

**BENIN AND URHOB0 PEOPLE IN PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD: A CASE STUDY  
OF INTER-GROUP RELATIONS**

**BY**

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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **ESEGINE OGHENEFIJIRO ANITA** in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to God Almighty, my source of strength, grace and wisdom throughout the period of my course of study.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### Introduction

People from different communities around the world have interacted with one another in a variety of ways for their benefit from the beginning of time. This link has been studied from both an intra-group and an inter-group perspective over time. Worldwide political, economic, and socio-cultural progress of people and societies can be attributed to both types of integration. This is especially true because no society can exist

in isolation from others; no society can live and flourish in this way. Thus, reality has influenced both inter-group cooperation and integration as well as inter-group relations on a global scale. From pre-colonial times to 1900, the Benin and Urhobo people were farmers, focusing on cassava, yam, plantain, and vegetables. They relied on neighbors for essential products like salt, fish, clay, and pepper. Factors like geography, climate, economic resources, food supply, and contact with other civilizations influenced their inter-group relations, with language being a barrier.

Linguistically, the Benins and Urhobos are Edo speaking people, whom by geography occupied an area referred to as southern Nigeria and in some literatures is referred to as the Niger Delta. Put simply, they in Edo and Delta State of Nigeria predominantly. It is an area characterized by identical language and similar religious, social, economic and political institution. What is unique about the people is that like other entity, whom by coincidence of history and human nature could not survived without cross border understanding, Benin and Urhobo people engage in trade, commercial and political relations. Because as it is know the political and economic survival of any group or a nation depends on the type of relations she maintains with her neighbour.<sup>1</sup> It is these relations that this study attempt to examine.

This research work therefore examines the nature, types and impact of Benin and Urhobo inter-group relations up to 1900. It would be argued that the environment of Benin and Urhobo people couple with their other needs is what triggered the inter-group relations of the Niger delta community in pre-colonial Nigeria. Hence, this study would

maintain that inter-group cooperation and integration where necessary and vital steps in tackling societal problems and promoting development in a community.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to examine the inter-group relations of Benin and Urhobo from early time to 1897. While the specific objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the traditions of origins Benin and Urhobo.
2. To examine the pre-colonial political institution, economic activities and social organization of Urhobos
4. To examine the economic Relations between Benin and Urhobo in the pre-colonial period,
5. To examine the socio-political relations between Benin and Urhobo in the pre-colonial period.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study will examine the political, social and economic relations of Benin and Urhobo from early times to 1897. It will also highlight the impact of intergroup relations on the standard of living and welfare of the people of Benin and Urhobo; and in, influencing the growth and development of Benin and Urhobo relations in post-colonial Nigeria. The study began from early times because it enable us to trace beginning of Benin and Urhobo relations and will terminate in 1897, as it was in that year that Benin was invaded by the British, their b terminating Benin and Urhobo independent relations.

## **Methodology**

This research would be carried out using the historical research methodology. Thus, carrying out this research the researcher would collate analyses, and interpret both primary and secondary materials.

## **Primary Sources**

The primary sources include oral interviews, intelligent reports, archival material, and autobiography.

## **Secondary Sources:**

While the secondary sources include textbooks, articles and journals and unpublished works and online materials.

## **Literature Review**

One of the difficulties that is faced by any researcher on studying pre-literate society such as the Benin and Urhobo in pre-colonial times, is the absence of or scarcity of written materials. However, the data that informed the basis of this study, are studies into other societies in Nigeria, within the period and oral interviews. Some of the information from literatures or sources may not necessarily relate directly to the area of study, but have provided very useful hints to the overall theme of intergroup relations. A brief review on some of those works relevant to this study would be carried out here.

A. E. Afigbo's work, "Igbo and their Neighbours: Intergroup Relations in South Eastern Nigeria to 1953"<sup>2</sup> contended that: "Inter-group relations presuppose contact and interaction between groups, each has an identity to make, some inputs into the

relationship, in short, each of which has some scope and area of autonomous action,”<sup>3</sup> Afigbo's contention introduces a very important subject which cuts across all forms of inter-group relations; that is, as groups interact, each contributes to the growth and development or otherwise of one another in diverse ways. He observed that:

Among its common facets are the political (which may be warlike or peaceful), the economic and technological, the cultural (which later includes arts, customs, modes of dress, etc). Other facets include interaction between legal and judicial systems, language and folklore, religion, philosophy and cosmology<sup>4</sup>.

Though writing on the Igbo and their neighbours, Afigbo's theory on inter-group relations is very relevant in our understanding of the Benin and Urhobo relations, particularly in the pre-colonial era. Both communities benefited from one another in one way or the other.

R.E. Bradbury, in his work, “The Benin Kingdom and the Edo Speaking People of South-Western Nigeria, and the Itsekiri”,<sup>5</sup> examine the origin, political organization, social and economic activities of Edo speaking people such as the Benin and Urhobo. The relevant of the literature to our study lies in his geographical description of the environment, topography, culture, trade, and the nature of the economy of the Edo speaking people of the Southern Nigeria.

Edoja Okpokunu in his work, “Major Culture Areas of Nigeria”,<sup>6</sup> divided the culture area of Nigeria into the Niger Delta Region, Rain Forest Region, Guinea Savanna Region, and The Sudan Savanna Region. He identified the imperative characteristic of

the major culture areas of our country. Looking at the article description, the Edo belong to or are located in the Niger Delta Region culture area.

Jude Cocodia in his work, “An Analysis of Traditional Political Organizations: Lessons for the Present”,<sup>7</sup> examined the process of interrogating political history. He adopted the descriptive approach as it tends to assess tenets of socialism and egalitarianism as obtained in some ancient societies of Nigeria’s south-south region. Jude opined that in as much as most of the tenets of politics and government as we know it today have been a part of life in our ancient communities, our history ultimately becomes a rich source of knowledge from which we can draw inferences from to explain the failure and successes of present day societies, as well as make predictions which is what the essence of political science and the study of history is all about. The relevance of the article to our study is that it examines the history, political organization, economic and social activities of the Benin and Urhobo people.

E. B. Eweka, in his work, the *Evolution of Benin Chieftaincy Titles*,<sup>8</sup> examined the development of the Benin Chieftaincy institution, but it does also examine the origin of the Abbi people. Since Urhobo community is an Edo speaking, the literature identified the people as being among the earliest people in conjunction with Benins to have dominated the pre-Benin kingdom and that migrate direct or indirectly from the land of the Ogiso.

S. O. Aghalino in his article, “Trade Currencies in Pre-colonial Nigeria”,<sup>10</sup> This article examines trade and currencies in Nigeria's pre-colonial period, revealing the

importance of money as a medium of exchange. Initially, Nigeria's economy relied on barter systems, but as time passed, standard currencies became more widely accepted. The people had a well-established currency system, including brass rods, manila, copper wires, cowries, iron rods, cloth, and salt. Guns were valued in terms of manila, and slaves were used as units of accounts but not as a medium of exchange.

O. M Ehinmore's article "Pre-Colonial Nigerian Economy: Dynamic Or Stagnant?"<sup>11</sup> The study explores the pre-colonial Nigerian indigenous economy, focusing on its scope, structure, and market status. It argues that a market economy is decentralized, with decision-making mainly determined by market forces, such as demand and supply. The economy is tied to a political system, with three basic functions: production, distribution, and consumption. Coordination is crucial, as individuals' decisions are influenced by society's wants and values. This co-ordination ensures that individual desires do not exceed available resources, which is essential for the successful operation of an economic system.

Anthony Danladi Ali's work , "Trade and Inter-Group Relations In The Lower Niger, 1830-1960"<sup>12</sup>, examine trade and intergroup relations in the Lower Niger in the period 1830-1960 and showed how the people of the Lower Niger related with each other in trade and other aspects of life. The study further examines how the various peoples made use of the opportunities they had in their environment and from outside their environment up to 1960 when Nigeria became independence.

Also, D.C.C. Ama-Ogbari's work, *Introduction to the Economic History of the Niger Delta*<sup>13</sup>, This study highlights the richness and influence of natural resources in the Niger Delta region's pre-colonial economic activities. The ethnic nationalities, including western, central, and eastern Delta, engaged in various activities such as fishing, agriculture, palm oil, and trade. The work provides insights into the Benin and Urhobo economies and their relations.

E. J. Alagoa in his article, "Conflict Resolution: the Nigerian Perspective",<sup>14</sup> discusses the experience accumulated by Nigerian communities over the years for the resolution or management of conflicts which our new democratic national state and local government can use to achieve national stability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He further looked at the prescription of recent study of stability attainable from negotiated settlements of wars with states. The author believe that the practicable way forward for Nigeria would be a return to principles and practices accumulated by our people over the past several centuries. These are to be, not in academic, but packaged in the proverbs and wisdom, literatures of our various communities and preserved in folk memory.

Obaro Ikime's in his work, *Nigeria Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and Europeans Presence*,<sup>15</sup> examined the relations between three ethnic groups: Urhobo, Itsekiri and Isoko in the Niger Delta. He highlighted the rivalry between the Urhobos and Itsekiris, assess the relationship between people of the delta province. He asserts that "the respective geographical location of these people has been one of the most important determinants of the relationship between them". This gives credence to our conclusion

that the Benin and Urhobo environment play vital role in determining their relations, the work will further help us to know the nature of the relationship between Benin and Urhobo.

## **Chapter Outline**

This study is divided into five chapters

### **Chapter One: Background to the Study**

This chapter provides us with the background to our study, the scope, aim and objectives, methodology, chapter structure and the literatures reviewed.

### **Chapter Two: Traditions of Origins of Benin and Urhobo People**

This chapter examines the historical background of Benin and Urhobo, the political organization, social activities, economic activities, and how they were organized in the period under reviewed.

### **Chapter Three: Socio-Political Relations Between Benin and Urhobo**

The chapter would examine political relations between Benin and Urhobo in some areas such as war and military, dynasty and boundaries relations. The chapter also examines the social relation between Benin and Urhobo in such area as festival, marriages and religion.

### **Chapter Four: Economic Relation Between Benin and Urhobo**

This chapter would examine the economic relation between Benin and Urhobo in areas such as trade, commercial activities, boundary dispute and resolution

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

This chapter concludes the research work. It summarise the major thrusts of the study and maintained that the Benin and Urhobo people does not only have the same historical ancestors but never live in isolation from one another. It maintained that, in the history of societal development across the globe, humanity has always survived ad thrived based on their increased collaboration ad interactions with members of other society.

## Endnotes

1. N. Nwabueze, "Towards a Wider Understanding of Inter-Group Relations".in R.T. Akinyele. ed., *Race Ethnicity and Nation Building in Africa: Studies in Inter-Group Relations*, Lagos; Rex Charles Publications 2003, pp. 1-3.
2. A. E. Afigbo, *Igbo and their Neighbours: Intergroup Relations in South Eastern Nigeria to 1953*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1987, p.18
3. Ibid., p. 19.
4. Ibid., p. 19.
5. R.E Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and The Edo speaking peoples of South-Western Nigeria and the Itsekiri*, London: International Institute, 1957.

6. Edoja Okpokunu, "Major Culture Areas of Nigeria", in A. D. Nzemeke and E. O. Erhagbe (eds.), *Nigerian People and Culture*, Benin City: Mindex Publishing, 2002.
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13. E. J. Alagoa, "Conflict Resolution: the Nigerian Perspective", *Kiabara: Journal of Humanities*, 7(1), 2001.
14. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and European Presence*, Ibadan: Ibadan History Series, 1990.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **TRADITIONS OF ORIGINS OF BENIN AND URHOBO PEOPLE**

This chapter examines the historical background of Benin and Urhobo, the political organization, social activities, economic activities, and how they were organized in the period under reviewed. Human is different from animal. Humans have the ability to create and imagine what his environment should look like. This ability distinguish human from animal. Thus, in every human community, primitive or civilized, we can observe an social organization, economic patterns, a coherent body of social norms, ideas, integrated unity or system in which each elements has a defined function in relation to the whole.

## **Traditions of Origin of Urhobo**

There are several traditions of origins of Urhobo and Benin; they are the Hamitic hypothesis, Niger/Benue confluence hypothesis and Benin-Urhobo connection. However, in tracing the traditions of origins, this project refused to be drawn into speculation, ideology and mythology. The thesis focuses on what the people and their authorities seen as their authentic tradition of origin.

## **Hamitic Hypothesis**

The theory has it that everything of significance that took place in Africa South of the Sahara was brought about the Hermites, allegedly a branch of the Caucasian (white) race. This theory was formulated by C. G. Seligman (1930).<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, the Hamitic hypothesis now involved a collective of writers who subsumed the civilization of the black race as especially seen in Africa to outsiders or a certain dominant people outside the Africa continent. These writers knowingly and unknowingly denied African ability to develop sophisticated culture and conquered their environment. They credited anything of civilization in Africa to European race. Some of these writers have therefore considered Africans as low and irrelevant even in terms of academic studies. According to Hughes Trevor-Roper, who in the 1960s was asked by his student at Oxford University about the possibility of teaching Africa history, his reply was, “what happen in Africa are the activities of Europeans. The rest is darkness and darkness is not subject matter of history”. The image portrayed by some of the Hamitic hypothesis theorists were properly summed up by C. G. Seligman book, titled, the *Races of Africa*. According to him:

Apart from the relatively late Semitics influence, the civilization of Africa are the civilization of the Hamits, its history the records of these people and of their interaction with the two other Africa stocks, the negroes and the Bushman, whether this influence was exerted by highly civilized Egyptians or by such wider pastoralist as are represented at the present day by the Beja and Somali. The incoming Hamites were pastoral European – arriving wave after waves – better armed as well as quicker witted than the dark agricultural Negroes.<sup>2</sup>

Benin and Urhobo is part of Africa and the black race. Therefore, the Hamitic hypothesis also influences Benin and Urhobo history. One traditions of origins of Benin and Urhobo claimed that the people migrated from the East. The tradition states that; a long time ago, Benin and Urhobo their followers came from the East (Egypt to be precise) along with the Binis, Ijos, Itsekiris, Hausas, Ga and the Yorubas.<sup>3</sup> The tradition claims that the Benin and Urhobo people were of the same people that lived in Egypt before they (they both) were evicted by the Arabs, Greeks and Romans. They were said to have dominated as leaders in the delta of Egypt where the people (then called the - Akka people comprising the ethnic group listed above) once lived.

### **The Niger/Benue Confluence Hypothesis**

Niger-Benue confluence version was introduced by writers after the unearthing of Nok Terracotta connected with the area. This is another version that tries to explain the traditions of origins of the people of Benin and Urhobo. Some Benin and Urhobo people have since made up their story to identify with the tradition. The attribution of the Benin and Urhobo origins to the Niger/Benue confluence seems to have been base on linguistic

affiliation. There is the view that groups of people might speak the same language at one period; but with the passage of time and their drifting apart, they might lose contact with each other, develop different dialects of the same language and finally acquire different languages. The Benin and Urhobo dialect belong to the Edo speaking group of language and which also invariably belongs to Kwa family group of languages.<sup>4</sup>

It is claim that all speakers of Kwa group of languages family such as the Benin and Urhobe must have lived initially in the Niger/Benue confluence area, from where they dispersed to their present locations all over this part of West Africa. The antiquity of yam cultivation, which the Benin and Urhobo people call “Ole” and “Iyhan”, has been used to support the argument for the migration of the Benin and Urhobo people from the Niger/Benue Confluence area.<sup>5</sup>

The Niger-Benue confluence tradition is unscientific and lacks merit. Yam cannot be used as an element in tracing the actual destination of Benin and Urhobo migration to their current abode. It is doubtful given the fact that the Benin and Urhobo area is not known for yam cultivation.<sup>15</sup> Besides, there are no detailed studies and archaeological evidence on Benin and Urhobo that links them with Niger/Benue Confluence. Consequently, even if the confluence area may have been for long a region for cross-cultural activities for many Nigerian peoples, it is not enough reason to identifying the area as the original homeland for the Benin and Urhobo.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Igodomigodo Connection**

This is may be a more tangible and realistic version on the traditions of origins of Benin and Urhobo. The problem with this tradition of origin is that it did not stated he exact location that the Benin and Urhobo migrated from. It only stated that the people of same stock and lived together for many years before the eventual separation from the land of Igodomigodo (now Edo). This version contains two interconnected traditions of origins of Benin and Urhobo. The first tradition subsumes Uroho clans - thirty-two (32) Urhobo clan's direct or primary migration from Igodomigodo (now Benin, Edo state). This tradition stated that the thirty two (32) Urhobo clans that migrated from Benin. Uniquely, the two traditions of origins showed that, the foundation of Urhobo is of great antiquity.<sup>7</sup>

The thirty two earliest Urhobo communities are - Agbarha-Ame, Agbarha-Otor, Agbarho, Agbon, Arhavwarien, Avwraka, Ephron, Ewreni, Eghwu, Idjerhe, Oghara, Ogor, Okere, Okparebe, Okpe, Olomu, Orogun, Udu, Ughelli, Ughievwe, Uvwie, and Uwherun that migrated from Igodomigodo. These were well settled before the rise of significant historical events that defined the boundaries of medieval and modern time.<sup>8</sup> Thus the first traditions of origins subsume Urhobo primary migration from the land of Igodomigodo.<sup>9</sup> Although, the period and circumstances that led to their migration cannot be verified. This is due partly to the differences in Gregorian and the Julian calendar as well as the absent of written documentation of history at that time in this part of West Africa. However, according to Ekeh, an Urhobo scholar and historian:

There were no contemporaneous account of Urhobo migration from the land once ruled by the kings of the Ogiso dynasty, which now constitute Benin City and much of modern territory. But Urhobo

traditions are firm in pointing to the region (land of the Ogisos) as the sources of their culture. There are indeed important markers of the prior existence of the Urhobo in these lands. The most important of these is the intimate kinship between the people who live in Benin and call themselves Edo and the Urhobo people: closeness between their languages, their religions, and their customs in our own times.<sup>10</sup>

In Ekeh's opinion, the Urhobo left the land of the Igodomigodo long before the words Edo (was indigenously invented) and *Ubine* or *Beny* was Portugarised to Benin, the two words or names that now identified the people of Igodomigodo. According to Ekeh, the two words do not exist in native Urhobo language, either in the past or even in modern times. Besides, Urhobo language has been relatively consistent in applying a standard name to those who inhabited the lands of the Ogisos. Thus, those who now inhabit the same lands under the Obas of the Eweka dynasty still refer to as *Aka*.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps, two major characteristics of the Urhobo primary migrations are could be deduce. First, the migrants took with them whole fragments of proto-Edoid culture and language. Second, those fragments were dominant in the new environments into which they settled. The primary migrants settled into virgin and unoccupied lands. If they did meet prior settlers, they might have been absorbed by the new immigrants. It is doubtful if they met bearers of an older Edoid culture, like the Erohwa, with whom the new migrant co-existed.<sup>12</sup>The point is that, like the earliest Urhobo communities, Ughievwe people migrated from Edo when the area was called Igodomigodo.

From the forgoing, it will be a mistake to indulge in Hubbard’s error in giving the impression that Urhobo language and culture were randomly formed from mixed immigrants from Benin, Ijo, and Igboland.<sup>13</sup> Besides, Professor Onigu Otite stated that:

Although the Urhobo migrated from their Edo abode, they nevertheless continue to assert that they are Edo, and recognized the protect kinship and other social ties with other Edo people. Many ancient songs, epics, and folklore commemorate and re-enact at moments of strategic festive occasions and politically. Militarily rituals, the union between the Urhobo and other Edo- speaking peoples.<sup>14</sup>

These affinities and relations are found in the people’s song and other socio-cultural activities such as nomenclature – to persons and items. One of the songs that symbolizes the social relations and identification with other Edo group states that; “Edo! Avware Edo, Uriri Edo! Edo ghini Edo, Uriri Edo”. The song simply means that; “Edo! we the Urhobo are Edo, glorious. Edo! Edo is Edo, Edo we are glorious Edo”.<sup>15</sup> This song is as old as the Benin and Urhobo people. Benin and Urhobo people are Edo speaking people in Edo state and Delta State. Below are some names common to other Benin and Urhobo.

NAMES IN UGHIEVWE	EQUIVALENT IN OTHER EDO SPEAKING GROUPS	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT
Omoeffe	Omoseffe	Child is better than wealth
Oghene	Osa (in Benin), Oghene (in Etsako or Afemai)	God

Eseoghene	Eseosa	God's gift
Otor	Otor	Land
Obor	Obor	Hand
Arho	Arhor	Eye
Owho	Owhe	Leg
Ozah	Okpia	Cutlass
Ore	Eran	Wood
Omo	Omo	Child
Omose	Omovhor	Girl
Etor	Ekto	Hair
Agogo	Egogo	Wristwatch or bell
Ebe	Ebe	Paper
Amen	Amen	Water
Olotu	Olotu	Champion
Uzo	Uzo	Antelope

**Sources: Field Work, from interview<sup>16</sup>**

From this version, the Benin and Urhobo people are of the same ancestors with other Edo speaking such as the Benin people are historically connected. This is expressed in the proximity of political system. The Ogiso political system or organization is closer to the Urhobo pattern of clan organization, which today can be seen as the foundation of local government administration in Urhobo and Benin and in many parts of Edo land.<sup>17</sup>

Although, the date for Urhobo separation or migration from Igodomigodo cannot be traced with great exactitudes, Professor Onigu Otite, while relying on Williamson's language analysis, makes a reasonable inference on the age of Urhobo and other Edoid languages separation from the land of Igodomigodo. According to him, "we speculate that the various Urhobo groups settled in their present separate territories at different times ranging widely between 200 years and 2,000 years ago".<sup>18</sup> Thus, the foundation or establishment of Ughievwe may be traced to about 2,000 years ago.

The reasons for the Urhobo's primary migration or separation from the land of the Ogiso may not be far-fetched from the low availability of farming space and population increase in Igodomigodo. In ancient time, it was not unusual for families to separate consensually because of low agricultural space.<sup>19</sup> This can also be inferred from the Lot and Abraham separation as recorded in the Bible book of Genesis. Therefore, much community was founded by migrants from Igodomigodo and then subdued their environment. What flowed from this initial primary migration are secondary migrations that give birth to new villages and towns.

In this chapter we have analyzed three distinct versions on the traditions of origins of Benin - Urhobo - Hamitic hypothesis, Niger/Benue confluence hypothesis and Igodomigodo connection. The chapter showed that, the Hamitic hypothesis which says that everything of significance that took place in Africa South of the Sahara was brought about by the Hermites, allegedly a branch of the Caucasian (white) race cannot be used to explain the tradition of origin of Ughievwe. The theory cannot explain the differences in

race, language and culture between that of Benin-Urhobo and Egypt.

Similarly, the Niger-Benue confluence version is too intellectualized. The chapter showed that the version is unscientific and lacking in merit. Yam cannot be use as an element in tracing actual primary place of Benin-Urhobo migration to their current abode. This is because, Yam does not thrive well in some places in Urhobo land. Also, there are no detail studies and archaeological evidence on Urhobo and Benin that link them with Niger/Benue Confluence. None of the Ughievwe renowned historians point to any cultural affinities.

The chapter showed that the Igodomigod version on Benin-Urhobo traditions of origins is the most tangible and scientific among all the versions on the traditions of origins. This tradition of origin contains elements back by the culture and tradition. The culture and language are proto-Edoid culture and language respectively. The position of this project is that, like other Nigerian people, Benin and Urhobo might have migrated from their same location both it may gone into extinction. The Urhobo and other Edo speaking people such as the Benins shared the same ancestors and historical foundation. This is expressed in the proximity of political system. The Ogiso political system or organization is same as that of the Urhobo pattern of village organization.

## Endnotes

1. C. G. Seligman, *Races of Africa*, 1930, cited in J. I. Osagie, “Nigerian History in Pre-colonial Times – Southern Nigeria”, in A. D. Nzemeke and E. O. Erhagbe (eds), *Nigerian Peoples and Culture*, Benin City: Mindex Publishing, 2002, 1.
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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **SOCIO-POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN BENIN AND URHOBO**

The chapter would examine political relations between Benin and Urhobo in some areas such as war and military, dynasty and boundaries relations. The chapter also examines the social relation between Benin and Urhobo in such area as festival, marriages and religion. Unlike the Benins, the Urhobo people of Delta state of Nigeria did not form a centralized system of political *administration* in pre-colonial time. Even attempts to do so were thwarted by some individuals. The people ardor, derived great

pleasure and satisfaction in a decentralized political administration based on the principle of gerontocracy. In spite of the absent of centralized or monarchical system of governance, the pre-colonial Urhobo people enjoyed relations at various level with the Benins. Sometimes, these relations were not cordial but with time animosities were replaced with harmony.

### **Benin-Urhobo Socio-Political Relation**

One of the foremost points of political interaction between Urhobo and Benin lies in the point of common origin. The problem with this level of relations lies in the exact location that the Benin and Urhobo migrated from. It only stated that the people are of the same stock and lived together for many centuries before the eventual separation from the land of Igodomigodo (now Edo). Many Urhobo oral traditions relate the level of political and social interaction between them and Benin. For instance, among the Urhobo people of Abraka, the tradition seemed to have relate the political relations between the Benin and Urhobo.<sup>1</sup>

For whatever reason Urhobos in general migrated from their brothers in the land of the Ogiso, one of the oldest fragment of that migration are those of Isoko and southern region of Urhoboland. (including Uwheru, Olomu, Ewreni, Ughelli, Eghwu, Okparebe and Ogor), mostly bordering Patani River or Ijos. This area are generally waterlogged, especially in the months of rainy season from June to October.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the above Urhobo communities and towns are the first to have had socio-political relations with Benins in the land of the Ogisos. In generally, Urhobo

cultural divisions in southern Urhobo and those in Isoko are the oldest fragments of the Urhobo migration from the lands of the Ogisos. What followed seem to be that from the initial migration into southern Urhobo, West of Patani River, resulted internal migration from southern Urhobo and Isoko, westward and northwards. What appeared to have taken place were secondary or internal migrations, backwards as it were toward Ethiope River. The evidence of that assertion arises from internal traditions of Urhobo migration.<sup>3</sup>

This internal or secondary migration resulted in the founding of northern areas of the Urhoboland including Oghara, Idjerhe, Okpe, Agbon Avwraka (now called Abraka), and Orogon.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, internal migration was what probably birth Abraka, and thus the different between Abraka and other Urhobo communities and towns in Delta state of Nigeria in pre-colonial period was a matter of independence political existence. However, there are still other versions to the political but embedded in tradition of origin of Abraka. These two versions linked the people origin to the Benin.<sup>5</sup>

Millinson intelligence report stated that Abraka people belong to the Umuakshaida clans and also stated that “although there was no legend as to where the founder Akasaia came from, he was almost certainly one of the early migrants across the Ethiope (from Benin).<sup>6</sup>” Abraka is said to have broken away from the Mein clan and had adopted Urhobo language and custom. According to oral account, Ewake, a son of an Oba of Benin, was prevented from succeeding to the Obaship by a half brother called Azonowe and was then driven from Benin and after settling at Orogho on the Benin side of the Ethiope, subsequently crossed the river and founded the present Abraka.<sup>7</sup>”

There is however another story that seemed to relate the socio-political relations between Urhobo and Benin. It is said that a senior Benin Prince named Avwaike (probably the same as the person called Ewake), and the son of Oba Oguola (circa 1280) founded Abraka. According to the story, it is said that Oba Oguola fearing that one of his male children would overthrow him, decreed that all his male children should be killed. In the face of this decree, all the Oba's wives were always reporting the birth of female children. When the decree was eventually revoked, a son who eventually became Oba Egbeka, was reported to have been born whereupon the traditional royal rituals associated with the eldest son of the king was administered on the new-born child.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of Avwaike who was senior to Egbeka, whose birth was not reported, it became impossible to recognize him as the eldest son of the Oba Oguola. At the demise of Oba Oguola, Egbeka was crowned and his senior brother Avwaike had to leave Benin because he could not humiliate himself by becoming a subject to his younger brother Egbeka. At this point Egbeka sent troops after Avwaike who then fled and crossed the River Ethiope to a place called Ovuwelame from which the present Abraka clan begins.<sup>9</sup> Reconciling the versions of the same story, one can only say that the founder of Abraka had political relations with the Benin but this relations had been intermix to form what is known as the tradition of origins of Abraka (and Urhobo Clans).

The Benin and Urhobo people interacted and related especially in times of coronation ceremonies of the Oba of Benin. If a king, Ovie of Urhobo people of Abraka

clan or a chief were being crowned, it was usually done with fun fares and pageantry. For instance, whenever coronation of the Ovie of Abraka was taking place in Abraka, The Benin people would be invited and they would all come and participate and witness the coronation ceremony<sup>10</sup>. In the same vein, when appointment of the elders and Odionwere were installed in Benins' villages such as Evbosi, Orogho, Ugo and many others, the people of Urohobo would also be invited and they would also grace the occasion and participate where necessary. There was always this cordial relationship and cooperation between the Benin and Urhobo people upto the coming of colonial rule.

### **Conflict and Diplomacy**

Despite the fact that the relationship that existed between Benin and Urhobo was cordial, it does not rule out the fact that there were areas where disagreement and misunderstanding arose between them especially in terms of thefts. It is instructive to know that these disagreements and misunderstanding were settled through diplomacy. Benin and Urhobo practiced diplomacy in their own terms. Diplomacy is the management of relations through peaceful negotiations.<sup>11</sup>

The relationship between the Urhobo clans and people with the Benins was not wholistically cordial all the time. The Mein group of Ijo who lived side by side with the Ughievewen (an Urhobo clan) seemed to have provided the answer. They stated that, Mein, the ancestor of the whole subgroup lived at Benin with his wife, Obolu.<sup>12</sup> He left Benin because of internal wars and settled at Aboh. He had large number of children here including, Kor. He fled Aboh with his family after killing a woman he caught stealing or

violating his god, *Dimieghbeya*, represented by an elephant's tusk. He lost the original tusk in his flight but received a fresh one from God. Mein then settled and established Ogobiri on the Sagbama- Igbedi Creek. Ogobiri soon became too crowded for Mein's descendants. At this time, the whole family was headed by Kor – the eldest man. With time, however, some Mein children decided to leave Ogobiri.<sup>31</sup> The point here is that, since the founding of Ogobiri by Mein is connected to migration from Benin, it is quite obvious therefore that the people of Benin and Urhbo people of Ughievwe like their Mein brothers in Ogobiri ones had political relation with Benin.<sup>13</sup>

A similar explanation has been given in an oral tradition which stated that, the Urhobo people of Ughievwen “ancestor left Benin to settled in this part of the Delta voluntarily after previous examination of the area by the employed hunters and sanctioned by the Oba of Benin”,<sup>14</sup> the oral account noted their ancestor abode in Ogobiri. This tradition held that, Ughievwe, Eghwu and Udu (a woman), Agbahor, Izon were children of the same biological father who left on the order of the Oba of Benin. But Ughievwe, Eghwu and Udu (a woman) were of the same mother and that Aghbahor, Izon were their step brothers. However, the name of their mother was not revealed. They all lives together with their father (Mein) who left Benin to Ogobiri and on the death of their father, disputes arose as to who would take custody of the ancestral shrine or god. This dispute gradually culminated in violence engagement between Ughievwe and Izon. In this circumstance, Ughievwe mother devise a planed, at mid-night she went and toke the god while the Izon were in a festive mood. That same night, the households of Ughievwe

and their mother migrated from Ogobiri. Izon people were happy that Ughievwe has left, without the knowledge that the god has been taken from the shrine. Up till today, Ughievwe's Ogbaurhie festival is used to commemorate their successful flight through water transportation from Ogobiri under the command of Bethiowha. Hence, the Ughievwe people say that Berhiowha was responsible for bringing the Ughievwe gods to their present settlement.<sup>15</sup>

On arriving at the Otor-Ughievwe, the Udu people were already here. The Udu people decided to migrate far inward. Two reasons have been adduced for Udu moved away from Otor-Ughievwe. The first talked about consultation and discussion based on the previous knowledge that, the land was demarcated or shared by the Oba of Benin and that Udu was outside her domain. Thus, Udu people decided to vacate the areas for Ughievwe. Second reason is that, Udu felt threatened by rapid population increase in the Ughievwe community. The Udu's husband (Ovo, who was a Benin warrior) discovered that, his wife (Udu) had paternal relationship with Ughievwe decided to leave. This attitude is reported to have resulted from frequent raids and other forms of harassment which the Udu settlement suffered at the hands of the Ijo (of Kiagbodo/Bikorogha) before the Ughievwe arrived. This was responsible for the decision of the Udu to evacuate the site in preference for the present day Oto-Udu, about four kilometres to the North-east.<sup>16</sup>

A section of the present Olomu was said to be living between the new Ughievwe settlement and the Eghwu people further to the east. There was a reported plan by the Ughievwe and Eghwu to force the Olomu group to quit the area. In a bid to foil this move,

the threatened group appealed to Oba of Benin for protection. The military and political influence of the Benin Empire which was then pervasive used to suppressed what could have a conflict between the two kins. The arrival of troops from Benin made the Ughievwe to flee, and crossing the Okpare Creek then pitched camp at the present day Otor-Ughievwe (Otor-Jeremi).<sup>17</sup>

Udu tradition stated that, the relations between them began far deep in history when a punitive expedition was sent against a *rebellious* Benin man, Chief Igvide (Sometimes rendered Igbede). The expedition operation was led by Onirhe and Ovo (both were Benin soldier). The expeditionary, having accomplished their objective of crushing Igbede, moved south ward into Izon territory (apparently Ogobiri) ostensibly in search of more spoils.<sup>18</sup>

Onirhe and some of the troops under his command got to a place called Igbeni at Ogobiri and settled temporarily. Here Onirhe married an Urhobo woman called Udu, after whom the clan is named. Udu was a younger sister to Ughievwe. From Igbeni, Onirhe, his wife (Udu) and the remainder of his legionaries migrated to a point near the present day Otor-Ughievwe. Not long after, the Ughievwe descendants also arrived and settled by the bank of the Okpare creek. The desire to have a more peaceful life coupled with the discovery that the Ughievwe had sanguine relationship with Izon, made Onirhe move his residence further inland to the present day Oto-Udu.<sup>19</sup> The first name of the settlement was said to be Oto-Onirhe. Onirhe had three sons by Udu. Their names were Ohuvwun, Aladja, and Uloho. Udu traditions agree generally that Onirhe's descendant,

and children later founded the thirteen villages and towns in the Ewvirhe section of Udu and that the people of Udu and Ughievwe are blood relative, thus marked unique relations between Ughievwe and Udu.<sup>20</sup>

In reconciling this position held by the Udu people, the people of Ughievwe reveal a clearer picture of the level of peaceful relationship between the Urhobo and Benin Udu. The interviewee stated that, Ughievwe, Eghwu, Udu (a woman), Agbarho, Izon were children of the same biological father from Benin. They all lived together with their father at Benin before moving to Ogobiri. But Ughievwe, Eghwu and Udu (who was a woman) were of the same mother. They also concurred that Agbarho, Izon were of the same mother. Of course, in those days, polygamy was a verve through which the family and the society were cemented. That is, men's wealth depended on the numbers of wives and the size of his family.<sup>21</sup> However, the name of their mothers is not known. But we were told that they all lived together with their father who left Benin to Ogobiri and after a long time, disputes arose as to who would take custody of the ancestral shrine or god.

This dispute gradually culminated in violent engagement between Ughievwe and Izon. During this time Udu was no longer at Ogobiri. She had been married to a giant who purportedly came from Benin, an apparent reference to Onirhe whom was said to be of an extra ordinary size. Tradition has it that, by the time Ughievwe moved away from Ogobiri to Otor-Ughievwe, Udu and her husband were already settled in the area. The point here is that, Ughievwe and Udu relations has paternal undertone. Thus, their

relations began at family level and gradually metamorphosed into intra-group or clans relationship as their descendants continue to engage with one another over the years.<sup>22</sup>

Also, after a sometime, Onirghe and Udu later moved upward to Otor-Udu about four kilometres to the North-east. Two reasons has been adduced for this movement, the first talked about consultation and discussion based on the previous knowledge and understanding that, the land has been properly demarcated by their ancestors and Oba of Benin using the wherewithal of hunters. Hence, Udu realized she was living outside her domain, the Udu people decided to vacate the areas for Ughievwe, their brothers. The second is that, Udu felt threatened by rapid population increase in the Ughievwe community. And that, Udu's husband, Onirghe, having discovered that the Udu had paternal relationship with Ughievwe saw no possibility of an harmonious co-existence. This attitude is reported to have emanated from frequent raids and other forms of harassment which the Udu settlement suffered at the hands of the Ijo (of Kiagbodo/Bikorogha) before the Ughievwe arrival. These fears were the underlying factors that encourage Onirhe to evacuate the site in preference for the present day Oto-Udu.<sup>23</sup>

Also, it was at this same period, Egbile (rendered Ngbile in Mein genealogy).a descendant of Izon, married from the Ughievwe family during the period. This was probably a gesture by the Ughievwe to strengthen diplomatic relationship with their Izone brothers and neighbour. But in view of the old family ties between the Egbile and Izon, Ughievwe did not feel secure in their relationship with their son-in-law, for it was feared

he might betray them to their enemy, the Mein. This made the Ughievwe to move further north of the Okpare Creek that is Otor-Ughievwe.<sup>24</sup>

Another way the people related was through the diffusion of secret societies. Among the four secret societies presence in Urhobo today, three of them has been transmitted or transfer to the people from Benin. The Igbun society is originally peculiar to the people of Ughievwe but has been transferred to the people of Udu by the Ughievwe.<sup>25</sup> The Igbun society also opens to males only who have distinguished themselves in war and other acts of valour. The title-holder (ogbun) is therefore a rough equivalent of a brave and distinguished soldier. There are two departments - Igudun Ovo and Igbun Eshovwin - each with its own Odede, who is always the oldest by length of membership (title-age). The Igbun performs judicial functions. Its court tries cases of theft and disputes over land. The society is also empowered to collect debts, on behalf of a creditor who seeks its assistance. Igbun are responsible for the organization of the annual festival (ore) to honour ancestors in contrast to the practice in other societies, the body of a dead Odede must be buried in his place of birth.<sup>26</sup>

The other is the Ebo Society. This is another secret society that has been transferred by the Ughievwe to the people of Udu. This has the largest followership, and is open to both sexes. Interested persons in other Urhobo polities are also eligible for entry. An important condition in this respect is that any of such people should be able to establish that one of his or her parents is genealogically linked with the Udu or Ughievwe polity. The society's main public function is the organization of the annual Ogbaurhie

festival. Ogbaurhie (the strong one of the waters) is the most importance of Ughievwe gods and is believed to be the god of procreation, fertility, or general well being. This is one reason why Ebon Society which is identified with the god, is the most popular of the four societies. The Odede by title-age is always the one with the longest record of membership. He must reside at Udu or Ughievwe where he receives tributes from members on behalf of the society.<sup>27</sup>

There is also the Ade society which is originally peculiar to the people of Ughievwe society and has not been transferred to the people of Udu. In social ranking this was the most important of the four societies. Members (males only) regard themselves as belonging to club of the noble and affluent. To become a member one must experience spiritual visitation by the god of the Ade Society. Anyone so visited must report to the Odede at Orugheevwee to declare his intention to join and make a promise of when he would be initiated. These processes are formed at *gorhovwen*. The ceremony mostly involved oath-taking (*edjere eshe*) The Odede is always the oldest member alive, and he on behalf of the society is responsible for the annual festival of *Emuereyavwon*.<sup>28</sup>

### **Festivities**

Festival was another way people in pre-colonial Nigeria interacted, by courtesy visit and formal invitation to friends, business/trade partners and in-laws in neighbouring communities and clans. Although in modern time some indigenes now look at the festival from the perception of Christianity and not from the traditional African religious values of festivals as was obtainable in pre-colonial Urhobo and Benin. Traditional festival is

part of culture. Culture is made up of a people's customs, traditions, and beliefs, their behaviour, dress code, language, their work, their way of living, network relationships, and their attitudes to life, the focus of group loyalties and the way they perceive the world.<sup>29</sup> The festival is an acceptable general behaviour guarded by the norms and beliefs of its members. Festival is period of music and dance and is also used to pray for peace and prosperity in a communities.<sup>30</sup>

It is the season or period when people reinforce their belief in the worship of gods, the divinities and the deities. It can also be as a day or period of religious or other celebration. Festival is a periodic celebration in acknowledgement of blessings already received, and means of requesting for more blessings, protection and guidance from the creator through lesser gods and ancestors. It is observed among the various traditional communities in Nigeria that as a periodic celebration, festivals provide occasional forum for the people to pray for peace and prosperity, to offer sacrifices to the gods, to make atonement for the sins of the past as well as to celebrate common ancestry.<sup>31</sup>

Festival is an event usually set aside by a local community. It centres on some unique aspects of that community. It is a set of activities and practice designed to entertain the people of that particular community. Among many religions, a feast is a set of celebration in honour of God or gods. A Feast and a festival is historically inter-related. Festival of many types serves to meet specific needs as well as to provide entertainment. These types of celebration offer a belonging to Religious, social or geographical groups.<sup>32</sup>

Festivals also remind people of their traditions and in recent times also helps in unity among family. There are numerous types of festivals in the world, though many have religious origin, others have some cultural significance. Also, certain people celebrate their own festival to mark some significant occasion in their history. Festival is also a set of activities and practice designed to educate and to entertain the people of a particular community through ritual performance, celebrations or social activities. Festivals are periodic re-occurring days or seasons of merry-making set aside by a community, tribe, clan, for the observance of sacred celebration, religious solemnities or musical and traditional performance of social significance. It is an occasion of public manifestation of joy.<sup>33</sup>By so doing, songs are used. Songs and dances are common features at their festivals and ceremonies. Urhobos have such festival as Emeteyavwo festival (clitoridectomy), Ore festival (ancestral worship), Omanuku festival (celebrated in honour of a water goddess) and the udje carnival. For instance, the udje dance is as old as the Urhobo people, the origin cannot be traced since the people cannot state exactly how it started.<sup>34</sup>

The Udje dance were originally performed by Eghwu (Ewu), Okparabe, Olomu, Arhavwarien and Ughwerun. The dance is performed by these communities at different times and dates fixed by their members. In most cases it is performed alongside special festivals such Ogbaurhie. Also associated with festival in Urhobo is the Ikenike dance. It was peculiar to the Ughievwe and Udu people. The exact origin and where the dance

came from seemed to be obscure from Benin. This claim is no doubt based on the intricate relationship between the two, Urhobo and Benin.<sup>35</sup>

### **Endnotes**

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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ECONOMICS RELATIONS BETWEEN BENIN AND URHOB**

This chapter would examine the economic relation between Benin and Urhobo in areas such as trade, commercial activities, boundary dispute and resolution. Inter-group relations appear to be one of the recent themes in African historiography. It could be conceptualized as a "state of friendship or hospitality, cooperation or competition, dominance or subordinate, peace or war between two or more groups and their respective members.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it has been viewed as a social unit consisting of a member of

individual who stand-in role and a status relationships to one another and who possess a set of value or norm of their own to regulate their behaviors towards each other in matters affecting them.<sup>2</sup> It presupposes contact and interaction between groups each of which has an identity, to make some inputs into the relationship, in short, each of which has some scope and area of autonomous action.<sup>3</sup>

For humans to survive there is need for relation with neighbours irrespective of barriers. Different ethnic groups in pre-colonial Nigeria discover this very early and in one way or the other engaged in some forms of relations with others. These relations were either through peace or diplomacy and conflict or war. Whatsoever dimension these relationships pass through, relations existed and will continue to exist between Benin and Urhobo. Urhobo and Benin are some of the earliest Urhobo clans. The two clans has enjoyed cross border relations with no language barrier. This chapter examines the various forms of relations between Benin and Urhobo. These relations include socio-political and economic relations in pre-colonial times. The major distinctive measure of the relations between Benin and Urhobo was diplomacy. The socio-cultural and political relations as well as economic activities were inclusive, but not limited to the ones above. Thus, this chapter examines the relations in regards to the agriculture, industrial and trade cooperation.

### **Agricultural Cooperation between Benin and Urhobo**

Agriculture is so ancient that it is usually associated with the beginning of the “world”. The people of Urhobo and Benin people were agrarian societies that depended

on agricultural activities for survival. In fact they were conqueror, not in term of conquering other human civilization but their environment which hitherto where not inhabited by any aborigine before their arrival. The main traditional occupation of the people is agriculture. The type of agriculture that was practiced was the subsistence method of which farm lands were cultivated. Agricultural development in Urhoboland consisted of the gradual acquisition of new crops, the evolution of viable farming systems, and appropriate technology.<sup>4</sup> Lumbering was also an occupation among the people. In this regards land was a vital commodity. Land was a key item for farming and the whole economic systems.<sup>5</sup>

Farming was the largest employer of labour, as well over 60% of the people engage in it. The main food crops grown in both Benin and Urhobo were cassava (*Manihot esculenta*), yam (*Dioscore Spp*), maize (*Zea mays*), vegetables and plantain (*Musa spp*). Plants are usually grown in compound gardens where it is fertilised using household refuse. Cassava, yams and maize are usually grown under a system of rotational fallowing. Today, owing to population pressure on land, the fallow period is being eliminated (this is particularly so in the vicinity of large towns) and continuous cultivation is rapidly emerging. Yam which used to be important in the past, is fast declining amongst Urhobo farmers mainly due to declining soil fertility occasioned by elimination or reduction of the fallow period without applying organic or inorganic fertilizers.<sup>6</sup> Cassava is now the major crop grown, mainly because it can tolerate less fertile soils more than yams. Cassava is usually processed locally to obtain garri, starch,

(Usi) and tapioca (ivworhtya) which is widely eaten amongst the Urhobo. The main tree crops are rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*) and the oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*). The former used to be a major source of income for the farmer and rural populace but has declined in importance in recent years, having been replaced by the oil palm as the major economic tree crop.<sup>7</sup>

By implication, Benin and Urhobo practiced subsistent farming with crude agricultural implements like hoe, knife, locally made spade and others were used for farming for family consumption or social exchange. And these implement where gotten from Urhobo who by circumstances of their strategic location was a melting point for people of varied professions. In other words, while there was something like farming for commercial purposes in Benin and aided by farm implements from Urhobo, it was different from the present day emphasis on commercial agriculture which has eroded traditional practice.<sup>8</sup>

The availability of suitable farm land is a crucial factor in the development of agriculture in pre-colonial Urhobo and Benin societies. Therefore, much respect was attached to its holding and usage in the overall economy. The people of Urhobo usually welcome others from neighbouring communities for agricultural and farming. Thus, in principle, the people of Agbahor would not lease land without the offer of a sacrifice or an oblation to the earth goddess since land belonged to a vast family made up of ancestors, living members of the society. Thus, lands were usually given to migrating

Benin people on temporary basis. A similar practice is also common among the people of Benin.<sup>9</sup>

This system of leasing of land was demonstrated right from the time a choice of land for farming season had to be made. Land in Benin just like in some parts of pre-colonial Nigeria was strictly communal and held in trust by the eldest man in the clan for his people. To this end, individual acquisition and private ownership were though allowed but discouraged in a large scale. Thus, every agricultural season witnessed complex process of selecting a suitable farm land by the people. There was the interplay of the physical, economic, cultural and behavioural attitudes within the community.<sup>10</sup>

Communal labour refers to a system whereby all the able bodied adult male members of the community were organized to clear a parcel of the virgin forest for farming. Once cleared and burnt, such lands were communally held by the members of the village. Nobody, not even the traditional head could sell or buy a communal land. The amount of land acquired by individual families for farming during the initial work of clearing and burning the bush depended on the amount or numbers of labourers he is able to mobilize for work, hence the wealth of a man was determined by the number of wives, children and domestics servants he has to provide him with the necessary helping hands in farming.<sup>10</sup>

It was here that there arose the need for agricultural cooperation between Benin and Urhobo. Since the people of Benin and Urhobo live in close proximity to one another, one of the first area of cooperation come in form of boundary demarcation for

agricultural purposes. The boundary was demarcated with trees (Okpagha) in some part, while in others digging was of long man hole of earthen stand was done to separate their farm land. This enable farmer at both sides of the territory to farm yearly without any encroachment from either side.

It must be noted that within the Urhobo and Benin, individuals could lay claim to land. The agricultural land cooperation helps to prevent individual and communal conflicts. Individual ownership of land depended on the ability to clear a part of the virgin forest for farming or building. However, the concept of ownership of land was restricted by the will of the gods, or the prevailing spirit of the ancestors whose wishes were interpreted through the priest of earth goddess. Nevertheless, actual occupation of land by an individual once permitted was usually regarded as conferring rights of continued use. Therefore, anyone who first deforested a parcel of land had a right to that land.<sup>11</sup>

In pre-colonial Benin land availability was less restricted compared to Urhobo, hence Urhobo people usually found it easy to be granted land on which to farm provided they obtained permission from the Benin, especially when their behaviours conformed to the established norms and values, within the society. Permission was also given to strangers to obtain land for residential purposes but, the moment such an occupant vacated the land either on his own volition or at the request of the community, the land automatically reverted to the elders as the custodians of such lands.<sup>12</sup>

This system of allocating land to strangers was another way that Benin and Urhobo cooperated during the pre-colonial. Both groups were good at providing land for agriculture to neighbours for farming and residential use. An Urhobo man or woman could be granted land on which to farm in Benin, provided he/she obtained permission from the chiefs and the behaviours conformed to the established norms and values of Benin.<sup>13</sup> However, for him/her to be able to continue enjoying this privilege the person must continue to maintain obedience to the values within the society.

On a similar note, among the Urhobo, apart from the communal farmland, every family head possessed a parcel of land behind his home. Until such lands were distributed to the growing male children of the family (wherein they built their respective compounds) they remained as gardens which served as supplements to the products for the main farm. The family head with some assistance from his wives planted various crops in the garden at the beginning of every planting season. With acceptable agricultural policy sanctioned by tradition, there was hardly any dispute over land in pre-colonial between Benin and Urhobo.<sup>14</sup>

In case of any land disputes between two persons, the elders of the village looked into such cases and effected settlements. Then, if it involved two villages, the elders would settle the matter. This policy was adopted in order to avert war over agricultural land and promote cordial relation between the two people. Land boundary between the two were usually demarcated by planting at the boundary marked by the elders of both villages; such boundaries marked the terminal point of expansion of both.<sup>15</sup>

### **Industrial Relation: Soap (Ojha) Manufacturing**

Indigenous soap was manufactured in pre-colonial Urhobo. The soap possessed a dark brown colour and was made in the form of cakes for domestic uses. Soap making involved a number of processes, which required the use of some green wood as part of the raw materials. Production began when such woods were gathered into a heap and fire was set on them until they gradually burnt to ashes. After the ashes were cool, they were gathered into a basket laddened with fresh cocoyam leaves. The basket was thereafter placed on a mud tripod stand and water was poured into it to settle in a collecting bowl. The collected brownish water was gently heated to leave a residue of powdery substance.<sup>16</sup>

The soap was formed with the addition of palm oil to the powder. The substance was mixed to a paste and cooked before it was cut into soap cakes. Although the indigenous soap making industry suffered major setbacks especially with the advent of modern soap making technology, the technology of making the indigenous soap remains to be adapted for modern soap making industry in Nigeria.

### **Palm Oil (Ofigbo) and Fishing Relations**

The Benin depended mainly on oil palm, and gins from Urhobo. Unlike the Benin people whose other principal economic activities revolved around farming and fishing, the principal economic activity of the Urhobo people was collecting palm nut from which oil and kernel were extracted. Fishing is done in the major rivers and creeks using gill nets, trap nets and cast nets. The main catch includes tilapia, mudfish, and catfish. As a result

of overfishing and indiscriminate use of poisonous chemicals to kill fish in the past, catch of fish has declined considerably in recent years. Aquaculture featuring fish production in fish ponds is in its infancy but it is likely to assume increased significance in the near future. Fishing remain one of the pre-occupation of Benin people and this they usually bartered for other commodities or items from Urhobo product such as palm oil

The process goes in this direction. Palm-nut collection was a seasonal activity. The periods of collecting extend from January to June and it was controlled by a council of elders in each village community, whose duty was to officially declare the palm bush open or closed for collection. Oil extraction from the palm-nut was a process that lasts for approximately days, and it involves the cooperation of the man, his wife and children, and in some cases, members of the extended family.<sup>17</sup>

The first stage in palm collection was the climbing of the palm trees using ropes woven from raffia palms. The man uses a cutlass to cut down the nuts, usually bunched together in a big cob of about eighteen inches long. The wife's role was to haul to the trough the nuts collected in a single day, which amount to "a little over one puncheon (13 cwt) or 180 gallons of oil and fifty-six bushels of palm kernel". In certain circumstances, such as when the tapper is a bachelor, the husband is very sympathetic, or the wife is very sick, the man could assist the woman in gathering the scattered nuts to his own trough.

At the end of the collecting period, the palm nut collector then slices the bunches into four or more smaller pieces each, covers them with palm branches and they are left for a period of two to three days to ferment a little. This fermentation softens the nuts and

facilitates further processing. That was done, the palm nut collector, shake the nuts loose from the sliced cobs into a bamboo rack, designed to remove husk or dirt from them. The clean nuts are then transferred into the oil canoe or trough of about 12 to 15ft long, 3 to 4ft wide and 4ft in depth, with a sloping bottom and a plugged hole at the end.<sup>18</sup>

When the trough is half full with palm nuts, the nuts are trodden with bare feet for about two days until they are reduced to pulp consisting of nuts, having integument and oil. Since this part of the job is laborious, the man is often assisted by friends and members of the extended family. The pulp that emerges as a result of the treading is piled on the higher end of the trough so that the oil will flow to the lower end. The trough is then covered with plantain leaves as well as palm fronds for a couple of days. Two to three days later, the man and his family complete the process of oil extraction, which may take approximately two full days more. The oil is usually of poor quality, and poured into tins for further boiling to remove impurities. Water is then added to the pulp and shaken vigorously to float the oil that is left in the nuts and hairy integument. The oil is siphoned off from the top of the water into drums and boiled for about one hour, after which it is poured into kerosene tins ready for consumption and sale. Meanwhile, the clean nuts and fibrous residues are thrown out of the trough to dry for about nine to ten days. These are shared by the women who participated in the palm oil processing. The women crack the nuts for domestic use and for sale.<sup>19</sup>

It was because of its economic value, the oil palm remained a source of revenue for the Urhobo and Benin traders and key item for industrial cooperation between the

people. Family gave up parts of its surplus for sale in return for what it needed and did not produce, and saved the remainder of its produce for the rainy day.<sup>20</sup>

### **Benin Trade Relation with Urhobo**

In Urhobo market operate on periodic basis usually with 4-8 days intervals between consecutive market days. The most important periodic market close to Urhobo was the Okan. For the Urhobo and Benin people domestic and external trades were the main types of trade engaged upon by the people. Farmers, traders and artisans exchanged their goods for those they lacked. In domestic or local trade, articles exchanged in the markets included palm produce like palm oil and kernel, starch, tapioca, yam, meat and fish. The Benin traders who travelled to Urhobo areas for market will purchased these produce in whole sale quantities and brought them to their market for retailing.<sup>21</sup>

It should be added that in Benin, there were markets. These markets however, varied in sizes as there were small markets and big markets. There were about four markets in Ilaji and these markets still exist till today and serve their usefulness. The market days were so chosen that no clashes occurred with the market days Benin and Urhobo. The markets were meeting point where people from various background or communities come to buy and sell. The Urhobo people enjoyed good trade relations with Benin land. This showed that the Benin people were not the only one that were attending or selling and buying in their markets. Thus, the likely hold that reciprocal trade cooperation were forge or formed between the Urhobo and Benin people.<sup>22</sup>

Palm oil remained one of the produced items that encourage the Urhobo people to engaged in trading activities with the Benin people, this was not just because the Benin land was not fertile for palm oil production but because the industrial and trade cooperation. Oil palm, which provided the fruit for which palm oil was obtained, grows abundantly in farmland and abandoned land. The palm tree was the centre of social and economic life of the people of land.

In attending each other markets, it was a matter of principle; if you treat me well in your markets I will treat you well in my village market. Customers and foreigners are well treated in neighboring markets. The market intervals varied from 4 days to 8 days. In any case, most of the markets fell within the traditional market days. Markets were organized by women who charged market women who required permanent trading post or position some amount of money or goods. It was their task to purify the market if any woman died with pregnancy. Different articles of trade had special areas allocated to them so that buyers and sellers knew the customary section of the market where various articles were sold. At each of these markets the women supervised transactions, settled differences and quarrels arising from haggling of buyers and sellers.<sup>23</sup>This situation was, however, not peculiar to the Urhobo and Benin relations alone, as this was a noticeable feature of pre-colonial market system. The point to note is that trade, which went on between the Urhobo and Benin, brought them in contact with one another, fostered cultural bond and also encouraged inter-marriages and language familiarity.

Long distance trade was well organized. The traders in most cases knew themselves. They often inquired from one another as to those who would attend the next market. This was in order for them to go in-group. Going in-group is understandable because of the general insecurity in trade routes. Markets were often the affair of women. Trading pattern in the area was not unconnected with the ecological disparity in the region which appeared to have given rise to some form of regional specialization. During the pre-colonial period, the Benin were not good at producing oil palm for self satisfaction, hence they rely on Urhobo for the produce as well as the palm kernels.<sup>24</sup>

Fishing product was another important produce that the Urhobo people got from the Benin people. Urhobo people were not producing fish sufficiently; hence they depended on the Benin people to meet this short fall. Fishes were valued for food, sacrifices to the ancestors and for festivals. The germane point to our discussion is that the markets which were important primarily as exchange centres also had an inherent social significance, facilitating the intermingling of people. Market is an excellent meeting place not only for buying and selling but also for exchanging ideas and forging friendships. Moreover, long-distance trade necessarily involved traders spending days outside their homes. Inevitably, this produced new relationships. There were no hotels or developed tourist centres to cater for the needs of traders and travellers. In this way, long distance traders made new friends on whom they depended for accommodation. However, these traders who had relatives in places to which they traded were housed by such relatives. These commercial relations between the various communities were important in

that they enabled the various groups in the area to trade their produce for the produce of other economic or ecological zones. This trade across the border towns underscored the complementarity of economic life and promoted healthy inter and extra-group relations. Culturally, Benin and Urhobo have institutionalized social relations through marriage alliance. In pre-colonial times, there were trade routes linking all the commercial centers within and outside the area. There were footpaths occasionally cleared to link one village or quarters with the others. Trade routes criss-crossed Urhobo and Benin and there was hardly any human related security threat.<sup>25</sup>

The medium of exchange started with trade by barter. The Niger Delta people were exchanging their wares for slaves, farm implements, farm produce, cloth and other articles they do not produce. Currency of trade was essentially the cowry in the beginning. It must be noted that trade by barter continued to the 20th century. The practice was mainly concerned with the exchange of agricultural produce for fish between traders. Evidence seems to indicate that the cowry was a major currency of trade, and, it was widely adopted. The cowry, as it were, had features of modern currencies. Salt was also used. It is not known if the people used the manila.<sup>25</sup>

The relation between the Benin and Urhobo in pre-colonial times shows that the people are not strangers to each other. It follows that, within the individual polities in Urhobo and Benin harmonious living is ensured not only by intrinsic integrative forces and ingredients, but also by the people's ability to devise additional mechanism for communal living and peaceful coexistence.

It is particularly instructive that the absence of written documentation, large and expensive state systems did not mean that the groups were isolated from one another and with neighbours far and near. Indeed, they were conscious of their common traditions of origins, kinship ties, language commonality and share historical experiences and this helped to bind them together. This was further consolidated by various forms of relations. However, it is again instructive that conflicts were neither absent but only minimal; the groups were able to devise effective mechanisms both for the prevention of conflicts and management of peace. Thus the contemporary Nigerian state can learn from it especially in its greater emphasis on preventing structural conflict and policy of divide and rule at the grassroots.

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## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

The long essay examined the Benin and Urhobo inter-group relations up to 1900. It would be argued that the environment of Benin and Urhobo people couple with their other needs triggered the inter-group relations in pre-colonial Nigeria. Hence, this study maintained that inter-group cooperation and integration could be necessary and vital steps in tackling societal problems and promoting development in a community.

The study examined the traditions of origins Benin and Urhobo. The study showed that the people of Benin and Urhobo are of the same ancestral line and both of them once lived together in the land of the Igodomigodo. The study also examined the pre-colonial political institution, economic activities and social organization of Urhobos, the economic relations between Benin and Urhobo in the pre-colonial period, the socio-political relations between Benin and Urhobo in the pre-colonial period.

The study showed the traditions of origin of Benin, including the Hamitic hypostudy, Niger/Benue confluence hypostudy, and Benin-Ogobiri connection. It acknowledges the existence of speculation and attempts to rewrite minority groups' traditions in Nigeria, but focuses on the authentic traditions of the people of Benin and their authorities. The Hamitic hypothesis, which suggests the Hermites brought significant events to Africa, cannot explain the traditions of Benin due to racial prejudice and lack of archeological evidence. The Niger-Benue confluence hypostudy is based on intellectual handwork and lacks evidence, and the study suggests that Benin may have access to yam through inter-group trading or relations with other Nigerian groups.<sup>1</sup>

The study focuses on the Benin-Ogobiri tradition as the most reliable tradition of origin for Benin. It presents two narratives: the first subsuming the Benin clan and Urhobo clans to direct migration from Benin, and the second tracing them to the Benin-Ogobiri migration. The study concludes that the Benin-Ogobiri connection is the most tangible and reliable scientific fact, as it retains elements backed by the Benin people's

culture and traditions. The Benin culture and language are proto-Edoid, and the study supports this by examining Urhobo culture, traditions, historians, and the Mein (Ijo) in Ogobiri Bayelsa state.<sup>2</sup>

Intelligence reports were often written for political and administrative purposes, often by imperialist cronies for material gain or ethnic domination. In places like Benin, historians were rarely consulted or reliable information could not be gathered due to foreign rule and loss of freedom. The Benin-Ogobiri connection was used to present the undistorted history of Benin, which can be found in people's songs, political administration, and socio-cultural activities. The Benin and other Edo-speaking people share the same ancestors and historical foundation, and their political systems and word formations are similar. Despite the distance and natural environmental barriers, human migration and group relations can still significantly impact future relationships.<sup>3</sup>

The study explored the Benin people's peaceful dispute settlement methods, including unwritten non-aggression pacts that strengthened brotherliness and were honored at the risk of departed spirits or violent death. These pacts were expected to be kept sacrosanct, as seen in the land and boundary demarcation between clans.<sup>4</sup> The Benin people were polytheists, believing in various gods and modes of worship. They also held a supreme being called Osanobulua, who was not given a specific form of worship but was revered by everyone. They believed that the dead could communicate with and see God, so their activities were carefully planned to avoid harming them. Festivals were significant for contracting inter-group relations and fostering friendships between village

groups. These periods were marked with festivity and merrymaking, especially after the harvest season or near the end of the year. These friendships were not terminated, as they were extended to wives and children, enhancing coexistence and cooperation among neighboring peoples.<sup>5</sup>

This study showed the economic activities of the Benin people and their impact on their relations with their neighbours. The people dominated the production of beads, jewelries, and other items of adornment in pre-colonial Benin, which were used for ceremonies and social activities. The Benin people were mostly farmers, and after harvesting their produce, they used it to sustain their families and sell excess. They had two modes of trading: selling items in front of houses or gathering at the market square.

The relationship between Benin and Agbarho is deeply rooted in their social and economic lives, with relations being classified as group relations. These relationships were influenced by diplomacy and other dimensions, and the people of Benin and Agbarho enjoyed cross-border relations without language barriers. The socio-political and economic activities were inclusive, and the relations between the two clans in pre-colonial times demonstrated that they were not strangers to each other. Harmonious living in Agbarho and Benin was ensured by intrinsic integrative forces, customs, and traditions, as well as communal living mechanisms. Despite the absence of written documentation, the Benin and Urhobo were conscious of their common traditions, kinship ties, language, and historical experiences, promoting harmonious relations overtime.<sup>6</sup>

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Eseghine, Iden Sunday	55	Teacher	Ughievwe, Delta state	June 14, 2023

Jeje, Godwin	76	Farmer	Ughievwe, Delta State	June 14, 2023
Oghenetega, Michael	70	Farmer	Udu, Delta state	August 20, 2023
Ohimamhe, Andrew	70	Farmer	Fugar, Edo state	August 15, 2023
Okitipi, Friday	28	Business man	Benin City	August 15, 2023
Selemo, Jesu Wini	79	Farmer	Ughievwe, Delta state	June 14, 2023

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