

**THE CHANGING NATURE OF ORSU AND ORLU INTRA-GROUP
RELATIONS UP TO 2015**

BY

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

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **GODSGIFT CHINOMSO ASIKA** in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, under my supervision.

DR. FRANK IKPONMWOSA
Project Supervisor

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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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I also want to acknowledge my project supervisor, Dr. Frank Ikponmwosa for his support and advice during my stay in University of Benin. He continually and convincingly conveyed a spirit of adventure in regard to intensive research; without his supervision and persistent help, this project would not have been possible..

The completion of this research work would have been impossible without these great personalities. My appreciation goes to all the lecturers in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin including Prof. Eddy O. Erhagbe, Prof. E. A. Ifidon, Prof. O. B. Osadolor, Dr. Odigwe Nwaokocha, Dr. J.C Nwaka, Dr. Toby, Dr. Charles, and my Course adviser Mr. Victor O. Aigubarueghian, Mr. Osariemen, who have guided me through my path in this academic journey, I thank them and may God bless them all.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The study of the place of women in the socio-political and economic life of the society from the early period to the present has aroused a wide range of interests amongst scholars and writers in recent times. Women’s study received a boost after independence especially with the declaration of the United Nations Decade for women, 1976-85. Attention was not only drawn to the need to grant greater freedom and more privileges, to womenfolk throughout the world, but also the need to study the role of women in society, their problems, and the best way to enable them to participate effectively in their own self-actualization as well as their societies and the world at large.¹ It is imperative to note that even till date, Africa is not left out in the marginalization, subjugation and under-representation of women in politics, they have also undermined the roles women have played over time in the economic and socio development of the continent. This is despite the fact that, African women had a prestigious and recognized place in the traditional society which made it possible for the gifted ones among them to rise to positions of political, social and economic eminence.² Among them were: Queen Nefertiti of Egypt, Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Sheba of Ethiopia, Queen Moremi of Ife, Queens Idia, Iden and Emotan of Benin, Omu of Onitsha, Omu of Ossomari among others.³

Therefore, this study attempts to highlight the place of women on a smaller scale, by using the women in Ibeku as a case study of the roles and status of women in relation to the socio-economic development of their society from the pre-colonial time and examining the various changes that have occurred after the advent of colonialism and the factors responsible for the change.⁴

Ibeku is a chiefdom consisting of seven clans nestled in the hilly terrain of Umuahia, in the southeastern part of Nigeria. It is located in the present-day Umuahia North Local Government of Abia State, Nigeria. People of Ibeku speak Igbo, one of the three dominant Nigerian languages. The neighbouring clans near Ibeku are interconnected by history and culture. To the South are the clans of Olokoro, AforIbeji, Amakama, Ubakala. To the East is Oboro. The clans of Umuokpara and Ohuhu are to the West, while Uzuakoli and Abiriba are to the North.⁵ These areas were once known as the Bende region of Eastern Nigeria. The people of Ibeku are a historically hard working people as evidenced by their calendar which contains four working days with rest and festivity only generally accepted at the end of the calendar year known as *Iri Ji* (literally consumption of yam: yam represents farming, hard-work, potency amongst others). *Ndi Ibeku Egwu Asaa* (people of the seven clans of Ibeku) is traditionally a farming people. They are also involved in trading and exchange of goods and services.⁶

The people of Ibeku are custodians of many traditional values in each of the seven clans called Egwu Asaa that make up Ibeku Nation. These seven Clans are Osaa, Amaforo, Ndume, Afaraukwu, Emede, Ishieke, Afaranta. Each has an Eze that is titled

accordingly with a name to reflect that clan. Ibeku clan has a Royal Highness with the title *Ogurube Ibeku*.⁷ The present *Ogurube* is His Royal Highness *Eze* Samuel Iheonu Onuaha, The *Ogurube* IV of Ibeku. His cabinet is made up of all the *Ezes* (seven) from the *Egwu Asaa*. These individual *Egwus* are autonomous in terms of organization in localities headed by their own *Eze*. Ibeku is of Igede history. The next *Eze* is Echefula Ibeku.⁸

It is against this background that this research seeks to understudy the socio-economic History of Ibeku women up to 1900. This study will examine the challenges faced by Abia women in politics and the various measures that had been put in place to improve women's political participation.

Aim and Objectives of the Study:

The general aim of the study is to trace the history of Ibeku women's participation in the socio-economic life of the people in pre-colonial time. While the objectives include to examine;

- i. a brief History of the people of Ibeku Chiefdom
- ii. the Socio-economic institutions of Ibeku Chiefdom
- iii. the women's roles in the economic activities in Ibeku
- iv. the Social roles of women in pre-colonial Ibeku.

Scope of the Study

The study covers women in Ibeku chiefdom and their socio-economic activities up to 1900. The study covers how women in Ibeku promote certain norms, cultural

traditions and economic activities in pre-colonial Umuahia, which brought about development to the general society of Ibeku chiefdom.

Methodology

The historical methodology will be used in this study. Both primary and secondary sources will be carefully analyzed to achieve a detailed analysis.

Primary Source:

Primary sources like oral interviews will be conducted in Ibeku community in Umuahia north of Abia State with members of a certain group called the Umuada, union women leaders and market women Association in Ibeku. The interviews will provide insight into the socio-economic situation of women in pre-colonial Ibeku and also help in obtaining suggestions for improving women's participation in the politics and economy of Abia State.

Secondary Source:

Secondary sources like books, journal articles and unpublished student dissertations will be used to obtain information about the subject matter.

Literature Review

Over the years, there had been increasing research on the economic and socio-cultural contributions of women particularly in Pre-colonial Nigeria. This shows that it is an issue of global concern. In the Nigerian scene, there exists written works about women in traditional economy. However, no author had written a comprehensive study about the socio-economic contributions of Ibeku women in the. However, there are some works by scholars that will aid this study, the first on my review is Nnanna Agomoh's article titled

“How Is Ibeku Organized,”⁹ The author describes Ibeku as a nation that comprises of over seven clans that have unique historical origin. The author identifies how people of Ibeku had well organized socio-political and economic institutions. Nnanna further asserts that:

In the Ibeku traditional sense, a community is a group of villages of kindred neighbourhood within a sub-clan. For example, Emede which is one of the seven sub-clans (Egwu) is made up of two communities of four and five villages each, namely Ihite community with five villages of Agbo, Ubani, Udide, Umueze, and Umuodudu; and Ikeaha community with four villages of Atta, Nkpuru, Umuagu and Umuakanu. The fine distinction between a village and a community in this arrangement is that no matter its size or largeness, no two members of the same village can marry.¹⁰

The author further identifies other socio-political activities and position of Ibeku chiefdom which have development to the people Ibeku. However, this work will be very useful to this study, especially when discussing the tradition of origin, socio-cultural and political activities of Ibeku people. But the author did not discuss women political, social and economic activities in Ibeku, thereby creating a vacuum which this study fills.

The work of Toyin O. Falola *The Role of Nigerian women*,¹¹ is also relevant to this study. The article states; “in the pre-colonial period, women played a major role in social and economic activities. Division of labour was along gender lines, and women controlled such occupations as food processing, mat weaving, pottery making, and cooking. Moreover, land was communally owned, and women had access to it through

their husbands or parents.”¹² Hence, this article is useful to this study as it relates to the economic roles and status of women in Nigeria.

Also, Gladys I. Udechukwu in her article, “Position of Women in Igbo Traditional Religion,”¹³ is relevant to this study. The author posits the discovering of the Igbo society; the author further explain how women played and still play some roles in the religious activities of their communities and villages and that it was very certain in Igbo land that women both participated in the religious activities of their society and made their own contributions to the spiritual welfare of their families and society at large.¹⁴ This work is relevant to this study as it discusses the important place of women in Igbo tradition.

More so Opata C. Christain et al, in their article, work “Women and Evolution of Cultural Practices among the Igbo of Nigeria”¹⁵ discusses that studies on Igbo women have ignored the part played by either fear of women or respect for them in the evolution of festivals and some customary practices, Embedded in this Neglect is the non-recognition of their contribution to the development of their societies.¹⁶ the article seeks to ensure that the histories of festivals and customs are preserved and that the efforts of Igbo heroines are not buried with them.

Furthermore, S.E Ododo in his work *Theatrical Aesthetics and Functional Values of Eku echi Masquerade Ensemble of the Ebira People in Nigeria*¹⁷ emphasizes on how the fear of women’s power and the need to counter balance the same by men has evolved into a famous festival among none igbos. For instance, among the Eriba of Kogi State,

there are records that *Ekú echi* Festival (*Ekú*, which represents the ancestors, is believed to ‘descend’ *Chi*) from the world beyond during *Ekú echi* festival. *Ekú* and *Chi* thus respectfully form the prefix and suffix in *Ekú e Chi* which can be translated literally to mean, “The ancestors are descending”. Ododo maintains that *Ekú echi* originated from them- Eika. The monarch and custodian of the people’s culture and oral history state that the real origin of the festival is a traditional secret which originated from necessity.¹⁸ This paper states that it was due to the cruel witchcraft of the women who ruled sovereign and their dealings with men that made them create a counter cult against the women, this shows that women were instrumental in the evolution of the cultures.

The work of Gloria Chuku, *Igbo Women and Political Participation in Nigeria, 1800-2005*,¹⁹ is of vital importance to this study. The author examines the participation of Igbo women directly and indirectly, in the affairs of the Igbo government. He went further to say that both men and women wielded power to some certain degree in pre-colonial Igbo society and here, social roles and responsibilities were the channel to which power was diffused.²⁰ The author equally put forward a number of social factors including age, experience, kinship relations and group solidarity as determinant of authority in Igbo indigenous system of government. Thus, this article is important to this study.

In addition, E. O. Ugwulero in his article, “Women and Customs and Tradition in Igbo land”,²¹ is important to this study. The study enunciates and analyses the customs of Igbo land which is inhibitive to women. These customs compel women to fall into certain

societal stereotypes. Thus, it is pertinent that these customs should be discussed as it relates to the general area of my research focus.²²

Furthermore, K. Okonjo, *The Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Mid-Western Nigeria*²³ is resourceful to this study. In this work she discusses the traditional Igbo political institutions. The work also describes in detail the nature of the “dual-sex” system, and compares and contrasts the Igbo system with the “single-sex” system in the Western countries, where the men alone make decisions. She argues for the creation of a modern version of the traditional Igbo “dual-sex” political system, and also notes that the imposition of colonial rule diminished women’s active participation in politics.²⁴

Moreover, V. O. Ibewuiké in her book, *African Women and Religious Change: A Study of the Western Igbo of Nigeria with a special focus on Asaba Town*,²⁵ contributed extensively to this study. The book examined the political, social and economic functions of Asaba women. She equally analyzed the roles of the traditional female organizations in Igbo land, which are: the Out-Omu, Out Umuada and Otu Inyemedi.²⁶ Though, the book was limited to the Asaba area, however, its contribution to Igbo scholarship is of utmost importance.

In addition, the work of I. S. Eyiuche, *Active Participation of Nigerian Women in the Politics and Governance: A Reality or Mirage?*²⁷ is extremely important to this study as it identified and discussed the international and regional instruments that recognize and encourage the right of women to participate in politics and the public sphere.²⁸ It also

looked at the part played by the Nigerian legislation to encourage the participation of women in politics and governance. .

Also, D. Azul et al in their article, “Gender Discrimination and National Politics: The Nigerian Case”²⁹ notes that women’s participation in Nigerian politics is crucial to the development of Nigeria and since women constitute a sizeable proportion of the population, neglecting them means losing their valuable contribution. The author goes forward to outline the socio-economic, political and cultural structures that aid discrimination against women in politics.³⁰The work also offered strategies for promoting effective gender equality. Thus, this article is of importance to this study.

The work of E. Irem and I. Nnenna, *Trends in Igbo Women Participation in Politics Since 1960*³¹ is also a source of information for this study, as it examines the level of Igbo women’s participation both at state and national levels from 1960. The author attested that from 1960 there had been a steady increase in the number of Igbo women in politics. It equally identified the factors that have contributed to the increased involvement of Igbo women in politics from 1960. More so, the authors noted the inhibitions or challenges to women’s participation in politics and made some recommendations to this effect.³² Thus, the work is essential to this study.

Furthermore, another source of information for this work is the article of A. Modupe titled, “Women and Political Marginalization in Nigeria”.³³ examined the various cultural practices in the country which promote the marginalization of women in politics. The study revealed that Nigeria is a male-dominated country and this reflects so

much in the political culture practiced in the country. It equally identified the political factors such as political thuggery and violence, vote buying, electoral malpractices among others that discourage women from participating in politics.³⁴ hence, this article is important for this study.

O. M. Adefi and A. J. Aladi in their work, *Rights of Women and Political Office in Nigeria*,³⁵ observed that there are still laws in the 3rd millennium which invariably hinder women from attaining political positions. These laws include the Igbo customary law of inheritance which is based on the principles of primogeniture among others. The authors posit that these cultural, institutional and legal constraints limit the potencies of the Nigerian women in politics. The paper also recommended the reservation of certain elective post and affirmative action for the enhancement of the political aspirations of Nigerian women.³⁶ Thus, this work is useful in this study, especially for chapter three. This view and thought of the literatures will be able to cover some areas of this study; however, proper study needs to be tackle in this study. This study will fill the existing vacuum.

CHAPTERS OUTLINE

This research is divided into five chapters, each of which gives an in-depth explanation focused on explaining the roles of women social and economic roles in pre-colonial Ibeku, in Umuahia.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This Chapter examines the background of the research work which has details of introduction, aim and objectives of the study, scope of the study, methodology, literature review, chapterisation and the end note. It introduces also, the research problem giving a clear historical background of the topic.

CHAPTER TWO: ORIGIN AND PEOPLE OF IBEKU

This chapter discusses the history of the Ibeku people by examining their geography, origin and political structures.

CHAPTER THREE: SOCIAL ROLE OF IBEKU WOMEN

In this chapter, there will be a critical evaluation of the social roles of women in pre-colonial Ibeku.

CHAPTER FOUR: ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN IN PRE-COLONIAL IBEKU.

This Chapter holistically examines women's economic activities in pre-colonial Ibeku.

CHAPTER FIVE: AN ASSESSMENT OF IBEKU WOMEN IN PRE-COLONIAL TIMES

This chapter concludes the entire research.

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CHAPTER TWO

ORIGIN AND PEOPLE OF IBEKU COMMUNITY

This chapter examines the tradition and origin of the people of the Ibeku kingdom, their geographical location and political formation before the colonial era. Ibeku is a chiefdom consisting of seven clans nestled in the hilly terrain of Umuahia, in southeastern part of Nigeria.

Geography of Ibeku Community

It is located in the present-day Umuahia North local government of Abia-State; Nigeria. The people of Ibeku speak Igbo, one of the three dominant Nigerian languages. The neighboring clans near Ibeku are interconnected by history and culture. To the South are the clans of Olokoro, Afor Ibeji, Amakama, Ubakala. To the East Oboro. The clans of Umuokpara and Ohuhu are to the West, while Uzuakoli and Abiriba are to the North. These areas were once known as the Bende region of Eastern Nigeria.¹ from the above one can say Ibeku is a nation of seven sub-clans *EgwuAsaa*. These seven sub-clans are each made up of communities which themselves are composed of a cluster of villages having the same culture, custom, Igbo language, tradition and heritage.²

Traditions of Origin

Generally, the lack and in places paucity of data has tended to encourage unrestrained speculation which in fact largely accounts for some insupportable

hypotheses being put forward by many early or pioneer archeologists, concerning the nature of cultural change in Nigeria. One of such hypotheses was that the peopling of the forest region (southern Nigeria and indeed, all of Guinea zone of West Africa) was a much later development than that of the northern open savanna area. Recent archeological research has shown that people were already living in south-western Nigeria (specifically Iwo-Eleru) as early as 9000 BC and perhaps earlier at Ugwuelle-Uturu in south-eastern Nigeria.³ According to tradition, Ibeku the community is the name of a man, a warrior called Ibeku, he is the son of Ogurube hence the title of the ruler of Ibeku is called *Ogurube Ibeku*.⁴

The people of Ibeku, against popular belief of all Igbo people being an off-shoot of Nri-Orlu-Awka civilizations, claim to be the aboriginal settlers of their community. It is a tradition that in the beginning was the *Egwu*, and the *Egwu* was with Ibeku, and that *Egwu* was Ibeku. The *Egwu* was seen and described as the primitive mode of life in Ibeku. Being primordial, it dates back to the beginning of life in Ibeku. The *Egwu* in Ibeku symbolizes unity: unity in diversity. In the words of an Elder, the *Egwu* is synonymous with the ancestors (*Ndi-Ichie*), it represents autonomy, and it is the beginning and end of an autonomous village group: *Isi-Mba*. The supreme nature of the *Egwu* is explained by elders using this proverb: *Ahu ghi de ji nalo kon ku abuo ma Okwe ghi iye, eww pu ta ya nam bara ochu. (Meaning; "if in trying to roast yam on two pieces of firewood it does not roast well, it is brought out to the wild fire")*.⁵

Ibeku, also known as *Ibeku Ugwu Ogurube*, (i.e, Ibeku the Great, son of Ogurube) married three wives who gave birth to seven sons who are the seven sub-clans *Egwu Asaa*, and have experienced regional outgrowth i.e. given birth to children also. These sons of Ibeku are; Afarata, Afarukwu, Amaoforo, Emede, Isieke, Ndume and Ossah. The children of these *Egwu Asaa* are forty six, Afarata's children includes; Amuzu Ukwu, Amuezeagwu, Mbom, Uba, Nkata, Amaeke, Isiadu, while the children of Afarukwu are; Isiama, Okwulaga, Ohokobena Umuokeyi. Amaoforo gave birth to five children and they are; Ajata-Okwuru, Iyienyi, Avonkwu, Amuzuora and Erote. Emede the brother of Amaoforo had Nkpuru, Ata, Umuakanu, Umuagu, Umueze, Agbo, Umuodudu, Odide and Ubani. Isieke the fifth *EgwuAsaa* had Umuajiji, Okwuta, Ihie, Ajata, Ukome, Okwoiyi while Ndume gave birth to Umuafai, Umuezeala, Ohokobe, Umuohu, Ahieke, Ihie, Umuana, Lodu, Umuhute, Umuaroko and Umuohu-Azueke. Finally, Osaah had six children namely; Uzi, Eziam, Mgbaja, Uhabiri, Umuchima and Amanso. Historians have tried to ascertain the order of seniority of the founders of the seven mini-clans. C.J Pleass, a British district official who tried to but failed to ascertain the seniority of the constituent parts of Ibeku has this to say:

Attempts to ascertain the seniority of these (Ibeku) villages had to be abandoned owing to the violent disputes which ensued when this subject was mentioned.... So violent was the dispute that when all the villages of the clan except those founded by Isieke wished to meet at Nwo-une, the people of Isieke said that if the clan would not meet at Isieke, they would not meet the remainder of the clan.⁶

It was told as it were a fable that God blessed Ogurube, the father of Ibeku, and promised him fruitfulness, affluence and influence in the land given to him. We are today witnessing the reality of what was once a fable. Ibeku Ukwu Ogurube that is Ibeku the Great, son of Ogurube is the landlord of the territory known as Umuahia Ibeku, the capital of Abia State of Nigeria, the ancestor of Major-General J.T.U Aguiyi-Ironsi quondam Nigerian Head of State and the only Supreme Commander that ever was of Nigerian Armed Forces. From time immemorial the name *Ogurube* is held in reverence and personified in the Traditional Ruler of the clan. Today, by the grace of God the mantle of this reverence is worn by His Royal Highness, Eze Samuel Iheonye Onuoha, and the Ogurube IV of Ibeku. He is the keeper of the custom and tradition of the people and the Ofo holder, the traditional mace.⁷

Political Organization

Generally, the Igbo pre-colonial society operated a quasi-democratic political organization, and the people of Ibeku were not excluded from this system. Ibeku largest political unit is the village-group also called *Egwu*. There are several secret societies in Ibeku which act as enforcement agencies for government policies like the *Ekpe*, *Akang* and *Okonko*. Also, the government of the people is shared by kinship. Policies and decisions reached by the village council and this system of governance is referred to as the ‘village republic’.

In this society, the basic socio-political unit is the descent group *Umunna* Here, the patrician is emphasized.⁸ this means that the father, in a typical Ibeku household is the

head of the family and is automatically a member of the *umunna*. Within the patrician, there is the rule of male precedence and seniority is recognized by order of birth. Under this system gerontocracy or leadership by elders is applied. In the *umunna* group, the most senior man is often regarded as the head and father of the family. Members of the extended family *umunna* are interdependent as the notion of atomized individual is foreign to traditional Ibeku.⁹

Within the sub-lineage or the extended family, we see what can be described as real government. The most senior man *opara-anna* of the extended family is the mouthpiece of the unit. Quite often he pilots the affairs of the unit and the symbols of the group (the *Ofo* of the family). This *Ofo* is the symbol of authority, right conduct, justice, and the link between the dead and the living. For these duties the *Opara* performs, he is accorded certain privileges.

Beyond this sub lineage, the entire village is regarded as a large family of which the different sub-groups *Egwus* are just segments. Each *Egwu* is autonomous, owning its land and choosing its leaders, transacting its affairs. In this society, the singling out of individuals to take the lead in ceremonies conduces to the emergence of leaders within the *Egwu*. During this time, there was no political leadership as seen today.

Another form of leadership in Ibeku land is seen via religious means; there were prominent cult leaders *Ndi Eze-Mmo*. The conduct of village affairs rested principally on the small village leaders and the religious leaders whose authority derived from their ritual office, which is in turn backed up by mythological sanctions. These myths, even

though they express some fundamental assumptions, about the ordering of political relationships, tend to impose a measure of continuity on existing patterns of resource allocation. There are several myths regarding the existence of the village and also, the authority of leaders, or later, the chiefs. The leader of the village is the religious leader who theoretically is the owner of the village land. Under the socio-political structure, the successor to the leadership is ritually selected. Due to the lineage based groupings, it is quite obvious that to the Ibeku people, the political community is not seen as just an association of brothers who had agreed to cooperate in the maintenance of order in the society, but it is primarily, a union comprising of the living blood relatives, the dead relatives and the gods of the community.

Because the gods are not left out in this political community, government in Ibeku at this time is of religious nature. As such, all major and serious decisions, be they judicial or legislative are reinforced by the pouring of libation and invoking the ancestors and *Ala* (the earth goddess) and all other gods (deities) like *Ahian kwota*, *Abiam Nkata*, *Apua gwu*, etc which are believed to be interested in the good or bad of the lineage or *Egwu* in particular. In this way, the cult leaders *Ndi-Eze-Mmo* are very significant in the leadership at this time.

An oral interview with Mrs Chinyere Oluoha revealed that there was a particular year one young lad from the amuzukwu sub-lineage, impregnated a girl from his kindred which was against the customs of the land. The penalty meted for this crime by the village *Eze-Mmo* was as prescribed by the gods which included the abortion of the child

and cleansing of the land as this crime was regarded as an abomination *Aro* which would have resulted to calamities in the village.¹⁰ this ability to interfere in the life of the Ibeku people and enact judgments based on the leadings of the gods earned the *Eze-Mmo* the title of “The Eyes of the gods”. It is necessary to state that due to the incessant interference of the *Eze-Mmo* in the running of the community, the executive powers of the real executive leaders were underdeveloped.

Over time, things changed and political leadership developed with what can be called political village leaders. Thus, added to the already existing direct democracy (as practiced at the *Umunna* level), is the representative democracy where the new political leader presided. However, these village heads did not on their own make laws. They only bring their authority to bear, and assert the traditional “Ibeku path” which leads to goodness and order. So characteristic of the Ibeku political structure at this time is that each *Egwu* head or leader of mini clan has his jurisdiction restricted to his *Egwu*. These *Egwu* head or leader of mini clan has his jurisdiction restricted to his *Egwu*. These *Egwu* heads are more of advisers or guides than executives. They are better described as the presidents of the *Ama-ala* (the council of elders). They lacked any real power to enforce their will, so far the cohesive power rested not on the chiefs but on the (*Ekpe, Okonko and the Akang*), age groups, or some other disciplinary group like the masquarades, which are representatives of ancestral spirits and women groups (*Umu-ada*). The *Okonko*, wielded a tremendous amount of power. They are responsible for the preservation of order within the village. The *Okonko* is the village ‘police’, they alongside the age grade

of each village help in enforcing the decisions reached by the *Ama-ala* (village council). In enforcing the decisions of the *Ama-ala*, the age grade organizes the working parties for cleaning the springs, the village square (*Mbara-ama*) and paths, they also are given power to collect fines or confiscate defaulters property.

Though they performed these special roles, the age group and *Okonko* could not fill the gap of what can really be called executive functions. But this gap did not constitute many problems since the Ibeku clan until its contact with Europeans between 1902 and 1903 functioned well. Power can be said to be diffused, and the government of the people both at the sub lineage level, lineage level and the village level was based on participatory democracy.¹¹

The ancient political tradition of the Ibeku people is divided into two parts which are Direct Democracy and Representative Democracy. These two parts are further subdivided into two parts and will be explained below.

Direct democracy is administered through the Assembly of the *Umunna* which is made up of adult males and occasionally women; it is headed by the *Opara* (eldest male), and the Lineage Assembly; which consists of all adult males and occasionally women.

While Representative Democracy occurs through the *Egwu* (mini-clan) Assembly; made up of lineage heads, sometimes elders and all adult male and the Clan Council (*Ama-ala*) made up of village heads, elder and other distinguished leaders.

This participatory democracy was astonishing for the early western visitors to Igbo land. Like one of these Europeans missionaries Henry Johnson puts it, he said he was in a

free land among free people.¹² in this level of people's parliament, especially at the level of direct democracy as mentioned above, there is in attendance all adult males and married women (when need be). Ideas or issues are raised and fully discussed with everybody having the right to be heard. After this open debate, the elders will withdraw from the group to consult (*Igba isusu*). After this, the discussion may turnout decisions which become policies for the whole village. The policy here involved communal action, which is centered on deciding upon a collective goal and means of achieving it. Once the question of group policy is settled, the members of the community coordinate their action to implement the policy.¹³

With political development and change, came the existence of one central *Eze* (Ogurube), and later, other *Ezes*. The *Eze* is regarded as the custodian and interpreter of the customs and traditions of the people and not a legislator nor chief executive, he lacked any real power to enforce his will, and he presides over the clan council or what is in recent times known as the Ibeku council of Elders. Like his colleague at the *Egwu* level, he is best described as the president of the *Ama ala* (council of Elders). He lacked monarchical powers and is more like the president of a bureaucratic society.

Administration of Justice

Jurisdiction or legal authority exists both in the minimal extended family, the maximal expended family (*Umunna*) and entire lineage, for example, *Umuaforole in Nkata Ibeku*. Beyond these levels, jurisdiction obtains at the *Egwu* level, for example, *Afarata Amala* or *Okonko*.

At every level, we have men who act as judges, witnesses and principals. Before a trial commences, a prayer must be said to the ancestors by the eldest member of the group after pouring libation. During this prayer, the ancestors as members of the 'spiritual common wealth' are called up to join in this trial, to make sure that the proceedings are conducted in a spirit of equity and truth, and without deviation from traditional practice. To ensure this truth, every witness is called to swear on his *Ofo*. The swearing to '*Ala*' (the earth goddess) of the group concerned reinforces the efficacy of the *ofo*.¹⁴ The *Ala* is regarded and feared as a disciplinary force of great authority which acts hand in hand with the ancestors.

In the Ibeku society, judges, from the *Umunna* group and other wider lineage or at the *Egwu* level attach much importance to equity than law in its strict sense. For those judges hearing a case, speed of procedure is not as important as the orderly presentation of information. The hearing of cases takes a long time often. Therefore, the judges in a trial are not only interested in giving equitable decisions and arriving at a settlement; they are also concerned with putting an end to disputes and reconciling the parties concerned so that they can live in peace, in the future. Thus, these courts were more of courts of arbitration than the court of law.

Therefore trials are often an expression of public opinion, and allowing for grievances to be aired and a litigant's objective being, frequently vindicating him publicly than receive from his opponent fines for damages. This process is locally called *Isa-aka Ikpe* which means the vote of thanks after a trial has been completed. The community nature

of the group members is seen as the members try to (by any means possible) reconcile the parties involved to avoid disturbing the harmony in the community.

According to Okechukwu, he stated that “unlike in recent times where the justice system has failed to rule in the favor of the innocent in most cases, in times past, justice was usually swift and accurate. Also this system made crime rate in Ibeku to be on the low side as everyone was well aware of the consequences of several crimes if committed and above all, nobody wanted to be separated from their kindred (exiled) as a result of a serious offense committed.¹⁵

The spirit of brotherhood is seen as every adult male leaves his day’s economic activities to attend a court to settle different disputes amongst themselves. It could be between two brothers, kins or families. Characteristics of such traditional court sessions are the presence and value of humor, sumptuous eating and drinking which the judges are treated to. In modern Ibeku though, the court is no longer a court of arbitration but a court of law where logic and money takes precedence over honesty, truth and equity.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER THREE

SOCIAL ROLES OF IBEKU WOMEN

For a society to be stable, it must have certain values, which the majority of its members affirm. In the reconstruction of African History, the African woman has been pushed to the background as if she was not a part of the evolution and transformation of the socio-cultural and economic culture in African societies. Though in Nigeria, the position and roles of women in pre-colonial times differed in the vast number of ethnic groups. A woman's position varied according to the (1) kinship structure of the group and (2) the role of women within the economic structure of the society.¹ The study and place of women in the socio-culture life of Nigeria from the early period to the present has been understudied.

It is in this regard that this chapter attempts to delve into the socio-cultural role of women in the pre-colonial Ibeku. It must be noted first that in a typical Ibeku setting, a man is allowed to marry more than one wife and each wife lives in her *Mpku*. It must also be pointed out that every wife is given a separate house for her and her children.² The general structure of Ibeku (socio-cultural activities) will be discussed and the exceptional

activities women who were involved will also be discussed in order to bring forth the relevance of women in Ibeku right from the pre-colonial days.

Social Institutions in Ibeku

The social institutions of Ibeku comprises of the totality of the people's way of life i.e. their birth, naming, burial, eating, and dressing, marriage, religion, Justice system, moral values and etiquette, festival, dance, musical instruments and many more, are all part of the social structure. The homogeneity and characteristics of the Ibeku people has been described by Ugwueje E.A in his book, and according to him, "the key to a people's character or personality can be found in their music, dances, folklore and dressing".³ The culture of the Ibeku people is an integral part of the Umuahia society especially with regards to the question of the Umuahia historical consciousness. The Ibeku people have a rich heritage; Ibeku culture is significant because besides revealing much about the kind of people they are, they also say much of the people's past and in some cases mark a deliberate attempt to preserve the past in human history.⁴ This does not remove the fact that there are variations in cultural practices as we move from kingdom to kingdom in Ibeku land.

In pre-colonial Ibeku community, there were different social structures and activities practiced among the people. These structures led to the evolution of social statues both for male and female which include; *Opara and Ada, Umunne and Umunna* under these associations; *Okonko, Nze, Dibia, Eze Ji and Agu*. The status rank of the Ibeku people is called *Diala and Ohu*. While their social activities include: Child birth, burial-rites,

marriage, method of inheritance, religion, festivals, language, music, folktales and folklores. The people of Ibeku are custodians of many traditional values in each of the seven clans called the *Egwu Asaa*⁵. In this society, the internalized social control is in two folds: which is simply defined as following ‘the Ibeku Path’. The path that is equated with the Ibeku way of life characterized by being good, honest and charitable. Secondly, the peculiar sensitivity of public opinion allied to the fear of *Ala and Erim na ofo*. This simply means that the sanction for honest conduct is found in the power of public opinion.

The people of Ibeku speak Igbo, one of the three dominant languages spoken in Nigeria.⁶ Though Igbo is spoken all over the land but there are slight variations in the different clans of division but such local linguistic differences do not create language barrier because they are mostly lexical and sometimes tonal which obviously is not enough to impair mutual understanding. The beliefs and customs of Ibeku go hand in hand and quite often they are difficult to separate, they cover nearly all areas of life. Beliefs in a general sense deals with religious ideas, while customs are concerned with what people generally approve or disapprove of and do.

Women Social Activities in Ibeku

In traditional Ibeku society the social role and status of women can be said to have been domestic for example; child bearing, gathering wood, fetching water, supporting their husbands on their farm land, giving informal education to their daughters. Notwithstanding, women were involved in various social activities like during ceremonies and festivals. Women played vital but subordinate roles under various

associations. For example in funeral ceremonies, during the wake keep *Igba Nzuzu* the women age group are always present to perform various roles depending on the sex of the deceased. At the main burial, they performed several roles; they were the cooks for the occasion; they sang and displayed various traditional dances, they console the widow and perform some rituals including shaving her head and bathing her. According to Francis Adaeze, it was common to see women in some villages in Ossai go through some inhumane rituals to prove their innocence regarding the death of their spouse while in other villages in Afarata like Mbom, these practices were not carried out.⁷ Women had various dance groups *Ekwe* that performed during ceremonies, such as; *Ogemba, Atilogu, Ugwudia, Igba Mkpuchi, and Igba Ogo*. There was also the women's association called the *Otu Omu* which was a secret organization whose function was to perform some rites during the burial. It was known that this association was accompanied with terrible spiritual forces that could not be phantom. This is not just a social activity that pertains to just the Ibeku people, it is seen in other Igbo nations and communities. Much demand is made of the wife in terms of mourning to show identification or concern for the mass departure from earth.⁸

Another social activity women participated actively in was during naming ceremonies *Igu aha*. Prior to that, a woman stays in confinement for 7 market weeks after delivering a child. She and her child are not permitted by custom to come out of the house until the day of the *Igu aha*. She stays all day besides the fire place (in her bedroom) to keep herself warm and to prevent any form of sickness after birth. She does

not associate with anyone; she neither cooks nor serves food to her husband because she is believed to be unclean.⁹ Instead her mother or sister is sent for to do the house chores and this period is called the *Omuguwo*. There were different hairstyles *Iche Ntutu* for the pre and post-delivery celebration, this hairstyle was done in *Ncha* yellow native soap and was ceremoniously washed after three months of delivery.

In Ibeku and Igbo land generally, marriage is seen ordinarily, as a set of cultural patterns that sanctions parenthood and provides a stable background for the care and rearing of children. Marriage and family in Ibeku is a group affair. Despite modernization, marriage for the Ibeku man and woman is done within the context of the kin-group or some publicly approved bodies like the Church or Court. Also in Ibeku, sex is forbidden between those who are not yet married. Therefore, in a patrilineal society like Ibeku, a child cannot belong to its father's lineage unless it's parents have been married in the appropriate way. The emphasis placed on marriage in the traditional society was reflected in the recognized women associations. At the village level, only the married women had a formal association called *Umudi*. The other women associations, if they could be so called apart from the *Umuada*, met only when there was vital ceremony to be performed. All over Ibeku, there were associations of married women and they held their meetings periodically. Once a woman has married into a village, she became a member of the association of *Umudi*, after performing the *Igba ikwu* initiation ceremony. The *Igba ikwu* initiation ceremony was meant to formally admit a *Nwunye* (bride) into the association and village at large. Thus the Ibekuman's believe that *ime-ogo bu igba ikwu*. That is, that

once in this marriage alliance, every person involved is seen as related and addressed with the prefix “ogo”.¹⁰ She acquired her *Ulo Okuko* (cooking space), during the ceremony, the bride was properly tutored or more appropriately reminded for it was expected that her mother would have given her enough education on the proper conduct of married life and particularly on those things that were regarded as adulterous. Her obligation as an *Umuada* was particularly stressed at the end of the day she would have obtained a code of behavior to guide her marriage life. The association of married women played many vital roles in the pre-colonial period. One of such roles was reporting or investigating and punishing cases of adultery.¹¹

Since Ibeku society was particularly concerned with fertility, adultery was considered to be a serious crime. Any woman who committed adultery was said to have literally entered “the trouble of the women”. It was the duty of *Umuada* to punish the adulteress and after she confesses to the adultery to perform cleansing rites to prevent the consequences of adultery. The adulteress hair is shaved off, and she will be stripped off her clothes with a heavy load placed on her head and is made to dance round the village, the stinging nettle leaves would also be wrapped round her waist.¹² When the women were exhausted from humiliating and lashing the adulteress, they would take her to the house of the leader where she was made to swear by the pestle which by then would have been gathered at the shrine. She would swear not to have extra-marital affair again. Since the association was only expected to handle the cases of women, the adulteress suffered greater physical atonement than the male offender. The adulterer paid for a goat to be

slaughtered at the family's ancestral shrine *Ihe Ala* and the *Umuada* shared the flesh. In addition, certain fines were paid to the aggrieved husband for purification of the woman before she and her husband could live as a married couple again. On the ground of adultery a marriage in Ibeku can be dissolved. It is only when a woman is guilty of adultery or when a spouse dies that divorce is permitted in Ibeku. Only the woman is penalized for adultery because traditionally, the man is allowed to marry more than one wife and adultery by a man is not an offence to a man but against the husband of the woman with whom the adultery is committed. This means that if the woman is not married then the man is not guilty of adultery while adultery by a married woman is an offence against her husband.

Religion: Religion is a very important aspect in every society because it helps to regulate behavior by teaching specific rules, laws and morals to guide the people. The Igbo culture is tied up with ancestral worship. The Igbo people are polytheists, believing in the god of man and god of woman *Chi na Eke* of the things in their environments, but they also believe in a Supreme Being called *Chineke* (God). The traditional Ibeku people like their counterparts in other parts of Africa, are very religious. Examples of their deities are; *Ala* (the earth goddess), *Ofo Na Ogu* (the god of nemesis), this god is one that carries out vengeance on behalf of victims who have been maltreated by an oppressor. The religions of many Nigerian societies recognized the social importance of women by emphasizing the place of female gods of fertility and social peace, but women were also associated with witchcraft which appeared to symbolize the potential social danger of women

exercising power uncontrolled by men.¹³ Also there are deified divinities in Ibeku, some of the deities were queens and princesses, the Ibeku people are known for their hero worshipping, deities like: *Erim na ofo, Ikenga, Njoku, Ala, and Mmanwu*, they are seen by the Ibeku people as intermediaries between God and man. Therefore, ancestral worship as a part of their belief and religion played a great part in the molding of the Ibeku custom, moral code and the general law of ordered life.¹⁴

Female Goddesses in Ibeku Land

The Ibeku people were polytheists, believing in the gods and goddesses of the things in their environments, for example, god of earth, god of iron, god of medicine, god of fruition, god of trees, goddess of health, goddess of the lake and fertility. Therefore, ancestral worship as a part of their belief and religion played a great part and there were some goddesses in Ibeku with outstanding histories; some were queens and some princesses before their death and deification. Such goddesses like; *Ala* or *Ani* the earth goddess and *Aha Njoku* the goddess of yams and fertility, *Oha Omomota* the goddess of pregnancy, *Ihu Ala*.¹⁵

In most of Ibeku history the present old men can remember of their past is due to the oral transmission of knowledge and belief from one generation to another during the customary yearly worship of the ancestors. At the worship, the chief worshipper recites the names of their ancestors. This combined with other aspects of Ibeku customary practices constitute the fabrics of Ibeku society which not only serves the significant function of codifying and transmitting societal norms and values but also acts as an

invaluable source material for the historian. It therefore, follows that Ibeku cultural practices are of dual historical significance, first as a medium instituted by the people to keep their past alive and secondly, as artifacts which contain those salient features invaluable to the reconstruction of the Ibeku past.¹⁶

Marriage Institution

Another institution to be considered under the pre-colonial social system in Ibeku is the practice of marriage. Generally, in the traditional African society, marriage was polygamous in nature and those who have more than one wife were classified as wealthy people in the society and this is applicable in Ibeku. Marriage is a communal affair and is an institution that exists among other institutions in Ibeku. Being an institution, there exists institutionalized ways of contracting it. These institutionalized ways will not be applied without the; enquiry and selection of marriage partner, locally known as *Ajuju*. This is done by carrying out some investigations on the girl's historical background and lineage. (In Ibeku, marriage is communal because it involves marrying not just the man or woman but also their families.) The thorough research is done in those days to enquire about the girl's genealogy, family social status (whether they were *Dialas* or *Ohu*), and whether her family was associated with any socially unacceptable sicknesses like epilepsy, leprosy, or mental illness and finally to trace the bride's genealogy to the nearest maximal extended family *ikwu* to ensure that an abomination is not committed by the intending couple, that is, marrying someone from the same blood line. After all enquiries have been carried out and all categories have been met both by the girl and boy,

they proceed to the next stage which will be a marriage negotiation carried out in three stages; the man visits the girl's family with few of his relative (this is locally called *Ibummayi ajuju Nna-nwa*) and carries some local items including two gallons of palm wine and a bottle of schnapps. This process is repeated twice then, the father of the girl is satisfied and begins the formal payment of dowry which was not a fixed amount and did not indicate that the girl was purchased like an item, but rather it showed the vested interest of the man. Before, the woman was seen to belong to her father before marriage, but when it is time for her to get married in Ibeku tradition she becomes the property of her husband.¹⁷

The aim of marriage is known traditionally for procreation and provision of financial security to the woman. The husband is expected to look over the entire family and support the wife throughout her life. Marriage is seen as a compulsory phase for a woman in Ibeku because a woman being single at a ripe age is frowned at; being married uplifted the status of women in pre-colonial societies for example in Ibeku, the woman is formally initiated into the *umudi* and is given safety and protection under this status. In the community, amongst the people of Ibeku, marriage was contracted in accordance with the native law and customs, there were initially six ways by which a man could get married to a woman in pre-colonial Ibeku; Betrothal *Ihu Aka* Dowry *onwu*, Pawning, seizure and Inheritance *Aku L' Ugba* but only three of these systems survived; Betrothal, Dowry and Inheritance.¹⁸

Betrothal (Ihu Aka): This method of marriage was the commonest, the supposedly cheapest in the nature courts of today. Immediately a man noticed a pregnant woman, he “begs” for the hand of a girl from this stage of conception to the age of five after the pregnant woman puts to bed a baby girl, the man renewed his request with minor presents such as logs of wood, yams et cetera. At this time the baby’s mother and father are usually were quite non-committal. As soon as the child grows up, he will carry a calabash of palm wine, which was passed through a middleman usually the girl’s uncle, cousin or traditional godfather. This person is traditionally called *Onye-mbawu* which means “go between”.

Mr Francis in an interview mentioned that the *Onye-mbawu* must be a discreet and trusted fellow. Not a loud mouth of the village gossip as he carries out some secret enquiries in the *Ogo* family.¹⁹ On the day, much speaking in parables and idioms are said by the go between who informed the father the object of their mission. In the type of marriage that existed in pre-colonial Ibeku, involved no actual monetary bride price demanded, but the man usually comes around to help with some odd jobs at the bride’s to be compound. Once a year during the community festival, special presents were made to the father and mother and dress for the girl. When she is up to fifteen years old, the husband now starts a gentle agitation for his wife to be sent to him. On the long run, this method of marriage was more expensive but it commended itself to everybody because of easier payments spread over her early age to fifteen years and finally, such a wife was more lovable, more trust worthy and more manageable than any other type.²⁰

Dowry (Onwu): The dowry system is the kind of marriage that entails paying of a bride price, it was rare but was a more lucrative system for the father and it was only the wealthy family that could leave their daughters to grow before marrying them out. The patient father asked and got a heavy sum of money for his grown up daughter. Although, this system that was common in pre-colonial Ibeku gave the father an avenue for money; though it had its draw back. The girl, despite her sex is allowed to express her likes and dislikes. She could refuse a man despite her bag of cowries because of one reason or the other. Probably his ugliness, old age or habitual drunkenness et cetera. However, the girl was forced and carried to the husband's house and for the next three months, the husband and his relatives had to stand guard over their unhappy bride, lest she bolted away.²¹

Inheritance: This was the last kind of marriage that was in practice in pre-colonial Ibeku known as marriage by inheritance. This marriage was by chance and was relished only by the poor, particularly when the woman to be inherited was young. When the husband dies, if she was not an Igwe's daughter, she become inheritable after due burial of the husband by the first son. In a situation when the widow was the only wife of the late husband and the heir's mother, then an uncle or the nearest patriarch inherits her. A heir might find himself the owner of several wives when his father dies. The heir could pick the young and beautiful ones and give the others to his younger brothers and ask those he does not want if they wish to stay or leave and remarry to refund their dowries. Rarely, some of the women who were asked to go and refund dowry, were unwilling to leave their children, in that case if there was no one to inherit them, the chief Priest (Eze Mmuo)

gave them an open license after performing certain rituals at the ancestral shrine. Some women were free to do whatever they liked as long as they did not bring open dishonor to their children's family.²²

Naming Ceremony: In every society the birth of a child is always a great celebration because it is believed that children are blessings from the gods and with marriage women have an obligation to bear children and if a woman does not bear children, traditionally the society blames her. Therefore child birth was a great deal for a woman and the society that is why the pre-colonial Ibeku people also had the child birth and naming of the child as a ceremony in the community. This system was related to the woman, whom after three months of delivery makes a peculiar hairstyle called *Nkobo Kobo*, after this is the use of *Ncha* (hair washing) ceremony then the naming ceremony.²³ This hairstyle was done with *Ncha* (yellow native soap) and was ceremoniously washed and it was women affair. However, during the naming ceremony of a child, it was unusual for a man to think up a name before the child was born except in cases where the native doctor had already warned the parents that the name of the person who reincarnated must be given to the new born. The Ibeku people in the pre-colonial period were firm believers in reincarnation. At the ceremony, the baby is taken to the most senior man in the gathering who throws the baby up and in the process gives him or her name.²⁴

Burial Ceremonies and Rites: Another event that was a socialized practice in pre-colonial Ibeku was the burying of the dead. The burial rites varied due to the age of the dead person. There was the tradition of Ibeku that when a woman loses her husband

among other rites, must sleep on the floor for seven days. On the seventh day, it is expected of her to trek into the thick forest as early as four o'clock in the morning and it is quite known that if any evil befell her, she was seen as responsible for her husband's death and if she came back successfully she was seen as a free woman.²⁵ The widow usually receives nothing from her husband's property but if she has children she can share with them. When it is a man that died, the whole village mourns him for the customary seven days and abstinence from their usual farm work, dances and merriment. On the death of a child, at birth, the father buries the child inside a bush. If it was a young person for example a youth, such a person is buried by the village youth. Mourning was limited to the immediate relatives. If, it is a young man, his age grade buries him with no formalities, he is buried naked. When an elderly man with children and grandchildren died, he will be buried with much feasting and the least sign of mourning. The corpse will be buried immediately without delay before the women in the harem are informed. According to Chinyere Oluoha, as a woman married in Ibeku who has been formally inducted into the *umudi*, In pre-colonial Ibeku and even in cases where a marriage has been dissolved, married women's corpses were returned to their families for burial.²⁶

Informal Educational system: The educational system in pre-colonial Ibeku was seen as one of the most important social institutions. Education is an instrument of change and a process of transmitting basic cultural values. Consequently, every culture whether simple or complex, has its own system of educating its youth. However, the goal of education and the method of approach may differ from place to place, nation and people to people,

but it is a known fact that the culture of a society is always consciously being transmitted from one generation to the next. Culture in this context consists of accumulated knowledge, values, norms, mores, beliefs and attitudes of a given society.²⁷

Culture is defined as the ways of life of the members of a society, or of groups within a society, which includes art, literature and painting. He identifies other cultural items as including how people dress, their custom, patterns of work, and religious ceremonies. Every society makes conscious efforts to transmit its rich culture and heritage to succeeding generations. This cultural transmission is very essential so that people can fit into the existing pattern of life and associate with others in a predictable, efficient and humane way. Generally, traditional education is always informal. The child learns from his parents and other elders, the importance of his tradition and customs, he learns the tradition and history of his people, imitating the habits and customs of his parents and elders. Traditional education in Africa had functionalism as its main guiding principle.²⁸It emphasized job orientation, physical and moral values; it was education for the practical needs of life and full participation in all activities of a community. Ebenezer Kpasa gives the “curriculum” of traditional education as including:

1. Manual Skills, which consists of tool making, construction, farming, husbandry, weaving, cooking, and many more.
2. Mores- social behavior.
3. Folktales, which consists mainly of tradition and customs.
4. Religion- rites and incantations (and medicine)

5. History- stories of ancestors and past events.

The different categories of teachers include first, the parents who teach mores, later elders, who teach history and customs, specialists teachers like priests who teach religion, teachers of apprentices who teach skills. Ugwueje A. sums up traditional education for girls thus:

Traditional education was largely a practical education through which one lived by doing and observing... The girl was taught good manners and learnt such tasks as cooking, tending children, fetching water, collecting firewood, doing garden work, cultivating, sowing, weeding and harvesting... A few older women played some public roles as medicine women but the place of women was largely in the home... The woman's role was essential to the well-being of the family...²⁹

This is the picture of female traditional education in virtually all the African societies. It is against this background that the traditional education in Ibeku is being discussed.

In traditional Ibeku, there were ways the young ones were taught the culture and tradition that were considered valuable. This, with particular emphasis on the girl child and the role of women, will be discussed under the following pattern.

- a. The Home/Family
- b. Vocational training
- c. The Age-grade

In traditional Ibeku the family was the basic unit and first stage for learning, because a child is born into a home and grows up in the home. That is from birth to about six years the child is close to the mother and dependent on her for his needs. The child

watches and observes the gestures, expressions and attitude of his mother and then starts to imitate what he sees. He learns his first language from his mother. It is therefore, the duty of elders around the child to teach him acceptable standards. Mothers were held responsible for any sign of improper behavior in children that is why women in traditional setting and even now are generally regarded as the custodians of morality, and receive the blame for lack of it.³⁰ The education was the whole process by which one generation transmitted its culture to the succeeding generation. The aim of education was not limited to the production of self-sustaining good citizens who live and interacted in society with others. Thus, the content was not limited to technical or vocational knowledge such as how to build houses, make pots, weave cloth and mats but included training in household management, allegiance, mutual interest in one another. Through assisting the mother, the female child learnt methods of planting and harvesting. In addition, she learnt simple use of the means of exchange through watching and participating in household trade or when she accompanied her mother to the market.³¹

The female was also expected to learn arts and crafts peculiar to the female sex. Gender relations also played a prominent role in the traditional education. While boys were mostly concerned with the traditionally male dominated vocations such as farming, hunting, herbal medicine production and construction, the girls took to domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning and weaving, basically anything that was domestic. Like; the weaving of mats, trays, baskets and clothes. In addition she learnt methods of making soap, processing of palm oil and hair plaiting by participation and sometimes by specific

instructions from the mother or other women in the village. The making of pots, weaving of cloths and mats required the female child to stay with a specialist for a period of apprenticeship but if the mother was a specialist in a particular trade, she learnt it from her.³² The mothers taught their female children the importance of chastity among girls before marriage, and how to take care of babies and the expected code of behavior of married women. This continued until she got married. After marriage, the education of the woman would be taken over by her mother in-law and the women association. As we know, education is a life-long process, children basically took after their parent's craft or art, form of trade and farming as mentioned above. There were no schools where the art of reading and writing was involved.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Intra-group relations is “whenever individuals belonging to one group, interact collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their group and identification.”¹ Intra-group relations imply therefore, the existence of mutually exclusive groups that are in constant interaction with one another. The study of intra-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.² Works on intra-group 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.³ 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 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.⁴

The concept of intra-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 intra-group 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 goods and services 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 intra-relationship.⁵

The concept of intra-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.⁶ Right from the pre-colonial period, intra-group relationship between the Orsu and Orlu were basically in the Imo State was characterized by hostility and as well as mutual dependency. Social conflict between the Orsu and Orlu pivoted around the control of the scarce resources called land. The control of land, which both groups needed to produce agricultural resources, formed the basis for the understanding of the Orsu and Orlu conflict.⁷ But despite the conflict over land, both groups entered mutual relationship in the areas of economic and political ties.

The study of intergroup 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 of Nigeria.⁸ Works in intergroup relations debunks the Eurocentric view that Africans were barbaric and that no meaningful interaction took place within the region prior to the arrival of Europeans. However, there exist several literature on this subject.⁹ The importance of the study of intergroup relations is to examine how groups were able to interact, cooperate and maintain common boundaries. It also facilitates a vivid understanding of the economic, political and cultural relations amongst them.¹⁰ Human society is conceived as the collectivity of economic, social and political activities of individuals which give them access to necessities of life. Man by nature is a dependent creature; he depends on his environment and others for food, shelter and clothing, all of which gives him a sense of purpose on earth. Hence, no group or human community, notwithstanding its level of development can be an island entirely to itself and hence, contact and interaction between groups (intergroup relations) is logical. Understanding these points, the relevance of human group dependence on each other makes interaction and interdependence not just a fact of life but universally constant and basic. However, what characterizes the interdependence between groups has continued to engage the keen interest of scholars.¹¹

Orsu is a local government area (LGA) in the Imo State of Nigeria. Orsu is also the name of the dialect of this people. They are an Igbo people located west of Orlu, north of Oguta and in the general areas around Oru East, Oru West, Ihiala, Nnewi south and Oguta LGAs. Orsu LGA is made up of several autonomous communities including Ihitenansa, Amaruru, Amazu, Amaebu, Amannachi, Awo-Idemili, Asaa Ubirielelem,

Eziawa, Umuhu Okabia, Orsu Ihiteukwa, Okwu Ufuruaku, Okwu Amaraihe, and Okwu Etiti. The estimated total population of Orsu LGA is 194,223 with the area mostly inhabited by people from the Igbo ethnic group. The Igbo language is commonly spoken in the LGA while the religion of Christianity is widely practiced in the LGA. Popular festivals in Orsu LGA include the *Iriji* festival. Ofeke day celebrations are a yearly celebration held every 1 January and brings visitors to watch the Masquerades.¹²Orlu people are mainly of Isu stock of the Igbo people. However, there are also people with Oru, Orsu, Aro, Ukwuani and Ikwerre heritage. People from Oguta town (not Oguta LGA) are of the same stock with Ndiosimili Ukwuani people of Delta state with similar spoken dialect. Ohaji share same kinship with the Ikwerre. Orsu people share same heritage with those from Nnewi south; the Oru's on the other hand are the same kins with people from Ihiala, while Ideato have same links with people from Aguata.¹³Orlu people speak the Isuama dialect of the Igbo language. Though variations exist in some communities, but are mutually understandable by all. In Oguta town for instance, their dialect is similar to what is spoken in Aboh Delta state and Ndoni Rivers state. The dialect spoken in Ohaji is similar to what is spoken in Ikwerre. However the rest of Orlu people speak mutually intelligible dialect to what is spoken in the rest of Imo state as well as Ihiala LGA, Nnewi South, Aguata and Orumba LGA's of Anambra state.¹⁴

Aim and Objectives

This work examines intra-group relations between Orsu and Orlu in the pre-colonial to post-colonial period up to 2015; specifically, this research work seeks to achieve the following:

1. to discuss the geography of Orsu and Orlu and also examine her traditions of origins;
2. to examine the social, political and economic organizations of Orsu and Orlu in during the period of study;
3. to analyze the political relations between Orsu and Orlu Neighbors.
4. to explore the socio-relations between Orsu and Orlu neighbours in the area of marriage institutions, traditional festivals, cultural belief, birth, death, burial, trade etc.

Scope of Study

This research examines Orsu and her Orlu Neighbour with its case study directed to intra-group relations up to 2015. The scope covers the post-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 Orsu and Orlu 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.

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 Orsu and Orlu neighbouring community. Such people include: Traditional Rulers, Elders, Lecturers, Distinguished members of Orsu Platform and the Youth Council. Also, Interviews will be conducted with individuals from Orlu. These interviews will be from people of Orsu and Orlu neighbour who have a wellspring of knowledge about Orsu and her historical, socio-political and economical interaction with her Orlu neighbor both in Imo State. 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 Orlu.

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 Orsu and Orlu neighbour, and between the different groups in the Igbo Nations, and also books that give an overview of the historical background of Orsu. 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 Orsu and Orlu neighbour both in Imo State.

Literature Review

The availability of academic works on intra-group relations in pre-colonial to post-colonial Imo state was proven to be insufficient during this research work. There has been little or no detailed account on intra-group relations between Orsu and Orlu in the pre-colonial period to post-colonial period. However, certain literature exists that gives an account of Igbo land of Orsu and Orlu is classified under. Some of the literature in this category includes;

Kanayo Nwadiolor, in his book titled, *“Protestant Missions and Intergroup Relations in the Igbo Heartland: A Focus on Anglicanism and Adventism in Owerri and Environs,”*¹⁵ examines the effect of Protestant missions on intergroup relations in the Igbo heartland, with a particular focus on Anglicanism and Adventism in Owerri and its environs. Drawing on a blend of ethnographic data on mission activities and historical sources, the paper seeks to understand how the two missions shaped the social and religious landscape of the Igbo heartland through their activities in Owerri and its surrounding areas. Furthermore, the author aims to ascertain how the different Protestant missions interacted with one another, and how this interaction shaped the Igbo society. The author showed that Protestant missions had a significant impact on the Igbo, leading to changes in their social and cultural life, as well as the development of intergroup relations. Anglicanism and Adventism both made inroads into Igbo society, and their

respective members interacted in various ways, including competition and cooperation. For example, while both mission societies sought to convert the Igbo to their particular interpretations of Christianity.¹⁶

Patrick Chukwudike Okpalaeke's, "*A View from the Periphery: A Historical Appraisal on Annang-Igbo Inter-Group Relations in Pre-Colonial Times*,"¹⁷ the author also showed how intertwined both ethnic group have been long before the coming of the Europeans. Asserts that inter-group relations in pre-colonial Africa have been severely undermined by the various erroneous reports from Eurocentric scholars who held the view that Africans lived in solitude prior to European intrusion into the African continent. This erroneous view was given impetus to by the postulation of Europeans who dismissed the African continent as having no historical importance to the world at large. Hence, an attempt to reconstruction a historical sketch of Annang-Igbo Relations in pre-colonial times becomes pertinent to further illustrate pre-colonial societies interacted with one another as this will further debunk the views held by Hegel, Trevor Roper, among others. Findings based upon this research showed that their (Annang-Igbo) relationship took numerous dimensions which included but not limited to commerce and trade; cultural exchanges; migration patterns; conflict and diplomacy, trade-religious activities, among others. The author concluded that inter-group relations is an age-long phenomenon and is still very much in existence. Also, it goes to show that the present ethnic rivalry Nigeria is experiencing is partly an attribute of colonial rule. The author

maintained that, in spite of brief skirmishes in pre-colonial times, both groups lived in peace and harmony.¹⁸ Historical analysis was employed as the method for this research.

Emmanuel Toby and Albert O. Onobhayedo's, work titled "Trade Relations between the Annang and the Aro of South-Eastern Nigeria in the Pre-Colonial Period,"¹⁹ examines the inter-group relations between the Annang of present day Akwa-Ibom State and the Aro, a sub-Igbo group in South-Eastern Nigeria during the pre-colonial period. The authors argue that the Aro oracle, Arochukwu significantly influenced the course of interaction between the two groups. Asserts that the oracle was not originally owned by the Aro, but by the Annang who called it Ibritam. But because of long time trade contact between them, the Aro adopted Ibritam as their god of trade, hence the name Arochukwu. The Aro were not only agents of the oracle, but also great traders. They were the main organisers of slave trade throughout the South-Eastern region. To extend the sphere of influence of the oracle and the trade associated with it, the Aro established widespread colonies along their trading routes throughout the South-Eastern region of Nigeria. Through these colonies, they won clients for the oracle and dominated the local markets from which they supplied slaves to the Niger Delta city-states and major towns like Calabar, Kalabari and Bonny.²⁰

Vivian Onyema's, article titled "Patterns of Inter-Group Relations between Nneato and Umunze of Abia and Anambra States,"²¹ examines the nature of change and continuity between the Nneato and Umunze communities of south-eastern Nigeria in marriage, war, politics, trade, and other forms of social and economic exchanges in their

relationship with each other. It is important to state that societies and ethnic groups in Africa were communally interdependent and coexisted as a whole in the pre-colonial era. In the colonial era, the pattern of intergroup relations experienced serious changes, especially in the socio-economic and political realities of the time. At the end of colonial rule, the nature of inter-group relations took a different measure as it faced the post-independence dynamics of the Nigerian state. Among others, the author argues that intergroup relations between the two communities served as catalysts of beneficial cultural exchanges on the one hand, and as well created avenues for certain effects, especially through external contacts on the other hand.²²

Akanbi Shola Ahmed's work titled "Inter-group Relations between the Igbo Migrants and their Host Community in Agaka Quarters of Ilorin Metropolis, 1950-2015,"²³ reveals that the Igbo migrated to the area in about 1950 and since then the migrants and their hosts have demonstrated a sense of tolerance, cordiality, good will, cooperation, consensus building and harmonious intergroup relations between them. These attributes by both have catapulted the area economically into what it is today. The author posits that since the beginning of creation, humans have always involved themselves in movement activities. This has been the major features of human beings all over the world. The Igbo ethnic group is among the major ethnic groups in Nigeria and is known for its migratory prowess. Over the years, the Igbo have migrated from their original home in southeastern Nigeria to other parts of the country for different reasons. Their impacts economically, socially and politically wherever they migrated to cannot be

overemphasized. Using both documented and undocumented sources, the author unravels the relations between Igbos and their host community in Agaka quarters of Ilorin metropolis (north central Nigeria). The author concluded that such relations between them had positively impacted on the development of the quarters over time.²⁴

Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo, in his article titled “The Aro, Host Communities and Continuities in Intergroup Suspicion in the Oguta Area since Pre-Colonial Times,”²⁵ discusses the common interest of the Aro and its host communities has continue to be two sides of the same coin. First the reason for various Aro settlements are not the same, yet mutual suspicion seems to be a factor affecting the co-existence of the two groups. The Aro and host communities in Oguta are not without these challenges. Hence the author uses historical evidences to demonstrate that these two groups have benefitted from each other and if the challenges ahead (Nkiru) can be subdued, then emphasis must not be laid on identity question in all spheres of politics and other social configuration in their domain. In the work, we have x-rayed some significant aspect of Aro settlement in the Oguta area. First, it must be emphasized that Aro settlers in the Oguta area came strictly on invitation. The Aro provided security as well as European goods to their host in exchange for goods and services. A situation that accommodates the host communities to look at the Aro from the perspective of mutual suspicion is a demonstration of lack of historical incompetence.²⁶

Monday, Ukpabi’s, work “Gender and Involvement in Community Development, A Study of Ihioma in Orlu L.G.A, Imo State, Nigeria,”²⁷ focuses on “men and women in

community development in Ihioma community, in Orlu local government area State. The broad objective of this study is to investigate men and women effects in community development in Ihioma. The author found out that gender disparity in Ihioma has not led to a decline in community development.²⁸The study also found out that the level of education among men and women in Ihioma has not affected the process of development in the area.

Chiemeka Onyema and Chikere Princewill's, article titled "Women Empowerment and Community Development in Okigwe Local Government Area, Imo State,"²⁹examines women empowerment and community development in Okigwe L. G. A, Imo State. Based on the data analysis, the author revealed that there is significant impact of educational empowerment on women contribution to community development; there is significant relationship between skill acquisition for women and community development; and employment of women contributes to women community development. Based on the findings, the author recommended that the Nigerian government should be empower women through educational and technical training to enable contribute significantly in community development. More so, women in good position should try significantly to prove that they have significant thing to offer in promoting community development, peace and harmony and unity in the society.³⁰

Kennedy Uchenna Duru's, work titled "Contributions of Imo State Agency for Community and Social Development Project and Sustainable Development in Orlu Local Government Area, Imo State Nigeria (2010 -2020),"³¹carries out to determine the extent

Imo State Agency for Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) contributes to socio-economic development in the study area. The author revealed a significant relationship between the CSDP interventions and key indicators in Orlu. Specifically, there was a significant positive association between CSDP –supported school rehabilitation efforts and school enrolment rates. Additionally, a significant relationship was observed between CSDP health interventions and life expectancy. The author recommended that the CSDP should intensify efforts on schools’ rehabilitations by maintaining existing primary and secondary schools and building more classroom blocks. Furthermore, the government through CSDP should help in constructing and maintaining primary health Centres so that people in Orlu LGA will have access to affordable and quality healthcare services.³²

Ify Henrietta Emejulu’s, article titled “Challenges of Igbo Migration into Cameroon: The Orlu Experience on the Sea Route, 1970-1997,”³³ examines the challenges encountered on the sea route by migrants from the Orlu area of Igboland into Cameroon in post-civil war Nigeria. The Igbo people, predominantly and indigenously found in the present South-East States of Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Abia and Ebonyi, and in South-South States of Rivers and Delta, constitute one of the major and distinct ethnic groups in Nigeria. This paper, therefore focuses on the post war causes of the Orlu migration to Cameroun; the challenges encountered thereto on the sea; and how to address them. The argument is that the Orlu migration through the sea into Cameroon as part of the larger Igbo mass exodus after the war has posed a serious problem as lives and

property were often lost in the course of these journeys. Findings show that aside the Cameroon's attractions those out-movements were mostly encouraged by the Nigerian government failure to address the plight of the Igbo people after the war, hence it suggests serious federal government actions in terms of economic rebuilding and infrastructure development in the Igbo areas of Nigeria.³⁴

Anyiam, K.H., Uhuegbulem, "Economics of Cocoyam Production in Orsu Local Government Area, Imo State, Nigeria,"³⁵ examines the Economics of Cocoyam Production in Orsu Local Government Area of Imo State Nigeria. The specific objectives were to describe the socio-economic characteristics of cocoyam farmers in the study area, to estimate the cost and return of cocoyam production in the study area, to determine the factors influencing cocoyam output in the area, and to estimate the profitability of cocoyam in the study area. The results of the factors influencing cocoyam output showed that the value of coefficient of multiple determinations (R²) was 0.974% which implies that 97.4% of the variation of the factors influencing cocoyam output was accounted for by the explanatory variables in the model. Variables such as quantity of fertilizer (p<0.01), farm experience (p<0.05), access to credit (p<0.1), household size (p<0.01), membership of cooperative (p<0.1), labour use (p<0.01). The profitability of cocoyam was 2.44 which showed high profitability. The author recommended that policies that will enable women to own a farmland should be enacted by governments at all levels, education of the farmers should be paramount in the study area and farmers themselves

should form or join cooperative societies access credit and build capital formation for cocoyam production.³⁶

Francisca C. Mhagwu, “Library and Information Services to Rural Communities in Orsu Local Government Area of Imo State,”³⁷ identifies the library and information services in Orsu Local Government Area of Imo State, using Awo-Idemili as a case study. The author revealed that 97.3% and 95.7% of the population do not have access to Internet and library, respectively while 66.7% and 60% also do not obtain information at all on health and education, respectively. The author recommended that government should provide basic infrastructures and facilities like libraries to at least 2-4 more communities that make up this Local Government Area considering its teeming population and the number of primary and secondary schools available in this area. Some suggestions in this regard were also made.⁴⁰

As a matter of fact, the existing literatures contain a lot of gaps that this study will fill. For instance, the existing literature, though talk about intra-group relations between Igbo society and their neighbours, they fail to examine intra-group among Orsu and her Orlu communities. On Orsu and her Orlu Neighbour, none of the reviewed work or existing literature examines in detail the intra-group relations between Orsu and her Orlu her Neighbour. Therefore, this study will fill the gaps in the existing knowledge of the inter-group relations Orsu and her Orlu Neighbour.

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

Chapter Two: The Historical background of Orsu and Orlu

This chapter examines the Origin, creation and geographical location of Orsu and Orlu in Imo state. It gives an overview of the historical, political, economic, and social makeup of Orsu and her Orlu. Politically, this chapter discusses the makeup of Orsu and Orlu in terms of leadership structure, political boundaries, political subordination, political Heads such as the Eze and the Ozo.

Chapter Three: Orsu and Orlu: Political Relations

This chapter focuses on the political relation of Orsu and her Orlu Neighbour 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 of Orsu.

Chapter Four: The Socio-Economic Relations of Orsu and her Orlu Neighbour

This chapter gives a vivid description of the relationship that the people of Orsu and her Orlu Neighbour 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 of Orsu and her Orlu

Neighbour 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 of Orsu and her Orlu Neighbour practice both local and long-distance trade

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This is the concluding aspect of the work; it gives an overview of the work and also the findings and recommendations arising from the study.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ORSU AND ORLU

Introduction

A study of Orsu and Orlu communities has revealed that the basic political unit is the village. This is the result of a favorable condition for settlement in the forest area which made independent group settle near each other with independent political system based on seniority, gerontocracy and ultimately fashioned their system of chieftaincy.¹ Both people of Orsu and Orlu were organized on segment lines and as time went by, they found special and often very interesting solutions to the problem of living together in communities. Social changes influence on political changes as their institutions unlike religious worship was mainly through ancestral believe. This chapter therefore examines the traditional and geographical settings of Orsu and Orlu people prior to colonial rule.

Geography of Orsu and Orlu.

Orsu is a local government area and sub-ethnic group in the Imo State of Nigeria. Orsu is also the name of the dialect of this people. They are an Igbo sub-group located west of Orlu, north of Oguta and in the general areas around Oru East, Oru West, Ihiala, Nnewi south and Oguta local government areas. Orsu LGA is made up of several autonomous communities including Ihitenansa, Amaruru, Amazu, Amaebu, Amannachi, Awo-Idemili, Asaa Ubiriele, Eziawa, Umuhu Okabia, Orsu Ihiteukwa, Okwu Ufuruaku, Okwu Amaraihe, and Okwu Etiti.³

On the other hand, Orlu Local Government Area is in the southern part of Imo State, Nigeria, and is known for its undulating hills and low-lying valleys. It lies at an average altitude of 60-180 meters above sea level. The area is characterized by minor

rivers like Ogidi, Amiyi, Nwakpurukpo, and Osherivers, with the Orashi River forming a boundary between Mgbee and Umuchima. Orlu is also recognized as the unofficial commercial capital of Imo State, with a diverse range of industries and businesses.⁴

Climate and Vegetation

Orlu which is a small part of Igbo land shares the same climatic condition with southeastern Nigeria in general. Southern Nigeria is under the influence of the rain-bearing south-west monsoon winds for most of the year and has a long rainy season of not less than seven months. It gets most of its rainfall in the months of July, August and September.⁵ The climatic factor is significant, not only in relation to its effect on the character of the vegetation, but also because climate has, by and large played a dominant role in the ways of life, including the pattern of economic activities of the people. Orlu being part of the rain forest belt of the Eastern Nigeria has suffered the alteration of the natural vegetation by man causing the complete destruction of the rain forests of Okwuabala, (OkwuOkiriteghete, OkiriIbuo), Umuagi (OgwugwoNwandu) Onummiri to Iyi-okwu axis etc.⁶ overlarge parts of these areas present day vegetation consists of open palm bush. The human alteration has affected animal life, in the past monkeys and other animals are regular sight in these areas but today have all gone.⁷

The significant natural resources of Orluand Orsu have been water, soil, sun plants and animals which produce a propitious agricultural life. Other natural resources are clays with which the bricks and pots of different varieties were fashioned. Coals exist in considerable amounts at Onummiri. The Iyi Ngodo fish pond, Iyiokwu waterfalls with

its alluvial valleys constitutes not only tourist haven but also source of economic development waiting to be tapped.⁸

The People of Orlu.

Orlu having warm climate, a fertile soil, native animals and plants suitable for food, water available and varied resources, was an area of the world favorable for the propagation of mankind, for the increase in man's standard of living and for the growth of an organized society. Throughout the ages the finest resources of Orlu land have been people – man. Anthropologists, archeologists and geneticist may yet unravel the twisted and indistinct story of history of origin and the claim of Orlu people of originating from the Ezize River. They had time to develop crafts such as pottery and to practice the art of decorating their utensils, houses and bodies.⁹Orlu land is in the present day of Imo State, Nigeria. Orlua is surrounded by her neighbors such as Okporo, Amaifeke, Ogberuru, Amannachi, Umuhu Okabia, Obibi and Mgbee. Her topography has assisted in the historical determination of human abode richly blessed with the famous Iyi Ngodo fishing pond, Iyi Nwoba Lake, Iyiokwu spring and its rich alluvial valleys at Onummiri, Biafra, Nwatao werre e.t.c.).¹⁰

Orlu is also rich in solid minerals such as the vast coal deposits at Onummiri. The people of Orlu have claimed to be aucthotonous with rich cultural and religious heritage, proud of their distinct dialect which goes to prove their claim of aucthotonous, example could be found in such expressions as “Wee Wee” (now now) “osinhuo” (says he) “O siwa Ngeewa (what is he talking about) “I da ekweni” (if you refuse) “Iriwuo, I

kochieuzo” (after eating you close the door) among others, which differs completely from the Igbo dialects and the dialects of her above mentioned neighbours. The aucthotonous claim of Orlu people contrasted sharply with three theories of Igbo origin and that is the oriental origin popularized by Olaudah Equiano, alias Gustavusvassa, an Igbo ex-slave who wrote his autobiography toward the end of the Eighteenth century.¹¹ The theory of independent origin claims that Igbo were created where they are found today, this claim is better articulated in an Nri creation legend. While the third theory of Igbo origin emanate basically from Linguistic studies. According of these studies, the Igbo language belongs to a sub-family of Negro language known as the Kwa, which derived from a parent stock, the Niger-Congo.¹²

The consensus is that Kwa language must have evolved somewhere in the River Niger-Benue area from where they separated to the various areas they inhabit, among these groups are in Edo, Idoma, Igala, Yoruba etc. Many Igbo group claim Nri or Amaigbo Orlu as their ancestral home. Many claims Nri as their spiritual and cultural ancestry, many communities in northern Igbo land even beyond believed that the spirit of every Igbo man at death had to pass through the streets of Nri before going to the world beyond.¹³Nri’s spiritual ascendancy had long been established. The priest king of Nri, the Eze Nri was looked upon as the Guardian of the earth goddess, ‘Ala’ and his priests’ purified communities of abominations against this deity. As time went on, these proto-Igbo populations dispersed more widely in the forests of Igbo land and came to concentrate especially in what much later became Owerri, Okigwe, Orlu and Awka

divisions.¹⁴ Writing on the history of Igbo origin, professor A.E. Afigbo posits: there are at least three aspects to the problem of Igbo origin, which so far have not always been distinguished by scholars and others. The result is that they are lumped together and dealt with in an undifferentiated manner and consequent confusion. On the emergence of Igbo society, Afigbo also stated that the average Igbo village, or even clan believe itself to be, as Jones puts it, “the descendant of a common ancestor whose son begat either the village section or the village sub-section.”¹⁵

Political Organization and Structure of Orsu

The Political structure or organization in Orsu land during the pre-colonial period can be likened to what existed in most parts of Igbo Land in general; although some practices may have been. However, in the case of Orsu land, politics were organized around some important bodies like the family group, the kindred, the village and the town level even the age grade. These were not only typical political units, but also, they equally reflected the order in which political and social hierarchy could be measured. A group of families make up the kindred, a group of which, in turn, constitute the village.¹⁶ Following in sequence, a group of villages form the town, and the age grade is formed in the town. The possession and exercise of political power was equally graduated along the outlined political formation in which the villages wielded the highest powers after the town and are followed by the kindred. The least but very important unit remained the family; the basic unit of socio-political organization among Orsu peoples, and indeed the Igbo. To deeply appreciate the uniqueness of the political system among

the pre-colonial Orsu people and how these confer on them a distinct form of identity among other groups within the ethnic Igbo, a focus and study on these political units is necessary.¹⁷

The Family group is one of the most recognized institutions in pre-colonial Igbo Society as the basic unit of every political institution. A typical Orsu family is made up of the father, who is regarded as the head of the family, the mother and their children. In an extended family, each family group was autonomously headed by the title holder called 'Okpara'. The Okpara controls the family and judges any family disputes. He also performs ritual and ceremonial functions on behalf of the family.¹⁸ Each Igbo village was seen as a political unit inhabited by related families who were bounded by common beliefs and origin. Each family head in the village held the 'Ofo' title and altogether formed the council of elders. The council of elders presided over important issues on village's welfare, safety, development and so on. Among the council of elders, one was recognized as the most senior to others. He was the 'Okpara'. He could call for and adjourn a meeting and could also give judgements as well. The council of elders were believed to be earthly representatives of the Igbo ancestors. They maintained the age long customs, traditions and laws of the land. These included Laws against misbehavior or immoral acts in which suitable punishment would be meted out to its perpetrators.¹⁹

To an extent, Orsu in pre-colonial times operated a political system which conformed to what was obtainable among other groups of the ethnic Igbo, although aspects of identifiable variations still exist. The socio-political system was built around a family

structure under the authority of the father. Family relationship was highly respected and valued. A typical household in Orsu land comprises of a man and his wife or wives, his children, married sons, their wives, and children. The man is known to be the head of the family and every household, as well as its dependent recognized the authority of the family head.²⁰Being the prime decision maker, he sanctions every important decision taken in the family by other recognized authorities in it such as the first wife or the adult first son (Okpara). Each responsible Orsu man knew the limits of his powers as a family head and worked hard to raise his family among the same path of social system that respected the rights and privileges of each member, male or female.²¹

The first son of a man was also known as Okpara, had a special place in the family hierarchy being the next of kin after his father. He performed, acted or inherited the tasks and responsibilities of his father in the man's absence or in the case of death. He stands for the interest of the family in the kindred meetings, and held the ofor, which is the symbol of the family's authority. In pre-colonial Orsu land, the okpara (first son child) succeeded his father in the family through the symbolic inheritance of the father's compound, the obi. His other brothers were expected to move to family virgin lands where their father must have allocated to them all, to build houses and develop, and establish their own families.²²

The next level of political organization in pre-colonial Orsu land beyond the family was the kindred. It is from the kindred level that the elements of politics became visible and well known. The kindred consist of a group of related families whose ancestry

can be traceable to a common forefather. The Igbo in an informal way generally refers to members of their kindred as *nwannem* (my brother/ child of my mother) or *nwannam* (my brother/ child of my father).²³ This is also true of the people of Orsu and the reason for this is not far-fetched. It is a practice that evaluates the belief that they all share the same blood relationship. The linkage to a common ancestor served as a strong unifying factor among the families that make up every kindred in Orsu. However, it was and is still a taboo for second or even distant cousins to get involved in sexual and marital relationships as this is seen as an abomination.²⁴

Also, age was accorded a lot of respect at the kindred level. And this explains and gives us reasons why the oldest man in Orsu lineage functioned as the overall head of that given lineage. The oldest male was seen as the supernatural through the ancestors and as the intermediary between his kindred. This act or practice reflected the belief among the Igbo that, the living, the dead and the divine all commune.²⁵

The *Okpara* was also present in the kindred level who was known to be the head of the kindred. The responsibilities of the *Okpara* were not limited to breaking the *kolanut* and pouring of libations as he prayed but he presided over kindred meetings and ensured the maintenance of law and order in the society. Although he exercised the highest authority in the kindred, the *Okpara* in pre-colonial Orsu did not have the right to interfere in internal affairs of the families that made up the kindred, except only in cases where some issues were brought directly to him for settlement. This tells us that the

powers of the Okpara, the kindred head was limited, and the system did not confer absolute power in any individual.²⁶

The Village in pre-colonial Orsu land was another political unit which was consisted of some kindred or in some instances quarters (a sub village group bigger than the kindred). These association of kindred was bound together by certain rules, based on which unity and peace was maintained. In the pre-colonial village culture system of Orsu, there was a belief that every indigene shared his/her lineage from an ancestor that united them all. For instance, in Orsu, all the kindred that constitute the village all agree to the belief of been descendants and children of ERI (the founder of Orsu).²⁷

Political Organization of Orlu

Orlu did not witness any invasion or outside conquest that has had or affected her political structure, which means that there was no known external influence on the kingship. “We have not been conquered by any community before; we have never had an outsider imposed on us as an Obi to rule over us before. “All our Obi from the beginning till today have come from the Durukoma dynasty: - Elder Okereke Udegbulem,(Dara Nnamefo, Nwa Emetopu.) An afa title holder”. The Statement above is from an Orlu elder and yet below is from another elder : “Ezize goddess, the one that brought the ofo of Orlu is too powerful, she cannot allow any other person to be the Obi of Orlu, anyone who tries it is playing with his life except the Obufo family..... Elder Joe Duruekp, leader of Eze Ikpe”.²⁸ Kingship of Orlu is as old as the Ofo of Orlu deposited by the Ezize goddess as a symbol of authority and spring board of Eze Orlu. John Nwosu in his

paper presentation at Orlu forum “99” confirmed that he quoted Unamma verbatim that these three villages: Ebenese, Okwuwabala and Umuezennachi comprise the trinity known as Orlu and Okpara Aro, the first son of Okwuekpe in Ebenese, exercises sovereignty over the other villages by virtue of his traditional right of primogenitor. A right which many both in the past and present very much itched to wrench from the privileged incumbents but for the fear of nemesis, and possibly too; the fear of the vengeance of the primordial goddess, Ezize, whose legends and cult in the past held the people in great fear..... Mr. Unamma according to Nwosu then proceeded to refer to a dispute in recent times between OkerekeOgbedi (the present Obi’s father) and Otughara also from Okwuekpe over primacy and leadership in Orlu which dragged the parties to the white man’s court: He reported that Otughara dramatically fled from the court when he was asked to carry home the casket of curious relics, Ofo Orlu, always in the custody of the ruling house.²⁹ The Ofo is awfully dreaded. OfoOrlu is believed to be a collection of antiquities left behind by Ezize, goddess of Ezize River on one occasion when she appeared and identified herself as such. The Ofo is seen only in lifetime by: The oldest man in Orlu. An Ozo tile aspirant at the last stage of his initiation.

While the Ofo was respected, the governance of Orlu, its unity, the order of precedence was respected and held sacred. According to legend, our ancestor, “Ihi” met an elderly woman, a supernatural creation from Ezize spring. She disappeared each time she finished answering his questions. It was during one of these encounters that she left the contents of ‘‘OFO’’Orlu package. This ‘‘OFO’’ is the springboard of Eze Orlu.³⁰

Orlu political institution combined popular participation with experience and ability. The family head was the oldest man of the oldest surviving generation in the family, or in the quarter. He would settle family disputes, and commanded respect and reverence, because he controlled the channel of communication with ancestors.³¹The kind of decisions made most often was what we would now call judicial land or debts disputes, case of theft, murder, and so on- or decisions affecting relations with other groups. In a judicial case, the lineage head would attempt to settle matter within family. If he failed, the matter would go to the elders, who would hear the case in public. A decision which affects the whole town, such as a decision to make war, could normally be put to the people (i.e. to an assembly of free adult males).³²

Conclusion

The historical background of Orsu and Orlu reveals the deep-rooted cultural, political and social significance of these neighboring regions within the broader Igbo civilization. Orsu and Orlu, while distinct in their identities, share intertwined histories marked by traditional leadership structures, resistance to colonial and post-colonial challenges. Their histories are rich with oral traditions, ancient institutions and a resilient spirit that has allowed them to thrive through pre-colonial and modern times. Understanding their historical development not only helps to preserve their cultural identity but also provides valuable insights into the dynamics of Igbo society. These communities continue to grow and adapt in modern era, acknowledging and celebrating their historical roots remains essential in shap in their future.

Despite external influences such as colonialism and modernization, both Orsu and Orlu have managed to retain their core traditional values while embracing development. Their historical experiences reflect the resilience, adaptability, and unity of their people and understanding the historical roots of Orsu and Orlu not only promotes cultural awareness but also strengthens the foundation for community development and future planning. These insights serve as a reminder of the importance of preserving local history as a vital part of regional and national identity.

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CHAPTER THREE

ORSU AND ORLU: POLITICAL RELATIONS

Introduction

The study of political relations within South-eastern Nigeria remains a vital aspect of understanding both historical continuity and contemporary governance in

Igbo society. Orsu and Orlu share deep political ties that have shaped their interactions from pre-colonial times to present.¹ Their proximity, kingship system and shared traditions have created a complex framework of cooperation and rivalry, often influencing wider regional political developments.² It is in this light that this chapter seek to examine the political Inter-group relations between Orsu and Orlu people.

The Clan System

Both the Orsu and Orlu people have certain contact of inter-clan relations, these relations occur when there are festivals or boundaries disputes. On the eve of the festival, the Orsu people engage in certain ritual dance and they invite the Orlu traditional dancer who comes and displayed their culture dance.³ Also the political leaders of the both the Orsu and the Orlu people exchange various pleasantries which help to promotes their cordial relationship as far as inter-clan relations is concern. It should be noted here that both the Orsu and the Orlu also have strong inter-clan contact especially as it relate to the boundaries disputes, based on this situations, the territory that involved in the boundary conflict, most time fall on a particular clan in Orsu and Orlu respectively, before the conflict will reached the central political head of the Orsu leadership, both clan (Orsu and Orlu) might have involved in serious fight which might result to destruction life and property.⁴ However, one should note here that both clan have high administrative unit. Both the Orsu and Orlu clan have a very strong unit because the villages were autonomous and both clan administrations tend

to create fragmented government. Both the Orsu and Orlu have executive title and clan meetings were always held only for festivals, homage to ancestors, title making and the like.⁵ During the inter-clan meetings between Orsu and Orlu discuss like religious and social issues were mostly discussed but political issues was prohibited due to certain conflict that might be on ground.⁶

Kingship Relations

The Orsu and Orlu 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 Orlu occur because of marriage contact, kingship contact, and family migration.⁷ Family Contact by Marriage: this takes place between Orsu and Orlu when an Orsu man or women get married a Orlu man or woman, they therefore form a union which most time help to further cordial relationship between Orsu and Orlu. Also the children of such marriage help to cement the strong ties between the Orsu and Orlu Clan.⁸ One should also note here that this marital union promotes political ties between Orsu and Orlu especially when one parent of the couple is a traditional palace chief and involves in the decision making of the community. This help to promotes political peace between Orsu and Orlu.⁹

Kingship Contact: this kind of family inter-relationship occur when the Orsu traditional ruler family member engages in a marital or political pact with the Orlu traditional ruler.¹⁰ For marriage, both leaders engage in what is a royal wedding. It

should be noted here that this kind of relationship usually take place when King son of Orsu marriage Orlu daughter and so it is respectively. Also, political pact involves the releasing of capture slave to the Palace of the Orlu. And this pact makes both the Orsu and Orlu people see themselves as one family.¹¹ Family Migration: As a result of economic activities and family livelihood, the Orsu people do migration to the Orlu community. And most time, this migration take long period of time to the extent that the migrated family began to adopt the social-cultural life-style, by way of eating their kind of food, speak Orlu language, involve in their festival and also allowed their children to married the Orlu children.¹²

Chieftaincy System of Orsu and Orlu

The relationship between Orsu and Orlu as it relates to chieftaincy position, over the year as always involve hostility and sometime cordial interaction. These hostilities occur when there are political clashes between the two communities.¹³ According to Yaya Okehi, asserts that during the inter-wars disputes resolution between the Orsu chief and the Orlu, both people engage in verbal attached and most time there tend to be physical combat which may the conflict resolution meeting.¹⁴ One should also note that boundaries dispute also fuel the inter-conflict contact between the Orsu and Orlu chief especially as its relate to the sub-clan of the respected families. Also there tend to be a cordial relationship between Orsu and Orlu chiefs. these cordial relations occur when there are marital affairs between the

children of the two communities.¹⁵ Common Boundaries and Contacts Sharing no boundaries between Orsu and Orlu people, each of the clan and villages in has had at least one border contact which most time came up because of dispute with each neighbor. 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.¹⁶ For instance, according to Barnabas Ifeaniyi, gave an historical account of the farmland conflict that occur between the community in Orsu known as Awo Idemili, and a community in Orlu known as Nwangele. The said clan had serious boundaries disputes which resulted in destruction of lives and property.¹⁷

Common Tradition of Conflict Resolution

This period between the Orsu and Orlu always have peaceful interaction which most time result in exchange of diplomatic ties of peace. For instance, the conflict resolution between Orsu clan and Orsu and Orlu also afford both communities to have good interactions, although the conflict is still going on, but there to be an experience of inter-group relations because of the conflict resolution.¹⁸ Concerning the land settlement between Awo-Idemili (Orlu) and Umuhu Okabia (Orsu) the Over the year both community traditional rulers have tried at different occasion in resolving the land disputes. At a particular period, the resolution falls out of peaceful agreement which later ended mysterious physical combat among titled chiefs of both communities.

Between 1977 to 1990, there were fruitful meeting of the land disputes held in the Awo-Idemili Umuhu-Okabia 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.¹⁹

It should be noted here that till date the Awo-Idemili (Orlu) and Umuhu Okabia (Orsu) people continue to have traditional rulers meeting by away of resolving the land dispute and series of agreement have been reached which have never been implemented by both communities. According to the interview conducted with Pa. Ejike said that the Awo-Idemili people are peace-loving people that are why they are trying to resolve the crisis with the Umuhu-Okabia people by apportioning certain parts of the dispute land to the Awo-Idemili people but still refused and claimed that the entire dispute land belongs to them.²⁰

General Political Relations

Generally, Orsu and Orlu 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 Orsu and Orlu. It should be noted that as from pre-colonial period, the Orsu and Orlu traditional political systems and cultural way of dialoguing and diplomacy has been super imposed upon them by the western political system.²¹ It is the development in Orsu and Orlu relations in the face of the changes in political systems that attracted attention in this section. It could be recalled

that through colonial administration the Orsu and Orlu people were merged in one division. But in the 1930s that came together under the platform called Igwe division. Each of the kingdoms of Igwe 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.²²

Effect of Orsu and Orlu Socio-Political Relations

One of the essential reasons for political interactions is to enable inter-developmental activities in their communities. There were notable community development programme, event and association that characterized their intergroup relations.²³ This ranged from social organization to cultural associations among the people. It is noteworthy to say that despite the existence of war in the pre-colonial period between Orsu and her Orlu neighbors there are still credited to the cordial and peace interaction she maintained with neighboring towns like Mbaise, Owerre, Ihitenansa, and the Ihiteukwa people. The Orsu people always see their Orlu neighbors as brothers and sisters. The similarity in their dialect also contributed to this fact.²⁴ It is not surprising to see that the inter-group relations also secured a level of autonomy for the people. Their cordiality improved the general relations that existed among the modern politics of the people after the colonial period.²⁵ The interaction encouraged other interaction such as economic and trade relations, religious interactions, social relations as well as inter-marriages among the peoples of Orsu and

Orlu. As observed in their political interaction during the 19th, the people relate with trust seeing such inter-group connection and migration history that connect them. There were several political interactions that existed between the people beyond the pre-colonial period. Nonetheless, there were colonial interactions between the two towns.²⁶

Conclusion

So far, in this discussion, it is evident that sound inter-group relations existed between the Orsu and the Orlu people during the pre-colonial periods, and as explained above. For one to promote inter-group relation among Orsu and the Orlu people, one must eschew bitterness, non-violent and unprovocative reactions. Considering all the above discussions on the Orsu-Orulu relations during the pre-colonial era, along with the pertinent, digressive references, it is evident that, this chapter has proved that there are many positive undocumented and unknown aspects of inter-group relations that could be used to promote rather than strain the unity.

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CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIO-ECONOMIC RELATIONS OF ORSU AND HER ORLUNEIGHBOUR

Introduction

Economic activities are the life support upon which any society is built and sustained. The assertion gives credence to the belief that without a stable economy, any civilization would fall. Considering this, the economic activities in Orsu and the Orlu

from pre-colonial times to post-colonial would be enunciated. The stable economic life of both Orsu and Orlu people ensured their sustenance even until present day.¹ Economic activities Orsu and the Orlu in pre-colonial times are classified under three major categories. They are Agricultural activities, trade and industry. It is pertinent to note at this point that the geographical location and climatic conditions greatly ensured the continued sustenance of Orsu and the Orlu blossoming economy. There were also hunting and fishing activities.²

Trade Relations

Right from the pre-colonial period, inter-group relationship between the Orsu and Orlu who were basically in Imo society was characterized by hostility and as well as mutual dependency. Socio-economic conflict between the Orsu and Orlu pivoted around the control of the scarce resources called land. The control of land, which both groups needed to produce agricultural resources, formed the basis for the understanding of the Orsu and Orlu conflict. But despite the conflict over land, both groups entered into mutual relationship in the areas of economic and political ties.³ For instance, Afegbo pointed out that despite the conflict between the Benin and Esan, at evening, a Benin man could still cross over to the Orsu side in order to take a Calabash of wine (Local brewed beer). The Orlu brewery industry greatly depended upon the supply of millet which was produced by the Orsu. This aspect of economic specialization fostered economic ties between the Orsu and Orlu. Despite the occasional wars over the control of land resources, the Orsu and Orlu exchanged economic and political relationship. The two

groups were mutually interwoven through the exchange of economic relationship and cultural ties.⁴

Relationship between these two groups was often characterized by hostility and as well as mutual relationship. The Orsu who so much depends upon the Orlu engaged in economic conflict with the Orlu especially on the land and river possession. For instance, Ihiala, community has been conflict land between Orsu and Orlu; and despite the conflict between Orsu and Orlu people, they still depend on each other especially in the areas of spices, beads and swords. Despite the hostile nature of economic relationship that was characterized by war, the Orsu and Orlu mutually depended on each other and co-existed with each other.⁵ It is important to note that the Benin, sometimes entered into major military and defence pact with the Orsu in warding off the economic military aggression on other ethnic group within the Niger Delta region. The defence pact between Orsu and Orlu provided the security bulwark that successfully checked the expansion of any unforeseen aggression in the entire South East. Orsu and Orlu relationship promoted the mutual interest of both groups in truncating the expansion of intruder in the South East Region.⁶

Long distance trade was another activity of Orsu and Orlu peoples. The kind of trade enables the Orsu and Orlu to travel together to different communities within the South East region amongst others. The long-distance trade was executed through trade by barter while the distance market promoted other levels of economic exchange.⁷ Aside from trade by barter on the long-distance trade there was also the use of cowries which

was also one of the currencies that served as medium of exchange in pre-colonial. Others include salt, etc which was used for large scale import and export trade. In the absence of large-scale import and export system in pre-colonial Orlu, there was intra-communal trade that existed among the Orsu society for instance, Orlu brought in ‘snuff’ and locally made fabrics, in other words, the Orlu people were, predominantly weavers and thus traded it with Orsu’s and others. Like Amaruru and Amazu people, these trade relations though with vary challenges assisted in promoting diplomatic relations between Orsu and Orlu peoples.⁸

Long distance trade was one major factor that connects the Orsu and Orlu, this was because of the farm product of both communities. Orsu and Orlu being a village situated in the rain forest region of Nigeria enjoyed favorable conditions that facilitated the farming activities of the people. Due to the presence of a fertile soil, farming practices were not tedious and coupled with adequate rainfall, harvesting season never delayed. Pre-colonial Orsu and Orlu men were mostly farmers who cultivated yam, and cassava while their wives cultivated maize, pepper, okra, melon, vegetables, pumpkins on the same land. Yam was the major crop in pre-colonial Benin. It was called the king of crops.⁹

Articles of Trade

Orsu and Orlu people’s falls within the gumea savanna environment, root crops like yam and cocoyam were planted in great quantity. There were grain crops like banished, millet, guinea corn, maize etc. Cotton was grown to serve the local textile

industry. This pattern of agricultural production was based on shifting cultivation. There were few tree crops. In short, plantation agriculture was unknown in pre-colonial Orsu and Orlu society. The trade relations between Orsu and Orlu rested largely on articles of trade which provided a suitable foundation in which other economic pursuits were based.¹⁰ These articles of trade include from Orsu there was abundant yam, cocoyam, cassava and other items like livestock including the goat, fish, and fowl. Other articles of trade were pottery items, mat and cloth weaving. In addition to agricultural produce, such as; palm oil, soap were exchanged for knife, cutlass and hoe.¹¹ Tree crops like citrus, guava, cashew, coconut and palm trees were largely twentieth century Orsu and Orlu men had to combine farming with other demanding tasks like the construction of houses, roads and bridges; art and crafts; herding cattle, and prosecuting military expeditions. This pre-colonial division of labour predated the reorganization of roles during the colonial era. Apart from the staple crops already mentioned, a variety of supplementary crops were grown in Benin land which served as their articles of trade namely cassava, sweet potatoes, groundnuts, beans, shea nuts, and ginger etc.¹²

Farming operations were purely agrarian between Orsu and Orlu as agriculture formed the bedrock for the economy of the people. Both Orsu and Orlu men and women engaged in the process of agricultural exchange. Although other forms of economic activities existed but agriculture was the most important occupation at the time. Research has shown that in Africa men bore significant proportions of the workload in agriculture. Men engaged in farming, pottery, mat and cloth weaving, processing of agricultural

produce, such as; palm oil, soap and the marketing to Mama Flora Oghale men never rested, they worked day in and day out and that with the sales made from their sale various products they were able to empower themselves financially.¹³

Orsu and Orlu Women in Trade Relations

The role of women in the economic activities of Orsu and Orlu was inevitable. Such significant roles were demonstrated in all spheres of the economy thereby promoting trade relations. The Orsu and Orlu people engaged in farming as their traditional economic life.¹⁴ Some of the important economic development field where Orsu and Orlu women featured prominently and contributed towards the economy and integration include agriculture, local industry, and exchange of goods and services.¹⁵

Among the most important forms of economic practices in pre-colonial Orlu, was agriculture and women contribution to agricultural output is undoubtedly extremely significant. Orlu women participated in specific aspect of agricultural production such as planting; crop as cocoyam, vegetables, pepper, tomatoes, and cassava, all year round through the traditional mode of irrigation. By providing the labour requirement in certain areas of agricultural production and through direct participation; such practices that were peculiar to production relations within the agricultural sectors as already identified, the women folk contributed to the growth of indigenous crop production process, and this became quite important to the agricultural industry.¹⁶

Orsu and Orlu women were in control of major economic activities in the non-agricultural sector. These include pottery, cloth weaving, basket weaving, mat making etc.

it is important to emphasize the connection between the agricultural and the non-agricultural sector as the development of one impacted on the other: agriculture provides the raw material such as cotton for industrial production in the textile industry. The industrial sector on the other hand provides agricultural implement such as iron material for farming, basket and sacks for harvesting and other works such as pot for domestic use, example for cooking and storage.¹⁷

According to Madam Beatrice Tobechukwu gave an historical analysis of how the Orsu and Orlu women goes on a long-distance trade as far as the Warri market to sell their produce. Mrs. Beatrice also testify that economic relation has been a peaceful co-existence between the Orsu and Orlu because they both appreciate their economic transaction which in turn help in the economic development of the communities.¹⁸ However, trade relation has also help the Orsu and Orlu people to promote social interaction during the trade. The Orsu and Orlu women usually take their sons and daughters for trade activities and during the course of trade relations they tend to be a mutual conversion between the sons and daughters of these communities which affect their inter group relations thereby gives birth to a new breed of generation of marriage-hood between the Orsu and Orlu. Therefore, one could say here that economic ties have birth a lot of peaceful coexistence between the Orsu and Orlu.¹⁹

Farmland and Agriculture (Products in Orsu and Orlu Relations)

Agricultural products facilitated the relationship between Orsu and Orlu during the period of the study. There was a high level of economic relation between the Orsu

and Orlu through trade farm contact. It came into existence because of the geographical location. In other words, the Orsu and Orlu peoples had land boundary and this help to facilitate trade farm relations. Such relations between the people promoted farm trade relations on mutual agreement in farming land. For instance, they tend to be a relation between the Orsu and Orlu in farmland whereby the land of the Orsu and Orlu was not sufficient. There were also the practices of land lease by the Orsu and Orlu farmers. However, another relation comes up with farming contact and this relation must be with boundary issues because of the usage of land in pre-colonial time between the communities they tend to be economic clashes that may result to the loss of lives.²⁰

The contact between Orsu and Orlu people in their local market such as Orsu and Orlu market was another area of integration, and this had been peaceful and mutually beneficial in pre-colonial time. Orsu people were mainly farmers and practice mere skills like fishing, exchange their farm produce of rice, yam, cassava, cocoyam, vegetable among other things for fish brought by their coastal neighbours which is the Orlu people who are mainly fishermen to keep a good and social commercial relationship, they established reliable contact and friendship with the hinter land families, this manifested in their special relationship that was establish between the Orlu fishermen particularly the hinterland communities. The people of Orsu for example were identified with the Orlu communities in Isu, Njaba, Nwangele, Nkwerre, Ideato North, this contact was strengthen through economic marriage and economic transactions.²¹

For most Orsu and the Orlu peoples, the marketplace is not entirely on economic or commercial center. The market also serves the purposes for the socialization and interaction of people that may not be necessary economic. But it is important to note that the Orsu and the Orlu through markets established administrative and diplomatic structures that could effectively resolve conflict and ensure peace. Trading markets were also avenue between Orsu and the Orlu to promote diplomat ties. Crises were resolved through this process. The council of Orsu and the Orlu elders in terms of disputes gathered at important market square to regulate peace and justice to promote peaceful co-existence amongst them.²²

However, it should be noted the nature and structure of market were in circles of both Orsu and the Orlu. The circles were such that interference was rare because they have developed a good relationship base on their trade relations. The early contact of the Orsu and her Orlu neighbor predate transatlantic trade in slaves. Other produce from other communities were exchange through barter system. These items were available in the different markets: yam, cocoyam, cassava and other items like livestock including the goat, fish, fowl etc. were exchanged for knife, cutlass and hoe which were manifested by other community outside the Orsu and the Orlu complex.²³

In addition, markets were never used by Orsu and the Orlu to prosecute war. The existence of market relations promoted peaceful relation and help to create trade specialization and promote distance trade relation. Orsu and the Orlu peoples used market to encouraged inter-cultural and intra-cultural relations which saw Orsu and the Orlu

encouraging marriage relations. There were other items that were traded in these markets which includes salt, simple iron tools, pottery, fanned leather and various agricultural products.²⁴

However, it should be noted here that most times the Orlu people buy the fish and livestock in bulk from the Orsu people and then sell them in mass quantity in a long distance trade. One major high point of Orsu and the Orlu economic relations as it relate to trade is the long distance trade relation which does not involve both the Orsu and the Orlu, but based on their close boundaries, the Orsu and the Orlu women usually had a combined commodity which they transport through canoes and other transport system to the interior villages and other part of Imo region. Farm goods like yam, tomatoes, potatoes, melon, cashew, okro are usually transported to far distance trade relation between the Orsu and the Orlu was consolidated to the point that in pre-colonial time they formed a guild system which both the Orsu and the Orlu people had a joint guild system for long distance trade. The Orsu and the Orlu people economically established large market for other ethnic groups commercial transaction which in turn promote inter-group relation between the Orsu and the Orlu. This trade was centered on farm produce, local industries and other services.

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3. *Ibid.*
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6. Chinwe, “Orsu Cultural and Religious Interview: An Insider’s Perspective”,
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19. *Ibid.*
20. Oral Interview with Ikenna Okafor, 67yrs, Traditional Palace Chief, Orsu, 21/07/2025.
21. Oral Interview with Ugochukwu Okolue, 54yrs, Teacher, Orsu, 21/08/2025.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Oral Interview with Chukwuma Chukwudi, 98years, Farmer, at his Residence in Orsu 12th May, 2025.
24. *Ibid*

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter concludes this work. It ties up all the major points in the previous chapters relating to the socio-cultural, economic and political relations between Orsu and Orlu people in pre-colonial times. Chapter one of the study surveyed introductions of the study, where the concept of inter-group was defined and a brief introduction of the relationship between Orsu and Orlu people was identified. Chapter one also captured the

aim and objectives of the study, the scope of work of the study, the methodology of the study and some related literatures were reviewed.

Chapter two of the study examined the geographical location of the people of Orsu and Orlu people, also the historical origin of the people of Orsu and Orlu was established, where the linkage between the Orsu and Orlu people were identify, the chapter also examined the socio-political institutions of the ancient Orsu chiefdom likewise, the socio-political activities of the Orlu people. The chapter also discussed the economic and trade activities of both the Orsu and Orlu people in pre-colonial time.

Chapter three of the study explains the various inter-group relations between the Orsu and Orlu people. The chapter gave an insight into the political relationship between the Eze of Orsu and the Eze of Orlu chiefdom. The study also identified that Orsu and Orlu people traditional political systems were similar but each kingdom existed as autonomous units. However this was not to say that there was no interaction at the political level between Orsu and Orlu people and that It was the development in Orsu and Orlu people relations in the face of the changes in political systems that attracted attention of other socio-cultural and economic activities. In other words, the chapter asserts how the Orsu as well as the Orlu ethnic group has been described as race that has strong socio-political relations. This is because unlike other ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Orsu and Orlu people build a strong centralized states, the villages were therefore the centre of government which has been described as direct democracy. Chapter three also examined the various socio-cultural activities between the Orsu people and Orsu and

Orlu people. These cultural activities was one major event that improve the cordial relationship between Orsu and Orlu people, especially the festival celebration, cultural dance, traditional wears, marriage and other social activities. Chapter three also examined the economic and trade relations between Orsu and Orlu people. The study gave an historical account of also the goods and services both the Orsu and Orlu people exchange and how they engaged in both short and long distance trade.

Conclusion

This study showed that inter-group relationship no doubt helped in straightening relationship among the groups. Both the negative and positive aftermath result contributed immensely in that regard. Another area of inter-relation was marriage, which institution promoted inter-communal relationship binding families, lineages and other grouping in reciprocal duties and other obligations. In addition, trade played a significant role, as inter-clan trade traversed the length and breadth of the area as a result of ecological dispersion which enabled the production of variety of crops and goods. Two types of trading were recognized. They were the long-distance trade and local trade which were carried out through the system of trade by barter and later changed to the use of iron bars, copper rods and cowries as medium of exchange.

Through secondary and primary sources, the paper has given a historical illustration on how both groups interacted. Some of the major factors of contact for them were marriage, trade and commerce, warfare and diplomacy, language, migration, as well as trade-religious institutions. It is important to note that while they had a robust relations,

there were still reports of clashes among them however, wars were never endemic but another means for their continuous relationship. In sum then, the Orsu and Orlu inter-group relations in pre-colonial and post-colonial times, is one example of the numerous relationships that existed among the various peopling that make up what is today Nigeria.

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Ikena Okafor,	56years,	Trader,	Orlu,	11/7/2025
Ikenna Okafor,	67yrs,	Traditional	Orsu,	21/07/2025

		Palace Chief		
Isiokwe, Francis	57yrs,	Trader,.	Orlu,	20th June, 2025
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