

**THE INTERGROUP RELATIONS BETWEEN THE BENIN AND URHOBO IN  
PRE-COLONIAL TIMES**

**BY**

**Sonia Odion EDOBOR**

**ART2008883**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

**BENIN CITY**

**MARCH, 2025**

**THE INTERGROUP RELATIONS BETWEEN THE BENIN AND URHOBO IN  
PRE-COLONIAL TIMES**

**BY**

**Sonia Odion EDOBOR**

**ART2008883**

**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE BACHELOR ARTS (B.A)  
HONOURS DEGREE IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND DIPLOMACY**

**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

**BENIN CITY, NIGERIA.**

**MARCH, 2025**

## CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by, **Sonia Odion EDOBOR** with matriculation number **ART2008883**, in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, Benin City, under my supervision.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Oghogho Oriakhi  
Project Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. F. Ikponmwosa  
Head of Department

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to God Almighty for his grace and mercies that have brought me this far during my stay in the university and also to my family.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My profound gratitude goes to God Almighty for giving me the strength, wisdom and for providing everything I needed for this project and throughout my undergraduate study.

My special gratitude goes to my project supervisor, Dr. Oghogho Oriakhi for creating time, making accurate corrections, patience, great insight, professional advice and scholarly guidance in the course of writing this project. To my Course Adviser, Dr. Charles Osarumwense and my other lecturers, Head of Department, Dr. Frank Ikponmwosa, Prof. E.O. Erhagbe, Prof. J.I. Osagie, Prof. O.B. Osadolor, Dr. D.O. Iweze, Dr. J.C Nwaka, Dr. W. Orukpe, Miss. Bridget, I also appreciate the Non-Academic Staffs of the Department.

My immense gratitude goes to my parents Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Edobor for their unending love and support. Thank you for teaching me that I can be anything I want to be in life, thank you for supporting me throughout my years in school. To my siblings, Mr. Godstime Edobor, Mr. Blessed Edobor, Loveth Edobor, Victory Edobor and to my twin Sophia Edobor, for their financial support. I love you all, thanks for your support and love.

My immense gratitude goes to Mr. Osas Inneh and Mrs Tina Elliot for their financial support during my academic pursuit.

My sincere gratitude goes to my course mate and friends, Patience Unweh, Osato Edeghagba, Miracle Adams, Gift Ekhaton and others whom I failed to mention for their support and guidance throughout my journey in the University of Benin, I am eternally grateful.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Certification - - - - -	iii
Dedication- - - - -	iv
Acknowledgements- - - - -	v
<b>CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BENIN KINGDOM- -</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: BRIEF HISTORY OF THE URHOBO LAND</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN BENIN AND URHOBO</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION-</b> - - - -	<b>76</b>
Bibliography- - - - -	79

# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### **Introduction**

An intergroup relation is the relations among states, covering the political, cultural, economic and other relations in their formal and informal dimensions and diversities. Intergroup relations include all international phenomena, all transactions whether involving the state or ordinary individuals across state boundaries. The Pre-colonial societies were so interwoven that the actions of one affect the other. Intergroup relation is a recent and popular theme in the Africa historiography. The subject is not only peculiar to the western world alone, but prevalent in Africa and also amidst numerous ethnic groups in Nigeria. Diverse ethnic group in Nigeria engaged in some forms of relations at one point or the other, either through treaties, peaceful mean, diplomacy, conflict or war and trade, whichever means this relationship or interaction is built, intergroup relation existed and it is a continuous process in as much, humans interact and co-operate in the international system. The classic definition of intergroup relations was originally stated by Sheriff who asserted that “whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another or its members in terms of their identification, there will have an instance of intergroup relation”. Intergroup relations have been conceptualised as “the existence of mutually exclusive groups that are in constant interaction with one another”.<sup>1</sup>

The Benin kingdom was a pre-colonial society located in the Southern parts of Nigeria, Edo state. The Benin Kingdom was “one of the oldest and most highly developed states in the coastal hinterland of West Africa, until it was annexed by the British empire in 1897.<sup>2</sup> The relationship between the Benin kingdom and the Urhobo, other reasons includes diplomatic purpose covering the political, social, cultural, economic and other relations in their formal and informal dimensions and diversities. From the early period with numerable trading routes, some of which covered long distance, the Benin kingdom of the time under consideration were able to interact with Her immediate neighbors as well as the Urhobo.<sup>4</sup> In times, the Benin people were able to establish structures of institutions known as the kingship Oba is the monarch that oversees the governance of the kingdom with which they made progress in governance politically, economically and socially.<sup>3</sup>

Geographically, Benin refers to the territory where the people speaking the Benin language are numerically and culturally dominant and whose common political identity date back to the thirteenth century. It is a city approximately 25 miles, north of the Benin River. About 10,400 square kilometers. It is located on a rolling coastal plain crossed by rivers, in an area of tropical rain forest. About forty percent (40%) of the region is forest reserves. Benin City, the capital, It is situated 200 miles by road east of Lagos is located approximately between latitude 6° 20' 17.34" North and Longitude: 5° 37' 32.70" East.<sup>4</sup> The land mass is about 17.802k. km. The climate is typically tropical with two major seasons- the wet (Rainy) and the dry (harmattan) seasons. The wet season lasts from

April to November and the dry season from December to February. This area is about four thousand square miles and is situated in a low-lying plain, with few rivers running in a north-southwesterly direction in steep valleys. The soil is composed of tertiary sediments made of highly ferruginous sand due to the excessive rainfall that leaches the soil, leaving it with little clay. The very nature of the soil and its retention of water at great depth favours the growth of deep-rooted crops or trees. This results in the formation and sustenance of dense rainforest vegetation, which in turn helps to protect and enrich the soil with leaf droppings. The rainfall is an average of fifty percent (50%) per annum.<sup>5</sup>

It is instructive to note that, though sometimes this relationship took the form of war and also expressed themselves through diplomacy, treaties, the borrowing of techniques and trade. Consequently, regardless of the fact that each ethnic group has its unique identity and occupied a distinct territory, there was, and has always been contact between groups. Amidst the distinctive measures of intergroup relations in Nigeria, war, diplomacy, socio-cultural and political relations are inclusive, but not limited to immediate neighbours but can emerge between distance neighbours. In view of the above conceptual clarification of intergroup relations, this study examines the nature of intergroup relations between Benin Kingdom and her neighbours Urhobo. This study intend to explore Benin and her neighbours' relations from 1400 upto 1900 when the kingdom was invaded by British and the kingdom came under the imperial control of the British administration.<sup>6</sup>

Urhobo people is located in the Southwestern part of Nigeria as one of the ethnic groups in the country, the Urhobo have their uncontested place in the history books. The peoples' existence can be traced back to centuries before African colonization and although the different accounts written from different perspectives may have caused it to be twisted and twitched over time, the history of the Urhobo people has survived every single tide of change that has occurred in African and Nigerian history.<sup>7</sup> The study of the political governance in Urhobo land has gained significant attention in recent times as scholars seek to understand the dynamics of power and leadership in this ethnic group in Nigeria. Urhobo land is located in the southern part of Nigeria and is home to over two (2) million people. The Urhobo people have a rich culture history, and their traditional system of governance is based a traditional system that has been in existence for centuries. The Urhobos are people located in southern Nigeria, near the northwestern Niger Delta. The Urhobos are the major ethnic group in Delta State, one of the 36 states in Nigeria, Ethnic Nationality in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Urhobo people speak the Urhobo language. They have a social and cultural affinity to the Bini people of Nigeria

According to Ofili Federick Iwendi, in his Article on "intergroup Relations in Nigeria"<sup>5</sup> discuss how the history of inter-ethnic contact in pre-colonial Nigeria have shown that diversity of culture and ethnicity have always been in conflict. Pre-colonial Nigeria is composed of different ethnic groups which amount to about 250 ethno-linguistic groups that reflect the multi-cultural diversity in the country. This multi-cultural diversity manifests itself in the nature of relationships that exist between these

diverse ethno-linguistic groups. This diversity has and is still being reflected in the form and nature assumed in intergroup relation. Inter-group relationships took diverse forms such as war and diplomatic intercourse, marriages, migration patterns, trade and commerce, traditional and religious settings, among others.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Muhammad M. Gatawa, suggested that, intergroup relations refers to the interaction which take place between members of different groups and societies or communities. The phenomenon of intergroup relations entails contact and interaction between groups which implies dealing with human beings, hence is a social phenomenon. Also, the significance of intergroup relations in whichever form manifested inter-ethnic, inter-race, inter-class and reflects human actions as a process of existence channeled towards economic, social, political and cultural development.<sup>9</sup>

This study extensively explains the intergroup relations between the Benin Kingdom and the Urhobo people, uncovering the events that surrounded the origination of the region, the many migrations of her people from various locations to lands where they spread their roots and either remained or moved from to their eventual settlements, as well as the political, social and economic activities of the Benin and Urhobo people in pre-colonial times, and how the people related in these facets.

## **Aim and Objectives**

The aim study is to examine the intergroup relations between Benin and Urhobo people in pre-colonial period. The specific objectives are as follows:

- Examine briefly the historical origin of the Benin Kingdom
- Discuss the social-cultural and economic relations between Benin kingdom and her immediate neighbours Urhobo people.
- Assess the political relations between Benin kingdom and her immediate neighbours Urhobo people.

### **Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study falls within the context of inter-group relations between Benin and her immediate neighbor Urhobo people in pre-colonial times. The study focuses on the economic, social-cultural as well as the political relations between Benin kingdom and immediate neighbor Urhobo people.

### **Methodology**

This study employs qualitative method which entails the use of written works in analyzing the history of Benin and her intergroup relations with the Urhobo people. Primary and secondary data collection was adopted.

**Primary Source:** Comprised archival materials and oral interviews. Primary information was source from National Archives, Benin, Ibadan and Benin Historical Society Centre.

**Secondary Sources:** information sourced from articles in journals, published and unpublished works from Edo State National Library, as well as online sources. The

secondary source compliments the primary sources and the sources were analyzed using historical narrative.

## **Literature Review**

For the purpose of this research, the relevant literature that have direct bearing on the study comprised the works, by Nigerian historians on the development, administrative activities on intergroup relations between Benin and Urhobo people and the area of study include the following.

Ofilo Federick Iwendi, in his Article entitled, “intergroup Relations in Nigeria”,<sup>10</sup> discuss how the history of inter-ethnic contact in pre-colonial Nigeria have shown that diversity of culture and ethnicity have always been in conflict. This study is relevant to this study because it discussed the intergroup relations between the Benin and Urhobo people.

S.O. Aghalino in his article entitled, “Trade Currency in Precolonial Nigeria”,<sup>11</sup> examined trade and currencies in pre-colonial times. The relevant of this article to this work lies on not just the trade but the presence of currency already in existence in Benin kingdom before the coming of the Europeans. He posits that “trade is a noticeable feature of pre-colonial economy and money is essential for a meaningful trading transaction”. However when the economy of Nigeria was still in embryonic stage, in absence of money, exchange was done by barter system; with its attendant challenges of double coincidence of wants. But as time went on, prices were assessed through standard currencies gradually gained general acceptance as medium of exchange. The currencies included

brass rods, copper wires, cowries, cloth, manila and salt. Also guns was accepted as a means of exchange, especially in the region. This article enables us to be abreast with the medium of exchanges in pre-colonial era but did not indicated the intergroup relations of Benin and Urhobo people in regard to trade.

Furthermore, A.M. Suleiman in his article, entitled; “Nigeria before 1800: *Aspects of Economic Development and Intergroup Relation in Nigeria*”,<sup>12</sup> posit that “prior to independence in Nigeria, interactions that cut across various ethnicity comprised the Nigeria polity were hardly in conflict”. Amalgamation ushered in a new form of intergroup relations whereby in these various groups, there was an intensified ethnic and religion animosity among the people. This article is important to this work.

P. J. C. Dark in his book entitled, *An Introduction to Benin Arts and Technology*,<sup>13</sup> examines the historical origin of Benin in lieu of its emergence from the Benin Kingdom. A description of the significance of the name Benin and its creation in order of hierarchy. The book also provide the genesis of Benin kingdom and relationship with neighbouring clans in terms of political, economic and social-cultural activities. The book provides relevant information on various version of Benin clan’s origin, that is paramount for our research work, it however did not assess the intergroup relations of Benin and her immediate neighbor Urhobo people.

Dawood O. Egbefor in his article entitled: “Internal Security Crisis in Nigeria”,<sup>14</sup> is an assessment of intergroup relations contact and interactions between groups which makes it a social phenomenon. The article reviews the major means of establishing

effective relations amidst ethnic groups regardless of their unique identity and distinct territory, such as war, treatise, diplomacy, visit of wandering scholars and enslavement. It also examines the subject of intergroup relations and its origin among different ethnic group in Nigeria. It however a veritable means of understanding the concept of intergroup relations among ethnicity in Nigeria, although does not focus on the research topic but, relevant in providing the understanding of intergroup relations.

M. Sheriff in his book entitled: *Social Psychology*,<sup>15</sup> accounts for what intergroup entails, “intergroup relation is like a state of friendship or hostility co-operation, dominance or subordination, alliance, peace between states and respective members”. He rationalized intergroup relations from the social psychology perspective. This work gives an overview of the concept of intergroup relations, however did not indicate Benin relations with her neighbours the Urhobo people.

R.E. Bradbury in his book entitled, *Benin Studies*,<sup>16</sup> closely relates to our study of intergroup relations between Benin and neighbours. He provides a detailed overview of the historical development of Benin kingdom. The work contributed significantly to this study by looking at some of the version of Benin kingdom origin but lack to talk about Benin’s intergroup relation with neighbor Urhobo people, which is our focus of study.

E. B. Eweka, *Evolution of Benin Chieftaincy Titles*,<sup>17</sup> accounts for the historical origin of Benin people and the development of clans from prehistoric times up to the post-colonial times using Benin as an exemplar for studying other Benin clans, it documented the various ways in which Benin clan has shaped the culture and economy of

Benin in ancient and contemporary times. In this article, He also discussed the colonial situation in Benin being the focal point of colonial administration. However its limitation is that, it did not give attention to the study of intergroup relations of Benin and her neighbours Urhobo people.

Azeez O. Olaniyan in his article entitled, “From Accommodation to Discrimination and Exclusion: The Changing Pattern of Intergroup Relation in Nigeria”,<sup>18</sup> accounts on the factors that contributed to the changing pattern of intergroup relations and its possible solutions by identifying such variables as revivalism (religions chauvinism) he also examine in his article African Value of Brotherliness, state actions and observance of religions injunction. However, this article provides relevant information to the research work but its limitation is that, it did not discuss the intergroup relations of Benin kingdom and her Urhobo neighbours.

M.A. Adebisi in his book entitled, *The Political Economy of Intergroup Relations*,<sup>19</sup> examine the source of intergroup challenges which started from ethnic militancy, which he describe as endemic feature of modern politics with consequences on intergroup relations. He also emphasised on hate and division which are seen as threat to intergroup relations amidst different ethnic group. This book provides relevant information that gives a significant contribution to this study.

J. U. Egharevba in his book entitled, *A Short History of Benin*,<sup>20</sup> dealt with the history of the foundation of Benin people and Urhobo people. Issues which the work addresses centers on the conflict of land ownership between Benin and Urhobo people.

The work draws from the kingship when there was interregnum in Benin. This book is relevant in presenting historical origin of Benin Kingdom land which is a fundamental issue that constitute conflict amidst both clans. However, it gives a significant to this study but did not examine the scope of the study in view.

Egbefor D. Omolumen in his article entitled, “Aspect of Intergroup Relation”,<sup>21</sup> accounts for the conflict constituted by ethnic group in order to pursue permanent interest set in achieving their objectives. It analyses the events in which interest is achieved by intergroup relations through alliance. This article provides significant contribution to this study.

M. Edigbonya in his article entitled, “A Study of the Portuguese-Benin Trade Relations: Ughoton as a Benin Port (1485-1506)”,<sup>22</sup> discussed the historical events surrounding international relations between Benin and Portugese. The work assess the biography and various version of the Benin origin but the defect of this work is that, it did not treat intergroup relation between Benin and neighbour Urhobo intergroup relations but was of relevance to the study.

Obaro Ikime in his book entitled, *The Peoples and kingdoms of the Delta Province*,<sup>23</sup> provides information on traditional origin and developments in various clans, some of which have close relations with Benin Kingdom furthermore, the assessment appraised the economic and socio-political system of the people of Benin province. However, in its relevance, it helps to understand the settlement pattern of Benin province when compared with institutions created as a result of colonialism.

Fredrick Iwendi Ofili in his article titled: “Intergroup Relations in Nigeria: The Dynamics and Complexities”,<sup>24</sup> examine the concept of intergroup relation through various expositions. This work also aid the understanding of intergroup relations, conflict and dynamic nature through diplomacy, economic and political. Therefore it demerit did not provide attention to the study of intergroup relation between Benin kingdom and her neighbour.

O. Ikime in his book entitled, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta: the Rise and Fall of Nana Olomu Last Governor of the Benin River*,<sup>25</sup> accounts for the rivalry between the British Royal Niger Company and the Niger Coast Protectorate. This work begins with how the British successfully carryout colonial mandate against each other and the challenges confronted by Benin people the defect of this work is that, it did not examine intergroup relations of Benin but relevant in exposes trade relations between Benin and European. It also exposes the local government system of the British through native courts and warrant chief system in Benin kingdom, hence it contributed to the study.

E. O. Abiola in his book entitled, *A Textbook of West Africa History (A.D, 1000 to the Present Day)*,<sup>26</sup> accounts for the decline of the powers of traditional political institutions. It analyzes the events of the pre-colonial and colonial period, taking into consideration the changes of the government structure. He used the reorganization report as a basis for assessing the appointment of chiefs and their roles while the work is used to x-ray Benin reorganization, its limited to accommodate the affairs of the Urhobo. However, its relevant in assessing the role of the clan councils and administrative

structure. This contributed to the study when related to Benin council formation and administrative processes.

E.D. Amadasun, *A Colonial Account of the Kingdom of Benin: A General Collections of Voyages, and Travels of Early European Visit to Benin City*,<sup>27</sup> renders an account of Amadasun Youthful experiences as a witness to British colonial rule at the earliest times in Benin. He asserted that, by 1913 the foundation for colonial rule has been firmly established, but further observation from Nigerian historians have shown that colonial rule had not been fully consolidated at the time He said it was. He appraised the earliest twenty two years British occupation of Benin and the establishment of government system based on Native Court and Warrant Chiefs. This work is importance as its provides for the assessment of British colonialism and government system in Benin kingdom. However, it does not assess the intergroup relationship of Benin clan and her neighbour.

P. B. Amos in his book entitled, *The arts of Benin*,<sup>28</sup> accounts for the importance of deities in various clans of Benin. He assess the beneficial aspect in terms of protection gained by such clan. He also examine the deities of Benin which has been of protection for the inhabitant of Benin in times of war and kidnapping of the subjects. It relevant in providing information on the understanding of Benin deity and how other clans visit to seek assistance from Benin deity. However, it did not examine the intergroup relations of Benin and Yoruba her neighbours.

From the above review works, it is obvious that, no comprehensive work has been carried out in this area of study. Existing works focuses on other aspect of Benin kingdom, while abandoning the intergroup relations between Benin and Urhobo people her neighbours in the area under study. It is this historiographical gap that this study tend to fill.

### **Chapterization**

This study of intergroup relations between Benin and Urhobo people her neighbours is from the pre-colonial to contemporary eras. The chapters are organized into six chapters which are outlined as follows.

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

This chapter introduced the research topic. Other aspect of the chapters were broken down in a step by step sequence to allow the flow of the work such as aim and objectives, significance of study, scope of study, literature review and research methodology.

#### **Chapter Two: Brief History of the Benin Kingdom**

This chapter takes into consideration the historical origin of Benin people. It also accesses the various versions of the origin of Benin. The chapter explores the geography and vegetation as well as the political institution, and social activities, Economic activities of the Benin people from pre-colonial era.

### **Chapter Three: Brief History of the Urhobo Land**

This chapter takes into consideration the historical origin of Urhobo people. It also accesses the various versions of the origin of Urhobo. The chapter explores the geography and vegetation as well as the political institution, and social activities, Economic activities of the Urhobo people from pre-colonial era.

### **Chapter Four: Socio-Political and Economic Relations between Benin and Urhobo**

The chapter focuses on the socio-political and economic activities between Benin Kingdom and Urhobo people and how the contact helps to promote cordial relations between the peoples. It examines industry (especially handcraft industry) in colonial Benin emphasis is on the methods of production, materials for local industries, places of production and those that were involved in the production of such industries. The weaving industry such as cloth weaving, mat weaving, basket weaving and rope weaving will be discussed. Salt, soap, wood, iron smelting, food processing and fishing industries will also be discussed in this chapter. This chapter examines the various types of trade like local and long distance trade between Benin and the Urhobo.

### **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

This chapter is the concluding chapter of this project. It provides a general precolonial historical survey of intergroup relation between Benin and Urhobo her immediate neighbours. Benin kingdom engage in interaction with Urhobo her neighbours and these relations are visible in their economic activities, socio-cultural and political relations.

## Endnotes

1. Sheriff, M. Sheriff, *Social Psychology*, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014, p.23.
2. B.U. Smith, *The Edo Speaking Peoples of Mid Western Nigeria*, London: Leeds Books, 1953, p.146.
3. E.S. George, *Yoruba Religion and Medicine in Ibadan*, Ibadan: University Press. 1980, p.44
4. Fred I. A. Omu and Leo E. Otoide, *Themes in International Studies and Diplomacy*, Department of History, University of Benin, Nigeria, 2002, p.169
5. Onigu Otite, *Autonomy and Dependence: The Urhobo Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria*, Evanston III: Northwestern University Press, 1973, p.9.
6. Adogbeji Salubi, "Establishment of British Administration in Urhoboland", in T.E.A Salubi: *Witness to British Colonial Rule in Urhoboland and Nigeria* (ed), Peter Ekeh, New York: Urhobo Historical Society Press: 2008, pp.3-7
7. Perkins Foss, *Where Gods and Mortals Meet: Continuity and Renewal in Urhobo Art* (New York: Snoeck Publisher, 2014), p.37.
8. O.N. Njoku, *Economic History of Nigeria in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Enugu: Magnet Business Enterprises, Publishing Division, 2001, p.133
9. Muhammed Mukhtar. Gatawa, "Intergroup Relations in Historical Perspective", *African Journal of History and Culture*, 5 (9), 2003, p.171.
10. Ofili Fredrick Iwendi, "Intergroup Relations in Nigeria: The Dynamics and Complexities", Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Federal University, Otuoke, pp.165-170.
11. S.O. Aghalino, "Trade Currencies in Pre-colonial Nigeria", N.O Njoju (ed) *The Pre-colonial Economic History of Nigeria*, Benin: Ethiope Publisher, 2002, p.8.
12. A.M. Suleiman, "Sustainable Development in Africa: Intergroup Relations in Nigeria", *African Journals of History and Culture*, 11(2), 2009, pp.325-521.
13. P. J. C. Dark, *An Introduction to Benin Arts and Technology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, p.12.

14. Dawood .O. Egbefor, “Aspect of Intergroup Relations in 21st Century, Nigeria: Emblem of Ethnicity, Religious Fundamentalism and Nationalism, Security Crisis, 2000-2004”, *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*,4(1), 2015, pp.62-69.
15. M.S. Sheriff, *Social Psychology*, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014, p.23.
16. R.E. Bradbury, *Benin Studies* (ed.) Peter Morton Williams, Oxford: University Press, 1973.
17. E. B. Eweka, *Evolution of Benin Chieftaincy Titles*, Benin City: University of Benin Press, 1992, p.9.
18. Olaniyan Azeez, “From Accommodation to Discrimination and Exclusion: The Changing Pattern of Intergroup Relations in Nigeria”, *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 3( 11), 2019, pp.521-525.
19. M.A. Adebisi, “The Political Economy of Intergroup Relations”, *Ilorin Journal of Business and Social Science* 5(3) 1998, pp.51-55.
20. J. U. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1968, p.5.
21. Egbefor D. Omolumen, “Aspect of Intergroup Relations in 21st Century, Nigeria: Emblem of Ethnicity Religious Fundamentalism and Nationalism, Security Crisis, 2004”, *International Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4(1), 2015, pp.62-69.
22. M. Ediagbonya, “A Study of the Portuguese-Benin Trade Relations: Ughoton as a Benin Port (1485-1506)”, *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 2, 2015, p.8.
23. Obaro Ikime, “The Peoples and Kingdoms of the Delta Province”, in Obaro Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigeria History* (Ibadan Heinemann, 1980), p.12.
24. Fredrick Iwendi Ofili, “Intergroup Relations in Nigeria: The Dynamics and Complexities”, *International Journal of Development and Management Review*, 11(6), 2016, pp.164-167.
25. O. Ikime, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta: the Rise and Fall of Nana Olomu Last Governor of the Benin River*, London: 1968, p.23.
26. E. O. Abiola, *A Textbook of West Africa History (A.D, 1000 to the Present Day)*, Ado Ekiti: Omolayo Standard Press, 1981, p.56.

27. E.D. Amadasun, *A Colonial Account of the Kingdom of Benin: A General Collections of Voyages, and Travels of Early European Visit to Benin City*, London: Pageters 1976, p.8.
28. P. B. Amos, *The arts of Benin*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1979, p.17.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BENIN KINGDOM**

This chapter takes into consideration the historical origin of Benin people. It also accesses the various versions of the origin of Benin. The chapter explores the geography and vegetation as well as the political institution, and social activities, Economic activities of the Benin people from pre-colonial era.

Benin refers to the territory where the people speaking the Benin language are numerically and culturally dominant and whose common political identity date back to the thirteenth century. It is a city approximately 25 miles, north of the Benin River. About 10,400 square kilometers. It is located on a rolling coastal plain crossed by rivers, in an area of tropical rain forest. About forty percent (40%) of the region is forest reserves. Benin City, the capital, It is situated 200 miles by road east of Lagos is located approximately between latitude 6° 20' 17.34" North and Longitude: 5° 37' 32.70" East. The land mass is about 17.802k. km.<sup>1</sup>

The climate is typically tropical with two major seasons- the wet (Rainy) and the dry (harmattan) seasons. The wet season lasts from April to November and the dry season from December to February. This area is about four thousand square miles and is situated in a low-lying plain, with few rivers running in a north-southwesterly direction in steep valleys. The soil is composed of tertiary sediments made of highly ferruginous sand due to the excessive rainfall that leaches the soil, leaving it with little clay. The very nature of the soil and its retention of water at great depth favours the growth of deep-rooted crops or trees. This results in the formation and sustenance of dense rainforest vegetation,

which in turn helps to protect and enrich the soil with leaf droppings. The rainfall is an average of fifty percent (50%) per annum. The raining season commences in earnest, in April and lasts up to weeks of October. The dry or hot season takes over from the month of November to March. Harmatan cold is felt in the months of December, January and February throughout the whole of Benin but with slight local variation.<sup>2</sup>

### **Traditions of Origin of Benin Kingdom**

Tradition asserts that the Edo people became dissatisfied with the rule of a dynasty of semi-mythical kings, the *Ogisos*, and in the 13th century they invited Prince Oranmiyan of Ife to rule them. His son Eweka is regarded as the first *Oba* of Benin, though authority would remain for many years with a hereditary order of local chiefs. Late in the 13th century, royal power began to assert itself under the *Oba* Ewedo and was firmly established under the most famous *Oba* Ewuare the Great who was described as a great warrior and magician.<sup>3</sup> He established a hereditary succession to the throne and vastly expanded the territory of the Benin kingdom, which by the mid-16th century extended from the Niger River delta in the east to what is now Lagos in the west. Lagos was in fact founded by a Benin army and continued to pay tribute to the *Oba* of Benin until the end of the 19th century. Ewuare also rebuilt the capital present-day Benin City, endowing it with great walls and moats. The *Oba* became the supreme political, judicial, economic, and spiritual leader of his people, and he and his ancestors eventually became the object of state cults that utilized human sacrifice in their religious observances.<sup>4</sup>

Ewuare was succeeded by a line of strong *Obas*, of whom were Ozolua the Conqueror (the son of Ewuare) and Esigie (early to mid-16th century; the son of Ozolua), who enjoyed good relations with the Portuguese and sent ambassadors to their king. Under these *Obas*, Benin became a highly organized state. Its numerous craftsmen were organized into guilds, and the kingdom became famous for its ivory and wood carvers. Its brass smiths and bronze casters excelled at making naturalistic heads, and other sculptures. From the 15th through the 18th century Benin carried on an active trade in ivory, palm oil, and pepper with Portuguese and Dutch traders, for whom it served as a link with tribes in the interior of western Africa. It also profited greatly from the slave trade. But during the 18th and early 19th centuries the kingdom was weakened by violent succession struggles between members of the royal dynasty, some of which erupted into civil wars.<sup>5</sup>

The weaker *Obas* sequestered themselves in their palaces and took refuge in the rituals of divine kingship while indiscriminately granting aristocratic titles to an expanding class of nonproductive nobles. The kingdom's prosperity declined with the suppression of the slave trade, and, as its territorial extent shrank, Benin's leaders increasingly relied on supernatural rituals and large-scale human sacrifices to protect the state from further territorial encroachment. The practice of human sacrifice was stamped out only after the burning of Benin City in 1897 by the British, after which the depopulated and debilitated kingdom was incorporated into British Nigeria. The

descendants of Benin's ruling dynasty still occupy the throne in Benin City although the present-day *Oba* has only an advisory role in government.<sup>6</sup>

### **Political Institutions**

The pre-colonial Benin political organisation centred on the Oba and three groups of senior title holders. The Oba was the pivot around which the socio-political system revolved. He lived in his palace (Eguae) apart from the rest of his subjects. Those who were closely connected with the daily life of the monarch lived in the Ogbe.<sup>13</sup> Surrounding the Oba, were numerous chiefs, priests, attendants and officers of state who added colour to the life at the palace. To sustain the political system and attempt a balance of competing forces, the Oba had power to create new titles and determine to what groups they could be attached. The Oba could therefore, distribute favours according to political expediency, and much of his success in achieving political stability depended on his use of this power.<sup>24</sup> The Oba controlled the various professional groups of guilds which were formed to supply the needs of the Oba and the society.<sup>7</sup>

The Uzama formed the highest-ranking order of chiefs. Beginning in the Ogisu era, they became, under the new dynasty, seven in number, holding their titles by primogeniture and possessing villages of their own on the environs and outskirts of Benin City. They had the right to confer titles on their subjects though latter withdraw by Oba Ewedo and were traditionally the guardians of some of the kingdom's shrines. Their courts were patterned on the Oba's court and they were thus, miniature Obas in their domains. Benin tradition holds that Oba Ewuare made the heir to the Oba's throne

(Edaiken) the seventh and the last of the Uzama. Others were the Oliha, Edohen, Ezomo, Ero, Eholorn'ire and Oloton.<sup>8</sup>

To mark their special position of primacy among the Benin chiefs, they occupied a pre-eminent position of honour during the rituals at the palace. They received the Oba's kola nuts before any other group and they were the last to pay obeisance to the Oba during ceremonial occasions for salutation and homage to the Oba. It is easy to see the Uzama as playing the stabilising role of a 'third force' in a situation where the town chiefs and palace chiefs were in disagreement.<sup>16</sup> The second groups of chiefs were those whose functions were tied to the palace Eghaevbo N'ogbe. This group was divided into the three palace societies of Iwebo, Iweguae and Ibiwe, each of which had specific functions at the palace. The third group of chiefs were the Eghaevbo N'ore, attached to the town rather than the palace and holding a comparative position like that of the palace chiefs. Of necessity, they were less attached to the Oba and proud to occupy this position of champions of popular liberties. Their leader, the Iyase, held the premier title among all Benin chiefs.<sup>9</sup>

In a situation where the Oba featured in all aspects of pre-colonial Benin state, it was easy to see him as an autocrat. In fact, the Oba was far from being autocratic. He was very much in the power of his priests and ritual personalities as well as the important title-holders like the Iyase whose state ritual functions were well defined. A subtle boycott by these functionaries against a difficult Oba would easily raise a political storm for such a ruler. The force of tradition strongly limited royal power in Benin. An Oba

could not, for example, deprive chiefs of titles already conferred-on-them, nor could he abolish important existing titles even if such a step were politically desirable. The highest titles of most of the societies were fixed and the seniority could not be altered without consultation. The Iyase's position was an effective counterweight to the Oba's power. While he was the Oba's chief executive, who conferred titles on other chiefs, he was easily the chief opponent of the Oba recognised traditionally under the Benin political system. He stood as the people's champion against unpopular methods, measures and decisions.<sup>10</sup>

For major state matters, the Oba had to consult a state council which was made up of the Uzama and the two Eghaevbo groups. It was this council which had responsibility for making laws generally applicable to the Oba's subjects and carried out executive and judicial functions at the central government level. Arbitration and the settlement of cases were dealt with at the family and village levels, while appeals and major issues of inter-village concern were sent to the Oba's court. In the villages and districts, there were village heads and Enogie assisted by their council of elders for the internal administration of such units. These were subject to the overall control of the Onotueyevbo. Under the village councils, the various age-grades organised the social, political and administrative life of the villages. Devolution of power depended on age qualification, which also determined inter-group functional relationships within the villages. For example, in a cluster of villages, the oldest men administered to group needs and the oldest village took precedence over the others.<sup>11</sup>

## **Social Activities**

In Pre-Colonial Benin, the village is the basic political unit of the Benin Kingdom. It is the widest unit of the age-grade organization, the minimal land unit, the smallest group which can have a hereditary chief, and also the co-operating unit for house building, most villages unit in worship of a common deity. Each village was a compact settlement though most are divided into wards, which may be separated from each other by small patches of bush. Each ward consists of one or more extended families living in close proximity and recognizing the authority of the oldest man or in exceptional cases, of a hereditary chief. In the age-grade system, the male population at any given time was horizontally stratified into three age-grade namely *iroghea*, *ighele*, *edio*.<sup>12</sup> In the pre-Colonial period, the oldest man in each ward was regarded as the *odionwere* of the ward. He controlled age-grade activities and where the ward has a separate shrine, he was its custodian and he directed age-grade activities within the ward. The women were well known traders in pre-Colonial period, who traded every market day as it falls in traditions of different villages.<sup>13</sup>

From the foregoing discussion regarding the historical background of Benin kingdom it will be imperative to conclude that the kingdom prior to colonialism has already launched herself into the part of development with a well-structured social, economic and political institution with the Oba at the helms of affairs, assisted by his chiefs. the introduction of the different guild system such as bronze casting at Igun, the *igbesamwan* and *Owina* guild as well as the market structures were all pointer to this,

however it should be noted that the presence of individual craft availability in the kingdom was second to know, these individual craft was said to have caught the attention of the Ogiso who in turn created the guild for the mutual benefit of the monarchy and the people.<sup>14</sup>

## **Religion**

Generally, the Benin people are polytheists, they believe in the gods of the things of the environment. This belief shapes their method of worship, as departed ancestors played a great part in their religious belief and method of worship. It is imperative, to mention that most of Benin history, culture and tradition are tied up with ancestral worship. The ancestral worship was a great inducement of respect and honour among the people of Benin. The Benin people, like every other people, strongly believe and acknowledge the existence of a supreme being. They believe that religion is an essential and indispensable aspect of human existence and that behind the highly venerated Oba, there exists a supreme power that is greater in every respect to the Oba.<sup>15</sup> They are of the opinion that the universe is divided into two planes of existence. The visible, tangible world of everyday life (*agbon*) and the invisible spirit world, which is the abode of numerous deities, spirits and supernatural powers (*erinmwin*). These are two parallel, coexisting realms. Their boundaries, however, are not inviolable as gods and spirits daily intervene in the lives of humans, and particularly powerful humans draw upon the forces of the spirit world to transform daily experience. Although, the people believe strongly in

a super-mundane being, they acknowledge other divinities, who they believe are closer to them than God. These divinities serve as the messengers of God, for they were created and given their portfolios by God.<sup>38</sup> The Benin people believe strongly in the existence of God called whom they call Osanobua. Osa is the shortened form. The word, Osanobua means “One who holds or sustains the universe”.<sup>16</sup>

## **Marriage**

In Benin culture and tradition, marriage rites are held in very high esteem. Marriage is a legal union of a man and woman as husband and wife, which constitutes a vital social institution in Benin custom and traditions. The process of formation of family in Benin society, as in most society has its rules and regulations guiding marriage relationships, which Benin is no exception to such rules and regulations. The family plays a significant role in the history of the people. Marriage is the coming together of a man and a woman from different families allowed by culture and tradition of the people to become husband and wife. Marriage ceremony according to the Benin native law and custom is a very interesting and fun filled event that also showcases the rich custom and tradition of the Benin People. The main reason for marriage is for procreation. The typical traditional Benin society believes generally in the polygamous nature of marriage. Although it was possible for the man to get married to just one wife, the decision on how many wives to marry was more of an individual choice than a collective one.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the polygamous nature of the Benin people in pre-colonial era, their women respected the institution of marriage and also were able to cohabit amongst themselves. Before marriage, every young lady was taken as her father's responsibility. Her family was expected to bring her up in morals and character and not to be seen as a spoilt child. The young lady was expected to learn under the tutelage of her mother on how to take care of the home, and what her responsibilities were to her future husband. Also, her disposition to men both while single and married was of utmost importance. She was expected to help in the kitchen, help with the market and also in the fetching of water from the stream.<sup>18</sup>

All of the basic responsibilities of the girl child as mentioned above, used to be the responsibility of the father. However, it becomes that of her husband after marriage. Marriage changes everything. The young lady becomes the responsibility of her husband. He is expected to take care of her, provide for her and ensure a level playing field for her to exercise her duties as a wife and mother. She, at this point, is expected to take care of her husband, give birth to children and assist in the training of the children. The traditional process of marriage is as follows:<sup>19</sup>

### **Igue Festival**

Igue festival is a celebration peculiar to the Benin. It marks the marriage between Oba Ewuare to a woman called Ewere. This festival is celebrated between the period of Christmas and New Year. During the festival, the Oba blesses the land and his people and

non-native persons are prohibited from being in the presence of the Oba. It is a time for offering thanks to the gods for life and to ask for more blessings. Sacrifices are offered and the chiefs dance in their traditional attire and dance the Ugie dance. The Igue festival also celebrates the death of past Oba's and for 7 days, propitiations are made to the spirits of the departed Oba's. This is done to invoke their blessing on the reigning monarch and their family and subjects. It is also a time to pursue evil spirits and bring blessings to every home in the kingdom.<sup>20</sup>

The festival usually begins with the application of chalk on the Oba's head which signifies purity and the blood of the sacrificial animals which are usually slaughtered during the festival. On the last day of the festival, the chief collects the Ewere and then hands it over to the Ihogbe, who hands it to the Oba in a dance. History has it that about a week after Ewere entered the harem, she began to think of her sister, Oyoyo, and she cried every day. Oba Ewuare again sent a message to Ogieka, asking him to allow Oyoyo to visit her sister. This request was promptly granted by Ogieka, and Ewere was very pleased to see her sister. But on arrival, Oyoyo decided to marry as well. So, the two sisters became wives of the Oba. When Oyoyo became pregnant, the Oba sent her to the Ihama at Idunmwihogbe for proper care and there she gave birth to a daughter. As a token of his gratitude, the Oba awarded the Ihama the Odibokofo (a large collar made entirely of red beads) and gave his wives the right to dress their hair in the *Ukpokhokho* style, like the Oba's wives. This elevated the Ihama to a higher position than ever before,

and the *Odibokofo* has been worn by every Ihama at every Ugie-Ewere ceremony till date.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout his reign, every year, the Oba celebrated Ugie Ewere, that is the anniversary of his happy and prosperous marriage to Ewere at the Igue festival. Here the Ihogbes present symbolic Ewere leaves to the Oba. The Benin have a long lineage of Obas, and Igue is also an occasion to celebrate Ugie-Evhoba among other occasions. During this period, the anniversary of their deaths is celebrated by the Benin, and for seven days, propitiations are made to the spirits of the departed Obas. This is done to invoke their blessing on the reigning monarch and their family and subjects. The Igue festival, which is a period for offering thanks to the gods for sparing their lives and to ask for blessings, is also used for offering sacrifices to some shrines in the palace. During this period, chieftaincy title holders display their Eben emblem in the Ugie dance as they appear in their traditional attire, according to the type of dress the Oba bestowed on individual chiefs during the conferment of title, while the Oba sits majestically in the royal chamber (*Ogiukpo*).<sup>22</sup>

Private and public ceremonies mark many of the important moments in Benin's yearly calendar. In the past, an elaborate series of rites were performed throughout the year to secure other worldly support for the kingdom's well-being and to celebrate decisive events in its history. Igue includes a sequence of rituals that renew the Oba's supernatural powers and cleanse the kingdom's unruly spirits. Benin's other important

ritual festivals include *Ague*, where the first budded yams are blessed in hopes of a successful harvest. Also, we have *Ugie Ivie*, the Festival of Beads, in which the oba's coral and red stone regalia is bathed in cow's blood to reinvest it with spiritual force, the *Ugie Erha* Oba is another festival which honors the oba's father and all paternal ancestors. Others include *Oduduwa*, a masquerade that likewise honors the oba's paternal ancestors and *Ugie Oro*, which involves celebrating Oba Esigie's victory over the Idah Kingdom in the 16th century.<sup>23</sup>

### **Economic Activities**

Agriculture, Industries and Trade are one of the most important economic activities in Benin Kingdom. Agriculture and Industries are also important economic activities in Benin Kingdom. Farming, fishing, animal rearing, hunting, palm wine tapping were the major agricultural activities. Basket weaving, pottery, blacksmithing, iron smelting, and the production of kaolin were the local industries that had effects in Benin Kingdom. There were no major differences between the economic activities of the Benin women and their counterpart in other part of the country in the pre-colonial period. Before the advent of the British, the people engaged in a number of economic activities which included farming, fishing, teaching, traditional industries such as weaving, black smiting, palm wine tapping and so on.<sup>39</sup> The traditional occupation of the Benin people was farming, and it was the mainstay of their economy. The majority of the people engaged in farming. The topography of the hill area together with the two distinct seasons of rainy and dry encouraged the practice of traditional agriculture. For example, the

people were blessed with fertile soil which enabled them to engage in the production of surplus food crops such as yams of various species, cassava, cocoa, yam, maize, plantain, banana, vegetable and so on. The area was equally known and described as one of the richest palm-oil areas in the world before the advent of the British. Though the people themselves engaged in palm-oil industry, it was the migrant people (that is the Urhobo) that actively engaged in the business.<sup>24</sup>

### **Agriculture**

Agriculture, trade and industries were the hallmark of Benin economy. These took the form of farming, craft, and trade. These economic activities are discussed below. The determined attempt at transforming the natural environment through a process of harnessing available human and material resources in the area to meet basic human needs. was a major economic activity in pre-colonial Benin. Agriculture was one of the mainstays of Benin economy.<sup>41</sup> Agricultural production was formally geared towards family consumption. Benin before 1900 and up to the present period is an agricultural country. Everybody, man or woman being simple farmers, hunters and animal rearers among others engaged in the production of food and raw materials for human, industrial and animal consumption. The food crops produced included yam, corn, coco-yam, cassava, beans of various varieties, pepper, groundnut, melon, banana, plantain, tree crops such as cocoa, palm trees, rubber and kola-nuts. Agriculture in Ancient Benin Kingdom varies. Yam is the main crop of the Benin people and it is planted in April and harvested in early September. The three main types of yams grown are white yam (called

*Emowe* or *Arebu*), water yam (called *Igiorua*); and red yam (called *Ikpen*). The red yam is preferable, because it is harder and stays on the ground for a longer period.<sup>25</sup>

### **Animal Husbandry**

Animal husbandry is concerned with animals that are raised for meat, fibre, milk, eggs, or other products. It includes day-to-day care, selective breeding and the raising of livestock. Husbandry has a long history, starting with the Neolithic revolution when animals were first domesticated, from around 13,000 BC onwards, antedating farming of the first crops. By the time of early civilisations such as ancient Benin, chickens, fowls, ducks, goats, pigs, dogs, sheep, rabbits, etc were being raised to yield more meat, milk, and wool. On poorer soil, such as in uplands, animals are often kept more extensively and may be allowed to roam widely, foraging for themselves.<sup>43</sup> Apart from the consumption of animal caught by hunters, some were reared by some Benin people. Some hunters and their wives reared a lot of animals caught from the forest. Others gained ownership of livestock through direct acquisition by gift or purchase and through what Ojomon has called the contract of agistment, or livestock tenancy. This operated in taking care of animals for the owner's and sharing the offspring's with him or her. The advantage always rested with the owner, for the sharing was always in the ratio of two for the owner and one for the caretaker.<sup>26</sup>

### **Industries**

Benin was noted for her weaving and textile industry. The abundant cotton grown and concentrated in the Savannah belts of the country which is the Northern & South

Western Nigeria such as Kano, Kaduna, Kogi, Oyo, Ondo, Kwara, Ogun, and Lagos state. They provided the needed raw materials for cloth weaving. Unlike farming, which was largely dominated by men, the textile and cloth production was dominated by the women folks. The women spinned and wove locally grown cotton into *Ukpon*, Benin cloth. Weaving was locally done on simple upright looms with hand heddles which produced strips of cloth of varying width. *Ukpon* was either plain white or with a pattern of red and white stripes. Children were introduced into the art of weaving at a very early age usually with the preparing stages of ginning and fluffing of the cotton wool. The cloth woven were used locally and also sold to traders/buyers from other countries.<sup>27</sup>

### **Wood Carving**

This was another prominent art among the Benin people which was said to have been copied from the Yoruba carvers. Benin tradition explains that at one time in their history, wood-carving was a thriving industry in Benin City. Traditionally carved staves (*ukhurhe*), which are symbols of the divinities worshipped by village communities were the most important objects. Important title holders in the capital and hereditary village chiefs could obtain *ukhurhe* and wooden heads as altar decorations and other ritual and ceremonial objects. The Oba had control over all ivory in the kingdom and nearly all ivory carvings appeared to have been for his personal use. Carvers were also noted in some other parts but with less skills and ingenuity. The Benin carpenters (*onwina*) who produced wooden trays, mortars, pestles, decorated doors, gates, stools, drums, ladles, masks, toys, materials, for religious objects, chairs, weaving materials and several others

were produced by Benin carvers. Most of the products were said to have been for the Benin royalty and long distance traders who transport some to other countries.<sup>28</sup>

### **Iron Work**

The indigenous craft and industries were engaged in the manufacturing of several products which also thrived and became developed before the beginning of the 19th century. These practice; were in the areas of *black and iron smithing*. In the political sphere, the crafts men, especially the blacksmiths (*Ogieogun*), helped to consolidate the power of the Oba over those of the titled chiefs. In this regard, the blacksmiths' (*Igunematon*) produced the monarchical symbols of authority (*Ada* and *Eben*) which were made of iron. *Ada* and *Eben* were produced for the use of the Oba only and were the symbols of his authority over his people. This was practiced in some parts of Benin under the guidance of the tutelary spirit, ogun at Igun street, with concentration on iron, bronze and brass casting works. The industry was very important in the production and repairs of farm tools for the agricultural sector which was the leading sector of Benin pre-colonial economy. The smith manufactured items include axes, knives, hoes, diggers, cutlass, needles, pins, arrow heads, chisels, long royal knives and short cutlass and bangles. Some of the knives and other weapons were used extensively for both defensive and offensive war-fares. It was these local weapons that the Benin warriors, used in resisting several communities in battles like Nupe, Esan, Yoruba and later British incursion at several times of their history.<sup>29</sup>

## **Trade**

Broadly speaking, trading in Benin was proficient in pre-colonial period. Until recent times, Benin women were the only ones that were good in trading, they were limited to the sale and buying of local food stuffs in the markets. This is understandable because the people in pre-colonial times lived a communal life. They hardly lack anything and they could freely get what they need among themselves. This notwithstanding, laziness was not encouraged in the land. However, because human needs are insatiable, no one person has all he or she needed therefore, there was need of exchange in one way or the other which eventually led to local and long distance trade.<sup>30</sup>

**Local Trade:** In the pre-colonial era, two markets existed in Benin. They were the silent market and the open market. Silent market is the system of market, the presence of the seller was not necessary. He or she just displays the goods according to size and price and goes as far as to his or her farm to work and the buyer comes collect what he or she needs and pays by dropping the equivalent in cowries. To safeguard the goods, the trader simply drops a piece of Iron representing the god of iron in the centre of the container and this prevented dishonesty. The open markets small markets in the village square known as Eki and were only attended by the villagers of the same village or at most two villages. As a result, these market were small, primitive and held under trees surrounded by bushes. But with time, a better market system emerged. Subsequently, Benin now had four market days and the market days were arranged to prevent frictions. So each market, according to the arrangement held every four days till date.<sup>31</sup>

**Long Distance Trade:** As more need arose to dispose surplus production in pre-colonial Benin, long distance trade emerged. Markets in pre-colonial Benin were not peripheral to the economy. Markets developed as a response to dispose surplus which characterized Benin productions in pre-colonial times. The change from an inward looking economy to a market oriented one owed much of its beginnings to internal stimulus from the growth of surplus. Another reason that led to long distance trade in the pre-colonial era was the different craft skills that led to professionalism.<sup>32</sup>

Benin in pre-colonial era evolved a centralised system of authority that had direct impact on the people. It also had organised political units and structures of government aimed at achieving an ideal society. The various political institutions and social groups played pivotal roles in maintenance of peace and order in the society. In like manner, the economic activities of Benin people which were based on agriculture, industry and trade contributed immensely to the development of the people of Benin using the resources at their disposal to meet several basic human needs. From the above, one can infer that the socio-economic engagement of Benin responded to their needs. Agriculture, industry, and trade significantly contributed to the development of the people of Benin.

## Endnotes

1. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas, from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshop, 1957, p.45.
2. J.F.A. Ajayi, & M. Crowder, *History of West Africa*, Ibadan: Longman Groups Limited, 1970, pp.23-25.
3. S.A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland: Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekiti Parapo*, London: Longman Group Limited, 1971, p.19.
4. H. C. Triandis, *Culture and Social Behavior*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1994, pp.9-15.
5. J.O. Lucas, *The Religion of the Yoruba*, Lagos: C.M.S Bookshop, 1948, pp.65-68.
6. A. Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-speaking Peoples and Their Neighbours Before 1600", in J.F.A. Ajayi et al (eds), *History of West Africa*, vol.2, London: Longman. 1971, pp.32-35.
7. J. U. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, Ibadan University Press, 1958, p.27.
8. H. C. Triandis, *Culture and Social Behavior*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1994, pp.9-15.
9. J.O. Lucas, *The Religion of the Yoruba*, Lagos: C.M.S Bookshop, 1948, pp.65-68
10. Edith R. Sanders, "The Hamitic Hypothesis: Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective", *Journal of African History*, 10(4), 1969, p.521.
11. George Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, New York: Dover, 1956, p.117.
12. Joseph Nevadomsky, "The Benin Kingdom: Rituals of Kinship and Their Social Meanings (1)", *African Study Monographs* (1993), 14(2), p.66.
13. O.B. Osadolor, "The Military System of Benin Kingdom, c.1440 - 1897", *Ph.D. Thesis*, University of Hamburg, Germany, 23 July, 2001, p.2.
14. P. A. Igbafe, *Benin Under Colonial Rule: The Impact of Colonial Rule on an African Kingdom, 1897-1938*, p.12.

15. Allan Frederick Charles-Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897*, 1969, p.1.
16. J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, *History of West Africa*, London: Longman, 1977, p.197.
17. E. Ola Abiola, *A Textbook of West Africa History (A.D, 1000 to the Present Day)*, Ado Ekiti: Omolayo Standard Press, 1981, p.35.
18. G.I.C. Eluwa, et al., *A History of Nigeria for Schools and Colleges*, Onitsha: Africana-FEB, 1988, p.44.
19. P.A. Igbafe, "A Bridge Across Time: The Benin Factor in Nigerian History", *Twenty-Third Inaugural Lecture*, University of Benin, Benin City, Tuesday April 29, 1986.
20. Jacob U. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, Lagos: C.M.S Bookshop, 1936, p.1.
21. Ibid., pp.1-7.
22. S.E. Orobator, "Trade of Imperial Benin with the Portuguese and the Dutch", in *Pre-colonial Economic History of Benin*, Ibadan: Heinemann, 2007, p.109.
23. R. E. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo Speaking Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, London: International African Institute, 1970, pp.40-42.
24. Victor Osaro Edo, "Changing Phases of Power and Civil Administration in Benin: From Inception to 1987", *Nebula* 5.1/5.2, June 2008, pp.168-169.
25. E. B. Eweka, *Evolution of Benin Chieftaincy Titles*, Benin City: UNIBEN Press, 1992, p.35.
26. J. U. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, Lagos: C.M.S Bookshop, 1936, p.1.
27. P.A. Igbafe, *Benin under British Administration: The Impact of Colonial Rule on an African Kingdom, 1987-1938*, London: Longman Publishers, pp.149-151
28. O. S. Omoera, & Maria N. Obonor, "Theatrical Elements in Olokun Worship in Benin, Nigeria", *Fireworks for a Lighting Aesthetician: Essays in Honour of Duro Oni* 60, 2012, pp.405-420.

29. R. E. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria. Ethnographic Survey of Africa*, London: International African Institute, 1957, p.15.
30. Ogbomo, Onaiwu Wilson, & Queen Onoriobe Ogbomo, *Women and Society in Pre-Colonial Iyede*, German: Nomos publishing, 1993, pp.431-441.
31. E.O.P. Iziengbe, “Women and Sexuality in Pre-Colonial Benin”, *Kano Journal of History*, 3(1), 2017/2018, p.4.
32. Thurstan Shaw, “Pre-History”, in Obaro Ikime (ed.) *Groundwork of the Nigeria History*, Nigeria: Heinemann, 1980, p.32.

## CHAPTER THREE

### BRIEF HISTORY OF THE URHOBO LAND

This chapter takes into consideration the historical origin of Urhobo people. It also accesses the various versions of the origin of Urhobo. The chapter explores the geography and vegetation as well as the political institution, and social activities, Economic activities of the Urhobo people from pre-colonial era. In the western part of the Niger Delta region, the Urhobos are a prominent ethnic group among several others. The geographical characteristics of the Urhobo territory have significantly influenced their way of life and occupational choices. In this chapter, how these geographical factors have had such a significant impact on the lives of the Urhobos will be explored. This chapter will also examine Urhoboland in the pre-colonial era by exploring various aspects such as the tradition of origin, which can be seen from four different perspectives.

The political structure of the pre-colonial Urhobos, which was decentralised in nature will also be discussed. How different age-groups (*Otus*) in Urhoboland functioned in the political structure of pre-colonial Urhoboland will also be examined. Additionally, the economy of the Urhobos will be examined , which relied heavily on agriculture. The social organisation of the Urhobos, which encompassed different age groups(*otu*) will also be discussed . Furthermore, the religious beliefs and other social structures, as well as the administration of land during the pre-colonial era will be explored.

## Geography of Urhoboland

Urhoboland is located in the western Niger Delta region between latitudes 5° 15' and 6° North and longitudes 5° 40' and 6° 25' East.<sup>1</sup> Its southern border is formed by the western Ijaw Division, its western border by the Warri Division, its eastern border by the Aboh Division and its northern border is formed by the River Ethiopia and the Benin Province.<sup>2</sup> The Urhobos experiences a hot and humid climate. It rains from March to October and is usually dry from November to February. The region typically receives rainfall from March to October, while it tends to be dry from November to February. This rainfall-dominant pattern has proven advantageous for the Urhobo people in cultivating crops successfully. Annual rainfall averages 2500 mm and temperatures hover around 27 °C year-round. The Urhobo people utilised their fertile soil, advantageous rainy climate, together with their resourcefulness and agricultural knowledge for cultivating crops like cassava (*imidaka*), yam (*ole*), beans (*esha*), and corn (*oka*), which has been vital for their sustenance and income.<sup>3</sup>

Urhoboland is distinguished by its unique topography including swamps, rivers and highlands. The region depends heavily on rivers such as the Niger River, Ethiope, and Sapele Rivers, which hold a significant place in the daily lives of local communities. These rivers serve multiple purposes, acting as transportation routes, supporting agriculture, and serving as a vital source of water for daily needs. Similarly, the Sapele River, beginning in the uplands, supports irrigation, fishing, and overall water resources.<sup>4</sup>

Various regions, including Okpe, Uvwie, Agbarha, Agbon, Udu, Abraka, Usiefrun, Orhuwhorun, Egbo-Uhurae, Orogun, and Eku, have thrived in Urhoboland for generations, benefiting from its rich environment and agricultural opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

### **Tradition of Origin of the Urhobos**

The Urhobos, as they are called today, were previously referred to by various distorted names as explained by Adogbeji Salubi. Names like "Subou," "Subo," "Sooba," "Uzobo," "Issobo," "Usobo," and "Sobo" were used to refer to the present day Urhobos. Most of these name were coined and documented by European explorers during their encounters with the Urhobo people in the past.<sup>6</sup> Notably, the historical origin of the Urhobo people, a significant ethnic group in the Niger Delta region, has proved difficult to narrate due to a scarcity of documentary evidence. However, oral tradition offers four distinct accounts regarding the origin of the Urhobos, contributing to the understanding of the history of the Urhobos.

According to the first account of the historical origin of the Urhobos, based on oral tradition, the Urhobos have always inhabited their current location without any migration from elsewhere. This tradition of origin claims that the Urhobos are the indigenous people of their territory and have been its original inhabitants. The Urhobo people attribute their presence in their current location to divine intervention by God (*Oghene*). This account argues that God (*Oghene*) created and specifically placed the Urhobos in their present territory. This oral account holds significant familiarity and

importance within the Urhobo community. There is however no archaeological or written evidence to support it.<sup>7</sup>

According to an alternate perspective on the origins of the Urhobo people, it is argued that the Urhobos migrated from Benin during the reign of the Ogiso and Eweka dynasties.<sup>8</sup> Other accounts have argued that the migration from Benin most likely occurred during the Ogiso dynasty when Benin was less centralised, less organised and was quite simple. This account based this argument on the fact that during the Eweka dynasty, Benin became highly centralised and the building of an empire occurred during this period, as such, the Obas discouraged emigration, this is because a strong population was needed to maintain their rule.<sup>9</sup> This account suggests that the Urhobo people can be traced back to a shared territory with the Edo-speaking people.

The Urhobo migration was not a one-time event, but rather a gradual journey into different parts of Urhoboland. However, it is important to acknowledge that not all Urhobo clans unanimously agree with this account of their origin. While some clans, such as Olomu, Agbon, and Abraka claim to agree with this tradition of origin, others like Ughelli and Ewu claim this tradition of origin is untrue. The Urhobo migration from Benin was claimed to be due to the unfriendly nature of the Oba or fear of attracting punishment for mistakes made.<sup>10</sup>

According to Abraka oral tradition, which agrees with this tradition of origin from Benin, Ewake, the son of an Oba in Benin is credited with creating Abraka, an area in

Urhoboland. He was supposed to succeed his father after his death but his step brother, Azonowe thwarted this by succeeding the throne even when he was not the rightful heir. He then forced Ewake out of Benin even when he had no home in the palace and made his home in Orogho, which was on the Benin side of the Ethiopian River. When he was driven, he eventually crossed over the river and formed what became known as Abraka. Another account has it that it was Avwaike, the son of Oba Ogolua that founded Abraka. Although Avwaike was the first son, Egbeka was announced as the first and when Ogolua died, Egbeka ascended the throne, regardless of having an elder brother. When he did, he sent soldiers after his brother, Avwaike to kill him, but Avwaike took off, crossed the Ethiopie River and eventually founded Ovwuwelame, which is where the Abraka people in Urhoboland sprang from. It is possible however that Avwaike is Ewake in the first story. It is clear from the above narrative that Abraka originates from Benin.<sup>11</sup>

The above narrative on Abraka's origin, however does not tally with Benin's history. The idea that Oguola was the father of Egbeka, does not match with Benin historical records, but rather, Oba Edoni, Oba Udagbedo, and Oba Ohen were the sons of Oba Oguola . Oba Ohen in turn had four sons of which one of them was Oba Egbeka, the others were Orobiru, Ogun and Uwaifiokun. When it was the turn of Oba Ogun, one of Oguola's son to rule, his brother Uwaifiokun ascended the throne in his place, using manipulative tactics despite being Ogun's younger brother. This caused serious chaos. It is possible that during this period where Benin was unstable due to the chaos, Oba Ogun might have crossed the Ethiopie River and formed Abraka and people who lived in fear in

Benin during this chaotic might have also migrated to Abraka, becoming the first dwellers there.<sup>12</sup> As such, this account argues that the Urhobos are from Benin and it was during the chaotic period in Benin that Urhoboland was formed. Abraka, amongst other areas in Urhoboland, agrees with this account. Also, in the early Eweka dynasty, Urhobo kings (*Ivie*) showed their respect for the Oba of Benin by paying homage to him. This is likely because they had a special connection and could trace their roots back to Benin. This demonstrates how much the Urhobo people admired and respected the Oba of Benin, highlighting the importance of their relationship. This historical practice sheds light on the close ties between these two groups during that time.

Linguistics also provides evidence that suggests the possibility of Urhobo migration from the Benin region. Both the Benin and Urhobo peoples were originally part of a linguistic group called Proto-Edoid. However, as the Benin language evolved from this group, certain changes occurred in their words. For instance, they dropped the consonant "r" from some words that originally contained it. For example, the word for "three" in Benin is "eha," while in Urhobo, it's "erha" for the same concept. These linguistic changes are attributed to efforts by the Eware dynasty in Benin to centralise the language by reducing dialectal variations.<sup>13</sup> Based on the information provided earlier, it is reasonable to conclude that the Urhobos had a significant connection with the Benins, and it's quite plausible that they may have originated from the Benin region. This assumption is supported by the presence of linguistic similarities between the Urhobo and Benin languages.

Another theory regarding the origin of the Urhobo people posits that they migrated from Ile-Ife. This argument is primarily based on the significant presence of Urhobo communities in the Ile-Ife region. Proponents of this theory suggest that this strong Urhobo population in Ile-Ife implies a historical migration from Ile-Ife to other areas.<sup>14</sup> It is important however to emphasise that the mere presence of Urhobos in present-day Ile-Ife does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that they originated from that region. Contrary to the idea of an Ile-Ife origin, there is a more plausible argument that the Urhobos might have migrated from Benin. This assertion is based on certain similarities, particularly in language, between the Urhobo and Benin cultures. However, the same cannot be said for Ile-Ife, as there are no striking similarities that would support an origin from there.

From an alternative perspective, the Urhobo people have been proposed to share a common origin with the Yorubas and Edos who trace their roots back to Egypt and Sudan. This viewpoint finds support in the accounts of travellers who noticed certain resemblances between Egypt, Sudan, and specific regions within Urhoboland, like Okpara and Uhwokori in Agbon. It is suggested that the Urhobo community's initial migration path included Egypt, with intermediate stops at locations like Lake Chad and Ile-Ife, before they settled in Benin and eventually made their way to the marshy Niger-Delta region.<sup>15</sup> This theory like substantial evidence, as archaeological and linguistic evidence is lacking. The history of the Urhobos with Egypt and Sudan does not also have a connection. The supposed journey the Urhobos took from Lake Chad and Ile-Ife is also

hard to believe as historical proof is lacking. The similarities which travellers claimed to also exist between the Urhobos and Egypt and Sudan can also be coincidence. It is possible that the claims by the Urhobos of originating from these places are influenced by the advanced civilization that thrived there.

In conclusion, when it comes to the origin of the Urhobo people, two prevailing theories have gained acceptance. First and foremost, the Urhobos' claim of being the indigenous inhabitants of their land, rooted in their historical connection to the Niger-Delta region. This perspective emphasises their deep ties to the land and its resources. Additionally, the historical migration from the neighbouring Benin region is also recognized. This viewpoint acknowledges that the Urhobos, like many other ethnic groups, may have experienced periods of migration and settlement. Together, these two narratives provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Urhobo origin and history, embracing both their enduring presence in their ancestral homeland and their historical movement. These two accounts are the most accepted tradition of origin of the Urhobos.

### **Political Organisation of Urhobo**

In pre-colonial Urhoboland, the political structure revolved around the figure of the *Ovie* (king) and a council of elders (*Ekpako*). The *Ovie's* role extended beyond governance. He played a great role in the allocation of land. The *Ovie* met with his council of elders (*Ekpako*) in a meeting and land allocation and other issues relating to land was discussed, ensuring that it met with the need of the growing population. The

political structure of the Urhobos in the pre-colonial era was not a centralised one, rather it was decentralised. This was because the *Ovie* had to call a meeting, where an agreement was reached by the council of elders (*Ekpako*) before crucial decisions could be made.<sup>16</sup>

The *Ovie* only had maximum control over land which was owned by his family. Issues affecting land owned by the community was discussed between the *Ovie* and the *Ekpako* before decisions were made. This was not the case for the *Oba* of Benin, as his word was law and he could not be questioned. Land was shared and allocated equally among families in the community. The land allocated to a family was then divided into different plots for members of the family. This allocation was instrumental in maintaining social cohesion and economic stability within the region. Additionally, the *Ovie* and council of elders played a pivotal role in resolving land disputes, drawing upon their extensive knowledge of tradition and culture to adjudicate conflicts and maintain the clarity of land ownership. Moreover, their custodianship of cultural practices ensured that land use and tenure were deeply rooted in the community's identity, promoting the sustainable management of the land.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, the decentralised nature of the Urhobo governance system allowed individual communities to have their own rulers, contributing to a sense of local autonomy. Each *Ovie* had the authority to tailor land policies to the specific needs and traditions of their community, enhancing flexibility in land use planning. This local

control not only facilitated the sustainable management of land but also acted as a safeguard against external encroachments on communal territory. In essence, the political structure of pre-colonial Urhoboland, with the *Ovie* and council of elders at its core, was intrinsically linked to the Urhobo land control and tenure systems, fostering fair allocation of land, conflict resolution, protection of land rights, and the preservation of cultural and traditional practices associated with land.<sup>18</sup>

Aside the *Ekpako* who were respected in Urhoboland, the chieftaincy title holders known as *Olorogun* in Urhoboland was another group that was highly respected. The *Olorogun* held a remarkable place of influence, not just in politics but also in land administration in Urhoboland. Despite not having direct political roles, their suggestions and contributions carried immense weight due to their esteemed status. While not directly managing land, they played an active part in land-related decisions, such as resolving land disputes. To become an *Olorogun*, the individual had to undergo specific rites, paying homage to tradition and community values. Membership in this group was prestigious, symbolising wealth. Although younger members could join, there was a set limit on membership, leading to some rejections. Seniority was determined by years of service. An *Olorogun* was granted a piece of land as soon as the rites of membership was completed as a mark of respect, reflecting their influence and respect in Urhoboland. In the pre-colonial era, there was a struggle to acquire the title of an *Olorogun* because it carried immense prestige and also due to the influential role they played in politics and

land gifted to them . Individuals were thus willing to borrow money from relatives or friends to attain this esteemed status.<sup>19</sup>

Aside the *Olorogun* who was a part of the political structure and the *Ekpako*, who were the oldest in the age-grade structure(*Otu*) and formed the council of elders(*Ekpako*), other age-groups existed in pre-colonial Urhoboland. They played different roles in Urhobo political framework and also in land tenure administration. The various age grades (*otu*) in pre-colonial Urhoboland were structured to facilitate different roles and responsibilities based on age and gender. Some of the age grade in the pre-colonial era included:

i) **Imitete-Otu:** The *Imitete-Otu* was the youngest age- grade in Urhoboland consisting of young boys and girls under the age of fifteen. Their primary role was to perform menial tasks due to their limited physical strength. This included cleaning village paths, sweeping public areas, and other similar chores that contributed to the overall cleanliness and upkeep of the community. While their tasks might appear easy, their contributions were important in maintaining a clean and organised environment within the community, which was essential for land administration. Their involvement in keeping communal areas tidy and well-maintained ensured that the land remained in good condition and was ready for agricultural or other uses. This indirectly supported effective land tenure, as well-kept land was easier to manage and allocate to families as needed.<sup>20</sup>

ii) **Otourere:** The Otourere age grade consisting of boys aged fifteen to about twenty-five held a pivotal role in pre-colonial Urhoboland. They did not only serve as the community's labour force due to their physical strength, but they also carried out more tedious tasks in the community compared to the imitete-otu. They were the youth of the land, as such they were termed, “the future of Urhoboland”. Aside the responsibilities of maintaining cleanliness, repairing public facilities, they also tried to protect the interest of their members and held small political offices within their circle as the youth of Urhoboland. Their dedicated meeting halls served as platforms for community discussions on politics and others, including those related to land administration and improvement.<sup>21</sup>

iii) **Ivwraghwa:** This age grade consisted of men aged thirty to sixty. Historically, they were the town warriors responsible for defending the kingdom when needed, ensuring the community's security and indirectly influencing land administration through the maintenance of a secure environment. They also served as mentors and supervisors for younger age grades, fostering discipline and cohesion essential for both political stability and effective land administration. Their role extended to executing orders from the community and ensured the implementation of political decisions related to land use and disputes. They were also expected to exhibit outstanding characters as they were next in line to lead the land after the *Ekpako*.<sup>22</sup>

## **Economic**

During the pre-colonial period, agriculture played a vital role in the economy of the Urhobo community. The main focus of land cultivation was the growth of food crops, which served as the primary means of sustenance for families. The Urhobo people engaged in cultivating a variety of crops, including cassava (*Imidaka*), yam (*ole*), beans (*esha*), groundnut (*Isagwe*), corn (*oka*), and other types. It was a common practice to cultivate multiple crops on a single plot of land, a method referred to as mixed farming. Simple agricultural tools such as cutlasses, hoes, axes, and similar implements were utilised for the various tasks involved in farming.<sup>23</sup>

Farming on land in the Urhobo community heavily relied on the labour provided by family members. A man (*Ose*), his wife (*Aye*) and their children (*Imitete*) would join forces to work on a specific plot of land. This strong dependence on family labour contributed to the prevalence of polygamy, as larger families meant more hands available for agricultural tasks. In situations where a family had limited manpower or required additional assistance, farmers sought help from individuals outside their immediate family circle. These external individuals were often compensated with a portion of the farm's produce or offered reciprocal assistance whenever they also needed a hand in the farm. For those who found the labour-intensive nature of farming burdensome and could not afford the extra cost that came with having a slave, purchased slaves to work on their

farm. Additionally, these slaves also undertook household chores for their masters, further expanding their responsibilities beyond the fields.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the Urhobos agricultural pursuits, the Urhobo community recognized the importance of fishing as a viable economic activity, thanks to the presence of nearby water bodies and their commendable fishing skills. They employed various fishing tools to capture fish. The fish caught not only served as a crucial source of sustenance but also held considerable value as a commodity for local trade.<sup>24</sup> According to Elizabeth Onanubi in an oral interview conducted, the river in Urhoboland swelled when it rained and overflowed to dry land. When the overflow from rivers entered dry land, it came with it water creatures like fishes, crayfish and other edible water creatures. The Urhobo people during this time built enclosures to protect the water with these water creatures from going back into the rivers. They did this with bamboos, even when the water could not totally be prevented from overflowing, the fishes were prevented from going with the water, after which the fishes and other water creatures, if they were, were collected and used for food.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the Urhobo people actively participated in the art of palm wine tapping, capitalising on the plentiful supply of palm trees in their region. The Urhobos whose lands were opportuned to have much palm trees, enjoyed this occupation, others who were not opportuned traded their advantageous products with those who had palm wine in surplus. The extraction of palm wine from these trees was a skill they possessed,

and they would subsequently sell the palm wine in local markets. Palm wine held immense cultural significance among the Urhobos and was regularly consumed during important ceremonies such as marriages, festivals, and other traditional gatherings. As a result, it served as a vital beverage within Urhobo society.<sup>27</sup>

Also, Urhoboland before British colonial administration had a well-established economic system based on the extraction of oil from palm nuts. This economic activity affected the economy of the pre-colonial Urhoboland and played a vital role in attracting the British to the area. Gathering palm nuts and extraction of its oil was a big deal in pre-colonial Urhoboland. The *Ekpako* and the *Ovie* decided when this activity should be done in the land. It was a seasonal activity done from the month of January to June. Families joined forces for about three weeks to prepare the nuts gotten from trees. The nuts were crushed to get the juice and oil out, it was done either with their bare feet or hands. The whole nut process from the tree to the extraction took about three weeks. The oil that was gotten was not very clean, so they boiled it again to make it better. Every part of the nut was useful. The leftover pulp was mixed with water and shook to get any extra oil out. They collected this oil from the water and stored it in kerosene cans to use later. The nuts themselves were important too. They cracked them open to eat and also sold them. This whole process was very important. This is why the British was very much interested in the Urhobos in the pre-colonial era.<sup>28</sup>

Trade cannot be neglected while discussing the pre-colonial economy of the Urhobos, as it played a crucial role in the pre-colonial Urhobo economy. The Urhobos with the help of their favourable geography and fertile land was able to produce surplus, which promoted the trade in surplus produce gotten from the land. The Urhobo community actively engaged in both local and long-distance trade, facilitating the exchange of goods they produced with those they required that they could not produce. This trade extended beyond the boundaries of Urhoboland, with notable trading centres such as Agbarho, Sapele, Ughelli, and Warri emerging as prominent hubs within the Urhobo region. Moreover, neighbouring communities actively participated in local trade, fostering economic connections and facilitating interactions within Urhoboland.<sup>29</sup>

## **Social**

In pre-colonial Urhobo society, land played a pivotal role in shaping the social structure and values of the community. Ownership of land was not merely a practical necessity but a symbol of prestige and status within the society. Those who possessed larger tracts of land were not only perceived as wealthier but also enjoyed higher social standing and respect. This incentivized individuals to acquire and manage as much land as possible, leading to the formation of more extensive households and larger extended families.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, polygamy was a common practice among many men in pre-colonial Urhoboland. Beyond personal preferences, this practice was influenced by several factors. Firstly, it contributed to a man's social respect and standing within the

community, as having multiple wives was seen as a sign of affluence and influence. Secondly, it had practical benefits, such as having more hands to help with farming and other labour-intensive activities, which were vital for sustenance and prosperity in an agricultural society.<sup>31</sup>

As stated earlier, acquiring chieftaincy title was one way land was owned in pre-colonial Urhoboland, as a result most men struggled to be chieftaincy title holders (*Olorogun*). These chieftaincy title holders did not only influence politics but also decisions pertaining to land and the society at large. They were highly influential and well respected. Additionally, the various age-groups, called *Otu*, played social roles.<sup>32</sup> The elders, known as *Ekpako*, played vital roles in passing down Urhobo traditions and history to the younger generation. They told stories and ensured that Urhobo customs were upheld. The *Ivwraghwa* age group focused on protecting Urhobo communities, safeguarding the lives and property of the people. The *Imitete* and *Otourere* groups helped maintain community cleanliness, which made land administration smoother. The *Otourere* group even undertook tasks like constructing shrines and halls, typically involving individuals aged 20 and above. All these roles collectively shaped the land tenure system, preserving culture, ensuring security, and contributing to community development.<sup>33</sup>

Also, land held strong connections to spiritual beliefs. The worship of *Oghene* was closely linked to the land, representing the bond between the people and the land

they lived on. The Urhobos worshipped *Oghene*. Although *Oghene* was not physically seen, the Urhobos worshipped him in a spiritual manner. In cases of misconduct, such as theft of crops from a piece of land, a customary practice was followed. The accused person was required to swear by calling upon the name of *Oghene*. If the thief went unidentified, the victim would invoke the name of *Oghene* for vengeance. The Urhobos believed that *Oghene* possessed the power to punish wrongdoers, thus instilling fear in the community. In Urhobo tradition, every family had a unique stick which they called *Oghene* (god). It was adorned with chalk markings and a white cloth fastened at its top which represented their devotion to the Almighty God. This stick served as a means of communication with God, establishing a holy environment for prayers and offerings. While there was no single central shrine for all Urhobo clans, certain influential Juju cults had an impact on various clans. These customs influenced Urhobo culture and spirituality, fostering a sense of community and identity.<sup>34</sup>

Also, *Orhen*, which was the white chalk, was worshipped by some Urhobos. The community's fear of *Oghene's* and *Orien's* ability to mete out punishment to wrongdoers served as a powerful deterrent against illegal activities concerning land, including theft. This fear played a significant role in promoting honesty and discouraging corrupt practices in land tenure and administration.

The exploration of the pre-colonial era of the Urhobo people unveils a captivating tapestry of the history of the Urhobos and way of life. Their geographical location,

blessed with fertile lands and abundant water resources, was instrumental in shaping the agricultural and fishing-based economy of the Urhobos in the pre-colonial era. Rivers facilitated irrigation for improved agricultural productivity and offered opportunities for fishing, vital for their sustenance. Also, the multiple accounts of the origin of the Urhobos, passed down through oral traditions, contribute to the rich diversity of the cultural identity of the Urhobos. Some narratives assert the indigenous roots in Urhoboland, while others suggest migrations from different regions like Benin, Ile-Ife, Egypt, and Sudan, however, the indigenous ownership of Urhoboland and ancestral ties to Benin are the most widely accepted. The significance of oral tradition highlights the importance of storytelling in preserving their cultural heritage.

The decentralised political structure, characterised by individual kings and administrative councils, underscores the importance of local governance and community involvement in decision-making. Economically, the Urhobo people exhibited industriousness through activities such as farming, fishing, palm wine tapping and trading. These practices were the pillars of the livelihood of the Urhobos and showcased their resourcefulness in utilising the natural abundance of their surroundings. The social structure organised by age grades in Urhoboland provided insights into the community organisation of the Urhobos, with each individual assigned specific roles and responsibilities based on their age and experience. Religiously, the Urhobos worship of *Oghene* and *Orhen* reflected their spiritual beliefs and deep connection with the divine and natural world. The pre-colonial land tenure system of the Urhobos where land was

communally owned by the community and also family and could not be sold, it depicted a picture of the togetherness, value for land and tradition of the Urhobos. The pre-colonial era of the Urhobos shows not only the traditions but the ingenuity, social order and spirituality of the Urhobos and respect for culture of the Urhobos.

## Endnotes

1. Albert .O. Aweto, "Outline Geography of Urhoboland", in *Studies in Urhoboland*, ed. Peter P. Ekah, Buffalo New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2005, pp.684-686.
2. A. Salubi, "The Establishment of British Administration in the Urhobo Country (1891-1913)", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1(3), 1958, p.240.
3. Ibid., p.685.
4. Aweto, "Outline Geography of Urhoboland", p.685.
5. Interview with Papa Okpako Oghenenyeroowo, 76 years, Retired Civil Servant, at Orhuwhorun on 15 June 2024.
6. A. Salubi, "The Establishment of British Administration in the Urhobo Country (1891-1913)", p.239.
7. Onigu Otite, *The Urhobo People*, Ibadan: Shaneson C.I, 1982, pp.100.
8. Obaro Ikime, "The Peoples and Kingdom of the Delta Province", in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, ed. Obaro Ikime, Ibadan: Heinention, 1980, p.93.
9. Peter Ekah, "Imperialism, Nigerian Historiography and the Nature & Outline of Urhobo History", in *History of the Urhobo People of Niger Delta*, ed. P. Ekah, Nigeria: Urhobo Historical Society, 2007, pp.10-12.
10. Ikime, "The Peoples and Kingdom of the Delta Province", p.93.
11. The Ancient Benins In Diaspora (The Urhobo People), retrieved from [http://www.edoworld.net/The\\_Benins\\_In\\_Diaspora\\_The%20Urhobo.html](http://www.edoworld.net/The_Benins_In_Diaspora_The%20Urhobo.html) on 25 June 2024.
12. Ibid.
13. Otile, *The Urhobo People*, pp.13-15.
14. Ibid.
15. Interview with Emmanuel Obukokwo, 69 years, Retired Teacher, at Usiefrun on 20 April 2024.

16. Interview with Felix Okiemute, 80 years, Farmer, at Usiefrun on 20 April 2024.
17. Ibid.
18. Interview with Mama Elizabeth Onanubi, 71 years, Retired Nurse, at Usiefrun on 20 April 2024.
19. Ibid.
20. Ikime, "The People's and Kingdom of Delta Province", p.93.
21. Otile, *The Urhobo People*, p.15.
22. Onigu Otile, Continuance and Change in an Urhobo Age-Grade Organization in Nigeria," *Cashiers d' Études Africanies*, 12(36), 1972, pp.304-306.
23. Ibid.
24. Otile, *The Urhobo People*, pp.100-103.
25. S.O. Aghalino, "British Colonial Policies and the Oil Palm Industry in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria (1900-1960)", *African Study Monographs*, 21(1), 2000, pp.19-33.
26. Interview with Mama Elizabeth Onanubi, 88 years, Farmer, at Usiefrun on 20 April 2024.
27. Albert .O. Aweto, "Outline Geography of Urhoboland ", p.687-688.
28. Ibid.
29. Interview with Sarah Akpowowo, 79 years, Retired Civil Servant, at Uvwie on 12 June 2024.
30. Ibid.
31. Interview with Oke Odjegba, 78 years, Retired Soldier, at Uvwie on 12 June 2024.
32. Mouth Piece of Urhobo, "Urhobo Traditional Way of Worship", retrieved from <https://m.facebook.com/mouthpieceofurhobo/photos/a.1862556480632157/2055023281385475/?type=3>, on 25 June 2024.

33. Interview with Mama Joy Onome, 72 years, Trader, at Uvwie on 12 June 2024.
34. Interview with Ufoma Obukokwo, 78 years, Retired Civil Servant, at Uvwie on 12 June 2024.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

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

The chapter focuses on the intergroup relationship between Benin and Urhobo Kingdom, socio-political and economic activities between Benin Kingdom and Urhobo people and how the contact helps to promote cordial relations between the peoples. In Urhobo society, as in many African cultures, the folktale is a story performed at evening time to entertain an audience that is critical. The tale is a fictional narrative and is different from an ordinary story (ikun) or myths (ikunodidi awanre) and legends (ikun awanre). This project uses Urhobo stories to establish that the influence of Benin on the people of the fringe states was perceived both realistically and imaginatively. Benin influence is both overt and covert. Cultural studies encourage the interpretation of a work of art from the perspective of a dominated-class worldview.<sup>1</sup>

This study draws an analogy from this story to explain that the might and majesty of the Benin Empire is seen as simultaneously strong and fragile by the surrounding states. This can be gleaned from such imaginative stories as folktales told by the peoples of the fringe states. The Urhobo people, for example, are one such group. They are egalitarian in nature. Thus, the performance of Urhobo tales attempts to instill in the audience the importance of freedom and the sacrifice needed to enhance their survival when conjuring up the Benin Empire, or Aka as the Urhobo call Benin, the Oba himself, and images of revolutionaries or freedom fighters such as Arhwaran, and despots such as

Inarhe and Ogiso.<sup>2</sup> The ancestral home of the Urhobo people is in Delta Central Senatorial District of Delta State, Nigeria. The Urhobo live in the rainforest area of Western Niger Delta. They are the most populous ethnic group in Delta State. Urhobo language and culture are related to those of the Edoid cultural area and many myths and tales show ancient Benin or Edo influence. For example, in the Urhobo folk imagination, the Benin Empire is a symbol of might and majesty.<sup>3</sup>

### **Socio-Political History of Urhobo and Benin kingdom**

Urhobo kingdom plays a pivotal role of been the main vehicle for the development in precolonial era. The belief in a monotheistic god who created and controlled the universe, and the destiny of man was central in Urhobo belief system. Given the concept of creation, the worship of God, *Oghene* as Supreme Being was of utmost importance. Since *Oghene* could not be seen nor described, he was worshipped in a representational form. Symbolically, “a long pole of about twenty feet high was planted in the compounds of Urhobo people to represent *Oghene* which was tied with white and red cloths to signify its sacredness. At the foot of the pole were placed bottles of gin and white native chalks that had been offered as offerings, while at the top a basket bearing food items was placed” In spite of belief in a monotheistic God, Urhobo people also take beliefs in divinities serious.<sup>4</sup>

It was also the believe of the people that they are surrounded by spiritual forces. All across Urhobo land were numerous divinities, shrines and grooves where people go for traditional worshipping. Traditional religion in Urhobo was usually assessed in the

light of pre-colonial and postcolonial times referred to as *Akpo'Ahwaren* and *Akpor'Oyibo*.<sup>10</sup> The belief that God created the spirit world and all the other divinities was tied to the thoughts of people of the old world. The spirit world (*Erivwi*) represented the abode of the ancestors from where they participate in human affairs. The veneration of ancestors (*Esemo*) was often regarded as important and given much emphasis because, not only were ancestors guardian of morality, they were also responsible for endearing social control. Erivwo, noted that ancestors needed no prompting before arresting and retributing an errant family member especially in cases of adultery and related sins; that not only were they guardians of morality detect, they also pursued a thief, a liar, or any other criminal.<sup>5</sup>

Owing to the significant roles played by ancestors in rewarding and punishing the deeds of people, atonement of sins and appreciation for blessings were performed by offering sacrifices to them. Communication between people and their ancestors came in the form of dreams, divination (*Epha*) and performance of sacrifices. There were existing relationships between the spirits of the ancestors and the '*Erhi*' which is the spirit being of man, makes communication possible between the living and the dead.<sup>6</sup> The *Erhi* and *Ugboma*, the physical body, reinforced each other; thus when the body dies the spirit (*Erhi*) joins the ancestors in the afterlife. People who died in the rivers were buried at the bank, while those died in the bush, confessed to being witches or were afflicted by leprosy and other diseases were thrown in the forests as it was thought that burying their corpses in the town could have severe consequences. In view of this, an individual while alive

committed him or herself to the laid down ancestral rules in order for his or her spirit to be in one accord with them at death. The place of *Erhi* is important to the Urhobo, because it helped an individual to manage, align and realign his destiny.<sup>7</sup>

Another object of the traditional belief system among Urhobo was the worship of Juju, spiritual beings called *Edjo*. *Edjo* were smaller gods or forces that dwelled in natural phenomenon such as forests; land, and water, that were revered by the people. In their classification, *Edjo 'agwa* was the god of the forest and trees, *Edjo 'otor* was the god of the earth or land, and *Edjo 'ame* was the river god. Among these gods, the river god commanded a large pool of adherents, who in their bid to ensure effective, permanent cure and continuous protection from the onslaught of witches or evil doers remained submissive to the dictates and instructions of the gods. Worshippers of water gods believed that God created the universe and gave control of it to water deities. These adherents also believed that they were magnanimous in wealth, riches and children.<sup>8</sup>

However; these gods could also react against adherents who went contrary to their ways or instructions. That other gods did not possess the kind of followership that river goddesses possessed was probably due to the destructive nature of these gods. For instance, the earth god when invoked into a disputed land could be very destructive in killing even into generations unborn. *Edjo* receives their physical manifestation in wood carvings, metal or clay figures, stained with native chalk, cam wood, or palm oil. Many of these *Edjos* were located in forests and grooves, and were usually represented by totems.

Popular among these trees chosen as dwelling places of *Edjo* are *Ogriki* which were sacred trees reserve for totemic purposes and the African oil bean tree known as *Okpagha*. Carvings and mouldings that were representational of jujus were placed in homes and town shrines. Some that had attained the level of clan gods or juju were celebrated annually in a feast organized in their honour.<sup>9</sup>

### **Economic Relation Between Urhobo and Benin**

The environment in which the Urhobo people lived had been a major determinant of their mode of life. The significance of geography on the people was not only noticeable on the environment which naturally conditioned and influences their mode and pattern of life. Geography provided a rich cultural environment which helped to place Urhobos in both an advantageous and disadvantageous position in their relations with other peoples of the Benin. Environment continued to influence their pattern of involvement as well as their means of survival. Economically, Urhobo people, unlike their Benin, Ijaw and Itsekiri neighbours were agriculturalists who lived in the hinterland of the rain forest of the Niger Delta. Being a hinterland people whose land was favourable to agriculture, they engaged in food and oil crop production which necessitated the exchange of other items of economic importance. It was given that Urhobo traders exchanged their sea foods for yam, plantain, pepper, and spices from the interior farmers especially the Urhobos while also buying off food and oil produce to the coast for sale to

the Benin.<sup>46</sup> Conversely, Urhobo land and its people were isolated by Itsekiri middle men from the international trade that was ongoing at the coast.<sup>10</sup>

The system by which Urhobo people thrived was based on communalism. Under this system, the family was the basic unit of the economy. Every family was not only responsible for the provision of its own labour; they were also expected to adequately provide for themselves. The impact of family on the provision of labour is important; hence it was important for a man to marry more than one wife in order to have more children that will act as source of labour in farm works. The economic structure of pre-colonial Urhobo societies was dependent on primitive system of capital accumulation. Typical of traditional African societies, the subsistent production process necessitated the use of simple and traditional implements.<sup>11</sup>

Land as a factor of production in the pre-colonial days had a socio cultural value placed on it; as a result it could not be alienated and was held in trust. Obtaining land for the farming was through the family. Land was not owned individually hence it could not be inherited. It was held in common by all members of a family under a communal system. In this style of ownership, each family had its own lands which were shared to the every house hold to farm on. By ownership, lands were properties of the ancestors held in trust, thus it passed from one generation to another. Since it could not be alienated, inherited individually, leased or expropriated, without the consent of the entire village group, access to its use therefore, was by being a male or female member of a

family. A land can however, be forfeited if it was mortgaged for a loan that could not be repaid. The size of a farm land and labour affects the capacity for people to produce at commercial level. The amount of labour available also does not in any way commensurate with available farm lands. This explains why production was confined at subsistent level. Although, not every piece of land was allowed for farming, some of these lands are reserved for traditional or religious purposes, whereas some others are swamps and fishing grounds.<sup>12</sup>

Agricultural was dominated by crop farming. A large number of local people engaged in its practice in order to produce food crop for survival. Crop farming was thus complimented with hunting and gathering, fishing, pastoralism and trade. Crop production was improved by the amount of rainfall from year to year. An estimated annual rainfall was given to be around 2500-2800mm,<sup>13</sup> allowing for natural regeneration and bush fallow which as a method of fertilization was the regular farm practice. Farming was done using simple agricultural implements such as cutlasses, hoes, spade and axes. Cutlass was used to clear thick bushes and prepare farm lands for cultivation. The crops grown in their order of importance were white yams, red yams, water yams, cassava, maize, beans, pepper, groundnuts and other vegetable crops. These food crops were complemented by plantain, banana, and other tree crops, which they traded with the Benin.<sup>14</sup>

Tree crop products are usually wild fruits and spices gathered and processed for consumption. Out of the tree crops, palm tree and raffia palm are the most significant wild trees owing to their numerous economic values. Thus it was recorded that “during planting season, palm trees were not cut down.” Palm trees were of significant importance because of its many uses which include palm oil production, foot mat, soap, pomade and weaving amongst others. Brooms and fronds for weaving are derived from its, and palm wine is extracted from it although not in much quantity as the raffia palm. A large number of raffia palms were also found in this area in the Urhobo creeks. The raffia palms, apart from being the chief source of palm wine and the production of local gin known as “*Ogogoro*” through local distillation method, constituted a very important source of cash. The leaves of the palms were collected and used in making thatched roof; brooms used for keeping compound environments clean are also made from it, hence its contribution to the wealth of pre-colonial Urhobo economy. Gin production was an important aspect of the traditional economy of urhobo people as it constituted an article of exchange of goods by middle men in the pre-colonial times. The Urhobo people traded with the Benin their Immediate neighbouring community.<sup>15</sup>

Hunting was another aspect of agriculture which the people engaged in, in the pre-colonial days. Hunting was majorly carried out to satisfy the protein needs of the general community. Urhobo land constituted a forested plain that housed various species of animals. Among these animals were elephants, wild cats, bush cow, antelope, bush pigs, and bush deer, snakes of various types as well as fowls and birds of different types, many

of which are now scarce due to deforestation and increase in population growth. Hunting among Urhobo people was a specialized profession which does not only require hunters to possess unique skills, but also required them to put those skills into practice. The skills developed by these hunters could make them move sleekly in the bush without making much noise.<sup>16</sup> They could imitate animal sound and pose in such a way that an animal would not suspect any danger. There are stories that some of the hunters turned into animals at night during their hunting expedition. Hunters used simple hunting tools like spears, machetes, trap and snare and at later time guns to effectively carry out expedition. Surplus killed during hunting were dried and sold, or exchanged for other items; and like farming, hunting was carried on at subsistent level. Being a reserve occupation it was usually more intensified during the dry season when the bushes were dry and many of the animals are changing habitat.<sup>17</sup>

Urhobo people engaged in animal rearing for domestic and economic reasons. The essence of this preoccupation was to supplement consumption of meats from hunting, and for sacrificial purposes during special occasions or festivals. Animals such as goats, pigs, sheep, fowls and ducks were the animals reared. Although animals were not reared in large scale, the practice was of fundamental importance to the traditional economy.<sup>18</sup>

An assessment of the pre-colonial foundations of Benin and Urhobo societies have been rendered in this chapter. This assessment goes with a view to understanding the various stages of developments in Urhobo land beginning with accounts of the historical

origins of the people, intergroup relations it had with its neighbours in trade, largely based on exchanges, as well as the pre-colonial political, economic and social institutional structures. A review of the developments in the political, economic and social sphere has shown that Urhobo people had conformed to a certain pattern of life that has guided their affair until the advent of colonial rule. This chapter and its contents could best be described as the developments and civilisations of Urhobo people and intergroup relations between Benin in the pre-colonial era.<sup>19</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. Adogbeji Salubi, "Establishment of British Administration in Urhobo Country, 1891-1913", in *T.E.A. Salubi: Witness to British Colonial Rule in Urhoboland & Nigeria*, Peter Ekeh (ed.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2008, p.239.
2. Jacob Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, Third Edition, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1960.
3. The word "Clan" has Scottish origin. Through gathering of intelligent reports, the British were able to identify and name Urhobo after the Scottish system. Otite refers to the use of clan as derogatory. In its place, he used socio-political units.
4. See-Onigu Otite, "A Peep into the History of the Urhobo" in *The Urhobo people*, Onigu Otite (ed.), Second Edition, Ibadan: Gold Press, Limited, 2003, p.24.
5. Ibid., p.25.
6. Peter P. Ekeh, "Development of Western Niger delta in Prehistoric Times", in *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland, and Western Niger delta: Ancient and Modern Versions*, Peter P. Ekeh, Onoawarie Edevbie, and Peter Ishaka (eds.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2012, pp.12-13.
7. Peter P. Ekeh, "Clanship and Development of Urhoboland and Central Niger delta", in *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland, and Western Niger delta: Ancient and Modern Versions*, Peter P. Ekeh, Onoawarie Edevbie, and Peter Ishaka (eds.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2012, p.41.
8. C.A. Spinage, *African Ecology: Benchmarks and Historical Perspectives*, London: Springer Science Business Media, 2012, p.72.
9. Peter P. Ekeh, "Edoid Complex and Urhobo Migrations", in *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland, and Western Niger delta: Ancient and Modern Versions*, Peter P. Ekeh, Onoawarie Edevbie, and Peter Ishaka (eds.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2012, p.25.
10. Peter P. Ekeh, "Descent from Olomu: Origin of Olomoro Clan in Isoko," in *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland, and Western Niger delta: Ancient and Modern Versions*, Peter P. Ekeh, Onoawarie Edevbie, and Peter Ishaka (eds.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2012, p. 55.
11. Peter P. Ekeh, "Olomu and Expansion of Urhoboland and Isoko," in *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland, and Western Niger delta: Ancient and Modern*

*Versions*, Peter P. Ekeh, Onoawarie Edevbie, and Peter Ishaka (eds.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2012, pp.53-54.

12. Albert O. Aweto, "Outline Geography of Urhoboland", in *Studies in Urhobo Culture*, Peter P. Ekeh (ed.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2005, p.684.
13. J.I Osagie, "Nigerian History in Pre-colonial Times - Southern Nigeria", in *Nigerian Peoples and Culture*, A.D Nzemeke and E.O Erhagbe (eds.), Second Edition, Benin City: Mindex Publishers, 2002, p.23.
14. The concept of *Ekwuoto* in describing the territoriality of urhobo clans was introduced by peter ekeh in the preface of his work on *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland, and Western Niger delta: Ancient and Modern Versions*.
15. Onigu Otite, "Agbon", in *The Urhobo people*, Onigu Otite (ed.), Second Edition, Ibadan: Gold Press, Limited, 2003, p.177.
16. HRM Richard L. Ogbon, "History and High Culture of Olomu", in *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland, and Western Niger delta: Ancient and Modern Versions*, Onoawarie Edevbie, and Peter Ishaka (eds.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2012, pp.184-185.
17. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Ibadan: Longman Publishers, p.15.
18. Obaro Ikime, "The Peoples and Kingdoms of the Delta Province", in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Obaro Ikime (ed.), Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980, p.97.
19. O.G. Idjakpo, "The Administrative, Legislative and Judicial Aspects of the Urhobo Consensus System of Government", *Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol 27 (2), 2011, p.132.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

This research has assessed the intergroup relation between Benin and her immediate neighbor Urhobo from pre-colonial period and it has been evident that there was a great deal of relationship as a result of their political, social and economic contact. The Urhobo people and her neighbours Benin manifested such contacts wherein a wide range of networks and links flourished. Through their political interaction, this research has demonstrated that in the pre-colonial era, the relations between Urhobo and immediate neighbours Benin were at some times cordial and at another time hostile. There was a peaceful relations because had their origins traced to the great Benin Kingdom and their political institutions had some level similitude and interactions had been established. Also between the people of Urhobo and immediate neighbor issues which include, land dispute, conflict and boundary encroachment. For some period, Urhobo and neighbours did not relate well and is affect their economic relation, especially with Ewu. However there were measures employed by the Ohworode of Olomu which enthroned peaceful settlement between them and had endured in precolonial times.

This study has shown that in the social sphere, festival such as, sharing of igboze deities, ancestral worshipping ,intermarriage, influenced the social relations between Urhobo and her immediate neighbours. Their social activities reflected their culture and

tradition and thus gave them sense of belonging. Some customs and traditions influenced and affected their social bond and make some of her neighbours to be socially independent .one of such issues was practice of female circumcision in Urhobo. The traditions of origin of Urhobo and neighbours that came into contact, through various processes, mutually borrowed culture. Indeed, an investigation of the socio-cultural relations of the Urhobo and her neighbours reveals that the people exchanged beliefs and practices during religious festivals, rituals, etc. Exemplary of this was annual festival exchanges between the Urhobo and her neighbours Benin.

Another major aspect of socio-cultural relations was marriage. Marriages aided in establishing, cementing and promoting cross-cutting loyalties between the people. Also, because peace is a fundamental requirement for inter-group relations, war is often seen as an ‘unusual’ pattern of inter-group relations. However, its role as a factor of contact and interaction was equally important. Societies driven by distinct interests occasionally declared wars against each other. The Urhobo and Neighbouring communities oral traditions are replete with examples of wars between their respective clans. Indeed, an eventual outcome of such war was the diffusion of political and socio-cultural ideas.

Economically, this study revealed that in the precolonial era, none of the clans were self-sufficient and independent, hence there was need for economic relations. The absence of industries for food and material production influenced their trading system and depends on each other. However operated on trade by barter system, where a

community exchange what it had, to obtain what it lacked so as to furnish their environment for a more meaningful survival. The Urhobo, for instance, exchanged their agricultural produce; yam, cassava, starch, tapioca, plantain, for the fish and salt of the Benin. Trade routes and markets were also established to facilitate such commercial transactions. Markets, not only provided functional platforms for economic contacts. Eventually, economic activities in the area led to emergence of commercial centres such as, in Okpare, Ughelli and Benin. Hence, from the findings in this study, one can conclude that the Urhobo and her neighbours shared a lot in common from the early times. The impacts of such common ties are exemplified in their socio-cultural activities such as festivals, rituals, inter-marriages, customs and even dialect. The oral tradition of the Urhobo, attest to the existence and intensity of such inter-group relations in the pre-colonial period.

From the foregoing therefore, one can make some reasonable conclusions such as: the Urhobo and her aforementioned neighbours in the Niger Delta region had a common ancestry, notably Benin; they had socio-political relations made manifest in marriages, festivals, rituals, religious belief systems, political structures, war, etc; economic transactions such as trade was a highly significant aspect of their interaction. Thus the nature of inter-group relations between the Urhobo and her neighbours in the pre-colonial period stresses mutuality, inter-dependency, autonomy and occasional conflicts.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

#### a. List of Informants

Name	Age	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
Obukokwo, Emmanuel	69	Retired Teacher	Usiefrun	20/4/2024
Okiemute, Felix	80	Farmer	Usiefrun	20/4/2024
Oghenenyrovwo, Okpako	76	Retired Civil Servant	Orhuwhorun	15/06/2024
Onanubi, Elizabeth	71	Retired Nurse	Usiefrun	20/04/2024
Akpowowo, Sarah	79	Retired Civil Servant	Uvwie	12/06/2024
Odjegba, Oke	78	Retired Soldier	Uvwie	12/06/2024
Onome, Joy	72	Trader	Uvwie	12/06/2024
Obukokwo, Ufoma	78	Retired Civil Servant	Uvwie	12/06/2024
Onanubi, Elizabeth	88	Farmer	Usiefrun	20/04/2024

### Secondary Sources

#### a. Books

Abiola, E. O., *A Textbook of West Africa History (A.D, 1000 to the Present Day)*, Ado Ekiti: Omolayo Standard Press, 1981

Adogbeji Salubi, "Establishment of British Administration in Urhoboland", in T.E.A Salubi: *Witness to British Colonial Rule in Urhoboland and Nigeria* (ed), Peter Ekeh, New York: Urhobo Historical Society Press: 2008.

Aghalino, S.O., "Trade Currencies in Pre-colonial Nigeria", N.O Njoju (ed) *The Pre-colonial Economic History of Nigeria*, Benin: Ethiope Publisher, 2002.

Ajayi, J. F. A., and Crowder, M., *History of West Africa*, London: Longman, 1977.

Ajayi, J.F.A., & Crowder, M., *History of West Africa*, Ibadan: Longman Groups Limited, 1970.

Akintoye, S.A., *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland: Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekiti Parapo*, London: Longman Group Limited, 1971.

Amadasun, E.D., *A Colonial Account of the Kingdom of Benin: A General Collections of Voyages, and Travels of Early European Visit to Benin City*, London: Pagersers 1976.

Amos, P. B., *The arts of Benin*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1979.

Aweto, A. O., "Outline Geography of Urhoboland", in *Studies in Urhoboland*, ed. Ekah, P. P., Buffalo New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2005.

Bradbury, R. E., *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo Speaking Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, London: International African Institute, 1970.

Bradbury, R.E., *Benin Studies* (ed.) Peter Morton Williams, Oxford: University Press, 1973.

Dark, P. J. C., *An Introduction to Benin Arts and Technology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Egharevba, J. U., *A Short History of Benin*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1968.

Ekah, P.P., "Imperialism, Nigerian Historiography and the Nature & Outline of Urhobo History", in *History of the Urhobo People of Niger Delta*, ed. P. Ekah, Nigeria: Urhobo Historical Society, 2007.

Ekah, P.P., "Clanship and Development of Urhoboland and Central Niger delta ", in *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland, and Western Niger delta: Ancient and Modern Versions*, Peter P. Ekah, Onoawarie Edevbie, and Peter Ishaka (eds.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2012.

Ekah, P.P., "Descent from Olomu: Origin of Olomoro Clan in Isoko," in *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland, and Western Niger delta: Ancient and Modern Versions*, Peter P. Ekah, Onoawarie Edevbie, and Peter Ishaka (eds.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2012.

Ekah, P.P., "Development of Western Niger delta in Prehistoric Times", in *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland, and Western Niger delta: Ancient and Modern Versions*, Peter P. Ekah, Onoawarie Edevbie, and Peter Ishaka (eds.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2012.

Ekah, P.P., "Edoid Complex and Urhobo Migrations", in *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland, and Western Niger delta: Ancient and Modern Versions*, Peter P. Ekah, Onoawarie Edevbie, and Peter Ishaka (eds.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2012.

Ekah, P.P., "Olomu and Expansion of Urhoboland and Isoko," in *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland, and Western Niger delta: Ancient and Modern Versions*, Peter P. Ekah, Onoawarie Edevbie, and Peter Ishaka (eds.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2012.

- Eluwa, G.I.C., et al., *A History of Nigeria for Schools and Colleges*, Onitsha: Africana-FEB, 1988.
- Eweka, E. B., *Evolution of Benin Chieftaincy Titles*, Benin City: University of Benin Press, 1992.
- George, E.S., *Yoruba Religion and Medicine in Ibadan*, Ibadan: University Press. 1980.
- Hegel, G. F., *The Philosophy of History*, New York: Dover, 1956.
- Igbafe, P. A., *Benin Under Colonial Rule: The Impact of Colonial Rule on an African Kingdom, 1897-1938*.
- Igbafe, P.A., *Benin under British Administration: The Impact of Colonial Rule on an African Kingdom, 1897-1938*, London: Longman Publishers.
- Ikime, O., “The Peoples and Kingdoms of the Delta Province”, in Obaro Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigeria History* (Ibadan Heinemann, 1980).
- Ikime, O., *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta: the Rise and Fall of Nana Olomu Last Governor of the Benin River*, London: 1968.
- Ikime, O., *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Ibadan: Longman Publishers.
- Lucas, J.O., *The Religion of the Yoruba*, Lagos: C.M.S Bookshop, 1948.
- Njoku, O.N., *Economic History of Nigeria in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Enugu: Magnet Business Enterprises, Publishing Division, 2001.
- Obayemi, A., “The Yoruba and Edo-speaking Peoples and Their Neighbours Before 1600”, in J.F.A. Ajayi et al (eds), *History of West Africa*, vol.2, London: Longman. 1971.
- Ogbomo, Onaiwu Wilson, & Queen Onoriobe Ogbomo, *Women and Society in Pre-Colonial Iyede*, German: Nomos publishing, 1993.
- Ogbon, R. L., “History and High Culture of Olomu”, in *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland, and Western Niger delta: Ancient and Modern Versions*, Onoawarie Edevbie, and Peter Ishaka (eds.), New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2012.
- Omu, F. I. A., and Otoide, L. E., *Themes in International Studies and Diplomacy*, Department of History, University of Benin, Nigeria, 2002.

Onigu Otite, "A Peep into the History of the Urhobo" in *The Urhobo people*, Onigu Otite (ed.), Second Edition, Ibadan: Gold Press, Limited, 2003.

Onigu Otite, "Agbon", in *The Urhobo people*, Onigu Otite (ed.), Second Edition, Ibadan: Gold Press, Limited, 2003.

Onigu Otite, *Autonomy and Dependence: The Urhobo Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria*, Evanston III: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

Onigu Otite, *The Urhobo People*, Ibadan: Shaneson C.I, 1982.

Orobator, S.E., "Trade of Imperial Benin with the Portuguese and the Dutch", in *Pre-colonial Economic History of Benin*, Ibadan: Heinemann, 2007.

Osagie, J.I., "Nigerian History in Pre-colonial Times - Southern Nigeria", in *Nigerian Peoples and Culture*, A.D Nzemeke and E.O Erhagbe (eds.), Second Edition, Benin City: Mindex Publishers, 2002.

Perkins Foss, *Where Gods and Mortals Meet: Continuity and Renewal in Urhobo Art* (New York: Snoeck Publisher, 2014).

Ryder, A.F.C., *Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897*, 1969.

Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas, from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshop, 1957.

Sheriff, M. Sheriff, *Social Psychology*, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014.

Sheriff, M.S., *Social Psychology*, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014.

Smith, B.U., *The Edo Speaking Peoples of Mid Western Nigeria*, London: Leeds Books, 1953.

Spinage, C.A., *African Ecology: Benchmarks and Historical Perspectives*, London: Springer Science Business Media, 2012.

Thurstan, Shaw, "Pre-History", in Obaro Ikime (ed.) *Groundwork of the Nigeria History*, Nigeria: Heinemann, 1980.

Triandis, H. C., *Culture and Social Behavior*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1994.

## **b. Articles in Learned Journals**

Adebisi, M.A., “The Political Economy of Intergroup Relations”, *Ilorin Journal of Business and Social Science* 5(3) 1998.

Aghalino, S.O., “British Colonial Policies and the Oil Palm Industry in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria (1900-1960)”, *African Study Monographs*, 21(1), 2000.

Dawood .O. Egbefor, “Aspect of Intergroup Relations in 21st Century, Nigeria: Emblem of Ethnicity, Religious Fundamentalism and Nationalism, Security Crisis, 2000-2004”, *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*,4(1), 2015.

Ediagbonya, M., “A Study of the Portuguese-Benin Trade Relations: Ughoton as a Benin Port (1485-1506)”, *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 2, 2015.

Edo, V. Osaro, “Changing Phases of Power and Civil Administration in Benin: From Inception to 1987”, *Nebula*5.1/5.2, June 2008.

Egbefor D. Omolumen, “Aspect of Intergroup Relations in 21st Century, Nigeria: Emblem of Ethnicity Religious Fundamentalism and Nationalism, Security Crisis, 2004”, *International Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4(1), 2015.

Fredrick Iwendi Ofili, “Intergroup Relations in Nigeria: The Dynamics and Complexities”, *International Journal of Development and Management Review*, 11(6), 2016.

Idjakpo, O.G.,“The Administrative, Legislative and Judicial Aspects of the Urhobo Consensus System of Government”, *Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol 27 (2), 2011.

Iziengbe, E.O.P., “Women and Sexuality in Pre-Colonial Benin”, *Kano Journal of History*, 3(1), 2017/2018.

Muhammed, Mukhtar. Gatawa, “Intergroup Relations in Historical Perspective”, *African Journal of History and Culture*, 5 (9), 2003.

Nevadomsky, J., “The Benin Kingdom: Rituals of Kinship and Their Social Meanings (1)”, *African Study Monographs* (1993), 14(2).

Olaniyan, Azeez, “From Accommodation to Discrimination and Exclusion: The Changing Pattern of Intergroup Relations in Nigeria”, *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 3( 11), 2019.

Onigu, Otile, Continuance and Change in an Urhobo Age-Grade Organization in Nigeria,” *Cashiers d’ Études Africaines*, 12(36), 1972.

Salubi, A., “The Establishment of British Administration in the Urhobo Country (1891-1913)”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1(3), 1958.

Sanders, E. R., “The Hamitic Hypothesis: Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective”, *Journal of African History*, 10(4), 1969.

Suleiman, A.M., “Sustainable Development in Africa: Intergroup Relations in Nigeria”, *African Journals of History and Culture*, 11(2), 2009.

### **c. Online Sources**

Mouth Piece of Urhobo, “Urhobo Traditional Way of Worship”, retrieved from <https://m.facebook.com/mouthpieceofurhobo/photos/a.1862556480632157/2055023281385475/?type=3>, on 25 June 2024.

The Ancient Benins In Diaspora (The Urhobo People), retrieved from [http://www.edoworld.net/The\\_Benins\\_In\\_Diaspora\\_The%20Urhobo.html](http://www.edoworld.net/The_Benins_In_Diaspora_The%20Urhobo.html) on 25 June 2024.

### **Conferences/Seminars**

Igbafe, P.A., “A Bridge Across Time: The Benin Factor in Nigerian History”, *Twenty-Third Inaugural Lecture*, University of Benin, Benin City, Tuesday April 29, 1986.

Omoera, O. S., & Obanor, M. N., "Theatrical Elements in Olokun Worship in Benin, Nigeria", *Fireworks for a Lighting Aesthetician: Essays in Honour of Duro Oni 60*, 2012.