

INTERGROUP RELATIONS IN EKPOMA BEFORE 1897

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **GRACE EBOSETALE IRIA** with matriculation number **ART2100445** in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin under my supervision.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty for the strength and wisdom in completing this project. Also, this project is dedicated to my lovely parents Aikhuomobhogbe Iria Pius and Aikhuomobhogbe Iria Christiana for the amazing support and love you showed to me.

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My heartfelt thanks also goes to my supportive friends, Ifeme Grace, Osamweide Precious, Umoru Success and Aliu Victory. Your resilience in study has shaped me in many ways. I am truly grateful for the advice, love, support and helpful discussions during various stages of this project. To my lovely coursemates, well-wishers and to all who have contributed to this project in one way or another, I extend my sincere appreciation and I am grateful.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Introduction

The examination of inter- group relations in Ekpoma prior to 1897 helps in understanding the confederated political structure, a centralized judicial system, mutual economic assistance and dependence, socio-religious contacts among other things existing in area¹. Ekpoma, in today's Edo State of southern Nigeria, is one of the sub-ethnic groups within the larger Edo-speaking ethnic group Esan but a people separate from Benin Kingdom's central authority. The intergroup relationship in Ekpoma is largely shaped by it's geography trading with other Esan communities based on cultural exchange that became inevitable. It's a region that has long been associated with complex systems of social organization involving many villages and sub-ethnic groups sharing linguistics/cultural ties.

The Ekpoma polity, which was mainly decentralized, revolved around clans and lineages and maintained a significant influence on inter-group relations. The compact nature of Ekpoma villages led to the inheritance of social functions, with family and clan heads being also referred to as leaders. The village heads, the "Onojie"(chiefs), were pivotal to the administration of the village by controlling resources, settling disputes and in representing the group interest of the community. The pre-colonial era saw the co-existence of segmentary leaders who shared power, much as there was no

absolute central authority like say that of Oba in Benin Kingdom, but that Onojie (the chiefs) played crucial roles for orderliness and conflict management.

In the pre-colonial period, society in Ekpoma hinges on kin-based social organization with lineage and descent taking precedence. Certainly, it can be assumed that before the dynamic period, the Edo who lived in the Benin area were socially and politically organized along lines which seem to have been characteristic of their kind elsewhere; that is to say as lineages which might aggregatively build themselves up into villages or small towns². Villages were based on extended family or clan structure, and the clan was at the centre of political affairs and day-to-day life. Relations between the groups at village sites were profoundly influenced by family, clan and kinship. Kin Relations among the Ekpoma, kinship relations in Ekpoma society were not only within family units but also with members of wider vilage communities. Elders were also vested with considerable power and with the task of ensuring peace and solving conflicts in the village. Lineages had important functions in control over inheritance, marriage arrangements, and land allocation, conflicts within or between clans being always supervised by gerontocracies or village councils.

Economically, the villages of Ekpoma were highly interdependent. The trade in palm produce, kolanuts and other commodities created economic interdependence that further cemented these ties with the neighboring communities³. People worked in agriculture which is the economic backbone. Generally, Ekpoma is located in a forest

zone and this makes the soil very fertile. The inhabitants were farmers with the soil being very fertile. Since each village or clan focused on growing certain crops and other economic activities (e.g., weaving, pottery, blacksmithing), inter-village trade was critical for the delivery of food and other necessities.

The people of Ekpoma belong to the larger group known as the ESAN ethnic group and their occupation is mainly subsistence farming with staple crops such as yam, cassava, maize and plantain. Trade in Ekpoma further expanded towards other parts of the Benin Kingdom as well as numerous communities in the Niger delta region. The principal economic crops raised were kolanuts and coconuts. These two plant crops were of prime economic importance to the community due to their function. Kolanuts were the first item to be presented during any gathering/meetings of all kind of visit. For such ceremonies as wedding, burial, age-grade promotion both coconuts and kola nuts were important. Such interactions were frequently based on annual festivals and cultural relations that had the effect of strengthening community identity. Commonalities in religious life including worship of Ogun and Osun, veneration of ancestors contributed to cultural ties between groups. These festivals were a community event and were assembled between neighbouring clans and frequently used to reconcile disputes, perform marriages and give reverence to ancestors and/or deities⁴.

This study therefore, offers valuable insights into how social cohesion and cooperation were maintained in pre-colonial Esan communities, providing a foundation for understanding the socio-political organization of the Ekpoma people in particular. This historical context will give us an understanding about the pre – colonial cultural ties, group identity and interaction among the Esan people.

Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this research is to explore the inter group relations among Ekpoma communities before 1897. The specific objectives of this study include:

1. To examine the historical origin of Ekpoma.
2. To examine the political organization of Ekpoma communities.
3. To examine the nature of inter group relations among the Ekpoma people.
4. To examine the festivals in Ekpoma.
5. To examine the cultural ties among Ekpoma clans.

Scope of study

The scope of study covers the intergroup relations in Ekpoma from the earliest times when the communities emerged to 1897 and they were conquered by the British and brought under colonial rule. The study discusses the level of interactions among the communities, trade, religion and cultural practices among the people.

Methodology

This study adopts the historical method of research. It utilises sources from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources used in this study includes oral interviews and archival sources. The secondary sources used in this study includes textbooks, articles and other materials from the internet.

Literature Review

The review of existing literature relevant to this research work is very necessary because without their review, this research work cannot be sufficiently considered to be an intellectual or academic piece. This literature review will explore existing studies and historical accounts that offer insights into the social fabric of Ekpoma, focusing on kinship, governance, economic practices, and conflict resolution. Therefore, the invaluable materials consulted includes:

*The Benin Kingdom and the Edo -Speaking Peoples of South -Western Nigeria*⁵ written by R.E Bradbury examines the Benin kingdom and the Edo-speaking people who live in what is now southwestern Nigeria. The book covers several important topics including the physical environment where these people live, their language, population numbers, their history and traditional stories about their origin. Bradburys book makes substantial contributions to understanding inter-group relations in pre-colonial Ekpoma by systematically documenting traditional social structures, political

systems, cultural practices and essential data for analyzing how different groups interacted before 1897. However, while the primary focus of this study is on pre-colonial Ekpoma, Bradbury also acknowledged how colonial impacts disrupted and transformed inter-group relations.

Dawood Omolumen Egbefo in his article "Intra-Group Relations among Ekpoma Group of Villages, Edo State, Nigeria in the Pre-Colonial Era: A Historical Perspective"⁶ examines the internal relationships within the Ekpoma group in Edo state during the pre-colonial period. This article helped to show that there were evidences to suggest that to a large extent, their relationship was bilateral and cordial before the imposition of colonial rule dictated by historical antecedents and geographical situation. Egbefo's work provides detailed, localized analysis specifically focused on Ekpoma villages. While this study focuses on inter-group relations, this article focuses on intra-group relations which provides crucial insights on how Ekpoma villages within Ekpoma group relates to each other, which helps to understand the broader patterns of relationships.

"Conflict and Concord: A Study of Pre-Colonial Peace Building Process in Esanland, Nigeria"⁷ written by Dawood Omolumen Egbefo and S.O Aghalino examines how pre-colonial Esan communities in Nigeria maintained peace and harmony despite conflicts, focusing on their unique conflicts resolutions. The article highlights the role of traditional institutions and mechanisms used in resolving conflicts. This article will

give a broader understanding of this research work as it explored how Esan communities, despite their autonomous nature, maintained strong inter-group relations through trade, cultural exchange and diplomacy which contributed to overall peace and stability.

*Groundwork of Nigeria History*⁸ by Obaro Ikime is a relevant book that examines the history of Nigeria's diverse people. The book covers a multitude of different issues and regions such as the Benin kingdom, the trans-atlantic slave trade, nationalist movements and Borno in the 19th century. Chapter 5 in part 2 discusses the Benin empire, its expansionist policies, administrative systems and influence over surrounding areas including Esan communities. While the book does not specifically focus on Ekpoma in Esanland, it provides valuable background information that supports a broader understanding of inter-group relations in the region. Ekpoma being historically connected to the Benin kingdom would have been influenced by socio-political and cultural dynamics of the wider Edo-speaking world.

Dawood Omolumen Egbefo in his article titled "Fostering Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria: A Case Study of Benin-Esan Relations of present Edo State c1500-1897 AD"⁹ examines the basis and nature of the pre-colonial and early colonial interactions between the Benin and Esan. The article explores how geography or natural environment, culture, economics and politics fostered and sustained inter-group relations in Nigeria with specific reference to that of Benin kingdom and the Esan

people both of southern western Nigeria in present Edo state. However, this article directly aligns with the interest of this research work as it gives a broader understanding of the inter-group relations in Ekpoma before 1897.

" The Economic and Social Cultural Activities of EsanLand 1800-1900"¹⁰ written by D.O Egbefo examines the economic and social life of Esan land during 1800-1900 period, highlighting its indigenous systems and the initial phases of its interaction with the wider world. This article contributed to this research work by explaining how economic interdependence alongside cultural festivals fostered strong networks. These insights provide understanding of how Ekpoma interacted with its neighbors. However, the article leaves certain areas underexplored particularly with regards to specific communities like Ekpoma which this research work aims to investigate in greater depth.

Esan Native Laws and Customes: With Ethnographic Studies of the Esan People by C. Okojie¹¹ examines the social, political and cultural practices of the Esan people providing insight into their unique way of life. This book discusses on the traditional laws that governed relationships between groups, cultural frameworks within which inter-group relations operated and provides detailed ethnographic analysis of Esan society. However, the time frame leans more on the 20th century with less attention to the pre-colonial period before 1897 and lacks localized case studies of Ekpoma. This book will be combined with this research work to fully capture Ekpomas way of life.

"The Nature of Pre-Colonial Benin and her Neighbour International Relations"¹² written by Akahomen Sebastine Agah examines the international and intergroup relations between the kingdom of Benin and its neighboring societies before colonial conquest, particularly the British invasion of 1897. The book explores how Benin kingdom maintained relations through diplomacy, trade, tribute systems with surrounding communities like Esan, Urhobo, Itsekiri etc. Although the book helps situate Ekpoma as a key community within Esanland, it focuses more on Benin and its foreign relations providing limited information about Ekpoma itself. This research work will display more information on Ekpoma and its neighbors.

An article written by Dawood Omolumen Egbefo titled "The Impact of Trade and Commercial Activities in Pre-Colonial Esan Economy up to 1900"¹³ examines how trade and commercial activities shaped and influenced the economic life of Esan communities during the pre-colonial period. This article contributes to this research work by documenting how trade relationships formed the basis of inter-group contact and demonstrates how trade created mutual dependence between groups. Although, this article matches the research timeframe but has slight extension to 1900. Unlike this article which primarily explores economic impact rather than relationship dynamics, this research work will focus on both economic impact and relationship dynamics.

"Esanland, Edo state, Nigeria: An Ethnographic Study of the Origin of the Tribe and Tribal"¹⁴ written by Williams Orukpe re-examines the origin of Esan tribal identity and challenged existing narratives about Esan origins. This article contributes to this research work as it provides foundational understanding of Esan tribes that would have influenced inter-group relations and how it explored the pre-colonial period. Nevertheless, this article concentrates on tribal origins rather than inter-group relationships dynamics and does not specifically examine how origin stories affect actual inter-group relations, but this research work will fully examine how the tribal identity influenced their inter-group relationships.

Jacob Egharevba book titled *A Short History of Benin*¹⁵ provides the narrative of the Benin empires history, focusing on its origins, political structure, culture and the events leading to the British invasion of 1897. Its contribution provides historical context of the Benin kingdoms relationships with tributary and neighboring communities including Esan areas. Egharevba explains how some Esan towns were founded by migrants fleeing from Benin and Benin warriors administering parts of Esan land which indicates early inter relationship. Though the book presents a Benin-centric narrative often neglecting the perspectives of Esan groups like Ekpoma, this research study will use this book as a supplement to delve deeper into Ekpoma.

*Benin And Europeans 1485-1897*¹⁶ written by A.F.C Ryder examines the diplomatic protocols between Benin and Europeans nations, showing how the kingdom initially

negotiated from a position of strength. The work covers the role of commercial practices, showing how both sides adapted their economic systems to facilitate exchange. Ryder also explained the gradual shift in powers which undermined Benin position. However, the documentation of Benin tributary system and administrative structure helped to illuminate how communities like Ekpoma functioned within broader networks. Unlike this book which did not capture the day-to-day interactions between communities like Ekpoma, local conflicts, marriages remain understudied. This research work will bring these concepts into limelight.

P.A Igbafe's *Benin Under British Administration: The Impact of Colonial Rule in African Kingdom 1897-1938*¹⁷ examined the British conquest of 1897 and the immediate aftermath of the punitive expedition that destroyed much of Benin city. The book also examined the transition to indirect rule under Lord Lugard's reforms, analyzing how British modified the traditional authorities. This book contributes to this research work as it provides a foundational knowledge of traditional Benin political structures and economic system before the colonial transformation. Despite its valuable contributions, the book primarily focuses on post 1897 period in Benin and gave limited attention to Ekpoma. However, this research work will give a broader understanding of the pre-colonial era in Ekpoma.

"African Value System and the Impact of Westernization: A Critical Evaluation of Esan Society in Edo state, Nigeria"¹⁸ written by Enato Lucky Success Ehimeme

examines the cultural values of Esan spanning from the governance, family, religion, social and economic system which was challenged by western influences. The study reflects Esan resistance and selective adaptation to western norms, emphasizing that while westernization offered benefits it disrupted the traditions. This work offered indirect insights as it highlights administrative systems, religious systems, family structure, marriage institutions in the traditional Esan society. Although, this book concentrates on the post early 20th century westernization and discussed the broader Esan transformations, this research work will have its main focus on Ekpoma during the pre-colonial era.

*The Benin Monarchy: An Anthology of Benin History*¹⁹ written by Oriiz Onuwaje and Obaro Ikime examines the empire's early origins to the rise of the current monarchical dynasty which is also one of the most enduring royal lines. Despite its focus on Benin, the book explains how Benin centralized power exerted political and military influence over Esan communities and the migration that is often cited in Ekpoma's foundational myths. While rich on Benin history, the anthology mentions Esan areas like Ekpoma without providing in-depth case studies. While leveraging this book, this research work will explore deeply and provide in-depth case studies of Ekpoma.

*Evolution Of Benin Chieftaincy Titles*²⁰ written by Enawekponmwen Basimi Eweka examines the transformation of Benin's hereditary and appointed titles from ogiso era

(Edion) to Benin's complex chieftaincy system. The book describes how core titles like uzama, odionwere originated, became institutionalized and evolved under the oba dynasty. This book attributes an understanding as to how Benin titles influenced border communities like Ekpoma which shaped how Ekpoma negotiated tribute, allegiance and autonomy. The title evolution is described wholly on Benin and limited attention was given to Ekpoma's adaptation and local meaning of these titles. This research will heavily focus on Ekpoma's titles and their responsibilities.

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CHAPTER TWO

EMERGENCE OF EKPOMA COMMUNITY AND ITS POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Introduction

Human settlement's character, growth, and identity are greatly influenced by its geography, and Ekpoma, a well-known town in Edo State, Nigeria, is a prime example of the connection between the physical environment and community development. Ekpoma is a significant town in Edo state, located in the south-south region of Nigeria that serves as the administrative headquarters of the Esan west local government area. It lies on the geographical coordinates of approximately 6°45'N latitude and 6°08'E longitude¹. The area known as Ekpoma was a district in the defunct Ishan Division of the Mid-Western region now Edo State of Nigeria. The Ekpoma district as a whole measures about 110 sq. miles². It is bordered by towns such as Irrua, Uromi, Ubiaja and Auchu(see appendix 1). The whole district was/is forested. There are no outstanding physical natural features. Ekpoma, derived from the esan linguistic tradition and classified among the seven original plateau chiefdoms is an example of the intricate political development that resulted from interactions between immigrant groups from powerful Benin empire and indigenous people of north-eastern African countries⁴.

The plateau chiefdoms, originally seven of them have been classed as Esan 'A' which includes Irrua, Ekpoma, Uromi, Ewu, Ubiaja, Udo and Ugboha⁵. The town, which serves as a pivotal point connecting various parts of Edo State and promoting regional connectivity within the larger Nigerian spatial framework, is located in Nigeria's

middle belt region, which is defined by transitional geographical features between the northern savanna and southern forest zones. The emergence of Ekpoma community is deeply connected with his geographical frames, as physical environment, strategic location, and natural resources have formed settlement patterns, cultural development, and the community organization over the centuries.

Emergence of Ekpoma Community

The emergence of Ekpoma community as a settlement is deeply related with the broader migration patterns and its political organization that characterized the region during 15th and 16th centuries. The first waves of migration in the area that would eventually develop into Ekpoma can be linked to the time frame of 500 CE to 750 CE, during which hunter-gatherers started to inhabit the savannah-forest environment of what is currently referred to as Esanland, as well as the forest region of the Benin Empire⁶. These early settlers created a pre-Esan, pre-Edo society that built advanced structures such as moats and walls around family properties, establishing the foundational settlement patterns that would influence later migrations⁷.

The community's emergence cannot be understood alone and must be viewed within the wider context of the Esan diaspora, which is well-defined in the Edo language in Esan meaning to jump or flee which comes from the Benin word '*Esan fia*', and was inspired by the circumstances of departure from the Benin kingdom⁸. The inhabitants of Ekpoma trace their origin to Benin with a few exceptions. Their language is a dialect of Benin, in most cases very similar, though not always understood by pure Benin. Some of the differences are in form of the word and some in intonation or

pronunciation alone. Their tribal marks, types of features and physical characters also proclaim their Benin origin⁹.

During the migration period, the reigning oba Ewuare lost his two sons on the same day and this saddened the king. He enacted a bereaved monarch which was called the draconian legislation. He decreed a compulsory mourning period that lasted for three years and prohibited the subjects from engaging in activities such as sexual relations, sweeping and washing of their houses, eating cooked food. Subsequently, to escape the harsh treatment and prohibition of several activities made by the Oba, the ancestors of Esanland fled into the Bush and established an autonomous community, thereby first establishing Irrua¹⁰. The formation of the modern Esan nation, including Ekpoma, is thought to have occurred in the 15th century, when nobles and princes predominantly left the nearby Benin Empire and traveled northeast; there, they established communities and kingdoms known as Eguares among the indigenous populations they encountered¹¹.

The use of the term "Eguares" for these emerging communities reflects the transfer of political and administrative ideas from Benin to the new regions, highlighting a continuity of culture despite being geographically displaced. This pivotal migration marks the most important demographic shift in Ekpoma's history and laid the groundwork for the settlement patterns that still shape the town's organization today.

The first migrants that came into Ekpoma were mostly traditional rulers. Ekpoma was founded by a man called Jibome, who was the first settler in Ekpoma and the first traditional ruler in Ekpoma kingdom¹². Rather than forming one centralized settlement, the migrants built several villages that upheld cooperative connections

while maintaining their local identity and independence. The twelve community units that occupy the area referred to as Ekpoma are; Eguare, Emaudo, Emuhi, Idumebo, Ihunmudumu, Illeh, Iruokpen, Uhiele, Ujemen, Ujoelen, Uke, Ukpenu¹³. The communities consist of several quarters and sub-communities with Eguare as the headquarter. Though Eguare is the political headquarter of the Kingdom, Ihunmudumu is the ancestral headquarter as that's where the Oṭo shrine (Alu Oṭo) is located¹⁴. Based on the preceding discussion, it is evident that villages existed prior to the establishment of the Eguare. This situation is further illuminated by the structure and membership of equals in Uromi. It has been noted that the Eguare was primarily settled by slaves, whereas the princes resided in Ebhoiyi; thus, the villages had already formed a political organization well before the onset of royal dominance in the second half of the 15th century¹⁵. In every community, there were leaders who gained prominence through military achievements as Ekakulo or through their wealth. Leaders from various Esan towns including Ekpoma were summoned to Benin by Oba Ewuare. He educated and developed these leaders from the respective Esan communities.

In turn, they brought back to Esanland the symbols of royalty, including the terms Eguare and Igule. It is not an oversight, as some historians suggest, regarding Egharevba's failure to mention Esan among the towns, villages, and rulers that Oba Ewuare had conquered. Upon their return from Benin, they asserted that the Oba had appointed them as Enijie. They soon distanced themselves from the people and eventually moved to new locations where they established their Eguare¹⁶.

Eguare consists of the royal Family and families that grew into quarters out of servants who traditionally lived in Ikokogbe. Another quarters in Eguare is Ukpughe which was founded by Isidaehomen, the second son of Udawe. Uwenlenafua was also founded by Afua, a junior brother of Udawe and second son of Odia and Uwenlen - oibo which was the very first settlement of the Binis who deserted the city during the Oba Ewuare reign. Their leader was Ijiebomen from here the ruling family moved to present Eguare¹⁷.

Emaudo is another constituent community that serves as part of the broader Ekpoma kingdom's territorial organization. The initial settlement in this area was established by a Nupe named Idubor. He is said to have come from a place called Ada - Udo somewhere in Bida or Ibira land in the present Niger and Kogi state. This village had a military origin as the man Idubor is said to have been the military commandant of the regiment of soldiers who came on plundering expedition in the area¹⁸. Some warriors who grouped together under the name "Hausas" later chose to remain with him, although most of them were actually from the northern region of IFEKU (IHEKU) Island along the Niger River. However, when they arrived in Ekpoma the Onojie of Ekpoma was to have given them a land to settle and used them as mercenary soldiers. Many of the Emaudo quarters are quite unique and entirely lack any familial ties. They constitute the same village solely due to their proximity to one another.

Emuhi is one of the eight villages that make up the Ekpoma clan in Edo State, Nigeria. It is believed to be a collection of smaller settlements that eventually integrated into the area known today as Emuhi. It is a group name for the eight quarters which are

Ebhoje, Oke, Igor, Idumumegbon, Ubhue, Udo, Edueki, Uwehimi¹⁹. The individual quarters within Emuhi have their own unique origins, with some settlers coming from other Esan towns and even from the Benin area. Ebhoje and Igor village was founded by two brothers by name Efeal and Oza who were sons of the Oba of Benin. This land was given to them by Onojie of Ekpoma yet they only owe him limited allegiance. After a while, another of their brother named Alege, settled near them and founded the the Udo quarters. The next quarter to be founded was Idumumegbon by Egbon, the don of Ogirole (founder of Ukpoke). Idumumegbon is part of Uhiele in spite of it being part of Emuhi village in location.

Eventually, an individual from Iruekpen established the Oke quarters, while the Ubhue quarters were created by Atagame, the third son of the Onojie of Ekpoma. The creation of Ubhue village was deemed essential since the Onojie of Ekpoma expressed challenges in communicating with the residents of other communities in Emuhi, prompting him to designate Ubhue as a guardian. Before this development, Ubhue was located in Eguare. The Edueki quarters was founded by a man called Egbon who was a slave trade for the Oba of Benin. He settled here, had children and his descendants make up most of the people in that quarters. The eight communities in order of seniority are as follows; Ebhojie, Oke, Igor, Idumunegbon, Ubhe, Udo, Edueki and Uwehinmin²⁰

Idumebo quarters was said to have been settled by later immigrants from obeidu, a village in the present day uromi. The original immigrants were said to have arrived Irrua almost the same time as the Ugboka immigrants from Benin. Oral tradition has it that majority of it's founders were not among those from Benin rather they migrated

from Ibiebhe. This village, famous for its native doctors, hence its name village of doctors, consists of Idumun - Ewakon, Odogbe, Uwen - Ikhale, Uwen - Izako and Idunegbon from Idumun-nin-ogbon²¹.

Ihunmudumu is also another community in Ekpoma that was founded by Uwase who was one of the sons of the first Onojie of Ekpoma, uda. He lived in the Egbelowesi idumu where the central meeting place/house Okuoghele is located. This meeting place is used by the whole of Ihunmudumu group including Ujoelen and Ukpenu. The village of Ihunmudumu is made up of the descendants of Uwase and other immigrants. Ihunmudumu consists of the following quarters; Egbe - Ibhiuase, Isibhohi, Idumuoakhen, Isibhi - enelo, Isibhua, Idumogo, Isibhelua²².

Illeh is situated in the northeastern section of Ekpoma land. It was established by a man named Ose, who originated from Ibiaro in the Kukuruku region of what is now Edo State. This village is relatively large and can be referred to as a collection of villages. Illeh covers Imule, Ukhiodo, Eborua, Uguoben, Uwene, Idumeakon, Ekunanlen, Ihonmidumun and Enogban²³.

There are two differing myths regarding the origin of Irukep. The first version, told by the Ihumudumu people, claims that the village was established by Uwase's second son, Irukehide, whose descendants migrated westward and founded the settlement. The Irukep people often reject this narrative and assert their own version, which states that their village was established by a man named Ekpen, the son of the Obi of

Agbor. Ekpen experienced mistreatment from his father and informed the oba of Benin about it. In response, the oba assembled soldiers to confront and defeat his father. This situation troubled Ekpen, prompting him to rush and warn his father, who then prepared for battle. In retaliation, the oba placed a curse on Ekpen, driving him into madness. He roamed until he found himself in Ekpoma. According to this myth, Ekpen married a woman named Iruekhede, who hailed from Irhuede in Benin. Together, they had children along with other immigrants, resulting in the formation of Iruerken²⁴.

Uhiele is made up of Ukpoke, Akahia, Ehanlen and Idumegbon, Idumu of Emuhi village which form one clan since they trace their descent from a common ancestor. Ebhoakawala and Idumegan belong to one clan, whereas Idumigun and Ikhiro stand alone with no ties to any of the Uhiele villages. According to the myth surrounding the origins of Ukpoke, the village was established by a man named Ogirole, who escaped from the Ihogbe quarters in Benin due to committing adultery with a wife of one of the Obas. The term "Ukpoke" translates to "hilly place." After Ogirole established himself in Ukpoke, he was accompanied by his stepbrothers, Obaguhen and Ahregieme. Once they were settled, Onojie summoned Ogirole, but he declined the invitation and instead sent his younger brother, Ahregieme, who was received warmly by the oba and granted the land known as Akahia, with Ogirole's consent. The village of Ehanlen was founded by the half-brother of Ogirole, obaguhen. He was a hunter, and while out hunting one day, he grew hungry and chose to crack open a

palm nut. He discovered that the palm nut from this young palm tree (ohanlen) was quite tasty. Believing the land where he hunted was abundant with this type of palm tree, he decided to make his home there. The Idumu of Emuhi village was established by a man named Egbon, who, similar to his father, engaged in an affair with one of his father's wives and was forced to flee to Igor, where he was granted some land to settle and create a village²⁵

Ujemen, as it is known today, was originally called Ejemen, which translates to "good place." It relocated to its current position many years ago and is one of the primary villages that make up what is referred to as Ekpoma or Ekuma, a name that has since been altered. The village shares boundaries with the communities of Iruokpen, Ikhideu, and Idumebo and is actually the ancestral land of the Ekpoma people, which can be traced back to the site of Ambrose Alli University. Ujemen was initially composed of three large quarters, namely Idumohi, Ugbevorun, and Uwenogbora. Idumohi, in particular, included the settlements of Odogbe, Idumugiede, Idumogho, Uwensumen, Uwenlenaba, and Uwenmakaba. Although Uwenogbora and Idumebolo were regarded as one quarter in the past, the desire for independence has led to the present division into seven quarters in Ujemen: Odogbe, Idumugiede, Ugbevon, Uwenagbora, Idumebolo, Idumogho, and Uwenmakaba.

Historically, Odogbe was the first settler in the area that is now Ujemen, followed by Idumebolo, which arrived through Uwenogbora to become part of Ujemen. This

particular quarter, Idumbolo, was known for its prominent native doctor, who came to Eguare to practice his trade alongside his kinsmen²⁶.

However, there are different myth of origin that explains how ujoelen was founded. According to Christopher Okojie, one of Oba Ozolua's daughters called Uoelen was so beautiful that all the great men of Benin fought to secure her hand in marriage; the battle was so much that the girl who combined beauty with wisdom, decided to shun the contestants with their wealth, and to spite them, she chose a nonentity as a husband. This was an unprecedented insult on such great Binis as the Iyase, Ezomo, Uwague etc. To humiliate the princess they demanded the head of the innocent man. Uoelen fled with her Romeo, seeking safety in the jungle. They founded Ujoelen and they expressed thanks to God who delivered them safely to their hideout by worshipping Ojiebiudu, which actually was no juju but just an expression that they were then in existence by virtue of the Onojie who owned the land and on their own strength of evading the jealousies of powerful Benin Chiefs²⁷.

Historical records have not been credited to the origins of Uke village in Ekpoma. It is crucial to highlight that Uke is an extension of Ihumudumu. This positions Uke within the larger historical context of Ekpoma's settlement patterns. Ihonmidumun is referred to as the very first settlement of Ekpoma and acts as the administrative hub where all major and serious meetings in Ekpoma took place. As a derivative of this initial settlement, Uke is part of this ancient legacy.

Ukpenu village as founded by a man called ukpenu who as a son of ihumudumu. It is an extension of ihumudumu. He named his village after himself and they had a cordial relationship with ihumudumu and ujoelen with whom they celebrate age-grade ceremonies²⁸.

Every quarter and village in Ekpoma have its own unique founding story, whether it originates from royal decree, the arrival of refugees, or organic growth from neighboring communities. These varied beginnings, from the royal districts of Eguare to the thriving settlements in Iruekpen, from the historical Ihonmidumun to the larger villages like Uke collectively demonstrate how the individual histories and movements of families merged into a cohesive political entity under the leadership of the Onojie.

Political organization of Ekpoma

Prior to British colonization and the introduction of western governance, the people of Ekpoma had established a complex and effective political structure that was deeply rooted with their culture, traditions, and kinship ties. This local governance system regulated every facet of social life, including leadership, justice, security, and religious practices. In contrast to highly centralized kingdoms like Benin or Oyo, Ekpoma functioned under a semi-centralized monarchy led by the Onojie, who was supported by a council of elders, age-grade associations, and village leaders.

At the helm of affairs was the great *Onojie* (King) of Ekpoma, whose position of governmental power, might and authority was and is synonymous to the great Oba of Benin²⁹. The *Onojie* was the Supreme, if not absolute Head of State in the indigenous Ekpoma Chiefdom, consisting of communities/villages³⁰. The story of how the Onojieship title came to be is as ancient and timeless as the narrative of the founding of the Ekpoma chiefdom. The *Onojie* resides in Eguare, the chiefdom's administrative center, where he oversees important issues concerning the communities. In addition, like the Benin system after the Ogiso dynasty, the system of succession to the throne of the Onojieship automatically became effective through the primogeniture principle after the coming king would have performed the burial rite of the late father³¹. The Onojie enjoyed numerous privileges. The Onojie had the right to acquire land in any part of his kingdom for communal use such as market (*eki*), cemetery (*egbi Itolimin*), shrine (*aluebo*) and playground (*ukpugbele*), without hindrance³². He had the authority to demand work from villages, except those that were granted exemptions as a benefit.

The Onojie also conferred titles and called the *Ekhaimon* to deliberate on specific or general policies. *Ekhaimon* refers to the titled chiefs. They were representatives of the Onojie selected from various villages within Ekpoma. In many instances, the Onojie may not know the *Odionwele* but he knew his titled chiefs whom the villagers also recognize. Whereas the *Odionweles* authority in the village is derived from age and custom, that of the *Ekhaimon* is derived from the Onojie. They assisted the *Onojie* in

overseeing issues that concern the entire chiefdom of Ekpoma. He had a contingent of actual titled individuals in Eguale whom he dispatched to the Igule as his envoys. In Ekpoma village group, the Onojie serves as the highest executive authority and plays a pivotal role in unifying the group, being regarded as the father figure for all. He fulfills the roles of chief judge, title bestower, supreme commander of the military, head of the highest court, grantor of state pardon, extraordinary chief priest, and representative of the land's founding ancestors. These various responsibilities and characteristics of the king position him as a crucial factor for social integration and cohesion within the community.

The Onojie is supported by a council of elders, known as the Elders Council (*Edion*), who represent various quarters and villages within Ekpoma. They are derived from the age grade system and are the senior age-grade. This council assists the Onojie in governance, particularly in decision-making related to land disputes, community development, and the preservation of Esan traditions and cultural Practices³³. The village council was in each case composed of the *Edion* or elders, presided over by the most elderly man of the village *Odionwere* with whom sit the titled men *Ekhaimon* though this is only if they are themselves of *Edions* age grade. The *Edion* represent the responsible opinion in the village; they try cases and settle disputes. The laws of the Onojie are transmitted through the *Ekhaimon* to the *Odionwere* who then called the meeting of elders to discuss the matter and set the executive machinery in motion³⁴. In the *Edion* group, there typically exists an organized structure. The elder

who is most senior by age or title is referred to as the Odionwere in Benin, or by other names like Okhaimon in Esan communities. This elder leads the council and acts as the representative of the Edion in outside matters. Other elders may have specific responsibilities based on their expertise or family heritage. Their authority is derived not from force or political strength, but rather from respect, wisdom, and tradition. In Esanland including Ekpoma, although the Onojie holds the title of king and the top authority, he does not govern independently. The Edion provide counsel to him and assist in making decisions that are consistent with cultural norms.

An additional political tool in Ekpoma was the management of internal matters within a village or quarters through the *otu* system or the age-grades. Throughout the community, there are three distinct age-grades, each assigned specific responsibilities, and the transition from one grade to the next is celebrated with ceremonial gifts and community festivities. Upon reaching the age where they can contribute to village tasks, a child joins the *Otu Egbonughele*, known for their role as street sweepers. This name is derived from *Ughele*, the central area of the village designated for meetings. Their responsibilities include various chores such as cleaning, running errands, clearing paths on farms, and performing other menial tasks for the village. At around 24 years of age, individuals in this group, along with their peers, advance to the *Otu Igene*, which represents the adult category. The *Igene*, made up of middle-aged men from different quarters and villages, are vital to the community as they uphold peace and serve as valiant warriors for the village's protection. Leadership within this group

is determined by one's courage and commitment to the well-being of the community³⁵.

The two junior age-grades mentioned, *Egbonughele* and *Igene*, are occasionally recognized by specific nicknames that reflect their roles. For example, the older youths in the top grade are sometimes referred to as *Erenata*, meaning "I will never accept begging," a nod to their role in collecting fines imposed by the village council. They may also be called *Ugiagbedion*, meaning "the people who assist the elders," among various other titles. This age-grade functions as the official messengers for the senior age grade. These messengers, known as *Aghale*, act as intermediaries for the senior group, tasked with enforcing penalties and rulings. They are responsible for distributing the collective offerings presented by those seeking advancement, fines, and other contributions. The *Aghale* are well-versed in the village's social customs and understand the entitlements of each individual³⁶.

Conclusion

Through a complicated process of innovation and adaptation, Ekpoma's political system developed, fusing Benin's monarchical traditions with local governance frameworks required by the region's shifting demographics and territory. The political structure of Ekpoma during the pre-colonial period was fundamentally based on tradition, hierarchy, and community values. Central to this governance structure was

the Onojie (king), whose power was both spiritual and administrative, supported by a council of elders referred to as the Edion.

Different age-grade systems and titled chiefs were essential in upholding law, order, and social progress. Decision-making predominantly involved the community, reflecting the collective voice and interests of its members. Although this system was not documented, it was well-organized and effective in ensuring stability, justice, and cultural preservation. It showcased the creativity of traditional African governance and continues to shape leadership practices in Ekpoma today.

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CHAPTER THREE

TRADE RELATIONS AMONG EKPOMA CLANS

Introduction

The clans of Ekpoma have traditionally regarded trade as a crucial element of their social and economic relationships. Situated in Esanland, which is now part of Edo State, Nigeria, Ekpoma consists of various clans that have historically established large networks for exchanging agricultural goods, crafts, and local materials. These trading relationships went beyond simple economic exchanges, also acting as opportunities to strengthen kinship bonds, promote interdependence, and enhance communal unity. The periodic markets in Esan communities, such as those in Ekpoma, served as platforms for clans to trade excess goods, strengthen cultural identity, and manage social responsibilities. According to Okojie, he points out that trade was closely tied to the geography and ecology of the area, with different clans specializing in crops and crafts best suited to their local environment, thereby ensuring a complementary system of exchange¹.

Trade also significantly contributed to promoting peace and reducing conflict. By generating economic benefits that clans were keen to safeguard, trade fostered collaboration instead of competition. Agricultural practices and the commerce that emerges from them were deliberately employed as distinct instruments for navigating relationships both among different groups and within them. The main idea presented here is that the trade interactions between Ekpoma clans in the pre-colonial period

were not merely leftover economic practices. Instead, they served as a crucial, established system that promoted social and political unity, encouraged local economic specialization, and created the internal stability necessary to support and maintain the centralized political power of the Onojie.

Examining the trade relations among Ekpoma clans, therefore, provides insights into how economic activities shaped not only the material conditions of the people but also their cultural and political structures

Trade Relations Among Ekpoma Clans

Ekpoma is part of the larger part of Esan economy, participating in significant domestic commerce with surrounding regions, enabled by periodic markets and focusing on products such as agricultural items (yam, cocoyam, plantain) and palm oil. Generally, Ekpoma is in a forest area with the result that the soil is very fertile. As a result of the fertility of the soil, the major occupation of the people was farming². Pre-colonial production mainly focused on personal needs; however, the idea of complete subsistence is no longer deemed valid due to evidence showing significant production aimed at exchange. Farming was the most important productive activity and was approached with a sense of importance. A key tenet of land ownership was that everyone should have access to land, *Otor*, for agricultural purposes³. Every man and woman were a simple farmer with main food crops like yam, rice, corn or maize, cocoyam, cassava and beans of various types; pepper, groundnuts, melons, bananas

with plantains are subsidiary crops usually planted by the women in their husbands farm (see appendix 2). Most of the women have separate cocoyam and groundnut farms⁴.

Though the above-mentioned crops are grown in all the villages, yet, there was a sort of specialization which according to Dr. Odion Asemota, promoted inter-village relations and understanding among the Ekpoma village groups where particular crops are grown more in abundance in particular villages. The reason for this could be attributed to vested interest and physical ability. Hence yams, plantains and cocoyams were more in abundance in Irukpen and Emuhi while Eguale and Uhiele are noted for the cultivation of rice. There is extensive cultivation of rice at Ekpoma and its environs. Popularly called “Ekpoma rice”, it is very tasty and harvesting period usually witnesses traders from many places, particularly from Benin and east of the Nigeria coming to Ekpoma to trade on it⁵. The only cash crop grown was cotton and was used in the local cloth industry to make multi-coloured cloth. Ukpon-Ododo. The most important economic crops grown were kolanuts and coconuts. These two crops were of most vital importance to the community because of the use to which they were put. During any gathering/meetings of any kind of visits, kolanuts were always the first thing to be offered⁶.

The farmland is supported by favourable conditions and sufficient rainfall enabling diverse production. The major products of the farmers include plantain, yam, corn,

cocoyam, pepper and vegetables. Palm oil went through several production process as the kernel was cracked and the nuts were fried, the oil that comes out from the nuts serves as the local pomade known as *Uden*. The women were involved in making of local soaps and weaving of mats (see appendix 3). Apart from farming as the major occupation for men they also engage in weaving of baskets. While the men go to the farm, hunting of games and setting of traps for animals in the bush. There were few blacksmiths who engaged themselves mainly in sharpening cutlasses and making crude hoes and knives⁷. This clearly shows that the economy in Pre-Colonial Ekpoma was heavily based on agriculture with focus on tree crops, cash crops and crafts.

In Pre-Colonial Ekpoma, trade was primarily agricultural conducted through a five-days market cycle using barter or cowries. Trade also involved internal exchange with neighbors and long distance trade with groups like the Benin kingdom which exchanged goods. The market day of each clan is/was held every five days and it was done in such a way so that the market on any particular day will not clash with another major market. So, it was designed in such a way that it was rotational in nature. These markets include Aigbera Odion, Eki-Erame, Ofuri market Ekiughe Egan, Ekiughe, and Eki Ekpen the 6th market located at Irukekpen. All these transactions were made with cowries till the advent of the British coins and currencies⁸. The market system promoted specialization and trade between various villages. Agriculturalists supplied yams, cassava, cocoyams, plantains, vegetables, and palm products to the markets, whereas artisans and merchants offered iron

implements, ceramics, textiles, and jewelry. Due to the fact that markets took place on various days and in different locations, traders had the opportunity to participate in several markets within a five-day span, thus enhancing trading possibilities.

This established an effective and ongoing system of exchange that maintained economic equilibrium and ensured the availability of goods throughout Esanland. Markets grew in Eguale, Iruokpen, Emuhi and Uhiele. All women started to go to Eguale market to buy rice while they went to Iruokpen market to buy yams, cocoyams and earthenware pots which the people of Ozalla and Ovbito came to sell there. These pots served as cooking pots; they were also used for the storage and drawing of water. Sleeping mats were bought at Uhiele market while yams and plantain were mostly got at Emuhi market⁹.

Trade routes by land were the same as the roads within the region. They were mere footpaths occasionally cleared to link one village or clan to another. For example, the principal local trade route by foot from Uromi and Ekpoma to Ehor near Benin and Ewu run from Ubiaja and Ugboha, Ewohimi and on to Ebelle, Amahor and Udo. There were markets in almost every village or clan¹⁰. Agricultural and manufactured products were exchanged in the domestic markets on market days and durable or less perishable items exchanged in long distance trade. Domestic markets varied in sizes as there were small markets called *Ekioto* and large markets *Ekiole*¹¹. All markets took place during daylight hours. The larger markets were visited as early as possible,

while those in smaller and less affluent areas were attended later in the day. The market days *Edeki* were so chosen that no clashes occurred in the markets which also have varying numbers of days, ranging from four to eight days. Most of the markets were held every morning or evening depending on the security situation¹². The market in Ekpoma served not only as a hub for trade but also as an important social and cultural institution. It was a gathering place for various groups of individuals including farmers, traders, elders, youths, and visitors who took the opportunity to engage with one another, share information, and strengthen social connections. Market days were usually seen as days for the community, with numerous social activities organized around them.

Initially, the means of trading was based on mutual responsibilities, which eventually developed into bartering and the utilization of cowry, *Ikpigho*. During the initial phases of Ekpoma's economic growth, trade by barter was the primary method of exchange. This approach entailed the direct exchange of goods and services without any currency involved. Within the various Ekpoma clans, including Eguare, Iruokpen, Emaudo, Ujemen, and Emuhi, each group focused on specific economic tasks influenced by their surroundings and the resources they had access to. These specializations promoted trade between clans, allowing one clan's surplus produce to be traded for another clan's goods.

According to Okojie, barter was not just an economic activity but also a social one that promoted unity and cooperation among the various clans¹³. Items like yam, palm oil, goats, and pots were traded through a mutual consensus. Nonetheless, this method had its limitations and one major issue was the challenge of establishing equivalent worth among various goods and the necessity for both parties to possess what the other desired. As trade grew, these limitations increasingly rendered barter less effective as trade expanded. As Ekpoma established stronger links with nearby Esan communities, the need for a practical and uniform currency arose. This demand resulted in the incorporation of cowries into the region. The introduction of cowries in the area occurred through trade activities.

Ryder explains that cowries came into inland communities such as Ekpoma through Benin's expanding trade network¹⁴. Cowries transformed economic transactions by acting as a common unit of value. This enabled people to trade goods conveniently without relying on a direct barter of items. Additionally, they were utilized for various functions such as settling bride prices, fines, and making ritual offerings, thus integrating into the cultural and social life of the Ekpoma community. The usage of cowries marked a transition from an economy based on subsistence to one that was monetized, facilitating increased interaction between the Esan communities and external traders.

Oral traditions from Ekpoma indicate that cowries were seen as a representation of wealth, frequently stored in clay pots and utilized during festivals and ceremonies. The articles of trade like soap, coconuts, pepper, groundnuts among other products were exposed for sale and they were divided up each division being sold for a number of cowries. The transition from barter trade to the utilization of cowries within the Ekpoma clans illustrates the community's economic flexibility and involvement in broader regional trade systems. Barter reinforced connections between clans and fulfilled local demands, whereas cowries improved trade efficiency, stimulated economic development, and facilitated integration into the Benin-controlled regional economy.

Trade was not just an economic endeavor, it served as a significant means for fostering social unity, building alliances, and encouraging harmonious relationships among different clans and surrounding communities. The inhabitants of Ekpoma, similar to other Esan groups, existed in a communal environment where economic pursuits were connected to social principles, kinship structures, and political arrangements. The specialization of different economic activities created interdependence among the clans since no single group could provide all its needs independently¹⁵

The necessity of frequently exchanging goods and services encouraged continuous social interaction among the community. Markets evolved into vital hubs of social

activity, where individuals not only traded items but also formed friendships, intermarried, and resolved conflicts. There were intergroup marriages among the people through betrothal¹⁶. Trade fairs and market days served as communal gatherings that united people, fostering a sense of togetherness and trust among them. Through these exchanges, barter trade in Ekpoma emerged as a means to enhance social connections. The trade of agricultural goods for crafted items or animals transcended mere economic dealings, it represented collaboration and social reciprocity.

Trade networks fostered a culture of fairness, trust, and negotiation, which played a key role in forming lasting friendships and alliances among individuals and clans. As time passed, these connections became formalized through common market practices, greetings, and rituals celebrated on market days. By engaging in trade, various clans and nearby Esan communities established collaborative connections that went beyond familial bonds. Market interactions frequently led to inter-clan marriages, which further consolidated alliances¹⁷. At the village level, the holding of markets brought people together from different quarters. This led to social interaction which generated the exchange of ideas. Developments along trade routes were important in the pre-colonial trade system¹⁸

Trade frequently coincided with celebratory and religious occasions that strengthened harmonious relationships. Market days held a sacred significance, and engaging in

violence or bloodshed during these times was viewed as a grave offense that the community would punish. This cultural prohibition fostered a peaceful environment for trade activities and motivated traders to settle conflicts through conversation and negotiation. The conviction that ancestral spirits safeguarded market days rendered them holy; hence, upholding harmony was regarded as an act of reverence to both the ancestors and the deities of the community.

It was earlier stated that trade maintained the centralized power of the Onojie and it can be seen with the fact that trade was an important approach for upholding peace and settling disputes in pre-colonial Ekpoma. Since trade connected different clans and surrounding communities, any instance of conflict could interrupt economic activities and endanger communal well-being. To avert this, traditional authorities like the Onojie of Ekpoma and the elder council acted as mediators to maintain peaceful relationships, particularly when conflicts emerged regarding trade or territorial disputes. Also, in the political aspect, the Pre-Colonial trade showed its significance. This could be seen at different levels. For examples, in the formation of the guilds, trading associations and thrift societies, Osusu discussed earlier, each organization laid down certain norms for the governance of its members. Certainly, this was an in-direct orientation into the political systems; people who officiated in such unions were vested with certain power¹⁹ Guilds in Ekpoma, therefore, trained their leaders not just in the mastery of their craft, but in state logistics, quality control,

efficient production quotas, and reliable resource provisioning all critical managerial functions required by a centralized monarchy²⁰.

The available evidence strongly indicates that craft guilds, trading associations such as Eken-Egbo and Ekhen-Oria, and Osusu thrift societies in pre-colonial Ekpoma served as vital secondary governance institutions. They provided a structured and rigorous introduction to the political system by promoting essential skills for effective governance, including self-discipline, management of command structures, enforcement of legislation, and accountability in financial matters. The authority granted to their leaders the ability to control pricing, oversee communal hunting areas was necessary for roles such as Ekhaemon or Odionwele. These groups guaranteed that political leadership, particularly at the local administrative level, was filled by individuals who had already proven their organizational abilities and moral integrity in the challenging, real-world context of the Ekpoma economy. This competency in managing high-value production and overseeing collective finances translated directly into practical skills.

Trade was a major source of wealth. The main basis of wealth was agriculture, which consistently functioned well beyond the subsistence level, producing substantial surpluses for both domestic and international trade. The need for extensive labor to clear forests and cultivate large farms for surplus production was a constraint. This led to the use of unpaid household labor and, importantly, the use of slaves for

farming. The possession and employment of slaves for increased production was a key way the nobility enriched themselves. Also, proceeds from the sale of lucrative exports and palm produce contributed to the royal coffers of the Onojie.

The trade that occurred before colonial times also influenced the dietary habits of the Esan people. While traditional foods remained important, new items were incorporated as well. For instance, starch, tapioca, and garri, which were previously consumed by the Urhobos, gradually made their way into Esan cuisine. Conversely, the Urhobos started to include yams in their diet, a food that had primarily been enjoyed by the Esan. The adoption of cutlery was inspired by Europeans, particularly among the Esan who had previously visited the Benin kingdom²¹

Although several accounts can recount the success of the trade relations among Ekpoma clan and even to the broader regional network, however it is important to note that while the trade resolved conflicts, there were still conflicts that occurred in pre-colonial Ekpoma. However, be that as it may, it will be misleading to present the picture of Ekpoma group of villages relations as if it was unity and cooperation all the time. There were also instances of disputes some of which led to armed conflicts and wars. The notable cases were the conflicts between Ekpoma and Illeh in 1746, Ukpoke and Ehanlen war 1779, Idumigun and Ugiolen war of 1816 and the Ukpenu and Emuhi skirmishes of 1826 or 1829 and several others the people cannot remember²². Not much is known about some of these conflicts, beyond the fact that

they usually resulted from such factors as the seducing for kidnapping of a woman, the seizure of property; the murder of person outside the Ekpoma confederacy among others. For example, one of the Illeh war with Emaudo in 1823²³ was caused when an Illeh woman was attacked in Ada-Udo market due to her refusal to pay tolls to the market official. The incident resulted into a war and siege on Emaudo because Illeh demanded apology from the family of the woman as she disobeyed the market officials.

Another cause of the conflict in pre-colonial Ekpoma was disputes over land. Trade relations in Ekpoma made it necessary for everyone to own a land. This fostered common law on land ownership and utilization²⁴. The land was entirely communal. Communal control was vested on the Odionwele of the village. Anyone of the indigenous son of the community or village could farm communal land, provided it has not been farmed before. Strangers could farm land, provided they obtained permission from the Odionwele and conform to the customs of the community like helping in any public work and joining the liberalized age-grade otu open all to further cement intra-group relations²⁵. There was individual ownership of land to some extent virgin bush, cleared by an individual for farming purposes, gave a certain right of ownership. No one could farm on that land afterwards without his permission or that of his heirs, if he is dead. Conflicts between villages frequently arose from disagreements over land ownership and territorial limits, since fertile land was the

main economic asset. This was a prevalent cause of warfare in pre-colonial Esan societies²⁶.

Several scholars have to agree that most wars experienced among the Ekpoma confederacy were easily resolved due to the several unity structures put on ground. Such structures include, the use of elders, inter village marriages, common use of natural resources, allegiance to the rulers and fear or the wrath of the ancestors²⁷. These and several other settlement structures never allowed disputes to be protracted and once peace was achieved, normalcy is returned but with precautionary measures to prevent such occurrences²⁸.

Conclusion

In summary, the trade relationships among the clans of Ekpoma illustrate how traditional economic systems can evolve in the face of contemporary challenges while upholding vital cultural values. The community markets, developing transportation infrastructure, and effective conflict resolution strategies have established a resilient trading system that fulfills both material needs and fosters social unity. As Ekpoma confronts future obstacles such as inadequate infrastructure, youth outmigration, and modern competition, it is essential to maintain and enhance inter-clan trade. Achieving success requires striking a balance between tradition and innovation, preserving the social aspects of trade while adopting technological advancements. Inter-clan trade in Ekpoma exemplifies the lasting strength of collaboration and the

potential for economic progress that honors cultural identity and reinforces community ties.

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CHAPTER FOUR

FESTIVALS AND CULTURAL TIES AMONG EKPOMA CLANS

Introduction

Ekpoma is one of those communities in Edo State, Nigeria that has a very rich tradition of festivals through which the people either thank or appease their various gods and ancestors¹. Ekpoma community boasts of a vibrant array of cultural traditions that unite their diverse clans through intricate festivals and ceremonial activities. Ekpoma, comprising multiple clans or *idumuegbe* (family compounds), has historically utilized festivals as platforms for negotiating inter-clan relationships, resolving disputes, and celebrating shared ancestry². The festival calendar of the community demonstrates a detailed comprehension of the relationship between spiritual practices, farming cycles, and social structures. Significant events like the Ihuen festival (uda festival), new Yam festival, age-grade ceremonies and rituals and unique clan ceremonies provide chances for members living away to come back home, strengthening their ties to their ancestral lands and family networks.

The cultural importance of these festivals goes beyond just their role in celebration. They act as vessels of historical memory, where ritual performances, oral stories, and dancing among its members. By strengthening the cultural ties, marriage served as an important symbolic action that contains vital information about migration trends, founding

ancestors, and the formation of different clans within the Ekpoma polity. Festivals within the Ekpoma clans act as vibrant traditions that unite the individuals through common beliefs, customs, and shared experiences. They maintain the community's cultural heritage while fostering social unity, continuity, and mutual understandportant mecahnism. Traditional wedding rituals feature intricate exchange between families, establishing connections that tie various clans together through relationships of kinship.

This chapter will showcase the full details of the several festivals that was/is celebrated among Ekpoma clans and the bond it created which strengthened cultural ties.

Festivals Among Ekpoma Clans

The Ekpoma clans hold various festivals that showcase their cultural traditions and spiritual values. These celebrations fulfill both religious and communal roles, highlighting significant times in the farming calendar and paying tribute to ancestral spirits.

Ihuelen Festival

According to Procyon News, for the typical Esan person, the literary interpretation of the term “ihuean,” which refers to “Ihuelen,” translates to “I rested.” Thus, Ihuelen signifies the act of resting or relaxation. The festival celebrates this moment of rest, or

the “Ihuelen,” following a hard year of labor. One might assume that “Ihuelen,” representing rest, would embody relaxation in the familiar sense such as sitting idle or sleeping³. However, the term “festival” clarifies the nature of this particular kind of rest or Ihuelen. In this context, the concept of rest or Ihuelen denotes a break from the regular daily activities of the community, meaning that farming and other work are paused for the duration of the Ihuelen. Typically, by the end of Ihuelen, participants often feel exhausted and fatigued, indicating that Ihuelen involves much enjoyment but does not equate to relaxation in the traditional sense, as it serves to honor ancestral spirits⁴. The celebration of Ihuen festival is dated back to 1456AD⁵. The Ihuelen festivals is usually held in February and sometimes falls in March. The participating communities included Uwenlenobo, Uwenlen Ebo, Uwendova and Ekeke Ogbe, among others⁶. In Ekpoma tradition, Ihuelen festival is also set aside for the celebration and commemoration of the life and death of some one, who is very dear to the people of Ekpoma; in this situation, the Eguare/Ekpoma and to celebrate and remember the reign of one of their Enijie. In the whole of Esanland, people celebrate different types of festival like Ihuelen but with different names. Ihuelen is known to be the annual festival of the Eguare – Ekpoma people. It is known as Ighele in almost other villages of Ekpoma⁷. In Uromi, it is referred to as *Ilukpe*. Other towns, such as Irrua and Ewu, observe the Muslim salah.

It is claimed that various clans embraced this heritage in various ways by linking the celebration to an ancestor, hero, or deity. For example, in Uhiele Ekpoma the Ighele

festival is known to be a celebration of one of their deities; *Eremenu*. It is linked with *Ekejokhor* in Emaudo Ekpoma, with *Efae* in Ukpenu, Ekpoma. While in Idumebo Irrua, their festival is called *ilunoko* which as the name suggested, is to commemorate a once existed iroko tree that must have played very vital roles in the lives of the people. The Illeh, Ekpoma people celebrate the Ighele festival in remembrance of their god *Elomojemene*⁸. The Ihuelen festival in Ekpoma is also associated with honoring one of its ancestral heroes, Uda (see appendix 4). Although other Enijie ruled prior to Uda, there is no evidence indicating that the Ihuelen festival was celebrated before that period. People claimed that this specific Onojie Uda greatly improved the quality of life for his subjects through his humility, compassion, courage, and fairness.

As a result, following his death, the residents of Eguare, Ekpoma chose to honor him by annually commemorating the life of their cherished Onojie Uda⁹. It is often stated that these various festivals manifest in different ways across various towns and villages. Many of these celebrations are religious, meaning they are conducted in honor of different gods with varying historical interpretations and significance. Such festivals typically take the form of Ighele, which includes the presentation of sacrifices or the worship of certain deities; however, the Eguare Ihuelen festival does not share this connection. It is solely intended to honor and remember the reign of an individual who actually existed. This person is not a deity but can be compared to a hero¹⁰.

Ihuen is a three-day festival celebrated annually, typically signifying the start of the traditional new year in Ekpomaland¹¹. It serves as a moment for prayers for peace, abundance, and a fruitful harvest, and it is an opportunity for the community, including those living in diaspora to unite. The Ihuelen festival functions as a vibrant archive of Esan history and customs.

By participating in this event, younger generations engage with their ancestral roots, gaining insights into traditional governance practices, spiritual beliefs, and the historical beginnings of their community. The festival effectively serves as a connection between generations, guaranteeing that cultural knowledge persists amid modernization. Ihuen serves as both an educational and entertaining experience, while also fostering love, peace, unity, and social harmony among individuals. It creates a chance for family or clan members to gather, engage, connect, and showcase their cultural unity. There were traditional dances like Agbenojie, Igbabonelinmin, Ohogho, Uleke, Iyoko (hunters dance). These were dances which used to bring the people together as a means of recreation. For instance, the Iyoko (hunters dance) do bring all the hunters at Uhie together. During the dance the hunters would demonstrate hunting tactics in the bush and the behaviour of animals in the bush. The public was free to watch these dances because they were staged in the open¹².

In this communal celebration, the king serves as the primary celebrator, while all sons and daughters of Ekpoma and their friends, families, and well-wishers participate as

co-celebrators. During the celebration of this festival, there were other activities that occurred in the Ihuelen festival. The Onojie confers title to deserving individuals. This is a traditional mark of honour as the Ekpoma citizens are being given authority from the Onojie. Also, the Onojie is dressed up in his regalia and is adorned ready to confer deserving titles on deserving citizens (see appendix 5). Furthermore, traditional priests conduct traditional rites in the Ihuen festival using kolanuts, palm wine to pray to the ancestors for good harvest¹³.

The Ihuen gives people from all walks of life who live and work in Ekpomaland the opportunity to pay homage to the Onojie. This outdoor ceremony usually happens on the third day of Ihuen¹⁴. Non-indigenes also pay homage to the king and this gives him the opportunity to create a relationship with these non-indigenes that will contribute to the growth of trade in Ekpoma land. The Ihuen has grown to the extent that it now allows some innovations such as performing artists (actants) from around Ekpomaland come over to the palace grounds to perform. The actants perform modern acrobatics (calisthenics) amid cheers and admiration from the surging crowd¹⁵(see appendix 6).

The Ihuelen festival is a major festival held in Ekpoma and it holds great significance for the residents of Ekpoma and the Esan community. It plays a crucial role in helping them preserve and remember their traditions, ensuring that their culture endures through time. The festival unites individuals from various locations and backgrounds,

fostering a sense of belonging to a large family. Through music, dance, traditional attire, and rituals, the Ihuelen festival provides the community with an opportunity to celebrate together, address issues and maintain a connection to their cultural heritage.

New Yam Festival: The New Yam Festival in Ekpoma, Edo State, also referred to as the Ihuan Cultural Festival, marks the end of the agricultural season and the beginning of the new yam harvest. This festival holds great importance for the Esan people of Ekpoma and the broader Esanland, with the next celebration scheduled from February 28th to March 2nd, 2025. The event features prayers, feasting, and cultural performances, which strengthen community ties and pay respect to ancestral traditions. The New Yam Festivals of the Esan people are celebrated from September to November¹⁶.

The New Yam Festival is primarily a ceremony of gratitude aimed at ancestral spirits (erinmwin) and the earth goddess (Osanobuwa or Isi), who are thought to guarantee fertility in agriculture and plentiful harvests. Prior to the festival, it is a common tradition that farmers cannot eat new yams, no matter how early their crops have ripened.

Each clan carries out initial ceremonies at their family shrines, where the oldest male members (okakulo) offer yams to their ancestors. These offerings generally consist of boiled yam, palm oil, kola nuts, and palm wine, along with prayers asking for ongoing prosperity, peace, and safety for the clan¹⁷. The Onojie sends his messengers

to the Eguale market to announce the date of the new yam festival across Ekpoma villages.

On the night before the designated date, the Egbonughele in every village would sweep and clean all the streets. On the morning of the celebration, the men would head to the farms to gather fresh yams for the women to prepare for dinner. While the men are at the farms, the women would keep busy tidying up the entire house by scrubbing and washing every area. In the evening, as the women cook, the men would gather to drink wine and share stories until the food was ready. When the meal is served, the eldest man in the household would first present the family juju before allowing others to eat. It was always a joyous occasion¹⁸. The festivities feature customary rituals, cultural performances, and communal meals. This occasion allows the community, both locally and abroad, to honor their heritage and leaders.

This event fortifies family ties and promotes the passing down of cultural heritage to younger individuals who might be living more in urban settings. The festival also encourages social interaction among different clans. Moreover, the festival season created a chance to tackle community issues, resolve conflicts, and convey significant messages impacting the clan or the larger society. The elders took advantage of these events to deliberate on governance, land distribution, and social rules, guaranteeing that the decision-making process was inclusive and open.

The New Yam Festival serves as a vital element of cultural identity and social unity among the Ekpoma clans. As a sacred ceremony and a community celebration, it reflects the lasting connection between the people, their territory, and their forebears.

Age-grade Ceremony

Asides the two festivals mentioned above, the age-grade Ceremony also known as Iruen was another social activity the strengthened the cultural ties among Ekpoma clans. The execution of this ceremony is one of the key events in a man's life, as it influences his entire status within the village throughout his lifetime. Therefore, this event can be seen as a rite of passage, marking the transition from being viewed as a child to being recognized as an adult in the community¹⁹. In many villages, though, simply being older is not sufficient to become an elder. Typically, the costly male coming of age ceremony, known as Irhuen which translates to "I tie on cloth", is a requirement for attaining the Odion grade.²⁰.

Typically, a man needs to have conducted a proper burial for his father, or occasionally both parents, before he can be considered for the role of elder. The most common way to become an Odion is by participating in the Ilodion ceremony, which involves the candidate providing gifts and hosting a feast for the current elders, who then grant their blessings and acknowledge him as one of their own²¹. However, following the subsequent process which was completed a gun was fired to approve the individual which is followed by eating and dancing through the hours of the night.

The age-grade ceremony brought individuals together with similar ages across different clans thereby strengthening the overall element of Ekpoma society. The initiation process signifies the shift from childhood to adulthood and also embeds values of responsibility, loyalty, and community service that are vital for sustaining social and cultural harmony.

Cultural Ties Among Ekpoma Clans

According to Yak Tack defined cultural ties as bonds or connections that link individuals or groups through shared beliefs, traditions, practices, and values, often rooted in a common heritage or historical experiences²². Ekpoma clans share traditions, beliefs and values that creates a sense of communal identity. Although there are dialectal differences among various Esan kingdoms, the Ekpoma clans possess core linguistic frameworks, cultural expressions, and symbolic systems that promote mutual comprehension and a shared identity²³. In spite of the conflicts, the Esans have preserved a unified culture largely shaped by the Benin Empire. This cultural coherence among Ekpoma and other Esan clans not only highlights their common roots in Benin but also reflects ongoing inter-clan relationships, intermarriages, and joint involvement in regional institutions that upheld cultural consistency.

There are several factors that strengthened the cultural ties among Ekpoma clans which includes; marriages and kinship network, Age-grade system, traditional

governance, religious and ritual rites, economic interdependence, festivals and celebrations. At the heart of Ekpoma's social structure are the Idumuegbe (family compounds), which establish vertical kinship connections through a lineage traced through the male line. Marriage customs enhance relationships between clans through complex ceremonies and exchanges that form kinship networks. In the past, marriage between clans like Eguare, Ujoelen, Emaudo, and others have been promoted, as they enhance relationships, harmony, and collaboration within the community²⁴. These marriages function not only as familial ties but also as means to preserve cultural heritage and maintain social unity.

Additionally, the age-grade system also brought different individuals from different clans to come together and observe common practices initiating the deserving citizens into the age grade system. This provided social cohesion and strong cultural ties among the people that encouraged sharing the same belief, traditions and values. Culture is the soul of a community, and the Esan age-grade system is its guardian. Through cultural preservation and education, age grades can establish cultural hubs, museums, and educational centers, ensuring that the rich tapestry of Esan traditions and languages thrives for generations to come²⁵.

Traditional governance in Ekpoma which is a monarchical system headed by the Onojie acted as the custodians of customs and traditions, overseeing the community affairs and preserving the cultural heritage of Ekpoma. The Onojie is supported by

council of chiefs and elders from various clan which promotes cooperation across Ekpoma. The traditional governance structure guarantees that cultural values such as greeting customs, attire, social norms and taboos, culinary practices, music and dance styles, life milestones from birth to marriage and death, traditional livelihoods, and faith-based beliefs are preserved and passed down through generations. Naturally, traditional rulers have a huge role to play as custodians of the culture and tradition of their people. This position confers on them some unique authority to help mould public opinion on strategic issues²⁶.

Religion is another socio-cultural activity that encouraged cultural ties. Ekpoma chiefdom were polytheist²⁷. Most of them had common belief in god's, iron, mountains, trees and rivers. All these gods were, however, a means to an end. They were regarded as intermediaries between the Supreme Being Osenobulua, and the people. The people believe that God is omnipotent and just, that without His sanction none of the request made to any of the lesser gods would be granted²⁸. These common spiritual practices fostered cultural unity and created a sense of oneness.

Economy is an important aspect in any community and the economy in Ekpoma encouraged interdependence on various clan market due to the production of specialized crops. The specialization of crops made it difficult for each clans to acquire all the crops which resulted to the trades and open markets. The economy system increased the cultural bond between Ekpoma clans. Agriculture is the bedrock

of Pre-Colonial Ekpoma economy. The economy of pre-colonial Ekpoma flourished through cooperative labor practices, particularly during the farming seasons. Clans assisted one another with tasks such as clearing land, constructing barns, or harvesting crops²⁹. This system strengthened social ties and lightened the workload for individuals.

Festivals and ceremonies acted as significant means for strengthening cultural connections among the villages that constituted the chiefdom. This shared religious structure implied that festivals dedicated to these deities united attendees from various villages who acknowledged the same spiritual leaders and engaged in comparable rituals, fostering a collective cultural and religious identity that transcended local distinctions. Entertainment and social events tied to ceremonies created essential opportunities for cultural exchange and the development of relationships.

The concluding part of specific ceremonies included hosting the applicant's guests from neighboring villages in his home, where feasting, dancing, and gun firing continued late into the night³⁰. These ceremonial title-holding positions created permanent institutional links between villages, since holders of such titles would participate in major festivals and ceremonies on behalf of both their home village and the chiefdom as a whole. The feasting and other socializing associated with such

events provided vital opportunities for the exchange of ideas and for relationships to be established³¹.

In these ways, festivals and ceremonies turned the independent villages of the Ekpoma chiefdom into a single culturally integrated entity, in which ritual calendars, religious observance, ceremonial celebration, and the political functions of the titled officers, along with the heavy socializing during festivals, created several networks of cultural integration that united the communities without themselves becoming a source of centralized political control³². Furthermore, the interactions between the different clans in times of festivals create a network of checks and balances that prevents the domination of one clan over another, yet ensures that each makes a unique contribution to what constitutes Ekpoma³³. Rotation in hosting major festivals, the requirement for representatives from other clans in important ceremonies, and the practice of seeking blessings from clan shrines at different times of life all establish a web of interdependence where the individual clans' well-being becomes inextricably linked with the prosperity and security of the larger Ekpoma community³⁴.

These prolonged social engagements enabled people from various villages to build personal connections, share cultural traditions, and cultivate the interpersonal networks that supported the official political and economic relationships among communities.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the festivals and cultural connections among the Ekpoma clans showcases a vibrant cultural legacy that continues to influence identity, social structure, and community life in significant ways. The Ihuelen festival, New Yam festival, age grade events, and various other traditional festivities act as pillars of cultural persistence, tools for social cohesion, and reflections of shared identity that unite the different clans of Ekpoma into a harmonious community.

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30. Personal Interview with Aikhuomobhogbe Iria Pius on 04/11/2025.

31. Personal Interview with Mr Patrick Osaigbovo, 58 years, Researcher and Librarian at Delta State on 12/07/2025.
32. Personal Interview with Pa Oseghale Victor, 71 years, Village elder through telephone call on 01/11/2025.
33. Personal Interview with Mrs Grace Iyobosa, 45 years, Illeh trader, through telephone call on 15/08/2025.
34. Personal Interview with Mr Paul Ighodalo, 55 years, Retired Farmer, through telephone call on 21/09/2025.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

During the period before 1897, relations among the various clans of Ekpoma had become key to the community in shaping their communal identity, founded its economic success and ensured social cohesion while maintaining political stability. Prior to 1897, research on the inter-group dynamics of Ekpoma has discovered that the society was a complex and changing place. Divergent clans symbiotically fostered their own individual networks with the most intricate systems of interaction, cooperation and mutual aid. From studies of migration and settlement patterns, political structures, trade networks, festivals and cultural affiliations, this research demonstrates that socially pre-colonial Ekpoma already had advanced systems of social integration spanning more than a single clan.

The diversity of peoples which coexisted within Ekpoma meant that it was not random or superficial; rather, they were intentionally nurtured and institutionalized through numerous overlapping channels that fostered a resilient and unified community. The findings presented in this study challenge simplistic views of pre-colonial African societies and illustrate that Ekpoma had well-developed political systems, dynamic economic activities, rich cultural practices, and effective strategies for managing diversity and encouraging cooperation.

Different clans migrated in Ekpoma. These migration and settlement processes lay the foundation for all later intergroup relations. Every clan has its own version of the origin and migration story. Oral traditions hold that Ekpoma's clans arrived different times, from different directions, and for various purposes. There are also differences between some clans in how they portray their origins. These diverse backgrounds had the potential to create divisions and conflicts among these groups, yet they instead contributed to a collective historical awareness that underlined the community's combined identity and the mutual understandings that united several groups. Moreover, the migration traditions themselves played great social roles in pre-colonial Ekpoma. Shared tales of the journeys, trials, and successes of the founding ancestors provided common points of reference for collective identity.

Each clan maintained its own unique migration tale, yet such stories consistently highlighted themes of bravery, perseverance, divine intervention, and the establishment of covenant-like relationships with the land and with other communities. The recitation of such stories on occasion reinforced historical awareness and acted as a call to remembrance for future generations of the agreements and bonds linking the clans.

The political organization of Ekpoma recognized the autonomy of the different clans and developed ways of cooperation, coordination, and joint decision-making on matters of common interest. In this way, it avoided the emergence of dominance and

exploitation but was able to mobilize itself when the need arose. The political organization also maintained developed mechanisms of conflict resolution that prevented conflicts from degenerating into violence and lasting hostility. During the pre-colonial period, Ekpoma also had institutions that enhanced cooperation among the clans and facilitated collective governance which promoted inter-group relation.

Also, the trade relations among Ekpoma clans before 1897 provided a financial underpinning for cooperation and an interchange based on mutual benefit and need. The transfer of goods and services among the various clans was not just thrift that generated profits, but rather a basic method for building and maintaining interconnections of trust. Each clan had its own special channel of economic activity determined by its geographical location, natural resources and heritage of knowledge. The result was that specialization which made production highly complementary required continuous interaction among clans through exchange itself. Outside of agriculture, various clans developed expertise in several crafts and manufacturing techniques. Some groups became prominent in blacksmithing, which was essential for making the iron tools and weapons necessary for farming, hunting, and defense. Others specialized in weaving cloth, making pottery, carving wood, or processing products obtained from palm trees. Specialization of skills within some clans ensured that everyone in society was dependent on these craftsmen for a number of consumable goods and services, hence establishing economic dependencies which reinforced social cohesion.

These festivals and ceremonies were important in pre-colonial Ekpoma in demonstrating and solidifying cohesion among groups, while at the same time allowing individual clans to pay homage to their distinctive identities and culture. The regularity of such festivals, often based on agricultural seasons, ancestor commemorations, or religious events, meant that the relationships they established were constantly renewed and reaffirmed. The educative function of the festivals is also significant. Participation in these community events allowed each succeeding generation to be informed about Ekpoma's history, values, and lifestyle. Children observed how adults from different clans cooperated in arranging festivals, behaved respectfully in ceremonies, and enjoyed themselves together in feasting and entertainment. Such experiences were highly instructive about the nature of their society and what the anticipated patterns of inter-group relations would be.

The clans of Ekpoma were held together by cultural ties rooted in shared history, language and social practices. The shared cultural elements gave the people of Ekpoma a sense of collective identity and made them feel that they belonged to one society, regardless of their clan distinction. Cultural cohesion became the background on which political and economic cooperation was built, enabling different clans to live together peacefully and work efficiently.

This study has identified systems of cooperation and unity among the Ekpoma clans, but it would be unrealistic to argue that inter-group relations were always devoid of

discord. There are surely conflicts and tensions over such issues as land disputes, trade practices, personal grievances, as in all human societies. Yet, the important aspect of inter-group relations in pre-colonial Ekpoma is not whether there were no conflicts or not, but whether effective strategies existed for containing conflict and ensuring general stability despite some disagreements.

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Aikhuomobhogbe, Iria Frank	57 years	Village elder	Benin City	05/11/25
Aikhuomobhogbe, Iria Pius	52 years	Village elder	Uhiele	05/11/25
Ighodalo, Paul	55 years	Retired Farmer	Lagos State	21/09/25
Iyobosa, Grace	45 years	Uhiele Trader	Uhiele	15/10/25
Osaigbovo, Patrick	58 years	Researcher and Librarian	Delta State	12/07/25

Oseghale, Victor	71 years	Village Elder	Eguare	01/11/25
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Osemudiamen, Fredrick	67 years	Illeh Farmer	Illeh	10/07/25
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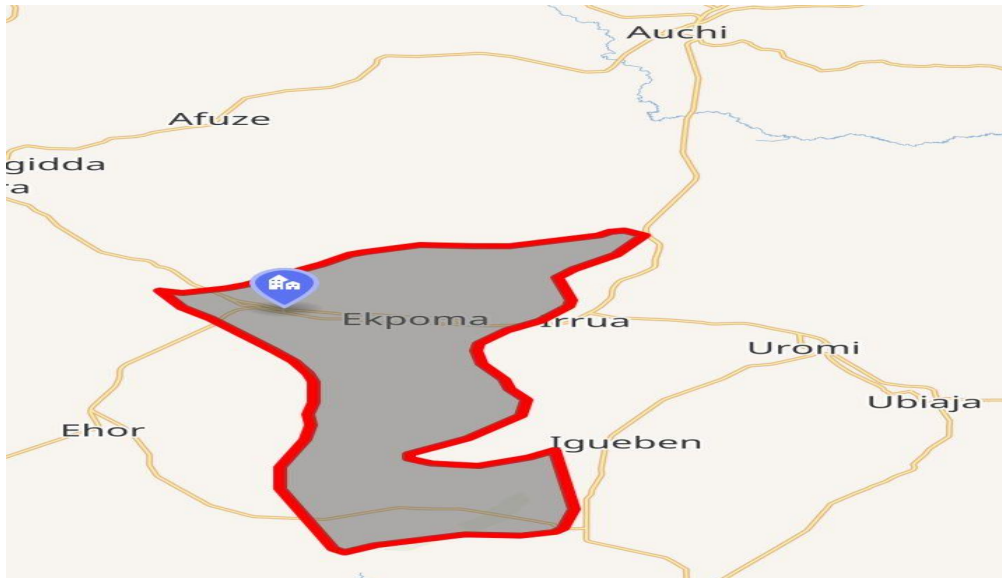
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Appendix

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