

THE COLONIAL ACQUISITION OF LAND IN NSUKKA CULTURAL AREA OF IGBOLAND NIGERIA AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Anayo Ossai, Ph.D

*Department of Religion and Human Relations
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.
ab.ossai@unizik.edu.ng; anayossia@gmail.com.*

Abstract

The colonial acquisition of land in Nsukka cultural area of Igbo-land, Enugu State of Nigeria and its socio-religious and environmental implications have remained critical concerns since after the colonial era. Notwithstanding the traditional ecological knowledge and rich cultural heritage of the people of Nsukka there are still problems resulting from the British system of land acquisition in the post-colonial time. This study recognizes the unexplored scholarly discourse on the link between the colonial acquisition of land and socio-religious and environmental problems of Nsukka area. The paper studied the consequences of the colonial acquisition of land in Nsukka and investigated how the indigenous land tenure patterns were significantly altered by the imposed land acquisition system. The paper employs Antonio Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony Theory to determine the dominance of British culture and ideas and its consequences on the people of Nsukka. The data was collected through oral histories and secondary sources, while qualitative was used in the analysis of data. The finding shows that the displacement of cultures of indigenous people, the change on customary governance structures and social cohesiveness, destruction of sacred places, and environmental degradation were among the outcome of the acquisitions. It also discovered that the indigenous knowledge and traditions about land use, management, and conservation were also lost and the traditions of spiritual knowledge and rituals were equally lost. Additionally, this colonial injustice is still felt today as it continues to influence land-related laws in current land ownership system. The paper encourages communication between many belief systems, honoring the land's sacredness in its various spiritual settings, and acknowledging and protecting indigenous religious practices as necessary means to reconcile these effects.

Keywords: Land acquisition, Colonial and Post-colonial, Environmental consequences, Indigenous communities and Socio-religious.

Introduction

The Nsukka cultural area in southeast Nigeria is known for its scenic landscape of hills and valleys, which enhances its cultural and agricultural appeal. Inhabited primarily by the Igbo

people, Nsukka boasts a rich cultural history and vibrant traditions, including folklore, music, dance, and art, that are celebrated through lively festivals and rituals. This cultural area holds significant religious and socio-economic importance in Igbo-land, blending elements of Christianity with traditional indigenous beliefs centered on a pantheon of deities and a supreme god, Chukwu or Chineke. Despite the influence of Catholicism and Protestantism, traditional rituals, rites, and festivals continue to shape the worldviews and cultural identities of the Nsukka people.

Nsukka is a hive of business, agriculture, and education on a socioeconomic level. The area's rich soil yields a range of crops, including as vegetables, maize, yams, and cassava, all of which boost the local economy and ensure food security. Many locals still make their living from agriculture, and farming techniques are frequently handed down through the years. Furthermore, Nsukka's advantageous location along important transit routes has promoted trade and commerce, with markets acting as important hubs for the exchange, purchase, and sale of products.

European imperialism in Nigeria, particularly in the Nsukka cultural zone, was propelled by the British Empire's overarching ambitions in Africa, driven by ideological, geopolitical, and economic motives. Economic interests fueled by the area's rich natural resources, such as palm oil, and other agricultural products, contributed significantly to colonial acquisition efforts, emphasizing the strategic importance of the Nsukka area in bolstering colonial economies.

Thirdly, possession of Nigerian territory gave European nations access to possible military bases, transportation hubs, and commercial routes, making Nsukka area strategically important. Strategically advantageous for commercial and military objectives, the Nsukka area was positioned between the Niger and Cross rivers which aid transportation for the Europeans. Another one is the missionary work. Christian missionaries made a substantial contribution to Nigerian colonization, which included the Nsukka area. In many cases, they collaborated closely with colonial rulers, presenting colonization as a civilizing effort to "save souls" and instill Western values and education in the native populace through which the acquired lands in the region.

Waites (1999) argued that the colonial project therefore placed great importance on the acquisition of new territory and natural resources. It supplied raw materials and marketplaces that fueled industrialization, giving conquering powers financial and tactical advantages that allowed enormous empires to expand. To ensure unrestricted access to their lands and to take advantage of their labor, indigenous peoples and other local populations were viewed as objects that had to be subjugated, expelled, or eliminated.

The fact that British property acquisition in the Nsukka cultural area has persisted since colonialism is evidence of the policies and institutions of that era's lasting influence on Nigeria's land ownership dynamics. Nigeria gained independence in 1960, but many institutions and practices from the colonial era persisted, including British-instituted land tenure regimes. These arrangements frequently encouraged the government or powerful corporations to acquire enormous tracts of property at the expense of local populations.

British colonial rule in Nsukka significantly altered the landscape by displacing indigenous populations and disrupting their traditional ways of life through land acquisition for infrastructure, reserved areas, and plantations. Even after colonial rule ended, the Nigerian government continued these practices, exacerbating land conflicts, especially with the rise of commercial agriculture and multinational enterprises in areas like Nsukka.

In addition, inefficient methods of land management and inadequate land tenure arrangements have made land disputes worse and allowed powerful interests grab more land. Due to their unclear land rights, local communities are more susceptible to exploitation and forced relocation, which feeds the cycle of social injustice and land inequality. Local people in Nsukka and other areas have been increasingly resisting takeovers of land and resource exploitation in recent years.

To demand the recognition of land rights, environmental protection, and equitable development, civil society organizations and grassroots movements have come together. Land ownership patterns and resource exploitation in the Nsukka cultural area are still shaped by the legacy of British land acquisition, notwithstanding these attempts. To tackle these obstacles, all-encompassing land reform initiatives are needed, which give local communities' rights and interests first priority while encouraging environmentally responsible development and sustainable growth.

Dominguez and Luoma (2020) note this fact as colonial powers asserted *de jure* sovereignty over their ancestral lands, the livelihoods of indigenous peoples who have long been the guardians of the world's forests were undermined. Customary land tenure did not reappear after colonial powers left Africa and Asia because European land laws persisted there.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on Antonio Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony Theory, developed by the Italian Marxist philosopher during his imprisonment in the 1920s and 1930s. This theory has significantly influenced political science, sociology, and cultural studies. Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony Theory explains how the ruling class maintains power not just through force but by controlling cultural practices and institutions. It explores how dominant groups sustain authority by shaping societal norms, values, and beliefs to serve their interests,

ensuring the consent of the governed. Gramsci emphasizes the importance of cultural and ideological control as key to social dominance.

The idea of cultural hegemony by Antonio Gramsci offers an invaluable framework for comprehending social control and power dynamics in colonial situations, especially with regard to land acquisition. Gramsci's theory illuminates how colonial forces imposed their domination and transformed the cultural and social environment to fit their interests in the case of the Nsukka cultural area of Igbo-land.

In essence, Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony holds that the ruling classes preserve their power not only by using coercive action but also by influencing the dominant culture and ideologies in society. The ruling class retains its position of power by having this dominating culture become so ingrained that it is seen by the public as normal. A crucial instrument used by European powers to defend and maintain their hold over conquered areas throughout the colonial era was cultural hegemony.

Colonizers suppressed native customs, imposed European standards, and enacted exploitative laws, prioritizing European economic interests and undermining indigenous land rights and livelihoods. Again, colonial authorities leveraged missionaries to gain trust, convert locals, and establish institutions that undermined indigenous traditions, facilitating land acquisition and maintaining control through promises of redemption and divine sanction. The people's cultural identity and social cohesion were threatened by hegemonic land acquisition and colonial land policies, leading to ongoing struggles for social justice and land rights.

By applying Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, researchers can analyze how colonial powers established and maintained control over land and resources in the Nsukka cultural region, highlighting the ongoing impact on indigenous communities and the importance of recognizing and challenging hegemonic systems to promote social justice and decolonization.

Colonial Land Policies

According to Onwuzuruigbo, I. (2019);

Contemporary manifestations of land grab, as it is well known, harks back to colonialism and the obsession with African lands. The imposition of colonial rule as a prelude to grabbing African land and resources was the driving force of the colonial project in Africa. Once this was achieved, European colonial powers proceeded to disassemble and reconstitute pre-colonial African notions of land and land practices they perceived to be archaic and constituting an obstacle to capitalist production and accumulation. (p.155).

Similar to many other parts of Igbo-land, Nsukka cultural area was subjected to the exploitative land laws imposed by British colonial authorities, which severely damaged indigenous people and the customary land tenure systems. These laws were not created to advance the autonomy and well-being of the indigenous populace, but rather to further the interests of colonial powers and quicken the extraction of resources.

As a result, social, economic, and cultural inequities that still have an impact on post-colonial communities continue to exist in Nsukka and other parts of Igbo-land through the systematic exploitation and expropriation of indigenous communities. This was made possible by British colonial land laws. Key elements of Nsukka's colonial land policies and their effects are as follows:

Land Expropriation: Colonial officials seized indigenous lands without consent or compensation, aiming to displace native communities for colonial activities, including settlement farms. The Nsukka people faced coercive tactics and violent annexation by colonial authorities, resulting in long-standing injustice as their ancestral lands were taken without regard for their autonomy or rights. The heinous deed of land loss in Nsukka triggered a cascade of issues, including social unrest, displacement, and the disruption of long-standing traditional ways of life, tearing apart communities and separating families from their homes and livelihoods.

The Nsukka people's response to colonial rule was marked by discontent and disappointment due to land seizure, leading to escalating tensions with the colonial government and fostering resistance and hostility, resulting in immediate material losses and long-term social, economic, and political turmoil with lasting consequences.

Land Tenure Systems: In the Nsukka cultural area, as in many other indigenous structures, the land tenure system was ingrained in the people's communal customs, traditions, and practices. Before colonization, land was usually held in common ownership, with rights to its management and usage belonging to the *Umunna* or the entire communities. The customary land tenure practices of the indigenous people were undermined by the new land tenure systems that the British introduced and implemented in Nsukka cultural area. They brought ideas that were foreign to many indigenous communities, like individual land ownership and land titles. According to Alden (2018), insecure land tenure was created and colonizers were able to take advantage of indigenous peoples, their lands, and their resources thanks to the establishment of personalized property regimes and the focus placed on farming as the sole "productive" type of land use worthy of legal protection.

Conflicts and misunderstandings regarding property ownership and usage rights resulted from this Indigenous land tenure systems were frequently viewed as archaic and ineffective by colonial powers, who attempted to replace them with their own schemes for managing and acquiring land. Usually, this required establishing private land ownership, which allowed some people or organizations to acquire land as their own. These kinds of structures frequently conflicted with the collective ownership and use practices of native communities, such as those in Nsukka cultural area. The Nsukka people were greatly impacted by the substantial shifts in land ownership and administration brought about by the entry of colonial powers in Nsukka. The process of alienating and appropriating land was one of the main ways that the colonial authority weakened the traditional system of land tenure. Indigenous groups were frequently forced to give up their land without receiving proper notice or compensation, which resulted in the locals being displaced and evicted. A further consequence of the establishment of private property ownership was the concentration of land in the hands of a small number of people or organizations, frequently at the detriment of the larger community. Conflicts over land ownership and usage rights also developed from this, as did unequal access to resources and land. In their own ancestral territories, many people in Nsukka discovered that they were ostracized and without rights. The traditional system, which had developed over centuries to meet the demands of the local communities and their environment, was also frequently more flexible and adaptable than the alien land tenure system that the colonists introduced. Deforestation, soil degradation, and biodiversity loss were all made worse by the inefficiencies and unsustainable land management techniques that resulted from this.

For the inhabitants of Nsukka and other indigenous communities in Igboland, the colonial forces' imposition of foreign land tenure systems had a profound impact. This led to animosity and rebellion against colonial control in addition to upsetting the social cohesion of the communities. In addition to upsetting their customs, it was a contributing factor in the social, economic, and environmental issues that still plague them now.

Clarke (2009) note that the concept of private land ownership originated with the advent of Europeans in most parts of the world. Indigenous communities, which often owned and used their lands and resources cooperatively for the benefit of the entire group, did not connect with this Western concept. In addition to being essential to their traditional way of life, communal rights over land and resources were also the best means of protecting their natural ecosystems. Despite this, during colonial authority, laws imposing personalized land tenure regimes were passed and community land systems were frequently ignored.

Terra Nullius Doctrine: The British initially used the concept of terra nullius, which translates to "land belonging to no one," to support their land acquisitions in Nigeria and

other countries. This theory effectively denied indigenous peoples control over their ancestral lands, giving colonial land grabs legal cover.

Essentially, colonial powers utilized the Terra Nullius Doctrine as a legal justification for acquiring land that they considered to be "empty" or "uninhabited" by native people. The ideas of this theory were applied throughout Africa, including the areas where the Nsukka communities lived, even though it was more frequently linked to colonial endeavors in nations like Australia. The Terra Nullius Doctrine gave indigenous peoples of Nsukka area and many other colonized areas a handy legal justification for being evicted from their lands. Large tracts of African land were frequently depicted by British colonial officials as "empty" or "underutilized," omitting the intricate networks of land ownership, use, and government that existed within indigenous communities.

The introduction of colonial power caused severe disturbances for the Nsukka communities, whose way of life was closely linked to the land through hunting, agriculture, and other pursuits. British colonial authorities established military rule over Nsukka territory, frequently without the indigenous people's meaningful input or agreement. In general, a larger pattern of colonial exploitation and dispossession throughout Africa was represented by the application of the Terra Nullius Doctrine in the acquisition of Nsukka lands. Although the theory has received little recognition in modern legal and academic circles, its legacy has had a lasting impact on the dynamics of land tenure and the struggles for indigenous rights in post-colonial Igboland such as Nsukka and beyond.

Land surveys and Registration: In order to establish legal ownership and borders, the British instituted land surveys and registration procedures, which frequently clashed with Nigeria's traditional land tenure systems. The main purposes of these surveys were to enable commercial interests and European settlers to get land, exploit minerals, and levy taxes.

As evidenced in other African countries throughout the colonial era, land registration and surveying were crucial instruments used by colonial forces to seize territories belonging to native Nsukka communities. Land surveying was the initial stage of the procedure. In order to identify and establish the borders of indigenous regions, surveys were carried out by colonial authority. European surveyors, who employed contemporary surveying methods to chart the land in accordance with European standards, were usually responsible for conducting these surveys. During these surveys, indigenous land tenure systems which were frequently based on communal ownership or customary boundaries were either ignored or not fully taken into consideration.

Büscher and Whande (2007), noted that policies that restrict indigenous peoples' access to and customary use of their ancestral lands ultimately have the effect of negatively impacting

their livelihoods. Such is the case with many areas that overlap with indigenous territory. As a result, more people are questioning these protectionist tactics.

Following the survey, land registration processes were established by the colonial authority. Nsukka indigenous communities were obligated by these procedures to register their land holdings with the colonial authority. In order to comply with colonial legal conventions, registration frequently required registering land titles, boundaries, and ownership rights. In contrast, colonial registration requirements were frequently not met by indigenous land tenure systems, which were founded on communal ownership and oral traditions.

Colonial rulers granted land titles and deeds to people or organizations approved by the colonial administration through the registration procedure. These titles essentially gave European corporations, colonial settlers, or government agencies ownership of the land that had belonged to indigenous populations of Nsukka communities. This procedure frequently resulted in the marginalization or exclusion of indigenous communities, which caused them to lose their ancestral lands. Abandoning native Nsukka communities from their ancestral lands was a common result of land survey and registration being implemented. When their resources and means of subsistence were taken away, a large number of indigenous Nsukka people experienced poverty, marginalization, and loss of cultural identity.

In fact, indigenous Nsukka communities' lands were acquired by colonial authorities through the processes of land survey and registration. Colonial authorities deliberately shifted land ownership from indigenous people to colonial settlers and institutions through legal frameworks, surveys, and registration systems. These resulted in marginalization and continuous struggles for justice and land rights, as well as in displacement.

Land Ordinances: To formalize land tenure arrangements, which generally valued private or state ownership above collective property ownership, the British colonial authorities created laws and land ordinances. These ordinances frequently ignored or suppressed indigenous land tenure systems, which caused ownership conflicts and caused indigenous populations to become estranged from their ancestral lands. Enyindah and Obah (2020) remarked that the colonial authorities required land in order to effectively occupy the colonies. The British colonial authority passed a number of laws that made it easier to expropriate African lands in Nigeria.

In areas like Nsukka, the colonial forces used a complicated web of laws, regulations, and frequently coercion to acquire territory. One such instrument used by colonial authorities to establish dominance over native lands and expedite the transfer of land from native populations to colonial settlers or the state was land ordinance enforcement. The practice of land exploitation, resource extraction, and the imposition of European land tenure

systems was intricately linked to the larger colonial effort in Nsukka and other regions of Nigeria.

Colonial powers imposed land ordinances that reinterpreted property administration and ownership in accordance with European legal norms. Indigenous land tenure systems were usually communal in nature, but these ordinances frequently ignored them in favor of individual land ownership arrangements that were better suited to European-style agriculture and commercial exploitation. To establish and record land borders, colonial authorities undertook extensive land surveying and mapping projects. Due to the frequent marginalization or disregard of indigenous land claims in these surveys, local populations were systematically denied their rights and their territories were appropriated by the state or colonial settlers.

The colonial takeover of indigenous lands in Nsukka and other regions of Nigeria was made possible, in large part, by land ordinances. Colonial powers effectively undermined indigenous land rights and perpetuated a legacy of exploitation and marginalization that still exists in the region today by imposing new legal frameworks, enforcing surveying and mapping initiatives, establishing land reserves, and legitimizing land dispossession through bureaucratic processes.

Creation of Reserved and Forest Areas: The British colonial authorities created reserves and forest reserves in Nigeria, notably in the Nsukka zone, to regulate and oversee land use for activities including agriculture, forestry, and wildlife conservation. Indigenous communities were further marginalized by these reservations, which frequently restricted their access to land and resources. According to Dowie (2009), the protected area designations created during the colonial period resulted in the denial of rights to indigenous peoples, their expulsion from their ancestral lands, protracted social unrest, famine, and fatalities. One important tactic used by colonial forces to seize properties belonging to indigenous groups, including those in Nsukka, was the formation of reserved and forest areas. During the time of European colonization in Africa, this tactic was especially common as colonial powers looked to seize control of large areas and profit economically from the resources they possessed.

The exploitation of natural resources by colonial powers was intimately associated with the establishment of forest and restricted areas. Important commodities like lumber, minerals, and farmland were frequently abundant in these places. Colonial officials might claim sole authority over resource extraction and commercial activity on these territories by designating them as reserved or wooded. Resource exploitation operations, usually overseen by private enterprises or colonial administrations, often resulted in the displacement of indigenous communities from their traditional lands.

Indigenous people of Nsukka cultural area experienced significant cultural and environmental effects from the establishment of forest and restricted areas. The loss of traditional means of subsistence, social structures, and cultural practices brought about by displacement from ancestral lands resulted in the disintegration of indigenous identities and socioeconomic systems. The vulnerability of indigenous Nsukka people was further increased by the frequent ecological and environmental damage brought on by the exploitation of natural resources in reserved and forested areas. Essentially, the establishment of forest and restricted areas by colonial powers was a methodical approach to resource exploitation and land expropriation at the expense of the Nsukka communities and other indigenous Igbo communities. Indigenous populations are still affected by the injustice and inequity that resulted from this process, which was marked by forcible relocation, land confiscation, legal coercion, and environmental damage.

Forced Labor and Taxation: To further change their traditional land-based livelihoods, indigenous communities were frequently subjected to forced labor and taxation. Many were denied access to their own land for cultivation and subsistence by being made to labor on colonial plantations and farms.

The colonial authorities' imposition of taxes and forced labor in Nsukka drastically changed the indigenous inhabitants' customary land-based means of subsistence while enabling the acquisition of Nsukka lands. The utilization of forced labor was a tactic employed by colonial rulers to take advantage of local populations for agriculture, and infrastructural projects. To labor on these projects, frequently in difficult conditions and for inadequate pay, indigenous people were coaxed or outright forced. The people of Nsukka were forced to abandon their usual agricultural techniques and other activities in order to comply with the demands of the colonial authority, upsetting the town's regular rhythms of life.

Another tool used to change the Nsukka economy's structure was taxation. Indigenous populations had to produce cash income in order to pay the taxes that colonial officials levied on land, crops, and other resources. To make the necessary money, this compelled a lot of people to switch from subsistence farming and other traditional pursuits to growing cash crops or working for pay. This led to the gradual replacement of indigenous groups' long-standing self-sustaining agricultural methods with commercial farming and other economic activities focused on paying taxes.

The indigenous inhabitants of Nsukka experienced severe repercussions as a result of both forced labor and taxes. It did not only upend their customs and commercial activities, but it also made it easier for colonial powers to infringe on lands of the Nsukka cultural area. Colonial leaders were able to establish their supremacy and take advantage of the land for their own gain, frequently at the expense of the native population, by controlling the labor

and financial resources of the area. The land acquisition procedure in Nsukka strengthened the colonial rule's power structures and further disenfranchised indigenous groups.

Consequences of the Land Colonial Policies

Land Disputes: Colonial officials thus imposed the commercialization and privatization of land as the primary principle of colonial land relations, in contradiction to the demands rooted in traditional customs. Despite the colonial state's brutal suppression of opposition to this policy, tensions resulting from the collision of these opposing ideas and the contradictory frameworks of land ownership that subsequently followed and were maintained by the postcolonial state established the groundwork for the ongoing land conflicts and land-based disputes that still exist in Nsukka and other parts of Igbo-land today. Nyong'o, (2013) lamented how the colonial administration land policies orchestrated land disputes in Nigeria and other parts of African. He writes that land conflicts and land-based disputes across the nation have persisted because of the clashing of these opposing ideas and the inconsistent frameworks of land ownership that resulted from them and were perpetuated by the postcolonial state. This was also true in Algeria, Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe outside of Nigeria.

Colonial land policies significantly influenced the systems of land ownership and management in Nsukka, as they did in many other African regions. European settlers, missionaries, and economic interests were given priority in the land allotment process when the British colonial administration implemented land regulations that frequently ignored indigenous land tenure systems. The result of this was the displacement of indigenous populations and significant disruptions to customary land ownership arrangements. Without providing the local communities with sufficient notice or compensation, colonial powers frequently took control of huge areas of land for infrastructure and agricultural projects. Indigenous people were displaced from their ancestral grounds as a result, which generated conflict and dispute about who was entitled to own land.

In Nsukka cultural area, the tradition of unequal land allocation continued even after independence. A small number of wealthy individuals or businesses continued to own large areas of land, while many common people had difficulty gaining access to land for home or agricultural use. Conflicts and tensions within the community were brought on by this inequality in land ownership. In order to resolve land conflicts that were carried over from the colonial era, the Nsukka post-colonial government frequently found it difficult to create efficient legal frameworks. Land disputes could not be resolved, and frustrations among impacted groups were exacerbated by unclear land laws, bureaucratic ineffectiveness, and corruption.

Land disputes that lasted into the post-colonial era were mostly caused by the colonial land policies implemented in Nsukka cultural area of Igbo-land. Unequal land distribution,

incompatible land tenure systems, alienation from the land, and a lack of effective legal dispute resolution procedures all contributed to these disputes. It took initiatives to acknowledge and uphold the rights of indigenous tribes to their ancestral lands in addition to legislative changes to address these issues.

Dismantle of Traditional Land Tenure System: Destroying customary land tenure was seen as a necessary step toward establishing colonial power and authority. More significantly, it meant taking land away from small-scale farmers and turning them into the landless laborers that capitalist employer so desperately needed. It also meant giving foreign corporations, businesses, and individuals' ownership and use rights over land.

According to Onwuzuruigbo (2019), inconsistent and incoherent land policies, along with the adoption of indirect rule, a British system of governing colonial subjects through pre-existing indigenous power structures paved the way for the emergence of Warrant Chiefs, complicated already-existing issues, and created new crises and conflicts. Many chiefs also distorted traditional land ownership and appropriated enormous tracts of land that had previously belonged to their community, taking advantage of the subsequent environment (Colonial policies). Chanock (1991) states that the official land policy of communal ownership was adopted in close association with the establishment of chieftaincies and chiefdoms as agents and agencies of colonial power. However, it also had negative effects on land relations in Southeast Nigeria. The rights to govern and use land are two components of land rights that progressively came into being and became institutionalized throughout time.

The establishment of chieftaincies and chiefdoms, which acted as crucial agents and agencies of colonial power, was closely linked to the official land policy of communal ownership in Nsukka and other Igbo-land districts. The complex socio-political restructuring brought about by colonialism in Nigeria in the late 19th and early 20th centuries provided a framework for this historical development. Motivated by a desire to exert control over resources and land, colonial authorities looked for ways to regulate land tenure systems that were intricately woven into the socio-cultural fabric of indigenous communities. Following decades of communal land tenure in Igbo-land, colonial authorities saw a chance to strengthen their hold on power through the chieftaincies and chiefdoms, which were already in place.

The implementation and enforcement of colonial policies within the different areas were greatly aided by chieftaincies, which were composed of traditional rulers and councils. As a way to facilitate the execution of laws like land ownership and taxation, these leaders frequently acted as go-betweens for the colonial administration and the local populace. In Nsukka and other Igbo-land regions, the official policy of community land ownership was thus not just a bureaucratic choice, but also a calculated move by colonial forces to gain influence and control over land resources. Colony administrators were able to effectively

control land allocation and utilization by aligning themselves with the power structures that were already in place.

Moreover, chieftdom formation offered a hierarchical structure for the propagation and implementation of colonial programs. Within their territories, chiefs held considerable authority over land administration, having been chosen or acknowledged by colonial authorities. They were essential in settling conflicts, collecting taxes, and making sure colonial orders such as those enforcing communal land ownership were followed. It is imperative to acknowledge the intricate dynamics operating inside these frameworks, however. Although chieftaincies and chieftdoms functioned as intermediates for colonial power, they preserved aspects of native sovereignty and legitimacy. The continuous struggle for control and authority in colonial-era Nsukka was reflected in the frequent conflicts and negotiations that characterized the cooperation between colonial powers and traditional rulers.

Essentially, the development of chieftaincies and chieftdoms as tools of colonial authority was closely tied to the acceptance of community land ownership in Nsukka and other Igbo-land regions. This historical connection highlights the complex effects of colonialism on Nigeria's indigenous government institutions and land tenure systems.

Socio-Economic Consequences: Colonial powers seized vast tracts of land for administration, missionary work, and settlement, forcing indigenous people off their ancestral lands and disrupting social networks and communities. It also led to the displacement and marginalization of indigenous communities, concentrating wealth and power among colonial elites and a small group of collaborating indigenous people, while most faced poverty and social exclusion. This disruption fragmented social ties, weakened traditional governance, and strained the displaced communities' ability to maintain cohesion and adapt to new environments.

Indigenous cultural customs and languages in Igbo-land, including communities in Nsukka, faced significant risk of extinction due to displacement, colonial imposition of foreign languages and cultural norms, and disruptions to communal life. These external pressures led to the decline or loss of traditional storytelling, music, dance, and art forms, as communities struggled to preserve their cultural heritage.

British colonial land acquisition caused enduring disruptions to local economies by imposing forced labor, and fostering economic dependency. The long-term impacts, including restricted educational and employment opportunities, urban displacement, and the erosion of cultural institutions, continue to affect the region's economic landscape today. The acquisition also disrupted the local economy by depriving indigenous people of productive agricultural land, leading to decreased household incomes and agricultural

productivity. The focus on commercial crops like rubber, cocoa, and palm oil over food crops exacerbated food insecurity in the region.

The colonial administration favored the colonial elite and collaborators with better economic and educational opportunities, entrenching racial and ethnic disparities and limiting indigenous access to education and high-paying jobs. Colonial land acquisition by the British forced indigenous groups, such as the Nsukka people, into overcrowded regions with limited resources, leading to economic and social marginalization. This displacement hindered their ability to support themselves, perpetuating poverty and hardship within their communities.

Cultural Consequences: Cultural identity in Nsukka and other parts of Igbo-land is eroding due to the deep-rooted connection between the land and community livelihoods, spiritual beliefs, and social cohesion, with colonial administrators often disrespecting or desecrating cultural sites and forcibly displacing indigenous populations to make way for colonial infrastructure or European settlements, resulting in the loss of cultural continuity and homogeneity as well as disrupting long-standing ties to the land and communal institutions. Colonial powers in Nsukka imposed Western cultural norms, values, and institutions, leading to cultural hegemony and assimilation, achieved through language, religion, education, and law. This eroded indigenous cultural practices and identities, sparking opposition and attempts at cultural revival among indigenous people, leaving lasting impacts on modern Nigerian culture.

The indigenous populations of Nsukka cherished masquerade ceremonies and cultural entertainment as vital expressions of their identity, community cohesion, and intergenerational heritage. However, colonial conquests led to their displacement and the erosion of their cultural practices, as British authorities deemed these traditions as primitive and incompatible with Western civilization, employing various tactics like missionary efforts and legislation to suppress them, forcing indigenous peoples to abandon their customs for Western ones. As a result, some of these masquerade ceremonies were significantly impacted by the British government's colonial purchase of territories in the Nsukka cultural region. Social network disruption, the destruction of holy places, gathering and mobility limitations, cultural repression and stigma, economic uprooting, and processes of cultural hybridization and adaptation all contributed to the erosion of these customs.

The consequences of their removal have really been especially severe for the indigenous people of the Nsukka zone. They were denied meaningful access to, use of, and participation in decisions concerning their ancestral land as a direct result of the loss of their territories and their ongoing inability to access the land after their eviction. This prevents them from pursuing their traditional way of life, cultural and religious practices, and business. The Nsukka people were displaced and forced to relocate among Idoma, Igara, and Tiv tribes, which often discriminate against them on the basis of their ethnicity. They

have also been refused access to the natural riches that are situated on their ancestral grounds without being consulted or paid for their relocation. Additionally, they lack access to the most fundamental social services, such as healthcare and education.

Religious Consequences: Since land represents the entire community, it was held in the highest regard in Nsukka culture. In order to prevent the ancestors' wrath from being directed towards the offender, their future generations, and the community as a whole, any anti-social behavior by a member of the community including murder, adultery, stealing, and incest was considered defilement of the land, and the perpetrator was forced to make certain sacrifices in order to purify the land and placate the ancestors.

These indigenous practices of faith were frequently disturbed or sometimes repressed by the British colonial government. There were certain rights and ceremonies connected to the natural world that reflected these deeply ingrained beliefs in the land. These practices of religion were disturbed, nonetheless, by the fact that the colonial conquest of the land frequently resulted in the displacement of indigenous people and the destruction of holy places.

Missionaries frequently worked to convert native communities in Africa to Christianity as part of British colonization. Religious missionaries, mostly from European faiths, founded schools and churches in the Nsukka cultural region. Due to the introduction of a new faith that contradicted traditional Igbo beliefs, the spread of Christianity had a profound theological impact. Adopting Christian rites and beliefs in place of native religious customs was common throughout conversion to Christianity. The Nsukka cultural region saw extensive cultural change as a result of colonial land acquisition. British colonization brought Christianity along with Western educational, political, and economic institutions that frequently conflicted with indigenous Igbo traditions. Due to the marginalization of indigenous traditions in favor of Western ideals, this cultural shift had an influence on religious beliefs and practices.

Traditional Igbo spirituality endured in sections despite attempts by Christian missionaries and colonial authorities to eradicate indigenous religious traditions. In order to maintain and modify their religious beliefs in the face of outside pressure, many Igbo people participated in acts of resistance against colonialism and cultural assimilation. Syncretism, the blending of Christian and indigenous ideas to form hybrid religious rituals, was frequently the result of this.

Within and outside of the Nsukka cultural region, religious dynamics are still shaped by colonization. Christianity is still the most common religion in the area, with a large following of Catholicism and other Protestant groups. But as attempts to recover and conserve traditional cultural assets have been made, indigenous religious traditions have also seen a resurgence in recent years. The way that faith is perceived and practiced by the

people living in the Nsukka cultural region has consequently been profoundly shaped by the colonial seizure of land.

Loss of Biodiversity: Deforestation: Deforestation, driven by British colonialism for purposes like agriculture and infrastructure, led to severe biodiversity loss and ecosystem devastation, particularly in regions like the Nsukka area. The clearing of forests disrupted ecological balance, causing habitat destruction and fragmentation, ultimately exacerbating environmental degradation through altered water cycles, soil erosion, and increased greenhouse gas emissions.

The introduction of non-native species into Nsukka zone during British colonial land acquisition policies significantly impacted biodiversity by clearing large tracts of land for cash crop cultivation, disrupting ecosystems, displacing native flora and fauna, and introducing invasive species from other regions of the empire. This not only reduced ecosystem resilience and functionality but also had severe socioeconomic consequences for local populations reliant on natural resources for subsistence.

Fragmentation of Habitat: Habitats in the Nsukka zone were fragmented due to British colonial land acquisition policies, disrupting ecosystems and isolating plant and animal populations. This fragmentation led to decreased genetic diversity, higher extinction risks for species, and the disruption of important wildlife corridors, ultimately threatening biodiversity in the region.

Pollution and Degradation of Soil: The heavy use of chemical pesticides, fertilizers, and industrial waste during British colonial rule in the Nsukka zone led to widespread contamination of terrestrial and aquatic habitats, resulting in population declines and biodiversity loss. Additionally, the colonial policy of land acquisition marginalized indigenous populations, disrupted traditional land management practices, and further exacerbated habitat degradation and fragmentation, ultimately contributing to environmental degradation and the loss of biodiversity in the region.

Conclusion

The colonial land purchase has profoundly impacted the socioeconomic and cultural environment by displacing indigenous tribes, eroding their livelihoods, and causing cultural degradation due to infrastructure, mining, and agriculture developments. The shift to wage labor and cash crops disrupted traditional subsistence practices, increasing local vulnerability and dependence. Modern land tenure issues and conflicts, stemming from colonial land acquisitions, persist due to unresolved ownership disputes and marginalization of indigenous voices in resource management, hindering sustainable development and community empowerment. A holistic approach that honors indigenous rights and agency is essential for tackling the enduring impacts of colonial land acquisition in regions like Nsukka, advocating for inclusive land governance, redressing historical

injustices, and empowering communities to sustainably manage their resources, ultimately aiming to foster resilience, justice, and prosperity for all.

References

- Alden, W. L. (2018). Collective Land Ownership in the 21st Century: Overview of Global Trends. *Land*. Vol. 7, N. 68. Google Scholar.
- Büscher, B and Whande, W (2007). Whims of the Winds of Time? Emerging Trends in Biodiversity Conservation and Protected Area Management. *Conservation. Socieitu.*,5, 22–43.<https://journals.lww.com/coas/fulltext/2007/05010/Whims>.Google Scholar.
- Chanock, M (1991) ‘Paradigms, Policies and Property: A Review of the Customary Law of Land Tenure.In K. Mann and R. Roberts (Eds.) *Law in Colonial Africa*. London: James Currey. (pp. 61-84).
- Clarke, R.A. Securing Communal Land Rights to Achieve Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: Critical Analysis and Policy Implications. *Law Environ. Dev. Journal*, 5, 132–150. **Google Scholar**.
- Dominguez, L and Luoma, C. (2020). Decolonizing Conservation Policy: How Colonial Land and Conservation Ideologies Persist and Perpetuate Indigenous Injustices at the Expense of the Environment. Google Scholar.
- Dowie, M. (2009). *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict Between Global Conservation and Native Peoples*. MIT Press: Cambridge: MIT. UK. **Google Scholar**.
- Enyindah,C and Obah, P.O. (2020). Colonialism and Alienation of Land in Ikwerreland, 1900-1960Independence. *Scholarly Journal of Science Research and Essay* Vol. 9, N. 2 <http://www.scholarly-journals.com/RJSSH>. Google Scholar.
- Enyindah, I.C. (2007). “Ikwerre and National Development: A Case Study of State Acquisition of Land,1900- 2000”.M.A. Dissertation. Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, University of Port Harcourt
- Nyong’o, Peter A. 2013. “The Land Question, Land Grabbing and Agriculture in Africa.” CODESRIA Bulletin 3/4: 26 –29.
- Obah, P.O. (2004). “Land Alienation in Ikwerre and its impact on the Society, 1913-2000 AD”. Ph.D Thesis, Department of History, University of Calabar.
- Onwuzuruigbo, I. (2019). Land Grab and Conflicts in Colonial Southeastern Nigeria, (1830-1960). *Ubuntu: Journal of Conflict and Social Transformation*. Vol.8, N0. 1. Google Scholar.
- Waites, B. (1999). *Europe and the Third World: From Colonization to Decolonization*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Springer. Google Scholar