

**INTER-GROUP RELATIONS BETWEEN ONITSHA PEOPLE AND THEIR
NEIGHBOURS**

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**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **COLLINS EKENEDILICHUKWU OGBONNA** in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

DR. ALBERT ONOBHAYEDO
PROJECT SUPERVISOR

DATE

DR. F. IKPONMWOSA
Ag. HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

DATE

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the Almighty God for his guidance, care and unending love throughout my stay in the University of Benin.

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And with a heart filled with gratitude, I appreciate my Boss Mrs. Eucharia Ifegbo, for his love, care, financial support and prayers. God bless you all in a thousand fold.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The study of inter group relations is significant because it reveals the fact that the communities in Nigeria and Africa in general were not disunited nor isolated from each other; they related with each other before colonial conquest.¹ Works on intergroup relations debunks the euro-centric view that Africans were uncivilized and barbaric, and that no meaningful interaction took place within the region prior to the arrival of Europeans.² However, there exist several literature on this subject.

These available materials examine the various patterns and nature of interactions which existed in Africa among Nigerian communities in particular. In Nigeria, the various communities cooperated and had meaningful intercourse before the advent of Europeans colonialism. The interactions among the communities were dynamic in nature. It was a robust and diversified relations. There were socio-cultural, political and economic relations.³

The concept of inter-groups relations contend that there is usually the existence of more than one or two group and usually what happens or follows is that there is exchange of relationship which may be political, social or economic. The concept implies a mutual world of inter-dependency in which no groups or single individual is all sufficient and all knowing. The concept of inter groups relations implies that no groups or individual is an Island and because of individual specific, limitation and short coming there is always an

exchange of relationship in order to complement the shortfalls in our relationship. In economic towns, where there is economic specialization in the production of goods and services, there is also need for exchange of good and service thereby creating a world of inter dependency and mutual relationship. Either as an individual group or society, it is impossible to produce everything a society or individual needs and thus the need for inter-relationship.⁴

The concept of inter-group relationship does not imply the absence of conflict or hostility. As a matter of fact, conflict and hostility are the integral part of a relationship. But the presence of hostility and conflict does not mark out the absence of diplomacy and negotiation in handling such differences and hostilities.⁵

Right from the pre-colonial period, intra-group relationship between the Onitsha people and their Neighbours were basically in the South-East was characterized by hostility and as well as mutual dependency. Social conflict between the Onitsha people and their Neighbours pivoted around the control of the scarce resources called land. The control of land, which both groups needed for the production of agricultural resources, formed the basis for the understanding of the Onitsha people and their Neighbours relations.⁶ But despite the conflict over land, both groups entered into mutual relationship in the areas of economic and political ties. For instance, Afigbo pointed out that despite the conflict between the Onitsha people and the Nnewi people for instance, at evening, a Onitsha man could still cross over to the Nnewi side in order to take a Calabash of palm wine (Local brewed beer).⁷ The Nnewi brewery industry greatly depended upon the

supply of palm wine plantation which was produced by the Onitsha. This aspect of economic specialization fostered economic ties between the Onitsha people and their Neighbours. Despite the occasional wars over the control of land resources, the Onitsha people and their Neighbours exchanged economic and political relationship

Inter-group relations in pre-colonial Africa have been severely undermined by the various erroneous reports from Euro centric scholars which held the view that African can live in solitude prior to European intrusion into the African continent. This erroneous view was given to postulate the argument of the Europeans who dismissed the African continent as having no historical importance to the world at large. Hence, an attempt to reconstruct times becomes important to further illustrate pre-colonial societies that interacted with one another as this will further debunk the views held by Hegel, Trevor Roper, among others.

Justification of Research

The purpose of this research seeks to evaluate the intra-group relations between Onitsha people and their Neighbours and its effects in pre-colonial Igbo society. It also seeks to elucidate the nature of interaction between Onitsha people and their Neighbours in pre-colonial to colonial Igbo community. Historical accounts have it that there were various intermarriages, linguistic borrowings and other interactions dictated by the needs of the societies involved.⁸ The nature of this research has made it very valuable due to the absence of related works that have made enquiries concerning this aspect of the Onitsha people and their Neighbours. The research shows that although pre-colonial to colonial

time, Onitsha people and her Neighbours featured a small state political system borrowed from Igbo chiefdom and other kingdoms like that of the Mbaitoli Aboh Mbaise kingdom, it still remained largely autonomous.⁹ This study also seeks to negate the Eurocentric thought propounded by the Europeans about intra-group relations that existed before the colonization of Africa.

Aims and Objectives

This work examines the intra-group relations between Onitsha people and her Neighbours in the pre-colonial to post colonial period. Specifically, this research work seeks to achieve the following:

1. To discuss the concept of intragroup relations and how it has been evident between Onitsha people and her Neighbours from pre-colonial period till date.
2. To examine the historical background of Onitsha people; the historical relationship of Onitsha people and her Neighbours from the great Igbo society, and the political, social and economic makeup of Onitsha people and her Neighbours.
3. To analyze the political relations between Onitsha people and her Neighbours in terms of the similarities in their political structures and administration and see if issues such as wars, conflicts/disputes, migration and alliances strengthen or affected their political relationship.
4. To explore the social relations between Onitsha people and her Neighbours through their social activities such as marriage institutions, traditional festivals, cultural belief, birth, death, burial, and the similarities in their linguistic makeup.

5. To describe the economic relations between Onitsha people and her Neighbours in line of their agricultural activities, economic value, industries, and their natural resources.
6. It will also analyze the impact of the relationship on both sides and also show how cordial relationship has been over the years.

Scope of Study

This research is set to examine Onitsha people and her Neighbours with its case study directed to intra-group relations from 1900-1960. The scope covers the colonial aspect of both parties. The platform of their relationship will be considered in cultural affinity-economic etc. Also, the impact of the relationship between both groups in their social, cultural, religious, economic and political life will be considered. The work is limited to intra-group relations between Onitsha people and her Neighbours during the era earlier stated. The period of study ranges from pre-colonial period to post-colonial era.

Methodology

Considering the study in focus, two sources were utilized for obtaining relevant data and information which were necessary for the success of this research which are the primary and secondary Sources.

(1) Primary Source

For a better and comprehensive analysis of this study, most of the information will be gathered will be derive from numerous oral interviews from prominent indigenes and members of Onitsha people and her neighbouring community. Such people include:

Traditional Rulers, Elders, Lecturers, Distinguished members of Onitsha Platform and the Youth Council. Also, Interviews will be conducted with individuals from Onitsha. These interviews will be from people of Onitsha people and her neighbouring community who have a wellspring of knowledge about Onitsha and her historical, socio-political and economical interaction with her neighbouring community. Another source of information used in this research will be from reports from annual and monthly meetings, festivals, inauguration, coronation and other cultural ceremonies held in Onitsha.

Secondary Sources

The Secondary source were from materials that ranges from books that describes the concept of Intergroup Relations majorly among the different ethnic groups in Nigeria, between Onitsha people and her neighbouring community, and between the different groups in the Igbo Nations, and also books that give an overview of the historical background of Onitsha Journals, internet sources, articles and publications will not be left out as they contributed mostly on the concept of intra-group relations. However, both sources are to be use appropriately for an effective and accurate comprehension of knowledge on the research course giving a historical, political, economic, and social account of Onitsha people and her neighbouring community.

Literature Review

The availability of academic works on intra-group relations in pre-colonial to colonial Igbo society was proven to be insufficient in the course of this research work. There has been little or no detailed account on intra-group relations between Onitsha

people and her neighbouring community from pre-colonial period to post-colonial period. However, certain literature exists that gives an account of Igbo land of which Onitsha people and her neighbouring community is classified under. Some of the literature in this category includes;

A.E Afigbo examined in his book titled; *Igbo and their Neighbours: Inter-Group Relations in South Eastern Nigeria*,¹⁰ various forms of patterns of inter-group relations that existed among the Benin and Igbo. He examined wars, diplomacy, economic, political and cultural factors as instrument of relationship. However, in the the intra-group relations between Onitsha people and her Neighbours relations, economic, political and cultural factors have been a bone of interaction among the two groups.

William Odiaka's book titled, *Women's Roles in Traditional Onitsha Society*,¹¹ the author elucidate that most of the important extra-kinship political institutions in Onitsha are largely closed to women. One of these, the masquerade society, is directly involved in suppressing them. No woman under the age of menopause can know the secrets of the masquerade and none can ever wear a mask. Further, women did not, traditionally, belong to age-sets like the men's, which were one of the major arms of the town-wide political action. They were therefore excluded from the ruling age set, which together with the King and chiefs passed laws for the town.¹² While this study was able to tell us about women activities in Onitsha, it is silent on the on the intra-group relations between Onitsha people and her Neighbours. It will however be useful in examining the

pre-colonial women activities in Onitsha. This work will fill in the gap in the existing knowledge of the intra-group relations between Onitsha people and her Neighbours.

Helen K. Henderson, in his book titled *The Onitsha Women*,¹³ the author identify that Onitsha Igbo (Ibo), whose traditional community is situated on the banks of the Niger River in Southeastern Nigeria, are a linguistic subgroup of the over twenty million Igbo-speaking peoples. In 1962 (when he conducted his dissertation research), the city of Onitsha was estimated to have a population of 80,000 persons, of which possibly 10,000 were indigenes, i.e., members of localized patrilineages in the Onitsha Inland Town community. The majority of the rest were non-Onitsha Igbo-speaking peoples, primarily from the areas to the east and south. When he visited Onitsha in 1992, some residents estimated that the population of the entire city was close to one million, of which perhaps 25,000 (or more) were Onitsha indigenes. When he peak of Onitsha people in this book, he was referring to persons who call themselves by that name (ndi-onicha) and identify their home as the Onitsha Inland Town.¹⁴ The author narrow is work on the typical Onitsha woman, in order words, the book examine the history of women activities in Onitsha, but failed to look at the intra-group relations between Onitsha people and her Neighbours; thereby making this work very relevant and important.

Henderson, H. Kreider, in his work titled, *Ritual Roles of Women in Onitsha Ibo Society*,¹⁵ The author focuses on the roles of women in traditional (i.e., pre-Westernized) Onitsha Igbo society. information for the account are drawn from early accounts by travellers and missionaries and from informants' recall of past events. While the stress is

on women's roles in rituals such as shrine worship, funeral ceremonies, and witchcraft, there is a good deal of information on women's roles in the domestic, political, and economic spheres as well. It should be noted that, although the author uses the present tense, she is generally referring to the latter half of the 19th century. Some caution should be exercised in using the materials presented in this source since the author presents an ideal model of women's roles based on materials that may come from different time periods.¹⁶ The author tackle onside of women history in Onitsha, particularly in the areas of socio-cultural activities. This work will fill the vacuum created by the Henderson.

In “*Igbo Traditional Political System and the Crisis of Governance in Nigeria*”¹⁷ by Ibenekwu Ikpechukwuka .E., the writer critically analyzes the importance of leadership in the pre-colonial Igbo society. One would see that the centrality of leadership in every society has given unprecedented popularity to the concept of democracy. It is the way that a society is governed that determines whether it is democratic or authoritarian. Such system of governance equally has implications on the values and norms which the society lives by. It is the structure of a society that determines to a large extent the type of leadership that can emerge from it. This is so because the structure of a society has inherently peculiar challenges which correspondingly demand peculiar solutions. Modern liberal democracy, however, assumes a “one size fits all approach to the solution of problems (especially that of governance) peculiar to each society. Pre-colonial Nigeria was characterized by fragmented ethnic nationalities each with its own unique system of government or institutions of governance. Such systems were traditional in nature and

structured to suit the peculiarities of the ethnic group involved. While the Hausa/Fulani political system was centralized and autocratic in nature, the Yoruba political system was said to be monarchical and based on the principle of checks and balances while the Igbo political system, on the other hand, was said to be democratic . The lack of uniformity and peculiar nature of political systems in these three major ethnic groups led to the adoption of matching systems of rule by the colonial masters for these three major ethnic affiliations. Thus while Direct Rule was applied to the North (given that it already had a centralized system of government and taxation), Indirect Rule was applied to the South. This alteration of the traditional system of government by the colonial masters marked the prelude to the introduction of alien systems of government into Nigeria.¹⁸ The work was silent on the intra-group relations between Onitsha people and her Neighbours, thereby making this work very useful in this discourse.

The above literatures no doubt covered various aspects of Onitsha studies but to a large extent non has been able to examine in details the intra-group relations between Onitsha people and her Neighbours in the pre-colonial to post colonial period especially its relations up to 1960. This vacuum, lack of detail work in the intra-group relations between Onitsha people and her Neighbours in the pre-colonial to post colonial period, this is the focus of this current study.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This is the introductory chapter which gives a highlight of what would be discussed in the entire research work. It gives a narrative of the subject of intra-group relations, and how it has been evident in other intra-group relations in Nigeria before and after colonialism. It majorly explains that prior to independence there were series of accommodation, smooth relationship, and peaceful cohabitation among other groups in Nigeria and how the interference of the colonial masters destroyed such peaceful coexistence

CHAPTER TWO

TRADITION OF ORIGIN OF ONITSHA PEOPLE AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

This chapter examines the Origin, creation and geographical location of Onitsha in Anambra State. It gives an overview of the historical, political, economic, and social makeup of Onitsha. Politically, this chapter discusses the makeup of Onitsha, in terms of leadership structure, political boundaries, political subordination, political Heads such as the Ummua' and the Eze. Economically, we see in this chapter how agriculture remains the main occupation of Onitsha people living at home. Socially, this chapter highlights the social activities of Onitsha such as the marriage systems, festivals, e.t.c.

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIO-POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN ONITSHA AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

This chapter focuses on the political relation between Onitsha people and her Neighbours in terms of their creation, political structures, and political leaderships. In addition, we see in this chapter that in terms of political Hierarchy and Superiority that the intra-group relations between Onitsha people and her Neighbours.

CHAPTER FOUR

ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN ONITSHA PEOPLE AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

This chapter gives a vivid description of the relationship between people of Onitsha and her Neighbours socially. The social activities include; the systems of marriage, festivals, societal beliefs, food, culture, language, proverbs, belief in reincarnation. In this chapter, we also evaluate the economic relationship between Onitsha people and her Neighbours and see how they have been able to benefit from each other. We examine the natural resources, agricultural activities, local industries, arts and crafts, economic value what they trade on, their economic challenges, and their main occupation for both the male and female. We also do the same for her immediate Neighbour. Our attention is drawn in this chapter that both Onitsha people and her Neighbours practice both local and long distance trade.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This is a sum up of all that is required in this study. Starting from the theme of intra-group relations, historical background of Onitsha people , its origin, its political features and structure, economic features, its social activities and examine how intra-group relations has been evident between Onitsha people and her Neighbours.

Endnotes

Endnotes

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CHAPTER TWO

TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN OF THE ONITSHA PEOPLE AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

Introduction

The knowledge of the history, tradition, origin and other cultural attributes of a people constitute the basis for the socio-economic and political assessment of the people. Although Onitsha, which is the main cultural center of Anambra East Local Government Area in southern Nigeria does not have much document written on its early history, as a result of the acute lack of academic historians from the community or perhaps the general apathy and lack of interest in history has overtime deterred the people themselves from reconstructing their early history.

Geographical Locations

Onitsha is in the present day Anambra State, in the Eastern Nigeria, with two local government councils namely Onitsha North and Onitsha South. Onitsha is a riverine community. Onitsha is located on latitude 6°08'N and longitude 6° 46'E'.¹ It has Nkwelle Town on the North, Odekpe on the South, Ogidi, Nkpor and Obosi on the eastern part and River Niger on the West. The people were engaged in a number of economic activities which included agriculture, trade and craft work in the pre-colonial period. However, agriculture was the hub around which other activities revolved. The people cultivated food crops such as yam, cassava, groundnut, maize, plantain and banana.² They were also involved in vocational career which they were famous for like

metal work, bronze casting, weaving, artwork, handicraft and trading. They were also involved in other agricultural activities such as animal husbandry and fishing.³

Tradition of Origin of Onitsha

Onitsha people trace their history to a kingdom called “Ado-na-Idu”, apparently a chiefdom tributary to the Kingdom of Benin and located in the Asaba-Agbor uplands west of the Niger.⁴ Due to conquests of the Benin armies shortly after the arrival of the Portuguese in 1458, this community was forced to move, first to the lowlands near the Niger and then across it to the east. Onitsha accounts of warfare with Benin are corroborated by oral traditions in Benin itself and by similar traditions in other towns called “Onitsha” west of the Niger. Although Onitsha people relate much of their social organization to the Benin sphere of influence, the relationship is most evident in the existence of chiefs whose names are similar to those in Benin, in the nature of the divine King, and in the performance of certain major ceremonies involving kingship.⁵

The second great cultural influence on Onitsha derives from Igala, a kingdom which also claims that its kings came from Ife via a town called “Ado”. Igala influence is thought to be responsible for numerous items in the Onitsha King’s regalia, and for the introduction of a particular type of masquerade society associated with the fearful masquerade called the Tall Ghosts (muo ogonogo).⁶ The relationship with Igala was primarily one of trade, with the former in a dominant position. Markets were held along the river or on the sand bank between Onitsha and Asaba. Fish and salt were traded by Onitsha and Aboh peoples for slaves and ivory from the North.⁷

The kingdom of Aboh, the third sphere of influence, also traces its origins to an area near Benin from which it, like Entice, was driven due to wars with the armies of Benin. Aboh people eventually settled on the Niger Delta, at a site of critical importance in the control of trade between the coast and Northern parts of the Niger. By the end of the seventeenth century through various political manipulations, Aboh gained control over the access to the upper Niger and thus was able to fill the important role of primary riverain middleman for the two most important commodities, slaves from Igala and firearms from the Delta.⁸ Aboh also functioned as a middleman for foodstuffs coming down river and imported goods coming up-river from Brass. After the coming of the British in the late 1850's, Onitsha took over many of these middleman functions and its market attained great importance.

The fourth culture to strongly affect Onitsha was that of Nri, whose people claim to have come from Igala. Nri and the related Aguleri peoples situated along the Anambra river are considered by Boston to have been one of the main centers of Igala influence east of the Niger (Ibid). In Northern Ibo mythology, the first Nri King is regarded as the creator of the two main Ibo food staples (the yam and taro), and the originator of the ozo title system.⁹ Because of his special relationship with the land, his people gained the duty of cleansing neighboring communities of "sins against the land" and they also controlled medicines for making yams plentiful and edible. Nri was also regarded in many Northern Ibo communities (including Onitsha) as a place where the dead went prior to the traveling to the underground.

The people of Onitsha left Benin to seek a new place of settlement in the 16th century during the reign of Oba Esigie who ruled the Benin Empire from 1504 to 1550. Oba Esigie had encouraged and improved the brass work which had been introduced to Benin by Oba Oguala. The emigrants were nicknamed “Onitsha” only after their exodus from Benin by people whose territories they marched through ravaging and plundering all that stood in their way.¹⁰ The name Onitsha means despisers which reflects the manner in which the emigrants dealt with obstacles placed on their routes by adjoining towns and villages. They are known for looking down on people other than their tribe. As they marched had been assaulted when she trespassed on his property. The Oba sent his military chief Obugwala to attack Chima and his people, and to avoid this, Chima and his people or group left.¹¹ This story, in all intents and purposes, cannot stand the test of truth in view of the fact that the ruling monarch in Benin when Onitsha people left the territory was Esigie by name. His mother, therefore because of the dignity of her office, the Queen-mother had no need to fetch fire wood by herself. Secondly, the Oba’s giant-warrior, Aguala or Gbuwala, who frequently featured in Onitsha mythology seems a mistaken Identity for Oguala who was regarded as the wisest Oba of Benin, having caused a trench to be dug around the town in which he resided and thus protected it from invasion. It can be deducted that this version of the story is merely a folklore.¹²

Settlement and Political Organization of Onitsha People

In continuation, Onitsha the eldest son remained in their father's temple, OBU, according to custom. To the name of Onitsha was appended their father's name Eri (i.e Agulu-Eri) by which Eri was remembered. Continuing with the expansion of Onitsha, Onitsha had four sons namely Anumuagana, Ezunukwu, Ezi, and Odeke. Anumuagana lived at Igboezunu and Ezi's descendants occupy Enugu and Eziagulu both known as (Ugwunadegbe). Odeke moved far away and settled at a place called Odeke: they speak a language called Olu (ibaji) akin to Igala.¹³

Furthermore, some of the inhabitants of Eziagulu went on a fishing campaign along the Anambra River and settled at a place called oroma which name was later changed to Eziagulu otu. Another group of people from Enugu Onitsha left their home for fishing and hunting and settled at a place called Enugu Otu Onitsha. Some travellers from ivite Onitsha settled at Isiokwe Otu while some from Igboezunu settled at Igboezunu Otu. Both Isiokwe Otu and Igboezunu Otu are called Nkpunando.¹⁴

Onitsha is divided into the following villages and quarters namely:

(A) Onitsha Uno:

1. Igboezunu

- (a) Okene
- (b) Eziama
- (c) Ngboko
- (d) Umueze
- (e) Umunkiti

(f) Umumba

2. Ivite

(a) Abo

(b) Umuawunu

(c) Isiokwe

(d) Umungalagu

(e) Okpu

(f) Amaerulu

(g) Umunoke

(h) Owelolie

3. Ugunadegbe

(i) Eziagulu

(a) Umuala

(b) Umuaga

(c) Umugama

(d) Egbeagu

(e) Umuanezunu

(f) Umuanevili

(g) Umuribo

(ii) **Enugu**

(a) Enugu ndida

(b) Umuokpota

(c) Umuezunu

(d) Amuleri

(e) Umunta

(B) Onitsha Otu:

1. Eziagulu Otu

- (a) okpa-ata
- (b) Umuriabo
- (c) Umuanevili

2. Enugu-Otu

- (a) Umu-ekweh
- (b) Umuenini
- (c) Umuokpoto
- (d) Umuezunu
- (e) Umuaekwu
- (f) Umuguma
- (g) Amerulu

3 Ivite Otu- Isiokwe

- (a) Uguoba
- (b) Umuagu
- (c) Umuokeke
- (d) Umuawunu n'Abo
- (e) Umuokpu
- (f) Nonoka
- (g) Amerulu

4 igboezunu-otu

- (a) Eziamma
- (b) Okene
- (c) Ngboko
- (d) Umueze
- (e) Umunkiti¹⁵

The town has the following traditional governance structure; the Ndi ichie (Elders in councils) and cabinet chiefs or a times referred as title holders; they are the highest ruling council in Onitsha community and are responsible for decisions which are taken in the general interest of the villagers/indigenes. These elders, supplied knowledge of the customs and traditions of the village during the process of its political administration. This system of administration used in Onitsha land during the pre-colonial times is similar to our today's centralized government, where exercised of political powers or duties are broken down into different arms of government (Executive, Legislative, and the Judiciary).¹⁶

Another political body was the Age Grade Group which constitute an important institution in pre-colonial Onitsha land. They served as the police and military force of the community. They were very important to the community as they carried out some executive duties which was necessary for the development of the community. The Age-grade members shared common initiation rites which showed that they had come of age of manhood and would contribute to the welfare of the members of the community.

Geography and Tradition of Origin of Aguleri

Geography is one of the most powerful shaper of history. It plays a very vital role in the history and culture of any society. It determines the pattern of settlement, their occupation, economic activities, food, pattern of interaction with others and so on. Hence, for Aguleri, geographic features of the territory they occupy as their homeland is a crucial factor in uniting them other than ties of ethnicity and culture.¹⁷

Aguleri is a large town situated on the bank of the river Omambala (Anambra) about 31 (Thirty-one) kilometers by the shortest land route to Onitsha, from the Aguleri junction. The town is crossed by the line 6.20 North latitude and 6.53 East longitude with a total population of about 890,000 people. The town is located south of the Igala towns (kogi state) and the Anam towns, north of Igbariam and Nando towns, and west of the Anaku and Omor towns, which are east of Umuleri and Nsugbe communities. The land is low lying.

Furthermore, in rainy season, the Anambra river floods its banks to the extent of many kilometers depositing alluvial soil resulting in the great fertility of the soil. The climate is hot, while the hottest days are in March, the coldest are in December during the harmattern period and the coolest are in June. The heaviest rain fall occurs in June and July and a break follows in August, and after that, another heavy rain fall start in September before the dry season sets in.¹⁸

Traditions of Origin of Aguleri people

Oral traditions history traces the origin of Aguleri to a man named Eri, who according to its close ethnographer, *Jeffrey 1934, the Divine umudri kings of Igbo land, Dissertation, I.A.I archives*, came down there from the sky, where he found himself in a flood land morass. He begged the Great God (chukwu okiki abiamama) to make dry land which Chukwu did and Eri sat upon it. Eri and his family thus Founded this community, located at the northernmost end of a line of hills that here meets the vast Anambra floodplain.¹⁹

However, there are various versions of how the people of Aguleri migrated to the region they found themselves today, But the most widely accepted version is the one linked to Israel when it was said Abraham is the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob (Israel), Jacob the father of Gad who was the seventh son of the former, Gad is the father of Eri (genesis 46:16) while Eri is the father of Agulu-eri.²⁰

The origin and migration of Aguleri people could be linked with those of the whole Igbo race, as a school of thought traced the origin of the Igbos from the Jews who migrated from Egypt centuries ago. The word Igbo is assumed to be a corruption of the name Hebrew. When the Hebrews left Egypt after four hundred years of servitude, they crossed the river Jordan and wandered about in the Arabian desert for forty years. Some of them who did not reach the promised land found their way to Africa, south of the river Nile, and then into Nigeria. The settlers at the confluence of the Niger and Benue were a group called the Igalas.²¹

Then Eri the son of Gad who was a warrior and hunter migrated with his followers from the Igala land and settled near the bank of the river Anambra (omambala). He built his camp called Eri-aka near Odanduli stream, a place which lies between Ivite and Igboezunu Aguleri. It is also believed that Gad the father of Eri founded a shrine in a place called Obu-Gad now called Obuga in umuenini, Enugu aguleri central square. In the course of time, Eri went out on war raids and captured many men and women and gradually his settlement began to grow. He was married to Nono who bore him six sons namely: Agulu, Menri also called Nri, Onogu(igbariam), Nteje, Nsugbe, and Amanuke and also a daughter called Adamgbo. Having only one daughter, Eri refused to give her out in marriage but housed her to bear children for him.²²

After the death of Eri, his descendants increased enormously and to avoid overcrowding, they dispersed to far off places. The children of Agulu who was the first born remained at their grandfather's residence according to customs and with the children of Adamgbo, Eri's daughter built up Aguleri. Menri's children established at Nri and expanded into the three groups of villages namely: Akamkpisi, Agukwu and Diodo and later to Umunri towns of Enugu-Agidi, Abagana, Nawfia and Oraeri. Onogu's children took their residence at Igbariam. Nteje's children lived at Nteje. Nsugbe's children resided at Nsugbe and Amunuke's children established at Amuke. A son of Menri by name Riamu, because of some misunderstanding with his people, left them to trace his way back to the original home of ERI. After passing through Nsugbe, he came to a beautiful site where he then settled and called it Nneyi. Later some of Adamgbo's

children who were being maltreated at Aguleri left Agulu's children and joined Riamu's children to live at Nneyi. Since the children of Adamgbo and Riamu were off shoots of Eri, they called themselves Umuli-Eri.²³

According to oral tradition, a descendant of Eri named Onoja whose mother was Oboli migrated from Idah in Igalaland and settled in Umunkiti. He was a giant and was said to have had six fingers in each hand and six toes in each foot. Onoja Oboli made raids single handed in various towns depriving people of their properties. After living there for many years and having children, he was carried away by a whirlwind just like Elijah the prophet.²⁴

Geography and Tradition of Origin of Awka People

Awka lies below 300 metres above sea in a valley on the plains of the Mamu River. Two ridges or cuestas, both lying in a North-South direction, form the major topographical features of the area. The ridges reach the highest point at Agulu just outside the Capital Territory. About six kilometers east of this, the minor cuesta peaks about 150 metres above sea level at Ifite –Awka.²⁵

Awka is sited in a fertile tropical valley but most of the original Rain forest has been lost due to clearing for farming and human settlement. A few examples of the original rain forest remains at places like the Ime Oka shrine. Wooded savannah grassland predominates primarily to the north and east of the city. South of the town on the slopes of the Awka-Orlu Uplands are some examples of soil erosion and gullyng.²⁶

Origin and Migration of Story

Awka is one of the oldest settlements in Igboland established at the centre of the Nri civilization which produced the earliest documented bronze works in Sub-Saharan Africa around 800 AD and was the cradle of Igbo civilization.²⁷

The earliest settlers of Awka were the Ifiteana people which translates into people who sprouted from the earth. They were farmers, hunters, and skilled iron workers who lived on the banks of the Ogwugwu stream in what is now known as Nkwelle ward of Awka. The deity of the Ifiteana was known as Okika-na-ube or the god pre-eminent with the spear and the Ifiteana were known as Umu-Okanube or “worshippers of Okanube”, which eventually became shortened to Umu-Oka and eventually Oka and its anglicized version "Awka".

In ancient times, Awka was populated by elephants with a section of the town named Ama-enyi and a pond Iyi-Enyi where the elephants used to gather to drink. The elephants were hunted for their prized ivory tusks (okike) which was kept as a symbol to the god Okanube in every Awka home with hunting medicine stored in the hollow of the tusk.

Over time, the town became famous for metal working of a high level and its blacksmiths were prized throughout the region for making farming implements, Dane guns and ceremonial items such as Oji (staff of mystical power) and Ngwuagilija (staff of Ozo men). In pre-colonial days Awka also became famous as the home of the Agbala Oracle a deity that was said to be a daughter of the great Long Juju shrine of Arochukwu.

The Agbala Oracle (which Chinua Achebe drew on for inspiration in his book *Things Fall Apart*) was consulted to resolve disputes far and wide until it was finally destroyed by colonial authorities in the early part of the 20th century.²⁸

Before the inception of British rule, Awka was governed by titled men known as Ozo and Ndichie who were accomplished individuals in the community. They held general meetings or IzuAwka either at the residence of the oldest man (OtochalAwka) or at a place designated by him. He was the NneUzu or master blacksmith, whether he knew the trade or not, for the only master known to Awka people was the master craftsman, the Nne Uzu.²⁹

In modern times Awka has adapted to the republican system and is currently administered by the Awka South Local Government Area. However, it still preserves traditional systems of governance with the respected Ozo titled men often consulted for village and community issues and a paramount cultural representative, the EzeUzu who is elected by all Ozo titled men by rotation amongst different villages to represent the city at state functions.³⁰

People and Culture

Awka comprises seven Igbo groups sharing common blood lineage divided into two sections. Ifite Section, the senior section, comprises four groups, Ayom-na-Okpala, Nkwelle, Amachalla, and Ifite-Oka followed by Ezinator Section, which consists of three groups, Amikwo, Ezi-Oka and Agulu. Each of these groups has a number of villages. Altogether, Awka comprises 33 villages.³¹

Conclusion

From the above analysis, the origin of Onitsha people can also be said to originated from Israel, and this is also affirmed by all Igbos in general as the latter agrees that they all share the same common ancestry from Eri who is the founder and ancestor of the Onitsha which also stands as the Ancestral home of the Igbo people. Also, as a result of their geographical location we can say Onitsha (both Onitsha uno and Onitsha otu) is a gift of the Anambra river just as Egypt is a gift of the river Nile. Furthermore, because of the annual overflow of the Anambra river, making it to leave rich soils on the lands which eventually becomes fertile, Onitsha becomes the envy of her neighbouring communities. She is often referred to by some of her neighbours as Ndi-azu-na-ji, which literally means “people of fish and yam”. It is the food basket of Anambra state and thus contributes to the Economy of the state. Also the presence of crude oil in Onitsha makes it important in the struggle for Anambra state to the given the status of an oil producing state. Today Onitsha community is one of the few communities that can boost of being blessed with abundant mineral resources. Thus, this will be discuss in the subsequent chapters.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER THREE

SOCIO-ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN ONITSHA AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

Introduction

This chapter looks at the relationship that Onitsha has with her neighbours economically. Their economic activities are grouped into Agriculture, system of trade, and industries. Farming, Animal husbandry, fishing, hunting, animal rearing are the major agricultural activities that are predominant in Onitsha and also in her immediate neighbours.¹ There were also existence of local trade, long distance trade and other bilateral relations among these communities. However, there are no much established industries present in these communities but notwithstanding, they are few arts and crafts, local products and other natural resources that serve as economic value to each of these communities.²

The pre-colonial economy of Onitsha rested on three major sectors which were Agricultural, industrial production, and trade. The diligent and hardworking characters of Onitsha people were encouraged and complemented by the benefits of their fruitful and conducive environment richly endowed with fertile soil for Agriculture as well as various solid mineral resources such as palm trees, cotton, clay soil, tuber and timber etc. that encouraged the development of local industries in the area.³ The major sectors of Onitsha pre-colonial activities (Agriculture, Non-agriculture production and Trade) prospered in the pre-colonial period, taking care of the needs of the people at the local village level.

Local and external factors played a great role to the growth of the economy but the local factors played a greater role. For instance, the establishment of the local craft and industries. In this chapter, we shall deliberate on the economic activities of pre-colonial Onitsha people which includes Agriculture, Trade (Local and Long distance trade), fishing, hunting, gathering etc.⁴ However, before we proceed further it is wise to lay emphasis on land which was of one of the most important factor of production in the pre-colonial Igbo society in general and Onitsha in particular.

The Traditional Economy of Onitsha

The economy during the period under review was just like economies of contemporary societies and can be grouped into three major sector, primary, secondary and tertiary, though majority of the people participated in agriculture, many others participated in the distribution of agricultural products. The major feature of agriculture was land cultivation. Land was easily made available to those who desired it for agricultural purpose.⁵ The pre-colonial economy was anchored on agriculture and trade, as agriculture was said to be the mainstay of the economy at the time of discourse. The Onitsha people were mostly subsistence farmers. as subsistence agriculture is based on crop husbandry. The major food crops grown included yam, cocoyam, cassava and banana.⁶ Auxiliary food crop consist of maize, beans and cowpea. A wide variety of vegetable is also grown. Of all crops yam was regarded by both men and women as the most prestigious and its production involves every member of the household. The division of labour between the sexes depended he significance of other activities, old men

and women engaged in agricultural work while the young ones travels to cities to secure jobs in big trading firms.⁷ The unit of labour was the nuclear family which included a man and his wife, also every able bodied person was actively involved in farm work. The labour was drawn from families (extended) or inlaws who assisted in either cultivation or during the period of crop harvest slave labour was also utilized. Wealthy farmers also made use of clientele labour and there was also re-approval exchange of labour between members of age grade or between in laws. The Onitsha people cultivated the kind on a more permanent basis, this was possible on the account of fertile soil in the Niger-Delta.⁸

Serious farming usually begins in late February with the arrivals of early rains. The heavy work of clearing and preparing farm lands is done by men although young women assist. During the period of cultivation, the head of the house and his wives are engaged in farm work, having many children is valued especially sons. Apart from prestige that goes with a large compound having many wives and many children also makes it easier for man to work in the farm and assure a larger harvest.⁹ Around the homestead, permanent cultivation was practiced although on a very small scale.

Yam is the basis of subsistence economy on which the people depended and the activities associated with its cultivation chiefly determines the pattern of the agricultural year. As early as January, adult males who intend to make farm look around for promising sites, taking into account the time interval since a particular piece of land was last cultivated. Leaving of the farms begins, After the undergrowth has been cut down with machet, it is allowed to dry before being burnt, after the burning of the farm, the taller

trunks of trees are then cut down. The very large ones may be left standing to be cut later and taken home as firewood (okpa-Nkwu).¹⁰ Different types of yam were cultivated which includes Ji Abbi, Okpai Obeke, Ji-Ocha, Okpa Ji Oru. The Ji Ocha and Abbi varieties are harvest August-September, while Okpai, Obeke, and Okpai Ji Ovu is harvested in November. Ji- Ocha is used for new yam ceremonies, is usually eaten up quicker than others.¹¹ After the planting of the yam, in order to facilitate their growths, offerings were made to "Ifejwu (god of yam and harvests) so that the people may have good harvests that agricultural year. Yam farming essentially the preserve of men while corn (oka), cocoyam (Akpu), okra (Okwofo), groundnut (Isegue) cassava (Akpu) and a wide variety of vegetables (Mpka ekwukwo) are generally owned always planted and harvested by women.¹²

Permanent tree crops were also exploited, for instance, oil palm, plantain, banana, and kola. The oil-palm was value not just for its oil and kernels but also because virtually every part of it, the trunk, fronds, leaves and the of the kernel are useful. The staple food for jeavs was garri made out of cassava, but a wealthy man ate pounded yam (NLI-YI). When yam was not available, any other food could be used as substitute, it must be pounded. Thus, coon would be grounded, boiled and pounded (NLI Oka).¹³

Market and Trade

Short or daily trades in pre-colonial Onitsha were trending activities carried out within Onitsha region and her close neighbor.¹⁹ The people observe four market which were held four day alternatively. The traditional week is made up of four day (IZU) on

which these market holds sessions. These market days includes Eke, Orié, Afor, Nkwor. It is not quite clear however whether the four market day was adopted from Benin or in the course of trading with Igbo merchants over time. In Igbo land trading activities are ritualized by associating markets with super natural beings. The same way, there are four market days in the week in Benin respectively representing the four quarters of the earth namely Eken (East) Orié (West), Aho (South) and Okuo (North). This similarity may be a consequence of a common ancestry or source of inspiration in primordial days.¹⁴

In the traditional society, trading was the exclusive preserve of women. No man of any substance could be seen buying or selling in the market because men were expected to engage in trading activities. Women traded in all kinds of foodstuff, goods bought from markets in other towns and product. Means of exchange was by barter before the introduction of cowry (Ego Ayala) as currency.¹⁵

Art and Craft

There are men and women skilled in the works of art and craft. These include, bead-making (Esu) basket weaving (Akpele), carpentry and leather works. The carpenter's and wood carvers produces mortar, pestle, door foams, wooden bowls (ugbugbe) and other wooden symbol of authority for ancestral workshop (Ikenga and Ifejiokwu).¹⁶

Fishing and Hunting

Fishing was an important activity in those villages which had sizeable bodies of water. The best known river in Onitsha is the River. Various means and equipment's

were temporarily employed in fishing including fish traps (Akaga). Fishing was the preserve of men, although women could catch crabs. Fishing was not a full time pursuit. Fishing intensive period was the dry season when reduced sources and volumes of water restricted the movement of aquatic life.¹⁷

Women in the Economy of Pre-Colonial Onitsha

The position of women in pre-colonial Nigeria was a reflection of their subordinate status. This is not peculiar to Nigeria alone but Africa and the world at large.²³ Women are the fundamental human reservoir in every society as they control most of the non-monetary sector of the economy (subsistence Agriculture, Labour, etc).¹⁸ Africa women occupied a position of complimentary rather than sub-ordinate to the men-folk.¹⁹

Women and Agriculture

Igbo women share with most women of southern Nigeria a relatively high economic status. They differ, however in their de of achieving this status and also in their perception of it. Onitsha women achieve their economic status primarily through subsistence farming and sales of surplus.²⁰ Generally, in the pre-colonial period, men in Nigeria dominated agricultural activities such as land tilling and sowing. On the other hand women played important roles in the weeding and harvesting of plants, portage of produce, threshing and storage of crops.²¹ Every woman was a farmer, either on full or part-time basis, while some owned farms where they planted varieties of crops and vegetables, others maintained gardens. The major crops women produced were cocoyam,

maize, grains, cassava, melon and pepper. Women do not cultivate yam because of the rituals yield to yam barns. Although women in Onitsha were basically farmers as their major staple crop was restricted majorly to cassava from which was made, oil palm was also one of the indigenous economic trees exploited by the people. Traditionally, oil-palm trees grew wild and belonged to the community women were free to collect the ripe fallen nut for processing, primarily for household consumption. Women's harvest was therefore primarily used or stored for family use women do not have enough income from their agricultural production activities to invest in farming as they engage mainly in the production of available crops. In traditional farming communities crops are stereotyped along sex lines.²² The cultivation of food crops is left for the women and the family needs are met largely from her farm holding. Women in pre-colonial period had rights to own personal properties such as farm, but not the right to own lands which they farm on. They could cultivate their husband's plot, a major individualistic strategy for women to acquire property independent of their husband was through the system originating in the pre-colonial lineage system.²³

The unit of labour was the family for women played an important part in the social relations of production in Agriculture. Women's farm work schedule kept them busy all year. The women, in fact were busiest during the slack months of June-October in which they were engrossed in weeding plots of farm allotted to them. Coincidentally, this period of intensive work for women was also a period of food scarcity. Food was scare from May-August because crops had been replanted but were yet to mature for

harvest. During this period, maize food (Ikpe-Oka) was the staple food.²⁴ Women combined this job with harvesting and transportation of their crops into their barn. However invariably, the women continued to harvest into February of the next year.²⁵

A wide range of tuber crops were cultural women dominated the planting of agricultural crops like coco-yam and the rest other than yam because they were termed women's crops for obvious reason, due to the issue of patrilineal characters among the western Ibos as well as the issue of men superiority and the over emphasis placed on men-folk. It was this feeling of superiority over women that influenced the entire Igbo culture. Another reason was the woman's desire to meet the feeding demands of her family. We have noted that men concentrate mainly on yam cultivation. Besides, no man would freely allow his yams to be indiscriminately consumed by people including members of his household because this was his capital base. As mothers of their families, the women endeavoured to plant subsidiary crops to yam and other crops they required to meet the food needs of the family at any given time particularly during the period when yam planting had been concluded and the farmer is practically left with little or no yam for the family.²⁶ The variety and size of her own crops available to the woman would determine the nature and character of the welfare of the family. By engaging in the production of a variety of crops, the woman not only averted the incidence of over dependence on yam crop by family members, but equally ensured the availability of a well-balanced diet made up of tubers and vegetable crops rich in protein, vitamins and vegetables.²⁷

Women and Trade

In the past, the business of buying and selling goods in Igboland took place in the open. There was no shop or room allocated permanently for the sales of commodities. It should be pointed out that women were active in the inter-regional retail trade. Thus, women played important roles in the daily and periodic markets, had food stalls, embarked on road side trading and moved from house to house selling their goods.²⁸

As with other Igbo communities, trade was an important sector of Onitsha traditional economy. There are two genre of trade local and long distance trade. By local trade, we meant here exchange of goods within Onitsha and her immediate neighbours. Exchange of this type does not require spending a night outside their villages. Whereas long distance trade, the exchange of goods took the participant from home for a night or more.³⁹ Trade was a predominant feature and a major occupation of the women Onitsha internal markets are mostly bid surrounded and decimated with trees. They were largely distinguished by different sections where each section was reserved for only one type of commodity. Generally, in daily markets item such as food crops were mostly sold. These food crops include vegetables of different types were sold because of the perishable nature of these food crops were mostly sold, while non-perishable and mostly cash crops like kola nut and cocoa were carried for long distance trade.²⁹ Long distance trade was carried out outside the community. It was mostly nonperishable goods and more of cash crops that were traded on e.g cocoa, palm oil and kola nut. Kola nut was also used as a ritual item, apart from the trading purpose, kolanut was used also in ceremonies such as

chieftaincy installation, oath. Taking etc. thus the demand in kola intensified the long distance trading activities between Onitsha traders and the northern traders.³⁰

Historically, market place was more than a forum for setting and buying, it was a place for social interaction of various sorts, gossips, informal discussion, recreation and for making friends. What G. S Basden observe of Niger Ibos generally applies that “on the market days, practically, the whole female population move to the market place either to trade or to enjoy the general entertainment such gathering affords.”³¹ Since most trading transactions were dominated by women, they were always at the forefront. When discussions about market affairs are conducted, and the market is under their control. In most Igbo markets, there are no standard prices. Both the buyers and sellers haggle until they agree on a price. The commodities are left without advertisement, the women will sit and wait for the customers to make the advance.³²

However, one basic feature that was present in trading activities in Anambra-land in general was the presence of trade guilds traders of different goods established themselves into guilds. In other to enhance the productivity and maintain a strong monopoly hold on their trading goods in the local market each section was occupied by different trade guilds known as “odu”. In pre-colonial Onitsha, trading guilds were named after the particular items they traded on. These includes Egbe Odu Uko (guild of cloths traders), Egbe Odu Ncha (guild of soap sellers, Egbe Odu Eusu (guild of bead sellers) Egbe Odu Ose (guild of pepper sellers) etc, any number of person selling the same object or engaged in the same profession could form themselves into guild. However in pre-

colonial Onitsha since most of the trade are dominated by women, a large number of these guilds were women's guild. In order to increase their capital to facilitate trade, each member of the guild organized a system whereby each member contributed a fixed amount periodically contributed a fixed amount periodically corresponding to the periodic market day.³³

The Onitsha people were not left out in Isoktion when exchanging goods. However, this is because there is no acceptable medium of exchange during their period of economic revolution. However, the method of Barter became an acceptable means of exchange. As the volume of trade increased, currencies were introduced because trade by barter was not reliable, one major currency popular in Onitsha and its other neighbours was cowrie shell.³⁴ According to Sylvia Leith-Ross "on the market day, the women have a busy time. The fowls are sold so as to buy yams, yams are sold to buy palm-oil and palm-oil sold to buy pepper all of which could have been done without stirring from the women's respective villages."³⁵

Economic Relations between Onitsha and Awka

The People of Onitsha and Awka have both similar economic activities ranging from trade, craft, and agriculture. They both have benefited immensely from one each other from their agricultural products. The exchange of goods between Onitsha and Awka people was the system of barter of trade.³⁶ The main article of trade which Onitsha sold to Awka was palm wine and native chalk, yam and cassava. Onitsha and Awka had similar farm products like palm kernel, coconut, ground-nut, plantain, yams, cassava, melon etc.

Later in the 13th century cowries (Akopegho in Awka) was introduced and was a medium of exchange between Onitsha and Awka.

In all, farming was the major source of livelihood in both Onitsha and Awka. Most of the farm products were used as articles of trade alongside with other crafts such as brass, calcium carbonate, native chalk, and kills from hunting were sold to Awka from Onitsha. Local trade were carried out in market places, Onitsha, the name of the market in Onitsha and Ochanja were parts of trade between Onitsha and Awka.³⁷ Farming, trading, crafts and industry as discussed contributed greatly to the economic relations that existed and still exists between Onitsha and Awka.

Trading was another economic activity that linked Onitsha and Awka. Under trade, the various markets that existed in pre-colonial Onitsha and Awka were carried out through the means of exchange. By about the fifteenth century, trade in Onitsha was localized. But external trade later developed between Onitsha and neighboring towns in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This was due to the appearance of the Europeans in Benin Kingdom. The traders at a time used barter system to trade, by exchanging goods for goods. Cowries and manilas were later introduced into the trade. This explains the trading relations of Onitsha and Awka.³⁸

Onitsha was the major supplier of farm products as they have more lands to farm. The people of Awka had lesser lands to farm. This means that Onitsha had more advantages in trade. Onitsha had a market day, the Eken market day which comes after every three days. The Ochanja market day is the market of Onitsha, the general town

market of Onitsha that attract traders of the whole area. Another market day known as the nkwo was established by the Obi to stimulate economic transactions between Onitsha and Awka.³⁹

Without any forms of speculations and strenuous enquiry, it is obvious, taking a look at Awka's geographical location, that agriculture has been the earliest and dominant occupation of the people. It was their major source of livelihood in pre-colonial times. The fertile soil and favourable climatic condition served as incentive to the practice of agriculture in Awka. Both men and women engaged in agriculture majorly to cater for their families. In other words, subsistence farming was the actual practice. The farmers produced staple food crops like yam, cassava and maize. They also produced beans, plantain, okra, melon, tomatoes, vegetables, et¹⁷. The area was blessed with rubber and oil palm, which the colonial masters later exploited extensively and converted into plantation farming.

Apart from farming, the people also kept poultry and livestock, which equally provided manure for their farms. Also, hunting was another aspect of the economic activities. For many, hunting served as a means of obtaining meat rather than as a means of getting money¹⁸. Another reason why many engaged in hunting in the olden days was to kill the animals that destroyed their crops.⁴⁰

Fishing was also an economic activity in pre-colonial Awka. The people engaged in fishing although, it was a small scale venture due to the absence of a large water body in Awka. Hence, fishing was mainly for subsistence purpose. Away from agriculture and

all that have to do with food production, the people also engaged in crafts. The local craftsmanship included cloth-weaving, mat making, pottery, smithing and basketry, especially in the olden days.⁴¹

Trade and commerce was not neglected by the people despite their keen interest in agriculture. It was believed that the Igbo taught Awka people trade and commerce, “our earliest entrepreneurs went through the tutelage of the Ibo merchants and up till today, still dominate trade and commerce in our metropolis”.⁴¹ However true this statement may be, the important thing to take note of is the fact that trade and commerce in pre-colonial era was necessitated by what in economic terms is referred to as comparative cost advantage, whereby, a community gave out what it produced in exchange of what it did not produce. The mutual dependency further necessitated trade. In their markets, the sight of locally produced good items such as yam, banana, plantain, fruits and vegetables, etc., were common place.⁴²

Economic Relation between Onitsha and Aguleri

There is a level of economic, social, and political similarities in the different tribes that emanated from the great Igbo society. Farming, hunting, fishing and animal rearing are all the economic activities present in Aguleri.⁴³ They partake actively in fishing because of the presence of the river Niger. They rear more of sheep, native fowls, turkey, goats and monkeys. Currently some indigenes are involved in fish farming and poultry business which is a very lucrative business. But is more of an individual involvement than a communal activity. Their long distance trade, traders from Aguleri do come to

Onitsha nkwo market days to purchase palm wine for personal consumption and for any social gathering. The people of Onitsha also go to Aguleri to buy cocoa yams, beans, rice and other food item that they are not producing. Onitsha and Aguleri have a good economic relationship.⁴⁴

Economic Relations between Onitsha and Obosi

The economic Activities in Obosi are obviously same with Onitsha which include farming, hunting, and animal rearing. They plant cassava, potatoes, okra, yam, maize, melon, beans, pepper, tomatoes, plantain, sugar canes, fruits and vegetables.⁴⁵ The hunting activities is more of a communal activity for group of male folks especially before their market days so they can sell to buyers. Both communities are the only communities in Ika South Local Government which produces palm wine. However, there is variance in the nature of the palm wine. While Onitsha is blessed with the up wine known as ‘nkwui’ which the palm wine tapper extract from the tree and could still be used multiple times, the down wine in Obosi also called ‘ngwo’ can only be extracted once the tree is brought down and it becomes condemned afterwards. They don’t have cowrie hence, they purchase from the women in Onitsha.⁴⁶

Just like Onitsha, Obosi also rear animals such as dogs, goats, and native fowl.⁹ For the sake of modern civilization, most indigenes in Obosi are now involved in fishpond, poultry business. They manage their market days so that it doesn’t clash with those in Onitsha in order for there to be an exchange in their trading system. From the

pre-colonial period till the present day, there exist a high level of economic relation between the people of Onitsha and Obosi.⁴⁷

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that each of the communities that share boundary with Onitsha has some level of similarities in their economic activities. However, there are some differences in the natural resources that these communities possess. Awka may not be naturally be rich in kaolin or palmwine, but it doesn't deny them the fact that they have good soil to farm and harvest their crops. Through bilateral relations with Onitsha people, they are able to purchase palm wine and native chalk when the need arises.

Not everyone prefers Onitsha up wine to Aguleri down wine, hence both communities still trade with each other on their market days and also most times they come to buy native chalk from Onitsha considering the fact that they are not a natural producer of it. The people of Onitsha and Aguleri still have possessed a strong bond in their economic relations. They are closed neighbours and also they have similar agricultural involvements. Their systems of trade was said to be by the trade of barter system in the pre-colonial period, but presently they meet at their different market days and buy what the other don't have naturally.

Onitsha and Obosi have similarities in their economic makeup and there still exist cordial relations regardless of the fact they have been placed in different political administrations. Onitsha has a good bilateral relation and long distance trade with her neighbours. In the process of this research, it has been noted that there have not been any

records of economic disputes pertaining to land ownerships, conflicts in market days, inflation of price on agricultural products. These communities have been amicable to one another from the pre-colonial period till date.

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CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIO-POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN ONITSHA AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

Introduction

This Chapter focuses on the political relationship that Onitsha has with her immediate neighbours. There will be a description on how Onitsha related with her neighbours on political matters as regards system of alliances, political domination, conflicts and wars, migration, diplomatic relations and also know the political system that Onitsha and her neighbours adopted if it is a monarchy, gerontocracy or a democratic system of administration.¹ However, Onitsha and her neighbours all emanated from the great Benin Kingdom where Monarchy has been the major system of political administration. The Oba has been ruling the kingdom for a long period of time even after the introduction of democracy. This system of government usually has a hereditary chief of state with life tenure and powers varying from nominal to absolute. In a system as this, the people are ruled with absolute authority from the Oba and in most cases verdict are issued to anyone who dares disobey the law of the Oba.²

The importance of the study of inter group relations is to examine how groups were able to interact, corporate and maintain common boundaries. It also facilitates a vivid understanding of the economic, political and cultural relations amongst them.³ It is in this light that this chapter seek to examine the political inter-group relations between Onitsha and her neighbours.

Both the Onitsha and Obosi have certain contact of inter-clan relations, these relations occur when there are festivals or boundaries disputes. On the eve of the festival, the Onitsha people engage in certain ritual dance and they invite Obosi traditional dancers who comes and display their culture dance.⁴ Also the political leaders of both Onitsha and Obosi exchange various pleasantries which helps to promote their cordial relationship as far as inter-clan relations is concern. It should be noted here that both the Onitsha and Obosi also have strong inter-clan contact especially as it relates to the boundaries disputes, based on this situations. The territory that involved in the boundary conflict most times fall in a particular clan in Onitsha and Obosi respectively before the conflict will reach the central political head of the Onitsha leadership, all clans might have involved in serious fight which might result to the destruction of lives and property.⁵

However, one should note here that both each community have high administrative unit. Both the Onitsha and Obosi clan have a very strong unit because the villages were autonomous and both clan administrations tend to create fragmented government. Both the Onitsha and Obosi have executive title and clan meetings were always held only for festivals, homage to ancestors, title making and the like.⁶ During the inter-clan meetings between Onitsha and Obosi discuss like religious and social issues were mostly discussed but political issues were mostly discussed but political issues was prohibited due to certain conflict that might be on ground.⁷

The Onitsha and Obosi people have a clear cut family relationship, which is very unique. It is unique in the sense that it is community based relationship family

relationship between Onitsha and Obosi occur as a result of marriage contact, and family migration.⁸

Political Relation between Onitsha and Ogidi

From the pre-colonial era till the present day, there has never been any conflict or wars between the people of Onitsha and Ogidi on issues concerning political superiority or any other politically related issues.

But lately the Onitsha people sometimes pressurizes the indigenes of Ogidi to be at loggerheads with each other but fortunately the Obi of Ogidi is said to be an indigene of Onitsha, hence, he appreciates a peaceful cohabitation rather than any negative influence from other Ogidi speaking tribes.⁹ Both the Obi of Onitsha and the Obi of Ogidi pay homage to the Obi of Agbor and are under the political leadership of Agbor. Their tenets of administration is based on their customs. Both political heads share likeness in their administrative rule and are also both submissive to their political heads who are the Obi-Onitsha and the Obi-Ogidi. Most interestingly.¹⁰

Political Relationship between Onitsha and Ogidi

Onitsha and Awka since the pre-colonial period have had series of diplomatic relation, political alliances and cordial relation amidst the conflict that existed between both neighbours before the ordaining of Awka as political head over Onitsha in Anambra by the Britain Colonialist. These disputes at a time really affected their political relation for a long period of time. But the issues have been resolved and there are cordial relationships between both communities.¹¹

Awka is an immediate neighbour of Onitsha from the south border and they are both under Anambra State. According to oral findings, it was said that the land in which the people of Awka occupy were once originally owned by the Onitsha people. It was during the making of a local government that made the Colonialist made Awka to be the political head in Anambra.²¹ This however created some levels of disputes and also it breached the relationship between both communities. The Ogbaka ohia who was the warrior from Onitsha served as protection for both Onitsha and Awka. There was political alliances to fight against the enemies of both Onitsha and Awka and also to prevent any form of reprisals. In all, there was a peaceful political affiliations and association between both communities.¹²

In traditional Awka society, the administration of the society rested on the shoulders of the Obi (the monarch) and assisted by his council. The right of an Obi and his council were regulated by custom.¹³ The Obi was the central authority in Awka whose office was hereditary, his first son succeed him. Also, there were two councils known as Ogwa Ndichien and Ogwa Idibodein Awka. The Ogwa Ndichien consisted of only noble elders, some of whom were king makers, the ancestral shrine priest and state messengers or Idibodein. The Ogwa Idibodein Awka consisted of title holders, some of whom were Obi's counselors and other messengers. The two councils were responsible for the life and property of the citizens,¹⁴ the Chief of the inner chamber was titled Oweh, he was head of the Idibodein and was responsible for confirming titles on anyone who had served the king and his kingdom. The government in Awka was administered in

Dein/Obi's name by the Ndichien Awka council among whom were classified chiefs consisting the Ihaime/Idibodein members who were the advisory body to the Obi.¹⁵

In attending to dispute or other issues that concern the people, for example, any complaint in a family circle was settled by the elders of the family if not an appeal the village elders at the Orgwa Onyisi Idumu (the eldest man in the quarter) or Onyisi Ogbe (the eldest man in the town). Serious crimes as murder homicide, theft etc, were tried by the village council or by the Obi's tribunal if not amicably settled.¹⁶

Boundaries Contact and Relationship between Onitsha and Aguleri

Sharing of boundaries between Onitsha and Aguleri people, each of the community villages in has had at least one border contact which most time came up as a result of dispute with each neighbour. These disputes are mainly over territorial claims, and are most frequently caused by the lack of clearly defined and marked boundaries, the availability of trans-boundary resources, and security-related matters.¹⁷ for instance, according to Osita Emeka, gave an historical account of conflict that occur between the community in Onitsha known as Isiokwe and a community in Aguleri known as Igboezunu, The said clan had serious boundaries disputes which resulted in destruction of lives and property.¹⁸

Boundary Dispute between Isiokwe and Igboezunu (Community of Onitsha and Aguleri)

In pre-colonial time, the people of Isiokwe had peaceful and cordial relationship between her and the Igboezunu community and this relationship cut across their socio-

cultural, economic and political activities which they established with their various neighbours. In fact, in ancient time the Isiokwe people usually invite Igboezunu to their festivals and on some occasion they have marital ties between the two communities.¹⁹ not until the boundary dispute that affect their cordial political relations.

The Isiokwe and Igboezunu boundary conflict started in the pre-colonial time which usually came up as a result of farmland dispute prior to the land dispute, both communities were living together as a civil community despite the fact that they have certain boundaries that demarcate them.²⁰ for the Isiokwe they were blessed with vast lands good for agriculture while the Igboezunu have more of river than lands. The Igboezunu people usually use the Isiokwe land for farming, fishing and of her economic activities. Although both communities were under different political administration and in fact in contemporary time they have in a separate state but they still trade together and engage in other economic activities such as hunting, fishing, animal rearing and farming.²¹

However, farming activities led to the emergence of Isiokwe and Igboezunu conflict. This came in the late pre-colonial and early colonial period. According to Chief Michael Ezewaniyi, points out that the Igboezunu people was given a vast portion of land by the Isiokwe people for farming; this land was strategically situated around the boundaries between Isiokwe and Igboezunu.²²

The Igboezunu people got the land as a result of compensation given by the traditional rulers of Isiokwe and the strong relationship the traditional leaders had

between them.²³ meanwhile, Chief Moses Ikenna, maintained that the Igboezunu people came to Isiokwe to plead for a portion of land which they will use for farming within a certain period of time and as the years go by the Igboezunu people refuse to revisit the agreement by returning the said land to Isiokwe people.²⁴ This crisis resulted to several damages which include

Traditional Council Clashes: During the period of the crisis, the traditional rulers of both communities called for meeting and try to resolve the land disputes. The meetings were never fruitful. According to Chief Joe Igbokwe asserts that the meeting was full of rancor to the extent that they were exchange of blows among the chiefs of both communities and that it took the intervention of some women in Isiokwe to resolve the conflict through song protest. Chief Joe Igbokwe also reiterated that the traditional rulers fights on the boundary dispute continues to the extent that both communities were using spiritual powers in harm each other which resulted to strange death of some high chiefs in both communities.²⁵ Chief Joe Igbokwe later concluded that although the land dispute still evolving but the tension has dense down because of the intervention of the state government. He later identified that his incident happened during colonial and post colonial time.²⁶

Resolution of Boundary Conflict: Most conflicts and their resolution methods in Onitsha at that time were predominantly local. Conflicts were between villages, communities or tribes who live in the same or adjoining border areas. Those who intervened were often tribal leaders or traditional rulers. It is instructive to note that when

the traditional rulers Onitsha sit down with their subjects to discuss a conflict, the talking usually covers all kinds of relevant background and goes into the thoughts and intentions of others.²⁷ The elders from a family, clan or state see their traditional objectives in conflict resolution as moving away from accusations and counter – accusations, to soothe hurt feelings and to reach a compromise that may help to improve future relationships. They also dwell on values, aspirations, perceptions and visions. All over Onitsha, people have deeply rooted cultural commitments, and in many of the communal and border conflicts in Onitsha, these cultural heritages play a decisive role.²⁸

Conflict Resolution Relations: This period between the Onitsha and Aguleri always have peaceful interaction which most time result in exchange of diplomatic ties of peace. For instance, the conflict resolution between Onitsha and Aguleri also afford both communities to have good interactions although the conflict is still going on, but this serve as inter-group relations as a result of the conflict resolution.²⁹

Concerning the land settlement between Onitsha (Isiokwe) and Aguleri (Igboezunu) over the year both community traditional rulers have made an attempt at different occasion in resolving the land disputes. At a particular period of the resolution falls out of peaceful agreement which later curded mysterious physical combat among titled chiefs of both communities.³⁰ Between 1977 to 1990, there were fruitful meeting of the land disputes held in the Isiokwe and Igboezunu respectively by the traditional rulers of both communities, although the meeting yielded result on a win-win agreement but still the meeting did not resolve the crisis because it was not implemented.³¹ It should be

noted here that till date the Onitsha (Isiokwe) and Aguleri (Igboezunu) people still continue to have traditional rulers meeting by way of resolving the land dispute and series of agreement have been reached which have never been implemented by both communities.³² According to the interview conducted with Pa. Chima said that the Isiokwe people are peace-loving people that the reason why they are trying to resolve the crisis with the Igboezunu people by apportioning certain parts of the dispute land to the Igboezunu people but still refused and claimed that the entire dispute land belongs to them.³³

General Political Relations between Onitsha and Nkwelle people: Onitsha and Nkwelle traditional political systems were similar but each clan existed as autonomous units. However, this is not to say that there was no interaction at the political level between Onitsha and Nkwelle. It should be noted that as far as pre-colonial period, the Onitsha and Nkwelle traditional political systems and cultural way of dialoguing and diplomacy has been super imposed upon them by the western political system.³⁴ It is the development in Onitsha and Nkwelle relations in the face of the changes in political system that attracted attention in this section. It could be recalled that through colonial administration, the Onitsha and Nkwelle people were merged together in one division. But in the 1930s that came together under the platform called Ndi Onicha division. Each of the kingdoms of Ndi Onicha had president general, they met and equally had a general president. They represent and recognize themselves and accept a way in which to elect a president over themselves.³⁵

Conclusion

It is evident in this chapter that there have been a major form of political relations existing among the immediate Neighbours of Onitsha. The idea of intergroup relations is not totally questionable in these communities even though they all do not belong to the same political Leadership. They however share some similarities in their political make up. And they exercise same political system such as gerontocracy and monarchy. The title of the 'Obi' is common among Onitsha, Obosi, Awka, and Nkwelle and it still has same function as the king person in a village or quarter.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

As a history of inter-group relations among the Onitsha and her peoples of South-East region of Nigeria before 1900, what has been attempted here is really a survey of their inter-group contact. The available findings in this study support the detailed history of their socio-economic and political relations in the pre-colonial time. It is however, important to draw attention once again to a few aspects of this survey. Firstly, it is clear that the unit of operations among the Onitsha and her neighbours clan were very small.

For most of them the clan was the highest level of political organization. Even for the kingdoms of Onitsha and her neighbours, the component parts were not well knitted together, and it is an autonomous group. The family was the known unit of operation and brought members together closely. Secondly, there was a great deal of interaction largely as result of trade, the people of Onitsha were in touch with the people of Obosi, and trade ensured among them. They travelled on foots, by canoes, and displayed their wares especially on their market days but as for the Obosi clan which was on urban centre trade took place there at any time. They also engaged in selling from each other clan slaves during the period of the slave trade. Indeed a map of modern Nigeria showing the various roots of trade in this period the people who now make up Nigeria and Anambra State are not removed from the other as it sometimes thought and publicly asserted. Finally, the development of the three clan were unequal being that they both dwelt in the forest region, they tended to remain within their smaller units and to engaged in much more

limited trading activities, because they mostly use smaller units and to engage in much limited trading activities, because they mostly use foot as a means of transportation but then the Awka people being that they were close to main river made use of canoes. This unequal development continued, where by Onitsha community developed quickly into a major city through the 20th century, and was to be a major factor in the history of the colonial period of Nigeria's history.

Geographical factors seem to dispose the territory of Nigeria to movement of peoples from one ecological zone to another in migrations or in interdependent relationships of trade exchange. This exchanges and contacts seem to have occurred even in pre-historic times from the little archaeological evidence yet brought to light of stone tools, pottery, and the spread of Iron technology, the bronzes and also in the spread of food civilization and of food crops. In addition, oral tradition which on the surface purporting to be about the origin of Nigerian peoples uniformly tell of wide spread mixing of various groups and of migrants over long distance from Onitsha to Aguleri. The Niger River which was close to Onitsha, provided a water way uniting widely separated groups like the Onitsha people and the Aguleri people through exchange of goods, even if the goods reached their destinations late, while the Aguleri people exchanged with the Onitsha people through the use of land routes. Market systems were developed and various sanctions were used for the control for this trade routes and the regulations of inter-commerce. These sanctions were more informal sanctions of religion and morality unlike sanctions that were often enforced for the political and military

authority of a state such as Benin, Oyo, Borno or the Hausa State. The local economic development and contact were reinforced rather than superseded or created by the introduction of European external trade from the Atlantic coast of Nigeria. The trade in slaves brought the Onitsha and Aguleri people together, therefore in the period of 1900, these people were not isolated from each other and from the outside world.

Also, intra-group relations within any given groups times connected and influenced and even some times determine the development of one another. Hence, invariably national peace, unity and development are dictated and directed by the nature of relations at each level of relationship. It is discernable from the above, how crucial and important the subject inter group relations.

The Onitsha people, over the years had developed and sustained economic and political institutions that earned them self-reliance, peace and stability even to the present time. The Nwkelle are fascinating people. The Nwkelle also had developed economic and political institutions that earned them peace and stability even to the present time. They are both peace loving and courageous. They detest any form of oppression, regardless of who the oppressor may be.

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