



## **NIGERIA INDEPENDENCE IN THE UPPER CROSS RIVER REGION: PEOPLES' EXPECTATIONS AND FEELINGS**

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### **Abstract:**

*Situated within the present Cross River State of Nigeria, in this study, the Upper Cross River covers the entire northern half of the State comprising Biase, Ugep, Obubra, Ikom, Ogoja and Obudu administrative divisions. This unique setting experienced colonial rule with its attendant socio-cultural, educational and other legacies under the former Eastern Region, until independence was granted to Nigeria on October 1, 1960. The general impression is that independence was widely embraced with a lot of euphoria throughout the country. Recent research reveals that the picture was variegated and that numerous factors conditioned peoples' response to the event. These factors include the existing communication profile, remoteness of the area from the centres where the main celebrations took place, the age and occupation of respondents in a locality, and the peculiarities of different areas. However, with the emancipation story, some respondents dreamt dreams of high expectations for Nigeria. The thrust of this paper is to examine the response of people in this region to the attainment of independence by Nigeria on October 1, 1960 and to explain why they reacted the way they did.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Independence, Upper Cross River Region & Expectations.

### **1. Introducing the Upper Cross River Region of Nigeria:**

Situated within the present Cross River State of Nigeria, the Upper Cross River Region (UCRR) (see Figure 1) occupies the entire Northern half of Cross River State lying between latitudes 4° 30' 7", and, longitudes 7° 30' and 9° east of the equator (Erim: 1990: 40). The region comprises the administrative divisions of Abi, Biase, Yakurr, Boki, Ikom, Etung, Obubra, Obudu, Ogoja, Obanliku, Yala, largely depicting the huge land mass in the region. The administrative areas referred to here are for convenience and are designated according to the different ethno linguistic groupings inhabiting the area. It is an area of the heterogeneous ethnic groupings of Yakurr, Agbo, Mbembe, Ejagham, Etung, Yala, and Ogoja. Bounded on the North by the Benue region, West by Enugu, Anambra and Abia states, and in the East by the Republic of Cameroon, this area witnessed colonial rule under the former Eastern Region of Nigeria until Nigeria attained independence on October 1, 1960. Notably, the colonial occupation of the different regions of Nigeria, (the UCRR inclusive) was an extremely complex process which brought the British into conflict with the indigenous communities. With the gradual breakdown of indigenous polities in the regions, it transferred the area into a de facto colonial regime until Nigeria attained independent status on October 1, 1960.

### **2. The Pre-Colonial Order:**

The Upper Cross River Society was indeed a stable and well regulated one before European encroachment into the sovereignty of the people. It has a very solid technological base exemplified by monoliths which dot the landscape in Nta, Nnam, Nselle, Akaju, Ukelle, Wakande and Nsadop areas. These relics are reminiscent of an ancient commercial network in the Cross River basin as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Andah and Okpoko: 1988, 70-7). The entire economic system of the region— the

superstructure on which all other structures of a viable society rests— was flexible and indeed receptive to external stimuli. Agriculture was a major preoccupation of the heterogeneous ethnic units in the region, the matrix in which all other indigenous economic activities are set (Latham: 1973, 5; Hopkins 1973: 28; Konczaki and Konczaki: 1973, 41) thus providing the context for the pursuit of other occupations in the region.

The region was not a self-contained geographical unit. The unity of the Cross River waterway and the topography of the area encouraged movement of people and goods into and out of the area subsequently leading to contacts and cross-cultural diffusion among them. The fluidity of the environment led to mass population movements from the Benue, Igbo and Cameroon area into the region (Talbot: 1969; Erim: 1990, 55; Noah: 1978; Dike and Ekejiuba: 1990).

The region exhibited distinct socio-political patterning in its societal organization. People here experienced a conspicuous absence of unitary political authority over segmentary societies in the area. Thus, it was politically fragmented and exhibited no dominant centralised political formations (Horton: 1976, 72-113; Erim: 1990, 117; Curtin et al: 1982, 246). There was no all-encompassing political authority to which the numerous village-republics paid allegiance. Each was fiercely independent and guarded its autonomy jealously.

An institutionalised device in this region served to structure socio-political activities (Ottenberg and Ottenberg: 1960). Thus the public, age grades and secret societies formed part of the judicial and executive systems of the area in pre-colonial days. The institution of age grades provided a mechanism for services which are today performed by the executive organ of modern government. The age grades in their respective categories were important agencies of socialization (Anene: 1966, 4). Thus life was more meaningful to these people within small communities.

*In effect no community was complete without... such was the subtlety, complexity and stability of the society in which the colonial invaders encroached upon in the 1880s (Erim: 1990, 58).*

### **3. Colonial Experience in the Region:**

Historians of Marxist orientation have analysed the main motives of colonialism to be that of exploiting, expropriating and expatriating the resources of people (Rodney: 1972). The imposition of British colonial rule in the UCRR was in several ways, a stunning experience for the people (Erim: 1990, 55). The British assault in this area occasioned far reaching changes on the pre-existing social order and was vigorously resisted in the first instance. The conquest and occupation terminated the political sovereignty of the people, led to loss of lives and insecurity, dislocated the economy and resulted in population redistribution.

By the 1880s, the various European traders broke through Efik political pretensions and trade monopoly in the estuary and sought to do business with the inhabitants of the Upper Cross River Basin. British officials went about signing so-called treaties of friendship with various rulers of the area. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, European traders sought to extend their commercial activities into the hinterland. The Royal Niger Company did much to foster British commercial interests through commercial treaties with indigenous communities.

*In 1883, Harry Hartze of the African Association attempted to “make treaties and acquire concessions” in*

*Old Calabar and up the Cross River on behalf of the company. Hartze was to win over the Old Calabar chiefs with the promise that European traders would not trade in the immediate markets of Old Calabar but in markets that lay beyond the town of Umon on the Cross River (Tangan: 2008, 120).*

Similarly, in a journey up the Cross River, the rabid imperialist, Consul Johnston recorded:

*On the fifth of January, I started on an expedition up the cross River for the purpose of making treaties with the various kings and chiefs along its banks... (Johnston: 1888, 435)*

These treaties of friendship turned out to be harbingers of colonial encroachment into the sovereignty of the people. The pattern of encroachment was entry by treaty of friendship and outright military conquest of each tiny settlement which characterised the region. On the political level, military conquest was followed by the suppression of the old socio-political order; a situation in which some persons who were neither titled nor lineage heads exploited to their advantage. The new political structure borne out of this experience presented problems as well as challenges to the people.

The history of colonial administrative structure in the region could be divided into two periods: (1.) 1891 - 1905 and (2.) 1906 - 1914. The general assessment of this period reflected no definite effort on the part of colonial administrators to study the politics of the new people they met with in order to adjust to the new circumstances. The entire area was arbitrarily divided into divisions, and later into districts. Each division- Obubra, Ikom, Ogoja, Obudu, Abakaliki and Afikpo was directly responsible to the local head of the colonial government designated Commissioner. In 1900, the Cross River division was created with headquarters at Ediba, detaching the Upper Cross River (UCR) affairs from the lower Cross River. This arrangement further changed following the amalgamation of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria with the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos. In 1914, Lugard had to split the Eastern Province into smaller provinces for his administrative efficiency. Afikpo and Abakaliki were included in the Ogoja province comprising Ogoja, Abakaliki and Obubra divisions. The political landscape of the UCR thus witnessed several changes,

*...some elders swiftly referred to these changes 'as the world being turned upside down.' How correct was their assessment. For the first time upstarts and loafers were being recognised as political heads of each settlement. Worse still, the people were being subjected to ... sub-colonialism... (Erim: 1990, 63)*

The arbitrary division of the polity into districts, divisions to suit colonial strategies was indeed revolutionary. It altered the political framework of the hitherto fragmented village units which guarded its autonomy jealously and in effect, wounded their pride as a people.

Indirect rule was introduced in the region by the British. In theory, it did not mean government of African peoples through their chiefs. In practice, it had heavy emphasis on the role of the "chief" in the government of African peoples (Crowder: 1968,

166) and this was contingent on certain modifications. This was to maintain law and order for effective free trade in the area after the several changes which turned things upside down in the entire area. It was rather a pragmatic and economical solution to the financial, personnel, defence and communication problems which confronted the British in the area. This new system led to several mistakes and excruciating hardship for the people. The Native Court system created artificial political figures who were both suspect to the people. These figures were made to exercise authority in which the colonial agents involved them to the neglect of the right persons (Afigbo: 1980, 425) recognised by socio-cultural standards.

The conquest terminated the political sovereignty of the people as it gradually eroded the powers of village heads in the region. It was predicated mainly on economic considerations to achieve the primary goals of colonialism. Hitherto, village heads had absolute control of the affairs of their respective units for they were regarded as the custodians of the traditions of the people. With British colonial intervention in the politics of the respective ethnic units, the Native Court System displaced the authority of the rulers. Warrant chiefs were arbitrarily appointed by the resident British colonial agents without recourse to the laws of the land. In the Yakurr speaking units of Ugep, Ekor, Nko, Nkpani, Idomi, Mgbeke, arbitrary appointments of persons as warrant chiefs was seriously frowned at as captured below:

*... the establishment of... Native court was based on the wrong assumption that the Yakurr never had judicial institutions capable of settling disputes... some... were appointed court members or Warrant chiefs... These men, traditionally had no claim to chieftaincy (Ubi: 2004, 200 - 1).*

The arbitrariness in the appointment of chiefs was informed by the colonial authorities creating a situation to appoint candidates whose loyalty to them would not be in doubt. Most of those who became "chiefs" were upstarts with no claim whatsoever to the traditional chieftaincy institution of the people. It is pertinent to note that this colonial practice was replicated in all the units in the region thereby disrupting the social order of the Upper Cross River society. Among the Ejagham speaking units of Akamkpa, Etung, Ofutop, Nde, Nselle, Abanyum, Nnam, Akparabong, Balep and Bendeghe Afi of Ikom, the Nkim, Nkum and Ekajuk, it is on record that:

*... the Native court system was contemporaneous with the appointment of Warrant chiefs... consistent with the British policy of "Indirect Rule"... Warrant chiefs were so-called because of the Warrants, the certificates of recognition issued to them by the colonial government... like in other parts of south-eastern Nigeria, those appointed... had no right to the traditional chieftaincy institution of the people. The establishment of colonial rule in Ejagham land was similar to what happened among the Boki, the Yakurr and other parts of the Cross River area (Tangban: 2008, 144).*

The native court system retarded the social and economic development of the UCRR peoples in so many ways. It was used as the medium for the execution of the Roads and Creeks ordinance of 1903 which legitimised forced labour and empowered court members to turn out labour for the construction of footpaths and the execution of other

public projects (Ubi: 2004, 204-5). Workmen were not paid by the colonial authorities and the man hour spent on the job made the economic pursuits of the people to suffer.

The agricultural programmes of the colonial administrators in the region centred on export crop production to the utter neglect of food crop production. The development of cash crop plantations adversely affected the rich and varied fauna of the region leading to severe consequences on the ecology. The Health system of the people was indirectly affected as some of the medicinal herbs growing in plantations were destroyed by clearing.

The innovation in the exchange system to replace the traditional currencies in the Protectorates had an economic undertone. By the "Native Currency Proclamation" of 1902, in the Cross River Area, brass roads and the sterling circulated side by side and empowered the Governor of Southern Protectorate of Nigeria, where our region of study is situated, to fix the exchange rate. The introduction of European currencies caused social strains on the peoples of the region. In South-eastern Nigeria, problems associated with the adoption of the sterling contributed to political unrest- the Women's uprising of 1929 - 30 (Tangban: 2008, 162). Excruciating economic conditions propelled women in this area into action (in parts of Igboland) consequently affecting our region of study.

The imposition of direct taxation on the people had serious consequences for it was designed to stimulate production of cash crops in exportable quantities. Direct tax was paid by all adult males, but only few communities in the region were provided with access roads, health centres and Native Administration Schools. Tax evasion was handled with cruelty by the colonial police and the pressure exerted to pay this tax led youths to go in search of paid employment to meet the obligations. This drain retarded socio-economic activities in the region as youths were the groups on which the socio-economic development of the region rested.

The colonial situation so to speak, weakened the faith of the people in their traditional systems, disrupted the society and subsequently engendered the formation of ethnic unions in the region. This aroused the sentiments of the people and mobilised them towards emancipation of their God-given territory from the clutches of colonialism. The partitioning of boundaries arbitrarily by the colonial authorities severed some units from their kith and kins. For example, the Ejagham speaking units of the UCRR in Cross River State whose primordial homeland straddles both sides of the Nigeria-Cameroon border and runs from the UCR to the precincts of Calabar were separated from their kith and kins in the Cameroons through boundary adjustment (Tangban: 2008, VII; Anene: 1970) by the colonial authorities. Generally, this development is observed in all of Africa as a result of colonialism.

The obnoxious policies of the colonial government adversely affected the people. For example, they made some families to lose their sources of cheap labour and introduce new currencies in place of the indigenous ones, making the latter become scrap metal cut up and used as projectiles in Dane guns (Afigbo: 1980). They issued the Roads and Rivers proclamation in 1903 enabling chiefs in the region to remit labour for the roads. Those recruited to work on the roads returned to their villages with strange ideas and resentment against the chiefs who recruited them.

Socially, the changes in the UCRR had far-reaching implications on the lives of the people. With the introduction of the Presbyterian Mission at Calabar in 1846, Christian missionary influence permeated the region and drastically modified the lives of the people along Western lines. The Presbyterian mission in 1846, established

Churches and mission schools in Umon, Ikot Ana, Unwana, Afikpo, Ediba, Itigidi, Apiapum and by 1928 had established a centre in Yala (Ikom). Mission stations were established at Itu (1903), Arochukwu (1904), Ediba (1907), Isu (1908), Itigidi (1908), Obubra (1911), Uburu (1912) and Okposi (1913) (Kalu: 1979, 7). After 1914, missionary activities expanded to areas previously unreached by the gospel. This led to the introduction of monogamy against polygamy and welcoming of twin births contrary to the cultural norms of the people. Conversion of some persons meant loss of adherents to the traditional religion. This bred tension in many communities as was the case in Okangbe Nkpansi and Bansara in 1954 and 1956 respectively. Western education which served the goals of colonial governments was introduced, thereby altering the political, economic, social and religious landscape of the area under discussion.

These changes alienated the people. Many doubted the reality of the changes, while others embraced them, and some resented it altogether, longing for better days ahead and if possible, re-invention of the old model in the region. The mixed feelings persisted in the region. When nationalist activities came up, many in the region embraced the ideology of freedom and joined political parties for the realisation of that dream. The dream eventually came true when independence was granted on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1960. News of this freedom permeated all sections of the country making in-roads into our region of study. The rest of the story and the expectations and feelings from peoples of the UCRR will form the subject of the next section.

#### **4. Independence: Peoples' Expectations and Feelings:**

Following the constitutional provisions of September 1960, and its subsequent enactment into law by the Parliament, Independence from British rule was granted Nigeria on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1960. The ceremony took place at the Race Course, Tafawa Balewa Square, Lagos. Ojiako notes that "...everywhere all men's thoughts were on what lay beyond" (Ojiako: 1981, 84). Many in the region embraced the good news of emancipation with a lot of euphoria in the hope for a happier society where race, pride and colour would know no bounds.

Expectations loomed large from some quarters. A reflection of the expectations and feelings of the October 1<sup>st</sup> 1960 event in the UCRR are here x-rayed. Generally, politicians in all regions in the country, (including our region of study) expressed hilarious feelings over their struggle for freedom for all and kept alive the hope for a great and noble future. In the words of Enya from Bekwarra Local Government Area:

*Individual enthusiasm was rekindled. There was sense of actualisation for Government was transferred from colonialists to indigenes who now decided their faith in the country (Enya: 2010).*

They embraced the new development with all their hearts. However, some made derogatory comments about British rule regarding the exploitation of resources, and upturning the old order in the society. The expectations of political activists could be deduced from the Queen's message below:

*I am confident that... will play a worthy part in the councils of the Nations and remaining true of the high ideals of friendship and co-operation which are so manifest... make a positive contribution to the peace and prosperity of mankind... (Ojiako: 1981).*

This hope about the role the country would play in world affairs ranked as one in which the world over shared and the then Prime Minister, Sir Tafawa Balewa, pledged himself and the nation to the great exertion it called for. Reminding his political associates of the challenges facing the country at this stage, he added:

*We are called upon immediately to show that our claims to responsible government are well-founded, and having been accepted as an independent state, we must at once play an active part in maintaining the peace of the world and in preserving civilisation... we shall not fail (Ojiako: 1981).*

Politicians all over Nigeria including those in the UCRR shared in this ideal of making positive contributions to the peace and prosperity of mankind in the years to come. Hopes that Nigeria will tower as a giant nation and take its pride of place in the years to come filled the minds of people.

In the region of our study and elsewhere in the country, the nationalists continued to reflect on the full implications of the 1960 constitution which conferred Independence on the entire country. Reviewing their struggle so far, they felt convinced that it was a significant development in the country. It was tagged an indigenous constitution for:

*On the surface, the constitutional framework at the time appeared flexible enough to permit compromise, judgement and change. Its federal system of government seemed loose enough to satisfy regional aspirations and to accommodate regional and national interests (Fafowora: 2008).*

They unanimously agreed it was the ultimate gain of nearly four decades of agitation and protests and felt more than ever that it gave the people a significant part of their demands by removing “veto power” from the political scene. The constitution contained far reaching features on human rights, citizenship, federalism and amendment procedure among others. Even though the much needed conditions of life sought for and promised could not be realised to its fullest, politicians were convinced that a substantial amount of their demands had been met and were hopeful for full implementation in the days ahead.

People in the UCRR of Nigeria admitted that the efforts of these nationalists in securing emancipation from colonial rule kept hope alive in the region. It rekindled their enthusiasm that the situation of things will improve for the better now that power is in the hands of the people. The very day of independence mattered in urban centres where majority of the people celebrated the event with pomp and pageantry. School children were indeed mobilised to participate in the memorable and unique ceremony. A scholar who actually participated in the Independence Day celebrations recalled:

*At independence in 1960, I was 19 and studying for my A levels at... Ibadan. I was one of the students officially selected for protocol duties. With other students, I came down happily to Lagos for the ceremonies... and remember vividly the widespread joy and jubilation of seeing the Union Jack, the British flag lowered on October 1, 1960, and the Nigerian National flag hoisted... the omens and prospects of Nigeria developing into a state and prosperous nation appeared good (Fafowora: 2008).*

This captivating expression was typical of what went on in some sections in the country. Hopes were kept alive for a brighter future for the country. The period of colonial rule was over and Nigeria could now take its place in the comity of independent nations and its destiny in its own hands.

Amidst widespread jubilation in some sections, we note with caution, the warning of some who described the country's leadership as weak. Fafowora noted,

*The organisation of power in Nigeria for the creation of political stability, whether for democratic or non-democratic purposes, is extremely weak. On October 1, 1960...Nigeria was granted its independence by the British colonial power. The transition to independence was peaceful, with profound goodwill on all sides. Nigeria's future looked bright. As the most populous black nation with impressive human and natural resources, expectations of Nigeria at independence were high both at home and abroad (Fafowora: 2008).*

Abroad, the Queen's speech by her representative reinforced the viewpoint,

*As you assume the heavy responsibilities of independence, I send my good wish for a great and noble future... it is with especial pleasure... I welcome you to... Commonwealth family of nations (Ojiako: 1981: 84).*

Some people in the UCRR shared in this view and never hesitated to express the same opinion and feelings when I interviewed them personally. Accordingly, Mr. Enya of Bekwarra Local Government Area admitted that:

*It was a happy day for every Nigerian because we moved from servitude to freedom... We were full of hope (Enya: 2010).*

Ubana Daniel Arikpo of Yakurr affirmed:

*I was two years during the independence day of 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960. But my father told me it was memorable, full of hopes for a prosperous Nation. The day was celebrated with joy, a feeling of self freedom from the British rule over the country (Ubana: 2010).*

However, it seems plausible that beyond the general feeling of euphoria that permeated the entire region, some persons were lost in the dark, mostly those confined to the rural areas who never fully appreciated the full implications of the event. This feeling is peculiar among those who lived in the remotest recesses of the region, whose source of livelihood was not actually impinged upon by colonial policies— the fisherman, craftsmen, tappers etc. From findings, these groups were indirectly drawn to the mood of celebrations in urban centres. They became involved by way of selling their wares to the celebrants.

The Christian religious groups were not left out in their expectations and feelings of independence for Nigeria. They expressed that Nigeria is independent, free from colonial rule or any other form of foreign domination and shall ever remain interdependent within the British Commonwealth and the United Nations Organisation just as the church is united with God. They admonished all Nigerians not to lean on their own understanding but to lean on God who is infallible viz:



*... We are going to journey along unknown roads... rough in some places... smooth in others... if we let God be the driver, we shall always be safe... entering the motor car of independence. There are good and bad drivers, the worst is the back seat driver who seeks to advise the man at the wheel what to do... let us... not burden the driver... let us uphold them always in our prayers... if with the eye of faith we all, our leaders and ourselves can see that God really is the driver... (Excerpts from State Service to mark Nigeria's Independence in Lagos).*

They envisaged that adherence to these principles in the administration of the new country will make all the difference. They looked into the future, praying for Nigerians' continuous faith in God; that given this approach, God will take charge of the steering wheel of the new Independence Motor car. With these assurances, they were convinced that Nigerians will drive along fearlessly and hopefully for even the emancipation is from God.

Some traditionalists in the region never directed their thoughts and feelings as detailed above. They condemned the colonial agents for destroying the basis of their culture and belief systems, introducing the 'White God'. Their joys knew no bounds and for them, independence meant a return to the status quo ante where their form of worship shall be practiced freely and without inhibitions (AHT: 1993). This group of worshippers are in the minority in every unit of the UCRR, reason being that the influence of Christianity in the region had almost made the traditional form of worship extinct and looked down with contempt by some indigenes. It is pertinent to remark that in this region, colonialism had made the region almost a Christian enclave and with the emancipation story, many continued to be converted to the faith. About 80% of people in the region today are of Christian orientation.

Educated elites in the region rejoiced at the news of freedom from the fetters of colonialism. They visualised the new picture clearly and saw themselves as the formidable group that would ultimately assist in building a virile nation for Nigeria. With Western education, they were optimistic of a sure future for the country. They also expressed happiness over the complete abolition of racial arrogance that became increasingly apparent among the British, in West Africa at the time. Nigerians could now apply for jobs in senior positions commensurate with their academic qualification regardless of colour. The era of rapid Europeanisation of senior posts in the Civil Service and the consequent blocking of African opportunities which greatly influenced the "official mind" of British imperialism was over (Hallett: 1974, 308). They recounted with nostalgia, the blocking of African opportunities by colonial agents who made it extremely hard for local men to obtain appointments in the senior grades of the Civil Services of the nation and reasoned that with the independent status in Nigeria, the africanisation of the service was guaranteed. People in the UCRR who are qualified can compete favourably with their brothers in other regions and will no longer suffer colour prejudice in all aspects of life as hitherto was the case.

Teachers were elated at the emancipation story and strongly felt this was going to have implications on the curricula of schools in Nigeria and in the region. With the development, pupils would now have the opportunity of studying African literature, geographical conditions and historical traditions of their units. The genesis of forming an indigenous curriculum for Nigerian pupils began with the birth of the Nigerian nation

on October 1, 1960. They welcomed the new change with hope that such an orientation will make learning more relevant than before.

Since our region of study was made up of an extraordinary variety of independent polities, inevitably the structure of the alien regime operating affected the character of these institutions. By the 2<sup>nd</sup> decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or so, the notion that every African society possessed its own traditional “chief” had become part of the dogma of “indirect rule”. This erroneous notion was without recourse to the pre-colonial order and traditional practices of the people. During pre-colonial times, placement of any individual was in line with the prevailing traditions of the people. A situation where colonial agents arbitrarily handpicked misfits of their choice to serve as Warrant chiefs was seriously frowned at. With the independent status of the nation, these newly installed chiefs ceased to function though the legacies of colonial practice are still observable in today’s Nigeria. The custodians of the tradition in the region of our study heaved a sigh of relief and expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the political activists who fought zealously to dislodge sub-colonialism in the region. The elders felt relieved of the obnoxious taxation instituted by colonial agents and prayed for the new leaders of the country. Whatever the local variations of place and individual personality in the UCRR, everyone instantly felt elated at the independence news and wished they were at the urban centres to participate in the ceremonies. They offered prayers for a better Nigeria in the years to come. Some traditionalists poured libation to commemorate the good news. Some regretted the distance of their communities from the venue of the ceremony and later on obtained the pictures to display in their homes. I witnessed these pictures in some homes in the UCRR. Ubana, an indigene of Ugep recalled his late father showing him some of these pictures when he was young. They are still being hung at their family home in Ugep (Ubana: 2010). Elsewhere in the region, this practice was observed indicating the strong feelings of joy that people in the region expressed about the 1960 event and their commitment to the course of further improvement and overall development of Nigeria in the years to come.

The upstarts and misfits who were favoured by colonial authorities in the region felt badly about the emancipation story as it would automatically displace them and rob them of their very means of livelihood. They regretted that it should not have been the case, that the country was not yet mature for the handover of power, that indigenes would have been properly schooled in European standards to qualify for leadership. They speculated and even predicted a number of ills that may befall the country and peoples in the new age of emancipation. Some people in the very remote parts of the region of our study never fully appreciated the implications of the celebrations. Some were too old to recount the ills and, remoteness to the urban centres led to the withdrawal attitude noticed by some persons.

The worst hit groups by the Native Court Proclamation in the region felt relieved of the heavy burden hanging on their shoulders. They lamented over the conscription of African labourers to work on the roads and waterways without any financial benefits and the consequent delay caused by the colonial government policies in the region over their economic pursuits. They were sure that return of power to the indigenes will bring a better future for the people and guarantee more gainful employments other than the menial colonial jobs.

Some predicted giant strides in developments technologically, economically, educationally and otherwise noting the exploitative tendencies of the colonial agents in the region as a set back to the nation. They lamented over the capital flights and drain

from the region by colonial agents over the years as the reason for the region's underdevelopment. They regretted the one-sided educational policy (arts) colonial agents instituted in the country which could not guarantee technological development, and prayed for the complete indigenisation of education. That the colonial system of education emphasised skills for employment, the colonial thrust was on literary education to teach the natives to write, to read and to count but not to make them doctors (Ferreira: 1974, 113).

There were mixed feelings. Some people later decried the legacies of colonialism (in Western education) and the high standard of discipline established by the whites. They even predicted fallen standards in education with the exit of colonial officials and begged for a return of schools to the missions noted for their high standards of discipline. Some criticised the colonial legacies in the educational sector for example, the issue of corporal punishment and felt it was designed to perpetually subjugate the people and their future generations. The new National Anthem and the Nigerian flag were looked upon as great symbols of unity amongst the entire Nigerian people. In a nutshell, the expectations and feelings of people during Independence cannot be over emphasised but suffice it to say that people from all regions in the country had mixed feelings about the event.

#### **5. Concluding Remarks:**

The Independence story was a milestone in the history of Nigeria, as a nation to be reckoned with. Although the spread of the news was variegated regarding the manner in which different persons responded to it, however the main subject was widely embraced. The subject of freedom, freedom from the hands of those that exploited the resources of the country for their selfish economic gains under the euphemisms of civilisation, evangelisation, and protectionism is no more. It is however remarkable to note that some of the feelings and expectations are here with us for the story of Nigeria's independence and the fissures that cracked the edifice is not peculiar to Nigeria alone. Other African countries have also had their experiences. The desired political independence has not fully translated into true economic independence for the people. The pace of development is rather slow. Devoid of economic independence, observed traces of so-called development in the country is sham, mere flag independence (Nkrumah: 1963, 239-259). The granting of political independence has not actually put an end to economic exploitation in the UCRR and the nation at large as it is quite at variance with the experiences of other colonial dependencies in Southeast Asia. Colonialism has indirectly (through the apparatuses of neo-colonialism— the Commonwealth, financial and technical aid, and other avenues) controlled the mindset of people in the country today.

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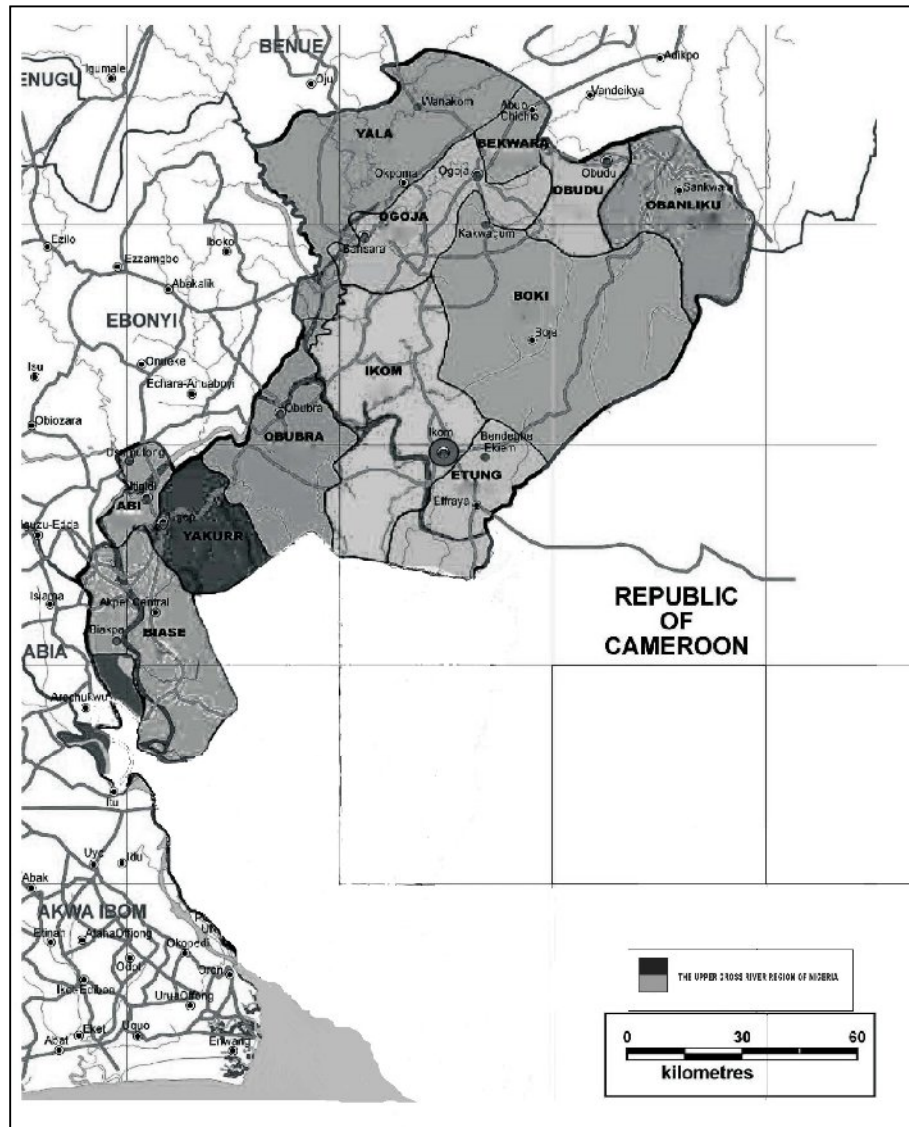


Figure 1: Map of Cross River State, Nigeria showing the Upper Cross River Region