ADMINISTRATIVE AND SECURITY CHALLENGINGS FACING PARAMOUNT RULERS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF AFIKPO

Christopher Ike Uhere
Otuu Vincent Uhere[1]

Abstract
The emergence of paramount rulers in a decentralized Igbo society as the forth tier of government and the administrative and security challenges facing paramount rulers in Afikpo is what this paper interrogates. Enquiry is made about the place of paramount rulers in government/governance, with highlight on their role as agents of peace and security and as the chief executive officers of their various communities. Enquiry is also made on the administrative and security challenges facing paramount rulers in Nigeria with focus on Afikpo with the view to questioning the conduct of traditional administration security mechanism in the light of security challenges in the Nigeria state. The paper looks into the relationship between the security agents and paramount rulers and their communities in the era of modern defence and security challenges, at the time of the agitation for community policing. The findings reveal that though the existing of the kingship institution in Afikpo is an artificial creation of the Nigerian government, paramount rulers have since their institutionalization contributed to the peace and security in Afikpo. The findings further reveal that while paramount rulers in some societies are the custodians of the traditional law, it is not so in Afikpo where the paramount rulers have become custodians of such laws, custom and tradition by mere title. The paper concludes that kings in Afikpo reign but do not rule. They are handicapped and appear to be in a dilemma situation as they have no administrative role with traditional relevance and are mainly

[1] Otuu Vincent Uhere is of the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna uherevincento@gmail.com

agents of government who call on them in the light of any security threat and development in their domains. However, their institutionalization in Afikpo is a workable and acceptable grass-root defence, peace and security approach that needs to be strengthened. The paper is historical and relied on both primary and secondary information materials. It employed both the descriptive and analytical pattern of research presentation

Keywords: Administration, Elders, Security, Paramount, Peace

INTRODUCTION

The Igbo are generally known to be heterogeneous in nature. For this the concept of "Igbo enwe eze" i.e. the Igbo have no kings became one of the widely speculated expressions among scholars regarding the socio-political organisation of the people. Onumonu (2006: 65) stated that "this claim cannot be generalized since it is not applicable to all parts of Igboland." Taking the Afikpo into focus, oral tradition and other available evidence are suggestive of the fact that kingship institution existed in the area prior to the advent of colonial rule. Onumonu (2006) writes that "this simply implies that there are some parts of Igboland whose people could be regarded as the genuine custodians of kingship institution as an imperishable heritage right from the pre-colonial through post-colonial era."[2] The above means that the concept of "Igboenweeze" applies to some parts of Igboland while it does not apply to some other parts. Afikpo can therefore, be classified among the Igbo areas where the concept of "Igboenweeze" should not apply. They had leaders who were in charge of the different communities and who otherwise, had positions equivalent to that of king (eze). Instances of such persons include but not limited to Egwu Ehite, Okoche Eke Egwu Elechi and Uhere Ogeri Ota for Ugwuegu, Egwu Urochi and Obia Ogburuka for Nkpghoro, Urobo Chiali and Agboti Mgbo for Ohaisu, Ukwuenyi Njaka and Enwo Di Ugo Enyi for

Itim, and Isu Okwogho for Ozizza.[2] Ezeogo John Ekuma in an interview observed that "they were strong men whose physical and economic statuses were highest in the different villages. They were also endowed with natural intelligence and wisdom. Obia Ogburuka, Uhere Ogeri Ota, Agboti Mgbo, Enwo Di Ugo Enyi and Isu Okwogho nonetheless, appeared to be the last remembered leaders"[3] of the different villages in pre-colonial Afikpo. Their reigns no doubt went beyond the pre-colonial period.

They served as monarchs but were not absolute. This was because they had limited powers as matters were decided by the different villages' assembly in a smaller scope while matters of general concern to the whole of Afikpo were decided by the Esaa Council of Elders or at the Ogo Okpoota Assembly which could only be convened by the Esaa. Agwo in an interview noted that during decision making, these leaders (those earlier mentioned) and other people of good standing were looked upon by their peoples for directions as they wielded tremendous influence on them.[4] The Afikpo society of pre-colonial time did not have a paramount ruler as the different villages that constitute Afikpo were indirectly autonomous.

CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE

A number of concepts such as administration and security have been used in this study. There is therefore need to conceptualise these concepts to the meaning and usage as applied in this study beginning with;

Administration: Administration as a concept has been variously defined. To Machado, (2018) "administration refers to the process of running an organisation, office or business. This includes creating rules and regulations, making decisions, management of operations, creating organisation of staff/employees/people to direct activities towards a

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[2] Isaac Otu Okorouka, retired farmer and trader, 90+, Interviewed at Afikpo on July 20th, 2018.

[3] Ezeogo John Ekuma, Paramount Ruler, 80+, interviewed in his palace, Afikpo Autonomous Community, Afikpo, July 21, 2018.

[4] Agwo Anigo Gabriel, Retired Civil Servant, 90+, interviewed at Afikpo, July 28, 2018.

common goal or objective." Machado's definition is with regard to organisational administration. Simon et.al defines administration as "the activities of groups cooperating to accomplish common goals" (Simon, Smithburg, and Thompson 1950). Put differently, administration is defined as "an activity or process mainly concerned with the means for carrying out prescribed ends" (Pfiffner and Presthus, 1967). Waldo (1955) on the other hand, defines administration in the context of public administration and explains it to be: (1) the organisation and management of men and materials to achieve the purpose of government. (2) The art and science of management as applied to affairs of state. Waldo's definition of administration is in relation to the administration of human society which is the concern of this study.

Security: What security is and what it is not has remained a debate among scholars. Buzan (1883: 245) noted that "the concept of security binds together individuals, states, and the international system so closely that it demands to be treated in holistic perspective. Security is key to survival as a people experiencing peace and security breach is in danger. Hans Morgenthau, quoted by Nwolise, conceives security as "the integrity of the national territory and its institutions" (Nwolise 2011: 33). In relation to a people or state, security becomes generalized. To this end, McNamara (1978: 42) conceives security in the light of national security and explains it to be the ability of a nation to handle its economic and political interests in a sovereign manner. On the other hand, Ayegba (2015: 15) noted that for the state, the most obvious threat is that of invasion from another state, while for the individual, it could be a threat of hunger, disease, physical violence, torture and terrorism among others. Security in Afikpo is considered in line with the above.

The people of Afikpo are conscious of their security and thus watch out for threat of invasion and for internal security threats which could emanate from anywhere and which could be in the form of disease, violence, torture and terrorism against individual or individuals, village or community or against Afikpo at large. There are individuals or certain institutions whose duty it appears to have become to ensure that there is peace and security in Afikpo . They are the

paramount rulers who are traditionally seen as the chief executive and security officers of their communities. They have become the first point of call to the government in the light of any security threat or breach of peace in Afikpo.

ADVENT AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF KINGSHIP INSTITUTION IN AFIKPO: A HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

The original name of the area now known as Afikpo is Ehugbo. Afikpo is a product of Anglicization by the colonial agents who mispronounced the name Ehugbo (Aja 2005: 8). Afikpo is an ancient town which is located in Afikpo North Local Government Area of Ebonyi South Senatorial Zone of Ebonyi State. Afikpo is classified among the eastern or cross river Igbo. It is also a group name for the five autonomous communities which include Nkpoghoro, Ugwuegu which is now known as Afikpo autonomous community, Ohaisu, Itim and Ibii/Ozizza (Uhere 2014: 244). These autonomous communities form geographical and social divisions in Afikpo each has its own tradition of origin (Uhere 2014). These five communities (Waddington 1931: 75) "were joined together in distance past for the purpose of mutual assistance in combating common enemies.

Each of the village group that makes up Afikpo had leaders who were equivalent to kings though not in its absolute sense prior to the coming of colonial agents. Uche Ukata responding to an interview is of the view that "these leaders that existed in Afikpo in the pre-colonial time and even up to the colonial time enjoyed the status of kings even though the term 'king' was never used to describe them. They sent emissaries and conducted traditional/local diplomacy amongst themselves."[5] These leaders as said earlier were Egwu Ehite, Okoche Eke Egwu Elechi and Uhere Ogeri Ota for Ugwuegu, Egwu Urochi and Obia Ogburuka for Nkpghoro, Urobo Chiali and Agboti Mgbo for Ohaisu, Ukwuenyi Njaka and Enwo Di Ugo Enyi for Itim and Isu Okwogho for Ozizza. It is pertinent to note those listed before other for each village reigned before the later ones. As such, the passing of some

[5] Uche Ukata, Retired Farmer, 83+, Interviewed at Afikpo, May 10, 2018.

them led rise and prominence of the younger generation as succeeding them. Obia Ogburuka of Nkpoghoro, Uhere Ogeri Ota of Ugwuegu, Agboti Mgbo of Ohaisu, Enwo Di Ugo Enyi of Itim and Isu Okwogho of Ozizza. Because these men were strong and possessed enormous wealth, physical strength and wisdom, they automatically became the administrative leaders of their domains. They engaged in diplomatic relationship among themselves on behalf of their people up to the advent of colonialism in Nigeria. The mode and administrative pattern of Afikpo at the time prior to the advent of colonial rule sanctioned capital punishment for thefts and other related capital offences such as murder. This was seriously detested by the colonial officers who in their efforts to put a stop to this traditional mode of jungle justice, exerted their influence and control over the already colonized people.

These supposed leaders became a threat to British colonial interest. To reduce their influence and authority, the British colonialists took to the arrest of Obia Ogburuka whom they encountered first on their arrival to the Afikpo area.[6] There is consensus among our respondents that Obia Ogburuka was subjected to series of punishment as a reprimand to quit meting out capital and other inhuman punishments to offenders. Obia Ogburuka who is reputed to have refused to capitulate, sent emissary to Uhere Ogeri Ota of Ugwuegu informing him of the presence of very fragile looking human beings who invaded his territory. Oral information is replete with the fact that Uhere Ogeri Ota on receiving the message, took off to Obia's residence. On his arrival, he was arrested and also subjected to sitting on the head of palm fruit at the point of a den gun. Discovering that the duo was not ready to give up, the British commissioned them among others as arrant chiefs. Corroborating this point, Eze (2015: 13) observed that having colonized Nigeria, the colonial administration introduced native courts in different parts of the country including Afikpo and appointed local agents to run them. The earlier mentioned men in Afikpo thus became the local agents to the British having lost their autonomy. It is on record that:

[6] Mma Unyamma, retired farmer, 80, interviewed at Afikpo, June 12, 2018.

> Since the British did not have enough resources, human and material to run the territory, or did not want to spend in a colonial territory they decided to select some local individuals whom they installed as warrant chiefs, and gave them power to run the government at the local level, while European colonial administrators sitting at the remote centres of the administration kept a watchful eye (Eze, 2015: 13).

Eze's description is however, the case of Afikpo in terms of the development of modern paramount rulership in the area. It was at the residence of Obia Ogburuka that other leaders viz, Uhere Ogeri ota, Agbo Oti Mgbo, Enwo Di Ugo Enyi and Isu Okwogho received their warrants as chiefs. For the first time, these leaders where addressed as chiefs and the term 'chief' was for the first time used in Afikpo. This marked the official institutionalization of paramount rulership in Afikpo. Recall that in the introductory part of this paper, it was stated that these men enjoyed the status equivalent to that of a king but were never addressed as such. Their status did not change except for the fact that the title of chiefs was added to them and they also came under colonial or foreign influence with the authority to act on behalf of the colonialists. By implication, they lost their autonomy/independence and got subjected to colonial monitoring and administration. They became indirect rulers. Idume Isu in an interview revealed that Uhere Ogeri Ota was succeeded by Otu Eke whom he single handedly brought to succeed him when requested by the British to get a successor for himself as he became capacitated due to old age. One significant thing about this development as noted by Idume Isu was that while the British issued them with warrants and called them warrant chiefs, their own local people called them Ezeogo as they were still in charge of the five different *isiogo* (5 villages) that make up Afikpo.[7] After Nigeria's independence in 1860 and the civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970, a new order emerged. This new order according to Agwo was the call by

[7] Idume Isu, Retired Farmer, 70+, Interviewed at Afikpo, July 10, 2018.

the Imo State Government in 1976 to her communities to produce paramount rulers.[8] In 1976, following the creation of new states, Afikpo was carved into Imo state. The Imo state government of that time delineated different parts of the state into autonomous communities. The five villages of Afikpo were made to become one autonomous community and were known as Afikpo autonomous community.

Based on the foregoing, the need for a paramount ruler became a matter of serious concern. Agwo in an interview posited that the Afikpo traditional council articulated conditions to becoming a paramount ruler to include being married and partaking fully in all traditional affairs in Afikpo. And that above all, such a fellow must not be of questionable character.[9] With time, a group of people who branded themselves as free born (Amadi) because of their possession of a charm called 'otosi' though few in number, added that one must also belong to the 'Amadi' to qualify for the ezeship. This however, generated controversy as it did not go down well with the people. Isu Oko Ogeri who taught himself very qualified as an 'Amadi' contested against Otuu Oyim and lost. Otuu Oyim of Ohaisu is therefore the first known paramount ruler of Afikpo. He was elected on the 23rd of October 1976 and was coroneted on 29th of January 1977 when he was issued staff of office as the Omaka Ji Ali 1 of Afikpo (ATWA 1977: 19). According to Otuu Inya, the title of "Omaka Ji Ali" was adopted in commemoration of the name of Igbo Ukwu's father, the acclaimed founder of Afikpo.[10]

In 1978, Ibii village which was part of the old Ohaisu community aligned with Ozizza, agitated and got the Ibii/Ozizza autonomous community with Vincent Ogbonnia Inya elected the paramount ruler of Ibii/Ozizza autonomous with the title "EcharaIcha I.[11] This development altered the status of Otuu Oyim as the sole paramount in the Afikpo area. By this time too, the position was made rotational

[8] Agwo Anigo Gabriel, Interview Cited.
[9] Agwo Anigo Gabriel, interview cited.
[10] Michael Otuu Inya, Artisan, 64 years, Interview held in his house, Afikpo, July 10, 2018
[11] Agwo Anigo Gabriel, Interview Cited.

among the remaining four component villages viz Nkpoghoro, Ugwuegu, Ohaisu and Itim. This rotational arrangement was made manifest when after the burial of Ezeogo Otuu Oyim who died in 1985, the traditional council of elders resolved that the Itim should produce his successor. This, as noted by Agwo in an interview, "led to the emergence of Ezeogo Enwo Igariwe who was elected by the Itim people in 1985. He reigned for only twenty-six (26) months and died in 1987."[12]

The Ezeship or paramount rulership then shifted to Ugwuegu which is presently referred to as Afikpo Autonomous community following the election of Michael Akpu Chukwu on November 7, 1987. Micheal Akpu Chukwu was crowned on October 16, 1988. As at the time of Akpu Chukwu's investiture, Afikpo was still in Imo state. He received his staff of office on December 19, 1991 from the Abia State government as Afikpo was carved out of Imo State into Abia state which was created in 1991. Akpu Chukwu continued with the title of Omaka JI Ali and was the last Omaka Ji Ali and paramount ruler of the remaining four component villages.[13] This is due to the fact that there was another creation of states by the Abacha military government in 1996 which saw to the carving out of Afikpo from Abia state to Ebonyi state where it has remained till the time of this research. With the creation of Ebonyi State, Afikpo, according to Agwo was balkanized into more autonomous communities thereby dividing the area into five autonomous communities.[14] These new autonomous communities are Nkpoghoro, Ohaisu and Itim. These three autonomous communities were carved out of the existing Afikpo autonomous community. The question here is was this really a balkanization of Afikpo? Suffice to disregard the term balkanization. This new order was not balkanization rather; it was a return to status quo ante. This is because prior to the colonial time, Afikpo was in that situation, this continued to even the time of Nigeria's independence. It should also be noted that there is no direct blood relation between the component villages except tracing

[12] Agwo Anigo Gabriel, Interview Cited.
[13] Agwo Anigo Gabriel, Interview Cited.
[14] Agwo Anigo Gabriel, Interview Cited.

their origin to Aro from where they all migrated to Afikpo at different times Ottenberg (1968: 24).

Traditional Administration and Security Mechanism in Afikpo

The age-long traditional system has not really changed albeit; western interference has brought about some modifications. Osakade (2015: 32) writes that this traditional institution provided a system of administration from which laws and order emanated thereby providing a stable system of governance. Pre- colonial Nigeria saw a system of indigenous traditional administration which varied from one part to another. While some societies like Yoruba and the Hausa had centralized political system with a central authority, some were decentralized and had no central authority. The Igbo of course belong to the latter. In Afikpo, the traditional heads of the different villages and the Traditional Council of Elders had socio-political roles. The laws emanated from the council of elders while the different village heads hitherto called Ezeogo became custodians of such laws by mere title. There was no spiritual head as different families and even communities had their deities. Aside this, there are other traditional institutions in Afikpo that are responsible for the administration of justice and maintenance of law and order. These institutions include the age grade system, matrilineal groupings (Ikwu), patrilineal grouping (Umunna or Umudi), the oath shrines and the Traditional Council of Elders, among others (Elechi 2006).

The age grade was and is still very important in the life of every traditional Afikpo born. It is a social political institution that organized people born within the interval of three years into an age group. It starts at the ward level in a smaller scale and gets to a larger scale at the village level (Elechi 2006). Otternberg (1971: 67) writes that "the age-set arrangement permeated Afikpo life. Age ranking is of considerable significance, as can be seen most clearly in the different behavior of members of younger sets towards those other older ones." The importance of the age grade lies in its membership. Matters that involved members of the same age grade are settled at the age-grade level. Idume Isu in an interview submitted that where the age grade

becomes unable to settle a matter, such matter was and could still be referred to the Esaa (traditional council of elders) of that village or community to settle.[15] The age grade is the major security apparatus in the traditional Afikpo society. They keep watch over the communities and farm land areas both in the day and at night. It is on record that:

> The fundamental basis of town organisation is *uke* or company (age group). Every boy and girl, as soon as he or she can totter is drafted into an *uke* composed of other boys and girls of a similar age. Progress through life is marked by a series of promotion from one company to another until finally the company of Elders is reached (Afidist, NAE 1926: 35).

The matrilineal groups (Ikwu) are also very important groupings in Afikpo with administrative and security significance. They ensure that no harm comes to their member and were such occurs; they ward in to defend, protect or fight for justice for their member. There are about thirty-five matrilineal groups in Afikpo. Members of a matrilineal group trace their descent between three to seven generations. Members of the matrilineal lineages are scattered all over Afikpo and beyond (Ottenberg 1968: 24). It is a very strong apparatus that has aided the existence of peace and security in Afikpo. It gives every Afikpo person a sense of relationship with every other part of the land. This has accounted to why there is no remembered intra and inter-clannish wars among the different villages or clans in Afikpo.

The patrilineal group (Umunna) is another important mechanism in Afikpo. Elechi (2006) has observed that patrilineal group members live together in compounds or villages unlike members of matrilineal groups. The patrilineal groups consisted mainly of male children who trace their genealogy or descent to one male ancestor. Ottenberg (1968: 9) fine-tuned this when he observed that the patrilineage is a named corporate, nonexogogamous descent group claiming descent from a male ancestor from whom it usually takes its

[15] Idume Isu, Interview Cited.

name; its genealogical depth is approximately five to seven generations. The patrilineages differ in number and size. But each group is found within a cluster. Mezie-Okoye (2016: 118) pointed out that the Igbo traditional institutions "handled conflicts at different levels in the Igbo society. However, the basic unit for teaching peace and preventing conflict was the family." The family as referred to by Mezie-Okoye is the parilineal group (Umunna). Each patrilineal group gathers to resolve conflicts among its members, member's wives and co wives. Land dispute is an example of major disputes that arise among matrilineal and patrilineal groups. Where the groups are unable to resolve such a dispute, it is referred to the village circle or the traditional ruler as first stage(s) of appeal. It is worthy of mention here that every person in Afikpo belongs to both the matrilineal and patrilineal groups. Members of the patrilineal groups live in one compound while members of the matrilineal group are spread all over.

Oath swearing was and is still very central to the resolution of conflicts in Afikpo. Its importance lies with the fact that in a case where the truth or falsity of the matter is difficult to prove, oath swearing becomes the only alternative (Elechi 2006: 118). Where a matter that requires oath swearing is brought before the paramount ruler, the Eze refers the parties involved in the matter to their different matrilineal groups. This is due to the fact that oath taking is a serious undertaking in Afikpo and cannot be administered by the king. The essence of such refer to the lineages is for the matrilineal members to have private discussions with their brother and sister so as to ascertain his or her level of innocence before they can allow him/her take the oath which the Esaa council of Elders will oversee. This is due to the fact that the efficacy of oath taking in Afikpo is very high. There is consensus among our respondents that people who take the oath while guilty of the charge(s) against them die within twelve (12) months of the oath taking. Where there is no such death after oath taking, the person that took the oath is assumed innocent.

The traditional administration of Afikpo is based on bi-cameral legislative structure. This is made manifest in the presence of the Afikpo traditional parliament. This parliament has two council or chambers,

viz, the upper (Esaa) and the lower (Eto) chambers. The upper chamber performs judicial and legislative duties. They make the traditional laws and adjudicate on myriad of matters. The lower chamber (Eto) see to the execution or implementation of the laws and resolutions made by the upper chamber. The lower chamber also has the power to adjudicate but only on matters that involved debts and debt recovery.

Paramount Rulers and Administrative Challenges in Afikpo

Unlike monarchs such as the Oba of Benin and the Alafin of Oyo among others, paramount rulers in Afikpo do not perform administrative function which is the exclusive preserve of the Esaa Council of Elders. The colonialists attested to this when they recorded the Esaa in Afikpo performed and still perform administrative, executive, legislative and judicial functions (Afidist NAE 1926: 11). Corroborating this view, Chukwu (2006: 32) submits that the Esaa is the custodian of the Afikpo traditional laws, customs and tradition, performed and still perform legislative and judicial functions, serve as the second to the highest court of appeal with regard to traditional matters, and regulate social norms, trends, ideas and taboos which they enforce through the *ekpuke eto* which is the police arm of the Afikpo traditional parliament. This has become the greatest challenge facing the kingship institution in Afikpo. Aside not having administrative role, paramount rulers in Afikpo did not and still do not collect taxes and tolls of any kind (Onumonu 2006). They engaged in economic activities of different sort for their family up keep. It is however worthy of note that the contemporary Ebonyi State Government has witnessed the introduction of undisclosed monthly allowances and even gift of cars to traditional rulers. This has relieved them of certain financial challenges.

Those who appeared as the leaders and later became warrant chiefs performed legislative duties in colonial Afikpo. They presided over colonial native courts as arbitrators, especially on land matters and theft (Elechi 2006). With Nigeria's independence and the abolition of colonial native courts, the warrant chiefs lost this position. With the introduction of kingship institution to Afikpo and the election of Otuu Oyim in 1977, Agwo in an interview, revealed that the Omaka Ji Ali

(traditional ruler) in Afikpo became one of the signatories to the resolutions and judgments passed by the Traditional Council of Elders.[16] This position of the paramount ruler was altered following the creation of states and subsequent creation of more autonomous communities brought about the existence of more than a king in the area and all could not be signatories to the resolution and judgment of the council.

As it is today, the paramount rulers no longer append their signature to the traditional council judgments and resolutions. They became full arbitrators and used their palaces as venues for such activities. However, each of the traditional rulers only attended to cases within his domain (autonomous community). Traditional rulers in Afikpo appear handicapped both on the side of the modern government of the day and in their traditional society. This is because they are largely middle men between the government and the people. They are mere messengers of the government. With regard to traditional matters, Elechi (2006: 135) posits that the Council of Elders oversees the traditional governance of Afikpo and constitutes the ultimate authority in the land. Onumonu (2006) writes that "the fact that the status of the king was defined shows that the tradition of following the laid down process in the act of governance was upheld… The act of governance… was not a foreign culture…" That means that the people of Afikpo had a structure that was well organized in terms of governance and leadership prior to the advent of colonial rule on one hand and prior to the institutionalization of kingship institution in the area in 1977. Since its advent in Afikpo, the position has never been hereditary as to be limited to one family which would have accorded such family certain powers and prerogatives.

Paramount rulers in Afikpo as said earlier, do not enjoy monarchical absolutism. Every one of them has his Council of Chiefs. Dennis in an interview averred that "the Esaa (Traditional Council of Elders) serve as a check on the kings."[17] As it is in Afikpo, Matters

[16] Agwo Anigo Gabriel, Interview Cited.
[17] Denis Otu, Retired Civil Servant, 90+, interviewed at Afikpo, April 14, 2018.

brought before the kings can be appealed before the Afikpo Traditional Council of Elders. The status of the paramount rulers appears such that they do not see themselves as absolute rulers. They serve majorly to bridge the gap between the modern day government and their people or traditional society. It is important to posit here that this function was the purpose for which the kingship institution came to be institutionalized in Afikpo in 1977 when the people elected their ever first known king, Otuu Oyim, the Omaka Ji Ali 1 of Afikpo.

Paramount rulers all over are known to be custodians of traditional laws. It is not so in Afikpo where paramount rulers are not the custodians of tradition and traditional laws and do not make laws. They work with the laws made by the council of elders provided such law is not in contradiction with that constitution or laws of the government. As mentioned earlier, even though paramount rulers in Afikpo arbitrate on matters, the council of elders remains the highest arbiter on traditional matters as matters handled by the kings can be appealed before the council of elders. Again, paramount rulers have limit to matters which they can handle. For instance, one of such matters as disclosed by Agwo in an interview which they cannot arbitrate is land matter.[18] In the contemporary times, traditional rulers generally do not handle criminal matters which are the exclusive preserve of the security agents and the court of law drawing legitimacy of purpose from the law.

Paramount Rulers and Security Challenges in Afikpo

There is now the agitation for community policing due to the increasing security challenges in Nigeria. This agitation has placed paramount rulers in a community security position and challenge as they are the heads of their communities. Even though paramount rulers in Afikpo appear to be ceremonial, Ezeogo John Ekuma, one of the paramount rulers in Afikpo, disclosed in an interview that they have become the Chief Security Officers of the autonomous communities. He further added that they work tirelessly to ensure that peace exists within their

[18] Agwo Anigo Gabriel, Interview Cited.

communities of jurisdiction and between or among the autonomous communities. They report matters of security threats to the police and also provide information on criminal elements and matters in their areas to the authorities.[19] As it is today, before the police or any other security agency carries out any arrest in Afikpo, they contact the paramount rulers and inform them before carrying out arrest within their community. In some cases, the traditional rulers have turned the police down from carrying out arrest for sundry reasons especially when they have to settle such matters in their palaces. And in some other cases, the paramount rulers have granted such arrests especially where criminal cases are involved. While doing all these, the paramount rulers do not charge for it. This has made their palaces the cheapest court to seek justice. In the course of performing this duty, the paramount rulers have encountered some challenges.

In the first place, Ezeogo Boniface Oti, the paramount ruler of Itim Community, in an interview asserted that paramount rulers in Afikpo do not have the power to engage the service of a palace guard and not even a Police orderly is attached to them. This he noted limit their boldness in handling matters especially, where miscreants and hoodlums are involved.[20] Ezeogo Ewa Elechi, the paramount ruler of Ohaisu Community expressed displeasure in an interview when he noted that, some people have neglected their offices by reporting matters directly to the Police.[21] Even the Police seem to some times, view the paramount rulers as obstacles to them in the course of discharging their duties. Some cases that would have been reported to the police have been settled in the palaces at the autonomous community level.

Ezeogo John Ekuma while responding to an interview observed that where traditional rulers have referred some matters to the police,

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[19] Ezeogo John ObeniEkuma, Interview Cited.

[20] Ezeogo Boniface Oti, Paramount Ruler, 80+, Interviewed in his palace, Itim Autonomous
Community, July 27, 2018.

[21] Ezeogo Ewa Elechi, Paramount Ruler, 80+,Interviewed in his palace, Ohaisu Autonomous
Community, July 23, 2018.

their subjects have accused them of incompetence and making their domains porous for incessant police raids.[22] In fact, traditional rulers in Afikpo appear to be in security dilemma as they have no security apparatus of their own and they also have no powers to create same for themselves. They are always the first to be called by government anytime there is crisis in their areas.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubting the fact that Afikpo in the pre-colonial era had no kingship institution and as such, had no kings. But as the research has shown, different components had individuals that were highly influential and who enjoyed the status of king. During colonial inversion, this set of people was identified by the British colonialists who commissioned them as warrant chiefs. They were given the power to arbitrate on matters within their domains but as agents of the British colonialists.

There was no central ruler among the people of Afikpo even up to the time of Nigeria's independence when the call to produce a paramount ruler was made by the then Imo State Government of Nigeria. In 1976, Afikpo had its first known and official king in the person of His Royal Highness, Otuu Oyim the Omaka Ji Ali 1 of Afikpo, was elected king on the 23rd of October 1976 and was coroneted on 29th of January 1977. By this time, despite the fact that the Council of Elders resolutions superseded that of the king, the king was given the right to append his signature on the council's judgments and resolutions as a way of authenticating them. The creation of more states brought about a return to the old order or rather, a proliferation of traditional rulers as the different component villages became autonomous with each having its paramount ruler. From that time on, the paramount rulers have enjoyed equal status and none of them is seen to be more than the others so as to continue to append his signature on the council of elders' resolutions. Amidst this situation, the paramount rulers fight to keep the peace, defence and security of their people intact albeit not

[22] Ezeogo John Ekuma, Interview Cited.

in the absence of some challenges. Despite the inherent challenges, the paramount rulers harness all the different traditional security mechanisms including the government security agencies to ensure the stability of peace and security in Afikpo.

Finally, at the time of the agitation for community policing, paramount rulers in Afikpo in particular and Nigeria at large appear handicapped and in a dilemma situation. They are mere ceremonial office holders as the Esaa traditional council of elders is the supreme traditional authority and oversees the administration of Afikpo. On the other hand, the paramount rulers who are traditional chief security officers of their communities are responsible to the government. They are to be held responsible for any breach of law and order in the land including those they have little or no information about. Paramount rulers in Afikpo reign but do not rule. There is therefore need to strengthen them by providing security for them. This will enable them to administer their administrative and security duties without fear of threat to their life and authority.

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