be made to pay back.

On the day shooting started, it was 6.o'clock in the morning. it was in the dry season; and Onwa-Asa feast (Otite) had just been celebrated. (That would make it about November of that year, thought to be 1901).

The Agulu began coming from Eke Mgbede – Evening Market (now Eke Nwide) side – shooting their guns in the air.

Amikwo had lockouts; and platoons of their men were stationed along the ndapo. Each platoon was under its chosen commander.

Another law of Amikwo was, that if an Amikwo man was killed, the "Ekwe" (wooden drum carried by hand) would be beaten, and every company of fighting men should send out one man to go and see for himself, that it was so, that an Amikwo man had indeed been killed; and then report back to his men. Otherwise, the law remained whoever killed an Agulu man would hang.

When the Agulu warriors, shooting their guns in the air, came in front of Ezekwems compound, they stopped, and began to exchange abuses with the Amikwo defenders. They then turned back.

As soon as they got back home, all the women came out and booed them, calling out:

"So the warriors have returned so soon!
So you have already driven off the Amikwos!

Now we can go and plant fine cocoyams and maize on their land!
Shame on you!
Come home and eat, brave warriors!!

They went back to Amikwo, around 9.a.m; again shooting. But this time they leveled their guns at man's level (ogo mmadi). Amikwos then took cover, and bullets whizzed over them right and left.

while this was taking place, Nwachi, the mother of Chinweze and Uyanwune, a daughter of Agulu but married to Amikwo, who was pregnant, and had at that time her home near Ogbugbankwa Square, plucked some green leaves, and careless for her safety, began waving them, shouting for the warriors to stop fighting. A bullet struck her. She fell. She was carried into a house at Okperi, where she died: The first heroine of the Amikwo people! Almost at the same time, one Ukulu, an Enugwu-Ukwu man, who was a man who cleansed people of abominations and who was living at Amikwo, came out, and following Nwachi's lead, endeavored to stop the fighting by waving green leaves. He too was hot down.

The Eke sounded.

The "Odabalagu" pipe sounded.

People knew when the die was cast. There was no way out now but war.

As soon as the Ekwe sounded, each platoon of the guards sent a man to view the dead. All sections did.

Then Nwosu Idiko, "Onyenweaku", started his war chant ("mbem"). He was an accomplished singer, and his voice carried. He chanted:

Ishi enyi nato du na Amikwo!
(Three great age-grades in Amikwo)
Umuofia du na Amikwo!
(Umuofia age-grade of Amikwo)
Irugo du na Amikwo!
(Irugo age-grade of Amikwo)
Apali du na Amikwo!
(Apali age-grade of Amikwo)
Anyavbuom ko-ho, ko-oh, ko-oh - o - o - o!
(I have seen what I should never have seen: my eyes
have seen an abomination)
Obu-na-etiti adu Igbo mma, Amikwo!
(Oh, Amikwo, whose situation is envied by her enemies)
Umu omem mgbadi, oduvba mma,
(You [Agulu] who oppress others and enjoy it)
Ma madi me vbe, oduvba nwute,
(But when others retaliate you hate it)
Kwanyili fuo, kwanyili fuo!
(Get away, get away, get away from our land)
Ogburo ogu nne na agbal nna,

(For this is not a fight a mother can fight for her child)
Oburo ogu nna na agbal nnwa – o – o – o,
(And this is not a fight a father can fight for his child)
Elili avbulu shi kota na ovbia,
(Amikow) get hold of any climbing plant from any bush you
can find and twist it into a rope)
Onye avbulu shi nikwie nye – o – o – o,
(Any one you see tie him with it)
Ma akpuchakwa aja sel okpa nwannem,
(When the mud wall has been build my brother)
Onye ovbuzil nya dagbuo – o – o – o!
(Let it fall on whomever it will)
Ishi akpu egbuo ibie – o – o – o!
(A human being has killed another)
Nke onye vbulu nya me – o – o – o!
(Whatever any man can do let him do it now)
Ebenebe egbuo ikpangali!!
(A person is lying dead)
Ikwodiaku! Ikwo nnam enyi!!
(Ikwodiaku, our great ancestor, we call on you to be
our witness, that we did not provoke this fight).

All the Amikwo shouted back angrily: “We are here, we are here! We are ready! Don’t make us cry like women!”, because their hearts were greatly moved by the lament, and they were near tears.

What Nwosu had told them was, the law is off, now fight to kill!

And so, when the next wave of Agulu came, shooting, Amikwo shot back, and ten Agulu people fell that day. The Agulus retreated, taking their dead and wounded with them.

Guns that were used were: Cham (cap gun), elefele (rifle) and egbe-okwa (dane gun).

There was no fighting for another one month. Each side prepared in earnest for the struggle.

After a month Agulu returned in full force, and there was fierce fighting, day and night for a whole year. But Amikow stood.

Then in order to wear them down by giving them no respite, Agulu divided themselves into seven groups, according to your villages. Warrior of one village had the task of fighting for one day. So that, while six villages had a rest, Amikwo were kept fighting continuously.

But this did not break Amikwo.

Agulu invested Amikwo on all sides, and it was difficult to go into or come out of Amikwo.

Agulu carried the war to the farmlands as well, and denied Amikwo free access to their farms, thereby disrupting their source of food supply.

Food was indeed scarce, but Amikwo managed to eat by rationing their food. Above all, they defended with tenacity their one source of drinking water – Ofiamazu Stream.

The rest of Oka looked on in sympathy, but joined no side. While they did not help Amikwo, the weaker side, militarily, they gave them moral support. They helped them with the all-important intelligence.

Ezioka smuggled food to them, and Ifite [popularly called Amaenyi] provided them with a haven of rest; children and those badly wounded, were sent there. Many of the leaders of the war used to go there for rest and recuperation before going back to the war front.

On the other hand while Agulu had all the resources, and were vastly superior in numbers, when the war took a bad turn against them, Oka saw to it that they were not destroyed.

Agulu villages did not fight the war with equal zeal. Umubele had not their heart in the war, and whenever it was their turn to fight Amikwo had some little respite. Amikwo reciprocated by sparing the life of Ifejuka Mgbechi, one of the most prominent men of Umubele. Ifejuka was one of a party of Agulu soldiers sent to block the way to Amikwo farms. He did not know that he had walked into an ambush mounted by Amikwo guerrilla fighters, the Mgbankiti. They decided not to kill him, firstly, because he was of Umubele; and secondly, because his death would have turned Oka against Amikwo. For Oka people worshipped excellence and Ifejuka was an exceedingly handsome and imposing man, whose violent death would have angered many. So, one of the guerillas picked up a pebble and threw it at Ifejuka. On realizing his danger, Ifejuka escaped.

Umuogbu and Umuanaga were the most intransigent, and the leaders of the war, particularly Umuanaga and they suffered the heaviest casualties. The most ferocious fighters, however, were Umuike. Their day was always a day of sorrow for Amikwo.

And when the war dragged on for so long, it was Umuike that made preparations to end it, by planning to capture at all costs, the source of the drinking water for Amikwo. They made elaborate preparations against the day it would be their turn to fight. They were determined to subdue Amikwo once and for all.

When that day came, it was a bloody battle. Amikwo had heard what was being planned to the story of the Amikwo people themselves, many brave men died that day on both sides.

But Umuike were repulsed and they retreated. That battle was a turning point in the war.

For now that Umuike had failed, Agulu became dispirited. They began to cast about for outside allies to help them defeat Amikwo.

The first help they got was in the form of mercenary soldiers from Ukpor. Ukpor was a town after Okija, near Nnewi. The people were great fighters, who carried huge shields of war that protected them from head to foot; the shields were too tough that they were believed to deflect bullets. But these Ukpor people had one characteristic: they

never ate cocoyam (ede). Their religion forbade it. Hence, Oka people called them "Ukpor-eli-ede".

Military Intelligence had informed Ezekwem of this peculiarity in the people Agulu had hired to fight him. So, he commanded his men to wrap their bullets, of whatever kind, even ordinary 'agini' of dane-guns, with the outer skins of cocoyam tubers. This they did. And during the encounter, when the Ukpor discovered that they were being shot at with guns loaded with bullets wrapped in cocoyam skins, they broke rank and fled.

After the defeat of Ukpor, Agulu went to the famous Okoli Ijoma, and solicited his aid. They paid to Okoli Ijoma the advance fees for the recruitment of Ada warriors.

Ezekwem came to know of this arrangement. He disguised himself as a woman, successfully passed through the Agulu lines, and went to Nankpu in Mbaukwu town. There he met his father-in-law, Akabogu. Akabogu of Nankpu had given his daughter, Nwejiaku to Ezekwem as a wife. Akabogu took him to Okoli Ijoma. Now, Okoli Ijoma had given one of his own daughters in marriage to Akabogu. So, when the situation was explained to him, Okoli Ijoma cancelled the plan to send Ada mercenaries to Agulu's aid. He only required that Amikwo should pay the balance of the fees Agulu had not yet paid. Amikwo complied.

The next effort Agulu made which was more successful was to seek the help of British soldiers from Asaba. These came, in 1904, and not only put an end to the war, but also put an end to the independence of Oka town.

Before then, in what is believed to be the beginning of the year 1903, the youths of Amikwo went to their elders and made a request: They said that the war had been on now for three years, and no one could see the end of it. That they had neither married, nor did they see any prospect for it. That they could not go on journeys because of the unending war, and the economic situation of their generation was getting from bad to worse, and the best part of their lives was being wasted. Therefore, they proposed, that they be given permission to go on the offensive against Agulu in this war. That they would surely be destroyed if they fought only on the defensive. That they proposed to take Agulu head-on, despite their fewness in numbers, because it was better for them to die as men, than live in shame.

"Ka ma oga abu uya,
Nya bulu onwu!, they said

The elders were impressed. They took counsel; and gave the youths their consent. They then placed them under the care and charge of "Onyenweaku" Nwosungene Idiko, the man of many parts. and so the fearsome Mgbankiti Guerilla Fighters of Amikwo were born, destined to write their name indelibly in the annals of Oka town.

Nwosu Afuluchi (as he was commonly called by his grandmother's name, Afuluchi, but whose proper surname was Idiko), was a bit light complexioned. He was nearing 90 when he died. Ozo Nwuba Mora (one of the author's informants) (Ozo Ikwodiaku), became a master-blacksmith in his lifetime. Nwuba ended his apprenticeship at the same time as one of Nwosu's third daughter and mother of the author.

Nwosu was a blacksmith, and he journeyed to Umunya, Ogbunike, Umudioka Akpom, Nwelle-Ezunaka and Ogidi. He was what was known as a strong man. He was, in fact, by all accounts a remarkable man.

Nwosu sang the "Oganigwe Masquerade" – a night masquerade, (hence he was sometimes called "Nwosu Oganigwe"). He also sang for his age-grade in such masks as Achikwu, Nwanza and Ayaka and he danced them all.

His grandmother was Afuluchi, daughter of Ikwe, (an ohafia warrior), who settled in Adabebe (Ada-nwebe) Quarter of Amawbia, after one of the Ada invasions of Adagbe early in the 19th century. Nwosu was of the same age-grade (Umuovbia) as Molokwu, father of Nweze-Okpuo. His age-grade fought the Norgu war. He was a titled man.

He was both a blacksmith and a native doctor.

But his fame was not in smithing, but as a native doctor.

many stories were told of his prowess as a native doctor, which seemed to suggest that even in that early period he had the knowledge of hypnosis, or the art of suggestion, and used it.

One such story concerned his encounter with another native doctor at Ogbunike. Doctors in Ogbunike area in those days were renowned for their skill and aggressiveness, and one day one of them met Nwosu on the road. They exchange uncomplimentary words, and Nwosu felt that the man was testing him. So he said to the man, as a parting shot: "ute agara abaghi, ikpo agara abaghi". (No mat will contain you, no bed will contain you).

On reaching home the man felt ill, and became restless. If he lay down, he would want to get up. And if he got up, he would want to lie down. When his people saw that if he was allowed to continue in that way he would die, as no medication seemed to have any effect on his condition, they closely questioned him what had happened to him. He then told them that he had an exchange of angry words with a fellow native doctor, an Oka man, residing in Ogbunike. From his description of the man his people were able to trace Nwosu Idiko to where he was lodging. They told him of the man's desperate condition, and implored him to do something about it. Nwosu remembered his encounter with the man. He followed them to the man's house. On getting there, Nwosu said to the man:

"Ute ga aba ghi, (mat will contain you)
Ikpo ga aba ghi (bed will contain you).

As he said this, (so the story ran), the troubled man felt as if cold water had been poured over him. He sighed deeply, and slept. Nwosu left. On waking from his sleep the man became himself again.

Another story concerned Nwosu's encounter with the dreaded Nwokoye Akpoto of Okpuno town.

The British had come, and were administering Oka town when Ezekwem Okafor Amari, the General of the Amikwo Army, died. During his funeral ceremonies people came from far and near. Nwokoye Akpoto came with his "Mgbedike" masquerade.

Nwokoye Akpoto, as his name implied, was a descendant of those Idoma medicine-men who had come to Oka to do some medicine for the Oka people and had been subsequently settled in Okpuno. He was a renowned doctor, and was feared by all.

On that occasion, when it was known that he was coming to Ezekwem's funeral, people became apprehensive. And when he arrived, people deserted the Village Square and when indoors, and peeped out from their houses all except Nwosu Idiko. Nwosu used to carry a small raffia bag, like a pouch, under his armpit, whenever he was about to perform his feats. He now took this little bag, hung it round his left shoulder and held it tight to his armpit. He sat cross-legged in the Village Square, alone, waiting for the coming of Nwokoye Akpoto and his masquerade.

The Mgbedike entered the Square, preceded by its followers beating their gongs and singing. Nwokoye Akpoto followed behind. They went straight into Ezekwem's compound, and paid their respects to the relatives of the deceased, with every other person keeping at a safe distance from them.

Then they came out into the Village Square, ready to dance, as was the custom. But the Square was empty except for the solitary man sitting cross-legged in it. Nwokoye Akpoto marveled at the courage of the sitting man, who could thus dare him.

The Mgbedike masquerade moved aggressively at the man and then stopped. Nwosu looked at it. Nwokoye Akpoto followed his masquerade behind.

As Nwosu looked at the masquerade, the masquerade stood stock-still, in the burning sun. It was unable to move. Its sponsor, Nwokoye Akpoto, the dreaded doctor, could do nothing for it. Nwokoye and Nwosu stared at each other for a long time. The villagers watched from their houses, fascinated.

At last Nwokoye Akpoto gave way.

he addressed Nwosu as follows, praising him:-

"Ububa zie imi olakuila na aru!
Okuku na okenwe, Nwosungene!
Odu ghali ikwe, osuo na ana nli!!"

[When the ububa tree sneezes, its mucus attached to its body, meaning, a person who wishes you harm has the harm turned back on himself;
Nwosungene! man of mystery protected by the gods,
When the pestle misses the mortar, it pounds the bare earth! meaning, you are invincible!].

Nwosu replied:-

"Omo na uga avbo,

Ome na uga nkwo!
Ogbuzulu ubosi, Nwa-Akpoto!!”
[Your fame has no limit,
Your power is not used in secret,
You kill every day of the week, you, man of the Akpoto!!].

Nwosu got up. He sent for a small chick from his house. Tying a palm frond around its legs he went up to the Mgbedike masquerade, sweltering in the sun, and attached the chick to its back, and said to it:-

“Eje elu uno, bu ishi ije!”

[That a person returned from his journey is the reason for all journeying – meaning – Go in peace].

The Mgbedike Okpuno moved and was able to go home!

After the organization of the young warriors had been entrusted to Nwosu’s care, the Amikwo people built a special Camp for them, in a wooded land beside the Uside Lake. An Ekpe (earth mound) was built around the Camps site, which was later called [‘Ekpe Mgbankiti’]. The Camp itself was called Olulu Mgbankiti – Mgbankiti Shrine.

What Nwosu did with the young men there, what knowledge and training they received, and how they were taught their brand of fighting, is one of the most closely guarded secrets of the Amikwo people. Suffice it to say, that they operated in small bands, and performed many functions, more often than not it was to attack the enemy in his home, but sometimes it was to search for food, and sometimes to go for information. But one thing was common to all the companies: As soon as they crossed that Ekpe-Mgbankiti, marking the boundary of the Mgbankiti s Shrine, they held palm fronds in their mouths, and never spoke a single word thereafter, until they had performed their missions and returned. They were known then as “the Silent Ones” –Mgbankiti. When they moved out, they performed more like Supermen, than mere boys, which they were.

When Nwosu sang his lament at the break-out of the war, he had mentioned the three age-grades in Amikwo: Umuovbia, Irugo and Apali. These were the fighting men. The age-grades above them were the elders, who had done their own fighting in their own day, and had become the Di-irus or Ndichie, such as Onyejekwe Ebonu, Okeke Ndawa, Okoye Ifedunmo, Alaekwu and others. The Mgbankiti were the tail end of Apali age-grade and included any young person who, because of the war, was incorporated into that age-grade.

From Umuovbia age-grade were Molokwu, Nwosungene and others. They were the dimkpas. Below them were the Irugo age-grade of whom Morah, Ezekwem and so on were members. Irugo were senior to Apali age-grade, who comprised Nwangwu, Obuekezie, Nwora and others. Irugo and Apali age-grades were the heart of the fighting.

Irugo and Umuovbia had married, but not all Apali. And except for Uyanwune Nwachi, who married early, the Mgbankiti people had not married at all. They were recruited from the tail end of Apali. They were the dare – devils, or guerillas or commandoes. they were called “Out Ekpe”, and nicknamed “Mgbankiti” – the Silent Ones.

The following were the original Mgbankiti (or Otu Ekpe) group:-

- From Igweogige
- (1) Nwadieliche (he beat the ekwe Mgbankiti wooden drum. he was called "oku ekwe"),
 - (2) Ekweli Adu (whose father, Adu, was one of the elders that received the British in 1905)
 - (3) Mogo Oraekie (praise-names - "Odogwu Ocha", and "Ocho-na-awu-na-agu")
 - (4) Nwobu Abugo (praise-name - "Ochu Mgbankiti")
 - (5) Nwokoye Inedi,
 - (6) Nwogbo Nwanyakwe,
 - (7) Onwuka Eze (praise-name - "Diechi-ezi"),
 - (8) Nwokavbo Igweonu (praise-name - "Ovbu-okpa-ga-na-agu, odu ga ovbu igwe mmadi", meaning, one man who
 - (9) Nweze (praise-name - "Okpuo") (son of Molokwu) - leopard
- From Okperi:
- (10) Nwammuo Ndo
 - (11) Nwogbo Ikpo
 - (12) Nwuba Okonkwo Obu
 - (13) Nweke Uyanwune (father of Teacher Uyanna),
 - (14) Nwanatune Umera
- From Umudiana:
- (15) Uyanwune Nwachi (whose mother was killed)
 - (16) Nnama Eziegbene
 - (17) Nnabuchi Akubine Anishi

Following them and younger in age were:-

- From Igweogige:
- (18) Nwobunabo Nwoye
 - (19) Chinwuba Idiko (Nwosu's younger brother)
- From Okperi:-
- (20) Nwegwunatu Nwambogu (Gong beater of Mgbankiti - ogene),
 - (21) Nwakalo
 - (22) Nwekwunivbe Ndo,
- From Umudiana:-
- (23) Monwuba Anishi, and
 - (24) Ekwenugo Eziegbene.

As the war progressed, any boy that looked grown up, and was able to carry a gun, was incorporated into the ranks of the Otu Ekpe or Mgbankiti. at the height of their powers the Mgbankiti did not number more than forty young men altogether. they were aged between 18 and 21 years. Those up to 25 years were the very senior members.

As they had promised, the Mgbankiti made raids into Agulu Villages, very often entering the villages from behind, and causing untold havoc before the fighting men could run back from the battle front.

The leader of the raids was usually Nwokavbo Igweonu, nicknamed "Ovbu-okpa-ga, ana-agu" (one man that passes through the farms and it looks as if a crowd had passed).

Victor Okoli Oji of Umudioka Village, who was an eye-witness of one of those raids, told the story thus:-

"I had gone to see my sister who was married in Agulu. As I was coming out of Oye Nwovbuvbe, I saw Nwokavbo Ovbuokpa with a team of four men come out of the bush, and set fire to the houses of Umuanaga people. Passing by Essell's house untouched, they set fire to the house of Nwokoye Nweji's father. They went into Agulu from the back. They came out at Oye market place, and rushed through Umuogbu. They were dressed in war dress, and carried guns. They were weaving from side to side as they ran through Umuogbu. They were dressed in war dress, and carried guns. They were weaving from side to side as they ran through the town".

The Mgbankiti dressed for war like their elders.

This is how they were dressed: For their headgear they wore okpumpoto-a close fitting cap, woven from the dried stems of the cocoyam plants, which was very resistant to machet cuts. On their abdomen they wore aji – broad strips of the bark of the aji tree, beaten into a leathery condition, which was then wrapped round the abdomen, like a cloth. it was like rubber when hit with a machet. On their waist they wore embunukwu, short loin cloth tied round the waist with a stout string. The legs were coloured with dye. On the left upper arm they wore igba-aka-copper armlet with a small pouch containing medicine for protection, topped with aghumme-the red feather of a parrot. over the right shoulder they flung their gun. And round their waist they wore onoko – a sword in an iron scabbard, made by the Oka people.

The Mgbankiti usually assembled at the Olulu Mgbankiti, the Mgbankiti Shrine, brought thereby the beating of their ekwe or wooden drum. There the group to go on a particular mission was selected. Then they were gone off under the field Commander – Nwokavbo Igweonu, and with them went the ekwe drummer – Nwadibieche, and the Mgbankiti gong beater – Egwunatu Mbogu.

The ogene Mgbankiti (gong) and its ekwe produced an eerie music that chilled the blood – the purpose being to instill fear into those that heard it. The Mgbankiti were fearless and merciless. after they had accomplished any mission they beat the ekwe and the ogene, on their way home as a sign that they had been around.

The exploits of the Mgbankiti were legendary. And they did not spare one another. a story was told about one of the raids led by Nwakovbo Ovbuokpa. As the Mgbankiti were scaling the wall of Uzoka's compound in Umuogbu Village, Uzoka, the owner of the compound was grinding snuff in his Obu, without realizing his danger. The Mgbankiti saw him, and because his mother was Uzoka's sister and Uzoka was, therefore his uncle, and "grandfather", according to Oka custom, Nwakavbo Ovbuokpa pretended to slip on the wall, and thereby made a sound that alerted Uzoka. Uzoka looked up and saw what was happening; he left his snuff, ran through the back of his Obu, and escaped. The Mgbankiti band jumped down the wall, and set fire to his Obu.

When they got back home, the warriors reported Nwokavbo Ovbukpa to the elders of Amikwo. Nwokavbo was queried. His only defence was that "Agha anara egbuzu ka ovbulu" – war does not kill every thing it sees on its path. His defence was not accepted and he was heavily fined for showing partiality.

The activities of the Mgbankiti definitely turned the war in favour of Amikwo. There was clear danger that Amikwo would drive Agulu into Nibo town.

Reverend George T. Basden, reporting on their early days in Oka town, wrote as follows (in C.M.S. Log Book) – confirming the effectiveness of the Mgbankiti bands:-

"A section of the people, viz, those of the Agulu Quarter were more ready to accept us they hoping thereby to reap some advantage over their enemies, the people of the Amikwo Quarter. At that time the two Quarters were engaged in civil war owing to the alleged infringement of blacksmithing rights by the Amikwo men. Part of Agulu was burnt down and eleven people lost their lives as the result of one assault by the Amikwo", [emphasis that of the author], 'With the thought in their minds that the presence of Europeans might, in some way, assist them the Agulus agreed to let us settle on the edge of their Quarter. Although no help whatsoever was rendered to either party, beyond doing what was possible for the wounded, yet it was very difficult to get the Amikwo (especially) to accept this fact. For several months that Quarter was subjected to a very rigorous siege the Agulu hoping to bring them into submission by means of hunger and particularly, by preventing the people from obtaining water outside the village. The siege was raised eventually by the intervention of the Government".

Nwoko Udegbe was a wealthy man of Umuenechi Village. Agulu people used to hold war-meetings in his house. One night, while such a meeting was going on, dead in the night, the Mgbankiti warriors were outside his gate, digging up the yams he had planted in front of his compound. People were going in and coming out of the compound without noticing anything wrong. It was the sixth month of the Oka year (onwa ishii) when yams had begun to mature. When the Mgbankiti had finished, they went and passed faeces in front of Nwoko's gate, to tell those within that they could all have been killed if the Mgbankiti had so desired.

After the disappointment from the Missionaries, whose vocation forbade them to fight; the search of the Agulu people for new allies became desperate. A compatriot, who had been a Corporal in the Royal Niger Company's Force, but who had retired, and had taken the Ozo title at home, named Obukwel, nick-named Ibaka, suggested that they made contact with the British fighting soldiers based at Araba (as the Oka people called Asaba).

Delegation was sent to Onitsha to meet with Ezeukwu, the former apprentice of Owo Ukaozo. Ezeukwu was from Umuokpu Village, but was apprenticed to Owo as a blacksmith, and had lived with Owo. Later, he had gone on his own to work at Onitsha as a blacksmith, and was living in the compound of Okafor Kwochaka, the future Igwe Amobi of Ogidi. Amobi was then a butcher in Onitsha and knew many people. The Agulu delegation saw Amobi, and he promised to go to Asaba and contact the British for them. He was paid a commission. His trip was successful, for the British soldiers agreed to go with him to the hinterland to put down the alleged fighting. (His visit

coincided with the change of policy of the British Government which had previously prohibited British nationals from going into the Onitsha hinterland].

Headed by Amobi, as their guide and Interpreter, and Ezeukwu, the British troops came to Oka. They were led by Major Moorhouse with some other European assistants.

The Oka people called Major Moorhouse "Nwangwele" (the lizard) because he has flat stomach, and was quick in his movements. The soldiers were camped at Ezi Umuanaga (the principal Square of Agulu), whilst the Major set up his quarters in Owo's compound, and his assistants camped in Onwurah's compound, from where they kept their eye soldiers in the village Square. This was in 1904.

A meeting was held between the British soldiers and the Agulu people. Okeke Omeligbo - then leader of Agulu - informed Major Moorhouse that there was a Quarter in Oka with whom they were at war, and they would want him to capture them, as they had killed many important person in Agulu.

Major Moorhouse then sent two messengers, both "nwadianas" of Amikwo (that is, persons whose mothers came from Amikwo) to tell Amikwo to attend a meeting called by the Whiteman for the settlement of the war. He promised that there would be no fighting, and called for a ceasefire on both sides. The venue was to be "Avbia Mgbede", that is, the present Eke Nwida.

At the appointed time, both Agulu and Amikwo assembled, Major Moorhouse wanted to know what was the matter. Agulu stated their case, narrating what had transpired in the Ijaw country, and Amikwo stated their case in reply. Agulu complained that many of their prominent people had been killed, and they demanded retribution.

Having considered everything, Major Moorhouse said he was there to stop the war. He ordered ten Amikwo leaders, whom he selected at random, to fall in line. He then picked out six of them, and told them that they were under arrest, and that they would go with him to Asaba. He said further, that Agulu had lost more men in the war; therefore, he would fine Amikwo "ili-ego-neli", that is, 300,000 cowries. He gave Amikwo five days to pay the fine.

When Amikwo - Akamanato returned home, they called a mass meeting of their people. They made a law, and took an oath to enforce it, that, after deducting "nnu-ego", that is, "orukwu-orukwu uzo na abo", that is to say, 2,400 cowries, anything else anybody had in his house must be brought out for Amikwo.

Because the war had been on for three years, Amikwo people had not much left, and they had to tax themselves heavily in this way in order to meet the demands of the Whiteman.

Everybody brought out what he had. The people made up the required number of bags of cowries. Each salt-bag contained "ili ego", and such bags contained "ili ego neli". Altogether, 100 bags made up the "ili ego neli neli"; and they were collected within four days and taken to Moorhouse.

Before going back to Asaba with the six leaders of the Amikwo people, Major Moorhouse asked Oka how they made peace so that people could intermingle again after a war. Oka told him that two combatant communities would bring a head of oil palm fruits each. That the two heads of palm fruits would be slashed to pieces and the nuts mixed together: That meant, "na ama ugu", that is to say, that peace had been made. The palm nuts would later be thrown away; and from that time onwards if anybody should kill another he must hang. That was Oka law.

So, in the presence of Major Moorhouse, at Avbia Mgbede market place, Amikwo and Agulu each brought a head of oil palm fruits which were slashed to pieces; and the palm nuts were mixed together. The Amikwo-Agulu war thus came to an end [1904, June].

Six cowries made up a unit of Oka currency then, it was called onuego. Orukwo (Oru-Ukwu) was onuego in 100 places, that is, 600 cowries. Orukwo-Orukwo was called nnu-ego, that is, 1,200 cowries. Orukwo multiplied by five, was called ili-ego, that is, 3,000 cowries. Ili-ego was contained in one bag of salt hence the name akpa ego. When the British introduced their own currency, ili-ego was equivalent to #1/-/- or 20 shillings.

1d (one penny) was equivalent to 30 onuego that is $30 \times 6 = 180$ cowries. 1/2d (half-a-penny) was equivalent to $15 \times 6 = 90$ cowries. Ili-ego neli was 10 bags of salt that is $3,000 \times 10 = 30,000$ cowries, which was the dowry for woman. Ili-ego-neli-neli was $30,000 \times 10 = 300,000$ cowries. Tolo, the three-penny-piece, which was the first minted money introduced by British, was equivalent to $180 \times 3 = 540$ cowries] "nnu ego na ugu asaa"). Cowry was called "ego", that is money.

When Major Moorhouse picked the six leaders of Amikwo and declared that he would take them to Asaba, everybody thought that they would be killed there in retaliation for the many people killed in Agulu; that these people would be held responsible for the deaths. Agulu people were happy and hoped that they would be killed, but the rest of Oka were not. Two men boldly came out and pleaded for them, they were Nwibe of Umuogbunu and Madaiyiyo of Umukwa. They begged the Whiteman to spare the life of the persons he had arrested; they said, how can these people be taken to be the killers of the important men of Agulu? That "when guns are taken to the bush in a war no one can say who killed whom"; therefore, these people should not be killed.

Major Moorhouse promised to take their plea into consideration. He then took the six men away. Those six leaders were:-

- (1) Molokwu Okafor, (Nweze Okpuo's father)
- (2) Adu Nwokolo, (Ekwegbeli's father, he was an Ezeana),
- (3) Nwankwo Ogbusu (a relative of Nwachikwu Okpo, he was a native of Umuokpu Village by origin but lived in Igweogige).

These three were from Igweogige Quarter; the other three were from Okperi Quarter. They were:-

- (4) Nwankwo Umeadu
- (5) Nwiyi
- (6) Nwokavbo Okoye (Ifedumma Odi)

Ezekwem Okafor - Amari, the General of the Amikwo Army, was away when the British came. When he returned he was told about what had happened in his absence; that the British had taken away his brother, and he pleaded with the Major to release his

brother, Molokwu, on the ground that Molokwu was old, and could not survive the rigours of imprisonment; he said that he would take Molokwu's place. As Ezekwem was a person that was being sought, Moorhouse acceded to his request, released Molokwu, and took him into custody in his stead.

After a few days under confinement, Ezekwem again begged to be taken before Major Moorhouse. He told Major Moorhouse to shoot him; that for three years he had been at war with the Agulu people but they couldn't kill him on the battle field; but now that the war was finished he was afraid they would kill him in prison by having his food poisoned. Therefore, he wanted to tell him that he would no longer eat the Prison food; he would rather be shot.

Major Moorhouse sympathized with his fears, and released him from prison custody. He made him one of the people who went about with him breaking the guns of the people brought under British subjection.

At the end of six months, Major Moorhouse returned to Oka, bringing with him the Amikwo leaders he had taken away – but not all of them, because Nwankwo Ogbusu had died in prison. Major Moorhouse released the remaining four, but continued to keep Ezekwem to work with him, as a free man; Ezekwem went with him all over the place breaking guns.

When Major Moorhouse came back to Oka in 1905, he had reported to his superiors on his visit in June 1904 to end the Amikwo – Agulu war; and now he had specific instructions from his Government to establish a Government Station at Oka, and to bring the town and district under subjection. The Oka people knew of his coming, and for what purpose; but they had been advised by those of them who were familiar with the Royal Niger Company not to offer any resistance, otherwise the British would wipe out the town with their big guns, called Maxim guns, to which Oka had no answer, as well as poison gas.

And so the British take-over of Oka town passed without incident. It was done by negotiation.

Major H.C. Moorhouse and his troops stayed at the same place in Umuanaga Village in which they had stayed in 1904. But he now sent a message to all Quarters of Oka to assemble at the Oye Nwovbuvbe market place in Umuogbu Village on January 6th 1905. All Oka attended, and Major Moorhouse addressed them.

He told them that the Government had come to stay and to open up the country to trade, with free roads and free markets, and that they in return must give up certain practices like slave-trading and the use of their Juju (called Agbala) which was used for obtaining slaves. He told them that as they were then to be under the protection of the British Government, they had no need of guns; therefore, they must bring out and surrender all their guns, of whatever kind, to be broken. Finally, he asked for a place to build a Government Station in their town.

Okolubu Ezikuno of Umudioka village spoke for Oka. He told the Whiteman that they were like the moon (Oka bu onwa), that they neither killed yams nor did they kill coco-yams (anyi anara egbu ji ma anyi anara egbu ede). That they had heard his demands,

and would carry them out. That as for a place to stay they would show him a suitable site in their town to build his station.

The Oka people then went and brought out their war guns and they were broken at Oye Nwovbuve and buried in a heap in one corner of the market. Then they showed him a number of sites to choose from in Oka, and he chose Agu Egbe, which he commanded the Oka people to clear for him and they did; and he built a Government Station there – the present Awka Government Station. He chose the place because it was hilly and had two springs nearby – Okika and Ogba – and a stream, Obibia.

Major Moorhouse then set up the British Administration. He placed Oka under the rule of a District Officer; and the first man he appointed there was Lieutenant Wayling, who had a number of soldiers with him.

Major Moorhouse also established a Native Court, made up of Chiefs whom he appointed from the four Quarters of Oka as members, to settle disputes, and enforce Government laws among Oka people.

Major Moorhouse started the building of a new road that linked Onitsha to Oka, which passed through Ogidi. The road begun in 1905 and was finished in 1907 – the Onitsha – Oka road.

Thus, Oka became a British protectorate, and lost her independence; all because of the Amikwo – Agulu war. It marked the end of an era.

The first set of Chiefs appointed by the first British Administrative Officers were, from:

- (1) Agulu:- Okeke Omeligbo (Succeeded by his son Obuora) and Onwura Uzoku, all of Umuanaga Village;
- (2) Amikwo:- Onyebunamma, elder brother of Dike Nwancho, but when he died Dike was given a Warrant; also Nweze Okpuo son of Molokwu;
- (3) Ezioka:- Molokwu of Umukwe;
- (4) Amachalla-na-ato:- Onyewuegbune of Umuzocha
- (5) Nkwelle:- Nwosu Okpachie (father of Ojiako);
- (6) Ayom-na-Okpala:- Ofodile Nwamalevbi Ndigwe;
- (7) Ifiter-Oka:- Anufa, father of Nwude.

These were called Warrant Chiefs. There was no paramount Chief among them. They were all equals.

Chapter 12

The Coming of the Christians

“You have nothing to reach the Oka man”.
- Okolobu Ezikuno to the Missionaries.

It was an Avbo market day in the year 1899.

Avbo-Agulu was in full swing. Men and women, but mostly women, were bustling about, pricing and reprising commodities offered for sale. And there was plenty of commodities for sale, for Oka was a very prosperous town in those days.

Suddenly there was a more than usual excitement from the Umuenechi end of the market. A whitewoman, two whitemen, and a Blackman, were seen riding into the market-place on horseback. The Blackman was recognized by some people as Ezeukwu, an Oka man from Umuokpu Village, (a former blacksmith apprentice to Owo of Umuanaga Village) who was leading them, but the white people were strangers. They rode straight along the narrow road through the market. There was a stampede, some hurriedly packed their wares and moved out of the way, and some pressed forward to take a closer look at the strangers.

The strangers did not come to buy anything in the market, for they passed on through the market, turned left, and headed towards Umuanaga Village. The curious ones who followed them reported that they stopped at the house of Owo Ukaozo in Umuanaga Village.

It was on this very day that Mama Nwudunkwo Obukwel Aguiyi, affectionately called by her husband's people “Omume-atuche”, and mother of Able and Paul Aguiyi was entering into the “mbubu” ceremony, which would take her out of girlhood; for she had just married Aguiyi Ncheazu, a leading man in Amudo Village, and was about to leave the status of girlhoods behind. She had come to visit her married sister, and had branched into the Avbo market to buy some necessary things for her ceremony.

Mama Obukwel said she remembered that day very well. People going home from Avbo market carried the news of the arrival of the white people to all corners of Oka.

The white people who had come amidst such excitement were the Reverend S. R. Smith – Secretary of the Church Missionary Society – then based at Onitsha, who became known to the Oka people later on as “Uzu”, because his name was “Smith”, a woman, whom the Oka people nicknamed “Nwamgbeke” (thought to be Mrs. T. J. Dennis); and two companions.

The Christians had arrived! They were of the Anglican Communion.

Owo brought them to the Obu of Onwurah, because Onwurah's Obu or Hall was more commodious than his own.

Out in the Village Square people were later invited to meet the strangers. The Missionaries preached to the crowd, and then promised to come again.

Four years after, in 1903, they came again; this time to ask for land to stay. Agulu people happily obliged, because this was at the height of the Amikwo-Agulu war, and they hope that the whitemen would aid them in their fight with Amikwo. Early in 1904, under the leadership of Reverend G.T. Basden, the Church Missionaries Society began its work in Oka town.

This is how Rev. Basden described their early days in Oka. (This account is found in the C.M.S. Log Book, kept at the National Archives, Enugu):

“At the commencement life at Awka was (fairly) difficult. The people on the whole, were not anxious to have us in their midst, knowing (fully) well that the advent of the whiteman meant, inevitably, the cessation of some of the questionable practices in vogue. A section of the people, viz, those of the Agulu Quarter were more ready to accept us hoping thereby to reap some advantage over their then enemies the people of Amikwo Quarter.

The site granted to us formed part of the Ajo Ofia of the town and the general belief was, undoubtedly, that (the) spirits of the dead would (have) such disturbing (effect) that we should be glad enough to forsake the place. The Awka folk would neither work for us, nor sell materials, and the first two years were far from being overwhelmingly luxurious. It was a matter of great difficulty to erect the original premises: the students had to prepare the mud, and the Europeans had to lay it to a great extent and build the huts. For several weeks the whole party lived in and shared the one long room”.

The Missionaries built a church and started preaching. They were called “Ndu Uka” – conversationalists, story-tellers, that is, preachers.

In the mat house which they used as their Church, Rev. Basden and his colleagues began to gather boys to teach them reading and writing, and the Bible. After many boys had begun to attend, the Missionaries got another area of land near the Udo Shrine, at the Iyokpu Quarter of Oka, and started a full-scale school building. It was called St. Faith’s School, and it opened in 1905. Among the first students to St. Faith’s School were Nwabueze Iloanya, Madubuobu Udeoba, George Mbogu and Thomas Nwana. The Missionaries, however, continued the training of evangelists, catechists and teachers in the old building known as t. Paul.

In the same year, 1905, the British Government established itself in Oka town, and constructed the Onitsha-Oka-road. The following year, 1906, the Government built a school of its own, called Awka Government School, on land donated by Umuogbuagu Family of Okperi, whose Head was then Mogbo, and by Umunakweo Family, of the same Okperi Quarter of Amikwo Village.

The Government School was opened for classes in January, 1907. The first headmaster of the School was Mr. Obro, an Asaba man.

The first set of scholars at the Government School were:-

- (a) From Amaenyi Quarter**
 - (1) Wilfred Okafor Udeozo

- (2) Nwobu Nwokoye (Ndefo)
- (3) Josiah Analokwu Okafor
- (4) Machie Ndife (Pastor Ndife's senior brother)
- (5) Ozo Nwaezenagu Chiaghana
- (6) Nwude Anufa of Ifite-Awka;

(b) From Ezioka Quarter:

- (7) Mbonu Anunobu
- (8) Onyekwe of Amudioka
- (9) Okoye (Obodoaku) Onwumbiko
- (10) Nwaezeji Okoye
- (11) Moses Nwaakafor Okoli
- (12) Victor Okoli Oji
- (13) Mogbo Asiegbu

(c) From Amikwo Quarter:

- (14) Nwobudigwe Molokwu
- (15) Christopher Onyechi Dike
- (16) Chinwuba Nwokoye

(d) From Agulu Quarter:

- (17) Ejike Nwobuana
- (18) Onyenyilionwu Nwobuekkwe
- (19) Ozoemene Kachi
- (20) Ugochukwu Nwakalo
- (21) Nwadigwe Anago
- (22) Nwaokodigbo Chinwuba and
- (23) Mbiko Aniche

The first public to the Government School were contributed by the villages, or Quarters of Oka. Each of the four Quarters was required to send a certain number of pupils compulsorily and within the Quarter each village had a quota to contribute. Communities were then made to contribute financially to the education of these children. This was the first instance of compulsory free education in Oka! The British did this in order to train as rapidly as possible enough man-power for their use in ruling the country.

After St. Faith's School had been established by the Missionaries and the Government School by the Government, the Missionaries asked for an extension of the land given to them. On that extension, and with the aid of the school children, they put up a big church building known as "St. Faith's Church". The Church was built in 1907.

From their two bases at St. Paul's and at St. Faith's Churches, the Anglican Missionaries carried on their evangelization work in and around Oka town.

All those who attended the Government School, and all those who attended St. Faith's School, automatically became members 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 – nine years of schooling in all.

Boys who went to school in those days were quite grown up, and one of them, Richard Chikwuneke Anagbogu, said that he stopped schooling for one year after 1910, and

resumed again in 1912 in Primary 3, which was Infant 3. He said he must have been twenty-one years of age, because the yams he cultivated in 1911, when he dropped from school, helped his father in his Ozo title, which his father took in that year, 1911!! On the other hand, the standard of education was very high, and a Standard 1 or 2 boys had acquired enough knowledge to enable him secure employment in firms or other places requiring the knowledge of the English language. For many years the minimum standard for entering the Police Force was Standard 4.

Twelve years after the Anglican Church had been established in Oka, three adventurous boys, named Festus Nnatu Dilibe of Amudo Village, Samuel Nwanenye Nwosu, of Nkwelle Village, and Vincent Ndukwe, of Umudioka Village went to Nteje to interest the Roman Catholic Church into coming to Oka. This was in 1915.

The motive for the journey, as was related by three of them – Festus Nnatu Dilibe, Samuel Nwanenye Nwosu, and Richard Chikwuneke Anagbogu – was that boys found going to school at Iyokpu, and the Government School at Agu Egbe far too strenuous. Therefore, they wanted the Roman Catholic Church to come and establish a school at Amaenyi, so that a school could be near them.

The Rev. Father they met was Reverend Father Bubendorf. At first, Father Bubendorf did not take them seriously; and in order to impress him the boys increased the numbers in their delegation, until they were altogether eleven. These eleven boys kept on going to Nteje, on foot, since there were no vehicles, until they overcame the reluctance of the Reverend Father with their eagerness and persistence.

The Catholic Fathers started their evangelical work in the Igbo country in 1885; the C.M.S was first in time, having come to Onitsha in 1857. The Catholics had their headquarters in Nteje.

The eleven boys who met Father Bubendorf were:-

- (1) Festus Nnatu Dilibe of Amudo Village
- (2) Samuel Nwanenye Nwosu, of Nkwelle Village
- (3) Vincent Ndukwe of Umudioka Village
- (4) Richard Chikwuneke Anagbogu of Amachalla Village
- (5) George Chikwunweike Ofodile of Umuayom Village
- (6) Alexander Nwokoye of Umudioka Village
- (7) Dominic Dibo Udeozo, of Umuogbunu Village
- (8) Nwejim Ndife, of Umuayom Village
- (9) Joseph Ekweanya of Umunnoko Village
- (10) Jeremiah Nwobuajulu Okeke, of Nkwelle Village
- (11) Christian Nwanachebe Egbunonu of Umduioka Village.

When Father Bubendorf saw the persistence of these boys, he agreed to come and open a school for them; but first of all he said he must see a responsible person in the community. He came to Oka and was taken to Chief Ofodile Ndigwe (Nwamalevbi) of Umuayom Village, a Warrant Chief, who promised to show him land to build a school. He showed him a piece of land near the Ovia ravine, not far from Ovia Stream, at the former Mile 25 on the Onitsha-Enugu Road. Amaenyi and Amachalla people helped to

put up a long mat house there. The walls of the building were mud walls and the roof was of "atani" mats.

The school opened in January, 1916, the first Headmaster of the school was Felix Udeme, a native of Ossomari.

All those boys who were attending Government School, and were complaining of the long distance, now transferred to this school. It was called "Roman Catholic School, Awka, "One Sundays religious services were held in the school hall, conducted by the same Headmaster. All the boys attending the school became automatically the first members of the Roman Catholic Church in Oka.

As the school developed, some boys from Agulu Quarter, and the extreme end of Ezioka Quarter, complained that it was too far for them! Because of this, the school was moved to a new site, along the Onitsha-Enugu road, exactly where Chief Elias Oyeoka Ofodile, a son of Chief Ofodile Nwamalevbi, in later years made his compound. Later still, it was moved from there to its present location at Umuzocha Village, in order to be yet more central, on land granted by the Umuzocha people. The school then became known as "St. Patrick's School", whose premises, later expanded, contained the Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Oka.

As the number of children wanting to go to St. Patrick's School increased. it became necessary to build a feeder school at the lower end of Oka, to collect the very young ones who could not walk the distance to Umuzocha Village. (In the same way as Mr. Wilfred Okafor Udeozo, a Government Surveyor did for St. Faith's and Government Schools. When he came home on leave in 1939, he built the Umuezeukwu School in Amudo Village, later to be called All Saints School, and, later still, Udeozo Memorial School, in co-operation with his friend, Mr. Mbonu Anunoby of Umudioka Village, to collect little children and give them instructions before they were strong enough to travel to St. Faith's School at Iyokpu, or to the Government School at Agu-Egbe). For the purpose of building the feeder school to the said St. Patrick's School, land was acquired along the road to Achalla, and when it was built, in 1947, it was named St. Mary's School.

The Catholic Church spread from Oka to Nibo, Nise, Amawbia, Amansea, Ugwuoba and Ebenebe.

The early Christians in Oka, both Anglican and Catholic had on the whole, no problem. The attitude of the Oka people towards them was one of good humour and tolerance, but never of hostility. Parents encouraged their children to go to Church in order to obtain the whiteman's knowledge, and husband raised no objections if their wives chose to join the Christians, not because they believed that the whiteman's religion was better than their own, but because the Oka man was always tolerant of other people's views and beliefs: "Live and let live", was his daily prayer - "Egbe bel ugo bel".

Christians were shown land freely (even if some were Ajo Ovbias, or "bad bush"!) and generally buildings were put up for them, and gifts of food made to them. They were not obstructed in their work, nor discriminated against. Hence, the Christian religions survived and flourish in Oka town.

There were very few conflicts. For when the early Oka Christian converts wanted to demonstrate their enthusiasm for their new faith by killing and eating the black monkey, which the religion of the Oka people forbade, the European Missionaries, who were pastmasters in diplomacy, did not encourage them to do so; they knew that affronting the people was not the best way of drawing them to the Church.

There were, however, interesting stories which originated from this early period of the Christians in Oka, when the two religions were learning to accommodate each other.

No Oka man, under any circumstance, would knowingly eat the meat of a black monkey. "Onwere Onye Oka na aso enwe, ibie ana elie". The reason was that the black monkey, which lived within the town among people (as opposed to the brown monkey which lived in the bush), was an animal dedicated to Imoka, and like everything owned by a god, it was sacred, and must not be touched. Visitors to Oka used to comment on this custom by saying: "Anu jul Oka aka, ewevbe wel enwe chuol Alusi" (It is because Oka have surplus meat, that they could consecrate the black monkey to the gods).

The story went that "ikpukpa", an animal much like the rabbit, which lived in the bush, was the first animal dedicated to Imoka, but after the Okoli Ijoma or Ada war, when the black monkey performed a service to Oka, by alerting Oka people to their danger through making noises on the approach of the enemy, the ikpukpa was demoted, and the black monkey was elevated to the status of an animal sacred to the gods, which must not be killed.

There was a story connected with this taboo of the black monkey. It went as follows: Two Oka men, one who would be called Nunti and the other who would be called Anunti, went on a journey. They came to a foreign land, and their host entertained them to a meal. As they began to eat, they discovered that the meat in their soup was black-monkey meat. Nunti immediately stopped eating, and washed his hands. But Anunti continued eating, saying:-

"Since I have started eating, I might as well finish"
["ka nli vbe, nam elivberego"].

Not long after, Anunti fell ill. His people went to a Dibia (diviner) to find out what caused his illness, and how he could be cured. The Dibia cast his "avba" shells, and announced that it was the god, Imoka that was killing him. The relatives then asked the Dibia to find out from the god what must be done to appease him. The Dibia threw his shells once again, and then revealed that the god had said:

"Since I have started killing him, I might as well finish"
["ka mgbuve, nam egbu vberego"].

Shortly after, Anunti died.

Another story was that a group of early Christians took the Nkwu, the movable altar of the god, Imoka which was carried round during its Festivals (called "uvbo"), and threw it into the Ovia ravine.

The whole of Oka didn't go to work that day, but searched for this altar throughout the town, mourning. At last it was found where it had been thrown.

It happened that the leader of the group that did this sacrilegious act, a Christian, was a member of the family of the Imoka Priest himself.

Shortly after the incident he was reported missing. After some search he was found at the back of their house, dead, with a heap of soldier-ants covering his body from head to foot.

Whether it was because of these mysterious deaths, or because of the tact and diplomacy of the white Missionaries, there was healthy respect for each other, between the two religions in Oka town. An instance of real conflict occurred only in modern times, when "uncomprehending strangers out of excess of zeal", attempted to lay down the law for everybody; but the conflict was short-lived, and it ended without leaving a scar behind; and mutual respect once more prevailed.

The Christian religion spread in Oka from the bottom up, that is, from school children to adults. The Missionaries were the vehicle for acquiring Europeans knowledge, particularly the art of reading and writing, which parents greatly wished their children to acquire; and in those days, to be a school-boy was automatically to be a Christian. That aspect was not hard. The difficulty came in converting the adults.

Mrs. T. J. Dennis, in her report already quoted had said of the Oka people:

"From what I have said it will easily be seen that the Oka men would make excellent evangelists for the Ibo country, if only they could be converted to Christ".

How to convert them to Christ became the difficulty. The reason being that the Missionaries were not working in a vacuum, with the task of just putting things in. The Oka people had a high civilization of their own, with their own philosophy and view of life, which the Missionaries would have to penetrate if their Christian beliefs were to make headway. The burden lay on them to show to the Oka man in what way their beliefs were superior to his beliefs.

For to every set of rules of conduct preferred by the whiteman, the Oka man put beside it his own parallel tenets. To the Whiteman's belief in one God, the Oka man showed that he had that belief before the whiteman came, even though he also recognized other gods.

To the rule by the Missionaries, that one should not commit adultery, the Oka man countered by saying that he not only had such a rule, but that his own rule went further, that whereas under the rule of adultery of the whiteman, the whiteman's son could properly marry the whiteman's brother's daughter (first cousins), in Oka religion it was "Alu", that is, abomination, conduct absolutely forbidden: that no one in Oka could marry a person to whom he was related by blood, no matter how distantly, if only the relationship could be traced.

And to another rule against adultery, that one should not have sexual intercourse with another man's wife, the Oka man repositied that his rule on the subject went further than that of the whiteman, that in Oka religion a man must not even step over a married woman's legs while she was down; or if he was bathing in a stream, allow the water from his body to touch her as she passed by.

Okolobu Ezikuno, one of the leading Oka people at the time of the coming of the Christians and the British Government, said to a white Missionary who had come to preach to him:

"You people have nothing to teach the Oka man".

"That is not quite so", the whiteman was reported to have answered, "for my religion will save you from group tyranny, my religion teaches individual liberty.

The Oka man replied: "What you call group-tyranny keeps Oka together.

This reported exchange between the two men concerned the weight upon an individual of his family and his community, that is to say, the obligation of the individual Oka man to conform to the dictates of his group on pain of being ostracized, which the whiteman called "group tyranny". This could be heavy at times! There was thus a lot of meaning in what the two men were saying to each other.

Another story concerned Oji Nwemeluwa (the oldest Oka man of his day) and a Christian Priest. The Christian Priest had gone to Oji Nwemeluwa to preach to him. He spoke to Oji Nwemeluwa about life everlasting. Oji listened patiently to him, and when he had finished, Oji asked:

"My son, are you married?"

"No", replied the Priest, who was a Roman Catholic Father.

"Then go and get married", said Oji Nwemeluwa, "and beget children, for children are everlasting.

"Ntonto tota ntonta, ntonta atota ntonto,

[Amuta nnwa, nnwa amuta ebie],

"Avbu nnwa, nnwa amuta ibie],

"Avbu nnwa, echete nna", meaning

The father begets a son and the son begets another son,

And so on down the line,

And when you see a son, you remember the father,

That is life everlasting.

Then there was the story of Nwosu Okoye-Oji of Umunnoke Village and another Christian Priest, this time an Anglican. The Christian Priest had gone to visit Nwosu Okoye-Oji Nwosu brought a kolanut and offered it to him. The Priest asked him to break it. Nwosu said to him:

"I hear you people don't approve of our way of praying to our gods [that is, 'ngo oji]?"

"No, we don't approve", said the Priest.

"Could it be because you do not understand us?", asked Nwosu Okoye-Oji.

"We understand you", answered the Priest.

"Very well", said Nwosu, taking up the kolanut, "if I say, "May Chikwu (God) give you long life and also give me long life, would that be alright?"

"Yes" the Priest replied.

"And if I say, may you prosper in all your endeavours in Oka town, would that be alright?"

"Yes" the Priest replied

"And if I say, may you return to your house as safely as you have come to mine, would that offend you?"

"No", replied the Christian Priest.

Nwosu Okoye-Oji broke the kolanut, and they ate!

These reported conversations were more significant than appeared on the surface. They showed a veritable contest between two sets of values, the original and the incoming.

The white Missionaries at first did not make much headway. They were baffled and discouraged by the pertinacity with which Oka beliefs held on, despite their efforts. When one preached to the Oka man, to what one said to him the Oka man matched it wit his own. The Missionaries felt that at that rate they would always remain outsiders in Oka. So, they turned to the temporal power for assistance – to the District Officer.

The District Officer was the absolute ruler of Oka town and its district behalf of the King of England. He had the guns and he had the soldiers. What he said was law.

He gladly came to the aid of the Missionaries.

One day in August 1911, the District Officer commanded the Oka people and the people of the neighboring towns, to assemble at the Nkwo Market place in Enugu-Ukwu. There, under the pressure of his presence, the Eze-Nri (The Head Priest of the Nri people) who occupied a special place in Igbo religious practices, particularly in the cleansing of abominations, was made formally to announce, with his Ovbo in hand, that all Nso and Alu in Igbo land were from that date abolished: That, thenceforth, nothing was "nso" and nothing was "alu" anymore; no one would suffer any consequences for their breach.

Thus, all the rules for behavior developed by the Oka people for their guidance as a people were summarily abolished.

The laws of the Oka people were grouped under three heads, two of which were serious and weighty rules, namely, Nso Ana, conduct which must be avoided, and Alu conduct which must not only be avoided but was absolutely forbidden; the two were distinguished by the sanctions or punishments for them. There were, lesser laws, called "iwu", which were rules to regulate minor everyday activities, but those carried no religious sanctions. It was the two categories of laws – Nso and Alu that touched on

the corporate existence of Oka town: without their observance Oka, as a community, would disintegrate, and lose her cohesion. She would be a town without laws.

It was Nso Ana and Alu that were compendiously called "Omenana", that is to say Oka tradition, or Oka native laws and customs, or Oka customary law. They are together with the practices of Oka culture, comprised the distinctive way of life which the Oka people had built up for themselves over the many centuries of their existence.

Justice Andrews Otutu Obaseki, a Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria, in the case of Princess Oyewunmi & Anor. vs. Amos Ogunesan, [1990]3 N.W.L...R. (Pt. 137) 182 at page 207 defined "customary law" thus:

"Customary law is the organic or living law of the indigenous people of Nigeria regulating their lives and transactions. It is organic in that it is not static. It is regulatory in that it controls the lives and transactions of the community subject to it. It is said that custom is a mirror of the culture of the people. I would say that customary law goes further and imports justice to the lives of all those subject to it".

It was that customary law of Oka, that Oka way of life that the British abolished in 1911, without blinking an eye.

The person, who first told the author the story of what happened at Nkwo Enugwu-Ukwu in 1911, before other people corroborated it, was Ozo Elias Ajaegbu-Mgbakor of Urunnebo Village, Enugwu-Ukwu. The story was so startling and unbelievable that Ozo Ajaegbu-Mgbakor promised to back it up with corroborative evidence. Later, he brought to the author a booklet published by the then East-Central State Government entitled "Historical Events List of Local, Regional and National Significance", and issued by the East-Central State Census Committee on 6th July, 1973. At page 30 of that publication, under the year 1911, there was the following information:-

Later still, the author found another written confirmation from a totally unexpected source, namely, the Report of Northcote Thomas, the Government Anthropologist, already referred to. In Part 1 of his anthropological report, which was entitled "Law and Custom of the Ibo of the Awka Neighborhood, S. Nigeria", at page 59 thereof, Thomas Northcote wrote as follows:-

"A characteristic of the life of these Ibo is existence of numbers of forbidden acts, known as nso ani, which may conveniently be termed bans...These bans affect matrimonial relations and in fact sexual relations generally, the birth and behaviour of children and among adults, more especially of women. . . . In some cases one town permits what another forbids.

"So far as the Awka district is concerned the bans (nso ani) were with one exception abolished in due form in August, 1911; but a change of this magnitude is naturally not effected in a day, nor even realized by those concerned. Apart from the unnecessary sacrifices, many of the bans are, in themselves, harmless; others, such as the prohibition to marry blood relatives are a part of ordinary civilized law".

From the comments of this Expert (who does not seem to have approved of what he saw) and who must have been an eye-witness of the event he described – an event he

said was one of great magnitude – it was clear that the laws and customs of the Oka people were abolished by the British in 1911, not because they were barbarous, or inimical to societal growth, but in order to make way for the Missionaries, to make it noted that this unprecedented proceeding took place in Oka district alone, and no where else in Igbo land. It was an act directed particularly against the Oka people.

That the forcible abolition of Oka customary law had an immediate and salutary effect on the fortunes of the Missionaries is shown in the fact that a rapid upward growth of the Church from that year was recorded. In a book written by the Holy Ghost Fathers of the Onitsha Archdiocese, entitled “Short Life of Bishop Shanahan C.S.SP”, the following statement is found at the beginning of Chapter VI:

The turning point in the history of the Church in Southern Nigeria took place between 1911 and 1913. Up to 1911 there was always the possibility that the catechist – teacher system would collapse thro’ lack of funds, or thro’ actual opposition from small bodies of ju-ju men and tiled men of the old order. But by 1913 the future was clearly outlined. The Catholic Church had come to stay”.

The new comers had triumphed!

It is a matter for speculation how widespread and deep, the Church would have grown in Oka town if the event of 1911 had not taken place; if the love of friendship exhibited by the Missionaries at the beginning of their stay in Oka had continued. It is possible that the unfortunate division that later developed would not have occurred, and that much faster and more solid progress would have been made by the Church. This is because Oka customary law was itself an organic law, not a static law, and if conversion by conviction had been persisted in, the people themselves might have adapted their rules to meet the challenges of the new age; and instead of the antagonism of two hostile camps that resulted, a great many more people would have become Christians. That this was a possibility shown by what took place in 1936:

It was an abomination for a woman to wear a man’s dress, particularly for a woman to pass a rolled cloth between her legs and knot it at the back; because that was how a man dressed for work in the farms, for climbing palm trees or for wrestling. (The Hebrews had the same prohibition against a woman wearing a man’s dress. They also considered it an abomination. (See Deuteronomy, Chapter 22, Verse 5).

After the event of 1911 above described, young Oka women, in imitation of white women, not only began to wear drawers, but also trousers. Seeing that a large number of their daughters were thus committing abomination, the Oka people decided to remove it as an offence. And so, on a day in the year 1936, all the Ezeanas, of Oka brought their Ovbos to the shrine of Aja-Oka, and there, after a ceremony, solemnly declared that if a woman passed a cloth between her legs, and thus wore men’s dress, it was no longer an abomination – alu. That law was there and then changed.

It showed the dynamism of Oka culture.

The British officer concerned with the abolition of nso ana and alu did not regard what he had done to Oka as cultural enslavement of a people. He must have justified his

action in his own way by reasoning that there must be destruction before a rebuilding. But, unfortunately, what was being rebuilt had no foundation in what was destroyed, for the foundation had been removed.

“Colonization may indeed be a very complex affair, but one thing is certain: You do not walk in, seize the land, the person, the history of another, and then sit back and compose hymns of praise in his honour. To do that would amount to calling yourself a bandit; and you don’t want to do that. So what do you do? You construct very elaborate excuses for your action. You say, for instance, that the man in question is worthless and quite unfit to manage himself or his affairs. If there are valuable things like gold or diamonds which you are carting away from his territory, you proceed to prove that he doesn’t own them in the real sense of the word – that he and they just happened to be lying around the same place when you arrived. Finally, if the worse comes to the worst, you may even be prepared to question whether such as he can be, like you, fully human. From denying the presence of a man standing there before you, you end up questioning his very humanity”.

A dramatic proof that Professor Achebe was right in this characterization of colonialism, was shown in a document which Dr. Nwibe Onejeme, Barrister-at-Law, discovered during his researches in the British Museum. It was a Report of 22nd July, 1905, sent by the High Commissioner of Southern Nigeria, Sir Walter Egerton, to the British Secretary of State, concerning those places which had been brought under British control between October 1904 and June 1905. Referring to Oka, Sir Walter had added a personal note thus:-

“Oka is interesting as the Headquarters of a very large community of blacksmiths and copper smiths, and men from this place are found in the most distant parts of the Protectorate. They execute wonderfully good work with the most primitive apparatus. I traversed the whole of this District myself a month after the patrol completed its work and, though it was deemed advisable that I should be accompanied by a considerable Escort, I never met with any opposition. Though I frequently bicycled far ahead along the native paths, I saw no signs of hostility though the unusual sight of my machine caused great consternation to most of the people we met”.

Dr. Onejeme made his own note on this passage in the Report as follows:-

“For some reason, somebody in the Colonial Office had minuted that this section be omitted from the report, and other, apparently, a superior, had commented ‘rather interesting and leave it in’”.

So, one is indebted to that unknown superior officer, who had found the said passage personally interesting, for the retention of such a revealing report, which confirmed, from the mouth of the colonial masters themselves, that Oka had a high civilization at the time of its loss of independence to the British. But for that superior Officer, the policy of suppressing every good

reference to Oka, and anything that tended to show that Oka people were not barbarous but civilized, would have held sway; and the tiny glimpsed of what the Oka people were like, before their independence was extinguished by the British masters, would have been denied the present age. All would have been darkness; there would have been no recorded proof that Oka people had at any time in their lives any kind of civilization of their own, before the advent of the white man.

The stubborn resistance of Oka culture to its displacement by an alien culture (until its forcible overthrow) was not peculiar to Oka. It was a universal phenomenon. Hamilton Gibbs, in the book, King Solomon's Temple, already referred to, noted as follows:-

"A living culture disregards or rejects all elements in other cultures which conflict with its own fundamental values, emotional attitudes, or aesthetic criteria.

And Oka culture was alive and well at the time of its purported abolition, and that was why it was not easy to displace it.

The coming of the Christians to Oka had its peculiar characteristics. It was not a gradual assimilation of the old to the new, as in many other countries, but the violent truncation of a wholesome body.

The result was that the educated Oka people of the 1920s to the 1940s, and part of the 1950s, were not Oka, and they were not whiteman. They had no culture they called their own. They were made to show their zeal for Christianity by turning their back resolutely on everything Oka, and embracing thin air. Thin air, because they rejected their own, but could not successfully follow the culture and way of life of the whitemen they were told to imitate, which were the product of the whitemen's experience and environment.