

IKWERRE AND OGBA RELATIONS IN THE COLONIAL AND POST COLONIAL ERA; 1900-1970

MICHAEL, T. B., PhD.

Department Of History and Diplomatic Studies
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni
P.M.B. 5047 Port Harcourt

&

OGARAM DAVID

Department Of History and Diplomatic Studies
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni
P.M.B. 5047 Port Harcourt

Abstract

This work examines intergroup relations in the Niger Delta using Ikwerre and her Ogba neighbour as a case study. The relationship between Ikwerre and Ogba during colonial and post-colonial eras cut across all the facets of human lives. Much study has not been carried out with regards to Ikwerre and Ogba relations and their contributions to the economic and socio-political development of the region and the mechanism they employed to manage their relationship within the period under review. The relationship between both groups has over the promoted peaceful and harmonious living in the Niger Delta region. The work adopted the use of primary and secondary sources to generate the required data. Primary sources deal with data generated from oral interviews while the secondary data was generated from textbooks, articles, magazines among others. Since knowledge cut across disciplines, the work also make use of inter-disciplinary approach using knowledge from related disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences to further enrich the available historical data. Analytical, narrative and descriptive approach to data analysis was employed to assess the nature of relationship between Ikwerre and Ogba using historical materialism theory to guide the study. The study revealed that Ikwerre and her Ogba neighbour have long years of relationship influenced by historical ties, cultural affinities, boundary demarcations, marriages, trade and political division for administrative convenience among others. Further findings revealed that, although most intergroup relations comprises peaceful co-existence and moments of confrontation, there was no recorded conflict between Ikwerre and Ogba during the period under review. However, the few disputes that occurred as a result of quarrels over boundaries were peacefully settled using the traditional methods of conflict resolution mechanism. The peaceful co-existence was based largely on the strategies they employed to manage their economic, political and socio-cultural differences. Based on various findings, the paper recommends that Ikwerre, Ogba and other ethnic groups in the Niger Delta should borrow from the peace building strategies employed by Ikwerre and Ogba which ensured a conflict free relationship all through the period under review.

Introduction

The various groups that make up Nigeria were not unaware of themselves. Inter groups relations can be seen in every area of Nigerian history, political, social, cultural and economic. The topography of Nigeria made it impossible for the various ethnic groups to live in isolation. The North which is mainly grassland had crops peculiar to her environment. The southern part which predominantly lived in the rain forest had some agricultural and economic advantage. These comparative advantages of each section of the country created certain dependency ratio. Therefore, from Sokoto to Port Harcourt and from Adamawa to Lagos shared things in common. That was why Orugbani (2005) noted that while the Igbo, Ibibio, Yoruba and communities in the Benue valley produced mainly tubers, those in the Savana such as Hausa

produced mainly grain while the communities bought cereals produced by their northern neighbours.

Orugbani (2005) also added that the coastal people of Niger-Delta had developed domestic economy base on the exchange of sea food such as; fish, oyster, lobster, periwinkle and salt with the hinterland people. The coastal people imported farm produce such as yam, cassava, palm oil among others from their hinterland neighbour in exchange for their aquatic produce. This suggests that they were considerable trade and cultural contact among the groups in Nigeria. Udo (1980) observed that each group occupied distinct and continuous territories and that during the pre-colonial era, boundaries and sovereignties were clearly identified, though occasional migrations occurred. A close study of these migrations show that the people who now constitute Nigeria have interacted with each other for centuries before colonialism. The Benue -Niger confluence was a melting point. Economy and the wellbeing of the people were the driving force of interaction in the early stage of various group in Nigeria, since no group was able to meet all her needs in isolation. The interaction that was initially driven by economic need did extend to other areas such as culture and political issues among others. For instance, the cultural similarities among the various groups in the eastern Niger Delta such as the Egenni, Abua, Nembe, Kalabari and others shows that the people actually interacted among themselves. Within the Niger-Delta, the relationship between Ikwerre and her Ogba neighbor in recent times has been characterized by land disputes, political and economic distrust, marginalization and wars. The hitherto peaceful co-existence that promoted unity between Ikwerre and Ogba has been replaced by conflict and acrimonies. Over the years, a lot of work has been done in the Niger-Delta in the area of Inter-group relations but much has not been done as regards to Ikwerre and her Ogba neighbor.

The Region known as Niger-Delta is located originally in South-South Nigeria. The Niger-Delta as now defined officially by the Nigerian government extends over above 70,00km² (2700sgmi) and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's Land mass. Historically and cartographically, it consists of present day Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers state. In the year 2000, however, Obasanjo's regime included Abia, Akwa/Ibom, Cross River State, Edo, Imo and Ondo states in the region. The region is made up of about 31 million people of more than 40 ethnic groups including the Benin, Effik, Esan, Igbo, Annang, Oron, Ijaw, Ikwerre, Ogba, Urhobo, Okrika amongst others. The Niger-Delta separates the Bight of Benin from the Bight of Bonny within the gulf of Guinea.

According to (Ikunga 2011) Nigeria's history can only be produced after the micro histories have been produced. That is, until the history of the small groups is highlighted can we get the history of the whole? Again, Niger-Delta cannot be studied as a whole owing to its numerous make - up, hence the need to be studied in sections. It is on this ground that we have chosen to take a critical study of Ikwerre and her Ogba neighbour as part of the study of inter-group relations in the Niger-Delta. Ekpeye and Ogba are of the same decent, and so have cultural affinity, trade links and political affiliation. The Ekpeye are usually included as a subgroup of the Igbo people on linguistic and cultural grounds. They speak an Igboid language. (Olso, 1996). Ekine, (2014) noted that the Ekpeye people live in the Ahoada (Ahuda) Ogba-Egbema and Ohaji-Egbema areas of Rivers State. He added that; the Ekpeye have long lived in the land bounded by Orashi River in the West and River Sombreiro in the East; starting out at the northern end from about 3000 BC. Archaeological work showed a steady and very

consistent southward movement of the Igbo people, resulting in about AD 1000 in a large settlement mainly at the central geographically elevated area now called Akoh (Dry Land) and Egi. The rise and Expansion of the Benin Kingdom in the following centuries, forced Igbo-speaking but Benin culture-bearing populations down the Niger River into then Ekpeye land. A socio-political crisis resulted (Clark, 1971).

Ikwerre and Ogba are both ethnic groups in Rivers state who migrated from ancient Benin Empire and settled in their present settlement. Amini,(1994) observed that a minority of the Ekpeye, who sided with the Benin cultured Igbo immigrants, moved away up north and founded what is now Ogba land, whose language plainly bears the in prints of the Ekpeye and Igbo languages. The commonest historical tale in Ogba and Ekpeye today, is that both are "the sons of one father born of different mothers". At about 1542 AD, during the reign of Oba Awuarre of Benin, when the Benin kingdom was at its most glorious and its culture at its most widespread, Ogba, which majority were Benin-cultured, created the theory that it's Progenitor was a Prince of Benin. The man known today as the father of Ekpeye and Ogba is now held by some historians to have left Benin kingdom due to infighting within the royal family; to have fled with his family, amidst rumours of his inevitable demise for his disloyalty to the Oba (Ikelegbe, 2005).

In line with this idea, there is need to study the history and interaction between Ikwerre and her Ogba neighbour to establish a point of reference for the future of the Niger-Delta and Nigeria at large. Importantly, Ikwerre and Ogba are major centres in Nigeria due to their strategic positions, rich culture and economic potentials. Hence, their proper study will proffer solutions to several societal and historical challenges.

Colonialism and Ikwerre Ogba Relations

Colonialism is the extension of a nation's sovereignty over territories beyond its borders by the establishment of either settler colonies or administrative dependencies in which indigenous populations are directly ruled or displaced. Colonizing nations generally dominate the resources, labour and markets of the colonial territory, and may also impose socio-cultural, religious and linguistic structures on the conquered populations. Though the word colonialism is often used interchangeably with imperialism, the latter is sometimes used more broadly as it covers control or economic leverage.

European nations have had encounters with the people of present day Nigeria at different times and for different purposes, starting from the first article trade of the 15th Century, the proceeding slave trade, the legitimate trade and subsequent colonialism of the 19th century. However, the appointment of British consular representative in the area known as Nigeria today marked the beginning of direct British administration in Nigeria. To justify this view Orugbani (2005) stated that "following several plea made to the British government by people engaging in legal trade in the Bight of Benin and Biafra to appoint a person who will reside in the region for the purpose of regulating legal trade between British merchants and the people of the region gave rise to the appointment of Mr. John Becroft in 1849 as the first British consul to the Bright of Biafra and Benin.

Also, following the flight of Kosoko on January 1, 1852, Oba Akintoye signed an anti-slave trade treaty on board H.M.S Penelope, agreeing to encourage legitimate commerce and to protect the missionaries, bringing Lagos under British protectorate. A Vice Consul was

appointed for Lagos from the Oil Rivers. This treaty was ratified by Oba Dosomu in August 6, 1861 and in 1862, Lagos was made a colony and the government of Lagos oversaw consular office in the Bight of Biafra and Benin. Similar arrangement was made in the present day northern Nigeria given rise to northern protectorate.

However, the issue of colonial rule and area of control in West Africa received international assent or recognition starting from October 1884 when France and Germany joined in inviting twelve other European states to a conference in Berlin, to discuss issues bothering on the liberty of commerce in the Basin and Mouth of Congo River, liberty of navigation on international rivers, and the definition of formalities to be observed before new occupations of territory on the coasts of Africa should be internationally recognized.

Orugbani (2005) Opined that during the Anglo French rivalry which preceded the Berlin conference, the British consul has succeeded to obtain treaties from the Delta Chiefs, placing their territories under British protection. Similarly, treaties were obtained from the chiefs of the communities on either bank of the Niger and from the Fulani Sultans of Sokoto and Gwandu. Due to these treaties, at the Berlin conference of 1885, the British representatives were able to successfully claim that British presence was supreme on the Niger and in the oil Rivers. Subject to an agreement embodied in the Berlin "Act" the British claim of the area known as Nigeria was recognized by the conference. By this understanding, the whole of the region known today as Nigeria became legally and internationally recognized to be under British control, though, the entire region was administered separately. For instance, the Oil River protectorate, the colony of Lagos and Northern Protectorate were administered separately.

Nevertheless, beginning from January 1900, the name "Nigeria" was applied to two out of the three territories administered by the British. The first step towards amalgamation was taken in 1906 when the colony and the protectorate of Southern Nigeria were amalgamated into a single administration. Thus reducing the three administrations into two: the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigerian and Northern Protectorate. This arrangement lasted till 1912 when it was decided to amalgamate the northern and southern protectorate and, shortly, the two regions were merged in 1914.

For administrative convenience, L.F. Lugard became the Governor General, but he divided the country into three provinces under one central administration. That is, the Eastern, Western and Northern Provinces. Each of these provinces were further divided into divisions. For instance in the Eastern province we had Aba, Degema, Owerri and other divisions. More so, the Divisions were divided into districts. For instances, the Owerri Division, Ahoada district, Port-Harcourt District and Warri district among others. Finally, the districts were divided into Native Administrative Authority which was according to the ethnic groups or clans in the districts.

By this colonial arrangement, northern Ikwerre, Ogba, Etche, Ekpeye, Abua, Egbema, Engenni and Eleme or clans were brought under one district "Ahoada District" (Williams, 1927).



Fig. 1: Showing old Ahoada District office



Fig. 2: Showing Ahoada District structures, now been used as office of PHED

Palm Oil trade and Ikwerre/Ogba Relation

The introduction of legitimate commerce in the Niger Delta Region by the European brought some remarkable changes in the economic history of the people especially in the trade between Ikwerre and her Ogba neighbour. By 1901 British forces have taken hold of the entire area known as Nigeria, and subsequently established control over the region, this is in pursuance of her imperialist objectives. Orji (1993) T.F Boxtton cited in Ogubani (2005) Opine that “19th Century British and other European countries has industrialized and so needed tropical raw materials, markets and outlets to invest surplus capital”.

Africa, (Ogba and Ikwerre inclusive) were now more useful to serve these purposes. This explains why Britain was willing to pay subsidies to the Delta rulers to convert their economy to palm oil. Michael (2017) in support of this view revealed also that for the colonist to achieve their purpose and to ensure Africans (Ikwerre and Ogba People) produce their needed raw materials, they introduced policies that intensified cash crop production. Cash crops such as

groundnut, rubber, cocoa and mostly palm oil and kernel were encouraged. With this development, palm oil and kernel business became lucrative business in Ikwerre and Ogba land. The region is naturally blessed with palm trees. The trade on palm oil and kernel affected the relationship between Ikwerre and Ogba people as Ella (1995) noted;

In the Ogba area proper, kalabari traders established a trading settlement on the Western bank at the Orashi River opposite Idu, just before Kreigani within Usomini area of Ali-Ogba. They went further inland to established post on the bank of Oguta Lake. In the course of time this trade grew in importance and Ogbaindegines such as Oluwu Nwa-Amadi from Obrikom, Dokorub from Obakata and Benibos of Usomini became prominent in the business.

Ogbuji (2018) disclosed that in the 1940s when the palm oil business was very profitable. People from Egbeda trekked down to Omoku to sell palm fruit because it was more expensive than when sold to the local buyers. He noted that some buyers came from the Kalabari and Omoku to Egbeda market to buy palm fruit and concluded that Egbeda and its environs had palm trees in surplus. Marchall (1941) stated that in 1937, the only palm oil and kernel factory in the district was built in Kreigani by United African Company. Woka (2018) stressed that during the period between 1931 – 40s due to the absence of palm oil factory in the northern Ikwerre area, large number of them used the manual methods of palm processing, while others sold their palm fruit to the Igbo and riverine traders. Palm tree was the most valuable cash crop during the colonial era, and its commercial benefits became well known to the Ikwerre people due to its high demand by the Europeans. Ikwerre people engaged in Palm oil and kernel production to meet their financial obligations. Woka (2018) noted that initially, Ikwerre people depended on Isu people from present day Imo State for the harvesting of palm fruit. He narrated the process of producing palm oil and kernel, which he described to be tedious. He added that only few Ikwerre personalities like Benjamin Ewo, John Didia from Egbeda, Chief Dimkpa of Elele and others engaged successfully in the palm oil business. The only advanced means of producing palm oil and kernel in the Ahoada district was cited In Kreigani, in Ogba and Umuaturu in Etche. Hence, Ikwerre people who took part in the business, due to proximity moved to Ogbaland where they had access to palm oil mill. Orji (2013) agreed to this fact when he posits that;

“It must be stated at this juncture that the nature of the colonial economy created another class of wealthy individuals that rose to prominence through their expertise in commercial enterprise”.

One prominent example is the case of late Benjamin Ewo. He had moved from his village in Egbeda and established himself as a successful palm oil trader in Omoku. Also, Amirize (2018) opined that by 1947 Eastern Nigeria Regional Government built more palm oil mills, and one was cited in Egbeda among other places. Amirize noted that In their usual trading with Egbeda people, himself and other youths from Ikiri usually went to Egbeda to sell palm produce to dealers who usually come to Egbeda on her market days.



Fig. 3: Showing Egbeda market where palm produce were sold and bought

It is therefore pertinent to assert that, the palm oil trades promoted intergroup relations between Ikwerre and her Ogba neighbour in that it created an avenue for socio-economic interaction between the both groups.

Creation of Urban Centre and Ikwerre/Ogba Relations

Colonial rule brought with it some changes such as creation of urban centres and new economic system among others, and these creations affected the intergroup relations between people involved. Ikime (2006) upholds this view, thus "Colonial rule brought our people a new way and for new purpose. This arrangement consisted of a Central Government, three Regions and several Provinces, District and Native Administrative Authorities". Omoku, an Ogba town benefited prominently from the changes associated with colonial rule, which further affected her relationship with her neighbours, especially, the Ikwerre people. Williams (1927) by 1934 Omoku was already a commercial centre and the most developed city in the Ahoada district. He further stated that "The Okoba clan: it is a clan of varied characteristics containing many primitive village in the district. Corrugated iron and brick houses and stores abound in the village and it probably the most important trading centres in the area".

Omoku became a centre of attraction for the rest members of the district due to the presents of Royal Niger Company at Kriegani, the Orashi and Sombrieo Rivers which made Omoku a possible rout to Onitsha, Oguta, Ikwerre among others. Corroborating the above, Ella (1995) disclose that Kalabari traders had established trading posts in Ogba land and that they bought palm oil and kernel and sold various goods which they themselves obtained from European traders on the coast. In course of time, this trade grew in importance and more Kalabari and other groups came and settled in Ali-Ogba". By this development, Omoku had become a hub for European made goods such as cotton, whisky, Umbrella and others. Ikwerre people especially those situated at the northern part who desired such goods went to Omoku where it could be gotten. The commodities of the Ikwerre traders includes yam, cassava flakes, oil bean fruit, palm oil and kernel which they sold at Omoku and the proceeds used to purchase their desired goods.

Allen (2018) stated that before independence, Ubimini people usually went to Omoku to sell their farm produce as well as buy what they needed. In Omoku one could buy almost everything he/she needed, "I started going to Omoku as a small child, then, there was no road,

we usually enter canoe from the Ubimini market". Corroborating the above, Eze (2018) asserts that the only place where they could buy everything they needed such as building materials and other European made goods was in Omoku. He narrated how he followed his father to Omoku market to buy his chieftaincy regalia in 1948 when his father (Dikeoha Eze) was appointed a chief in Ubimini community.

Wage Labour and Ikwerre/Ogba Relations.

Ikwerre and Ogba people like every other African society had a lineage mode of production. Whereas the British had already developed a capitalist mode of production where money and labour are key factors of the system. Orji (2013) noted that for the colonial economy to maintain an effective control on the indigenous economy, it needed a strong monetary system. In other words, the colonial economy could only penetrate into the fabrics of the local economy only when economic activities of the later had been monetized.

Michael (2017) asserts that the monetization policy actually promoted trade and facilitated the commoditization policy. When the British saw that the policy was not intensifying the cash crop production, the next policy was introduced (Taxation). Taxation as a major component of the colonial economy was put in place to compel the peasants to produce commodities to acquire money to meet their tax obligation. This simply means that for the indigenous people to pay tax, they must have the new European currency, and the European currency could only be gotten through the sale of labour or commodities (cash crop) to the European firm. Contrary to Michael's idea of taxation, intelligent report in Ahoadist (2013) reveals that the essence of the imposition of taxation to the indigenous people was to generate fund for the administration of the colony. Igbeffe (1979) disclosed that taxation was also introduced because the First World War produced strains and stress for British and her colonies. The British government needed money to execute the war and to assist the colony.

However, the monetization of the economy and subsequent introduction of taxation promoted the inter group relations between Ikwerre and her Ogba by 1930 tax system had become functional in the district. Since tax could only be paid in European currency (pound sterling), it became necessary for Ikwerre and Ogba people to secure money either through selling of their commodities, rendering services to individuals or to companies. Ella (1995) stressed that Ogba people depended on migrant workers for their farm work, and as such, they depended on the Isu people in present day Imo state. He added that "in the first place, Isu efforts were usually very feeble. Their attitude was to do less work and expect high pay. They would arrive late at farm and leave early. They were noted for their ability to feign illness at the slightest opportunity, hence, the Ogba expression Oria-ka-umuisu". (Isu people usually feign ill at the presents of work). Due to the tricky behavior of the Isu people, Ogba indigenes especially the Igburu that is Obioshimiri, Akabta, Obikegi and Elehia group and others depended largely on the Northern Ikwerre people for their farm work.

Esther (2018) affirms that in the early 1940s they Ikwerre people (Ubimini) were hired by the Ogba people to work on their farms. She believes that the Ikwerre people were more skilled in farming activities. Ogbugo (2018), posits that Egbeda people usually did farm work to raise money especially during the farming season. It was easier and better to work for Ogba people because their farming season and ours are not the same. While Ikwerre people commences farm work by late January, the Ogba except those from Obioshimiri, Akabta and

Obikegi people start clearing their bushes for farming by late November – January. Therefore working for them did not prevent us from working in our own form. Barnabas (2019) Ubimini youths did go to do farm work in Ogba land to raise money. The introduction of wage labour actually promoted inter-group relations between Ikwerre and her Ogba neighbour by spurring the Ikwerre people to work in Ogba land, and through this interaction they introduced certain farming skills to Ogba people and learnt some fishing techniques from them. It also promoted inter group marriages between the two groups especially those who lived and work in either Ikwerre or Ogba.

Religion and Ikwerre/Ogba Relations.

Christianity is an acceptable religion in some parts of Africa. Though Christianity spread into tropical Africa in the 15th Century from the Portuguese through the sea, that's why most of the coastal towns has larger churches where they attend worship on Sundays and other days (Nwabueze, 2018). Christianity and education are interwoven. It was not until the 19th century that large scale missionary activities and mass conversion took effect resulting in the Christianization of Nigeria up to Ikwerre and Ogba land.

Ella (2005) posits that by 1906 missionaries were already in Omoku through the Garrick movement. Garrick a Kalabari man sent two of his disciples to Omoku and they were accommodated upstairs in Ada Nwa Osia' storey building. Annual report of Ahoada district in 1938 disclosed that "The following missions were present in the district:- Church Missionary Society (Niger Delta Pastorate) Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Baptist Church, American Baptist Church, Seven Days Native Church, Seven Days Baptist Church and the African Church:. The report further established that Mr. Vine the "Bishop" of Seven Days Adventist Church and his wife and three children lived at Elele.



Fig. 4.: Showing the Bishop's quarters where Mr. Vine and family lived

The Religious relationship between Ikwerre and her Ogba neighbour started in 1930 when Edwin Oburu and his wife broke away from the seventh Day Native Church of God. Conflicts appeared to have risen in connection with prophesy and vision which presented certain individuals in bad light. Before then, Seven Days Adventist Church had established in

Elele. Edwin Oburu and his wife extended the new branch to Omoku. All the members of the seven days native church who supported Oburu became members of the new church.



Fig. 5: Showing Seven Days Adventist Church, Elele



Fig. 6: Showing Seven Days Native Church, Omoku were Mr. Edwin and wife were members

Waga (2018) stated in clear terms that church activities promoted intergroup relations between Ikwerre and Ogba. Waga disclosed that by 1907, Seven Days Adventist Church was established in Elele through which the church spread to others parts of the district including Ogba land. The early churches were accompanied by schools. The church built schools in Elele, Ahoada and Omoku. Waga added that the missionaries used schools and churches as a unifying factors in Ikwerre and Ogba relations. The Seven Days Adventist Church usually organized a yearly camping meeting and other programme which are usually rotated amongst the various churches in the district. Wags (2018) added that his first visit to Omoku was in 1936 for a camp meeting to be hosted by Omoku branch of Seven Days Adventist Church. The program, he said, featured a lot of activities that encouraged integration. Through the program some Ikwerre people made friends to several Ogba people such as Victor Nwogbidi, Isaac Isuogwu among others and many Ogba and Ikwerre people had one form of relationship or the other which resulted in marriages and socio—cultural affinity.



Fig. 7: Showing Seven Days Adventist Church, Omoku: Venue of the 1936 camp meeting

Another area through which the church promoted inter-group relations between Ikwerre and Ogba people was through school. Waga (2018) opined that the Seven Days Adventist Church built schools in Omoku, Elele and Ahoda. The church trained her members to serve as teachers in her schools in the district and beyond. Waga further stressed that his first primary school teacher “Friday Agbidi from Ogba land” was trained by the mission and posted to Elele to serve as a teacher in Seven Days, Adventist School Elele now State School 1 Elele.



Fig. 8: Showing present State School I, Elele

Other Ikwerre persons trained include D.A.H Emejuru, Samuel Eleonu, and Luke Wokoro among others. They were trained and sent to Ogbaland to serve as teachers. They lived with their families and worked in Ogbaland for several years. This created relationship between

Ikwerre and Ogba people. Buttressing the above, Onuoha (2006:117) opined that Anglican Church came to Ozuaha community in 1917 from Omoku Ogba land. The Church was established by personalities such as Wokem Adaolu later renamed Jeremiah Ekubiri, Alfred Ogbu with the help of Dokubo Werek of Kalabari. Ogba people through their early missionary encounter became crusaders of the missionary activities in Ikwerre land. Onuoha (2018) further stressed that so many Ogba people served as missionaries and teachers in Ozuaha community. For instance, Mr. Ahiamadu was the first Head Master of St Michael's Catholic School Ozuaha. In 1919, also, Mr. Ikeagwu Christopher an Ogba man who lived with his family and worked in Ozuaha for many years was also posted as the Head Master. He established a very strong tie with every family in Ozuaha.



Fig. 9: Showing St. Thomas Anglican Church, Ozuoha

The creation of district fostered inter-group relations between Ikwerre and Ogba people. It brought them together as colleagues and counter parts especially as District officers. For instance, Ella (1995) noted that between 1936-1940's handful of Ogba people such as Tom Odu of Akabuka, Oburu Ahuo, John Ajie and Francis Ella had acquired education both within and outside the district and were employed as District Officers. Francis Ella was the first Ogba man to attain the position of senior administrative officer. In the same vein, Onuoha (2018) posits that Ikwerre people were truly counterparts with the Ogba people. Captain Elechi Amadi and E.W Eke were the first indigenous education officers in the District, Mr. Dimkpa from Isiokpo worked as administrative secretary in the district, Ishmealn Wogwu from Umuawa, Chief Mpi and Chief Oriji of Emouha also served as chairman of district administrative council respectively. It is obvious that colonial creation was necessary for administrative convenience. At the same time, it helped in galvanizing relationship among groups of common historical origin. Among this, we have those groups of Akalaka migration who were brought under one district. This act awakened their common historical origin and promoted their relationship.



Fig. 10: Showing St. Michaels Catholic School, Ozuoha now State School Ozuoha

Self Determination and Ikwerre/Ogba Relations.

Ikwerre/Ogba relation during the post-colonial era was an offshoot of the pre-colonial and colonial relationship. However, some factors affected their relationship during this period. Among such factors is majority/minority dichotomy. At this time, the politics in Nigeria became the affairs of Nigerians directly, but was lopsided to the advantage of the major groups. Ikime (2006:123) clarifies this argument as he posits "it was no doubt that in keeping with the pursuit of their limited objectives that the British paid scant regards to the ethnic compositions of the regions they created. The three regions with which Nigeria moved into independence were each dominated by a single ethnic group. This legacy of colonial rule has left permanent impart on national politics. The politics of Nigeria since independence has been conceived largely as a trade-off between the Hausa-Fulani Yoruba and Igbo. The other nationalities whose contribution to the national economy, sports and to the provision of skilled manpower has been treated as mere pawns in the game of national politics.

Ahoada district which was under the eastern province was highly dominated by the Igbo group. The struggle for liberty and self-determination, made members of the Ahoada district especially Ikwerre and Ogba to be minority .Which eventually promoted self-determination. Self-determination aroused the consciousness of their common historical origin and migration from the old Benin Empire (The Akalaka Migration). This unity was demonstrated by the 1965 general elections as Woka (1993) succinctly stated "remarkable at this period of Ikwerre political history was the attempt by the Igbo led defunct NCNC to impose a candidate for the House of Representatives of the Ahoada district in the person of Mr. Elugworonu. This attempt was resisted by the people for the first time by sponsoring Barrister Nwobidike Wonodi as an independent candidate and he defeated Mr. Elugworonu in the 1965 General Election.

Chukwulabia (2018) noted that Igbo domination of almost all activities in the District were resented by Ogba people. Hence, Ogba supported Barrister Wobidike Wonodi massively who they believe is more like an Ogba person. Eze-Ogba Obuoha Nwaobi, John Wokocha Ella and G.A.J. Nwachukwu were among prominent Ogba sons who championed the cause of indigenous self-determination by supporting an Ikwerre son. It is important to note that self-determination brought the Ogba and Ikwerre people together especially within the period before the creation of state and local government, thereby promoting intergroup relations.

The Nigerian Civil War and Ikwerre/Ogba Relations.

The Nigeria Civil war, commonly known as the Biafran War (6th July 1967 – 15th January, 1970), was a war fought between the government of Nigeria and the secessionist state of Biafra. Biafra represented nationalist aspirations of the Igbo people, whose leadership felt they could no longer coexist with the northern dominated Federal government. The conflict caused political, economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions. Immediate causes of the war in 1966 include a military coup, a counter-coup and persecution of Igbo people living in Northern Nigeria, control over the lucrative oil production in the Niger Delta among others.

The Nigeria Civil war affected the inter group relations between the groups in Nigeria. During the war, minorities in the Eastern region suffered atrocities in the hands of those fighting for both sides of the conflict. Communities or individuals who were perceived to be supporting Biafra were massacred by the Federal troop. In the same vain, minorities in the Igbo dominated Eastern region who were accused of harbouring interest in having their own state within the Nigeria Federation, were suspected of collaborating with Federal troops to undermine Biafra, hence, were massacred and leached alive by the Biafra troops. This was the situation Ikwerre and her Ogba neighbour found themselves during the civil war. Ikwerre people such as those from Egbeda, Ubinmini, Umudioga among others and Ogba people from Akabta, Obiosimiri, Elehia and Obukegi among others took refuge in the Sombriero Island popularly called Owsheshi (Comfort, 2018).



Fig. 11: Showing the Owsheshi camp where people from Ikwerre and Ogba camped during the Civil War

The Owsheshi is an Island between Ikiri, Akabta and Egbeda. Grace Joseph, Comfort Ogwuali, James Omereji, Ebenezer Abu Ogbuji and Omah Omeriji in a group interview in Egbeda community agreed that they all were of age during the civil war and that they were among those who camped in the Owsheshi Island. They asserted that Biafra troops were killing and forcing every adult in the community to join the army, and it was these adults who fended for the families. Therefore, to escape being killed, they took refuge in the Owsheshi Island which was unknown to the Biafran soldiers. The Owsheshi Island is very vast land reserve. Ikwerre people built a temporary structure, farm and even did fishing during the period of the war alongside their Ogba brothers. The Owsheshi camp promoted intergroup relations between both groups. It was a period when Ikwerre people lived in the same hut with Ogba people and they shared everything in common. Okpara (2018) who fought as a Biafran soldier revealed how he directed his family to cross over to the Owsheshi Island when he found out that the Biafran troop will not spare any group perceived to be undermining the Biafran movement.

Corroborating the above, Alantri Odi Amadi, Chibueze Orikoha and Gas-Gamba Akuogu (2018) in a group interview in Akabta community affirmed that Akabta, Obioshimiri, Mgbumini among other communities did not move out during the civil war but camped in the Owsheshi Island with their Ikwerre neighbours. They mentioned some Ikwerre people that camped together with them such as Comfort Ogwuali, James Omereji, and Benedict Ogbuji among others. Gabriel Uchendu Onyeri and Chijioko Onyeri (2018) opined that Ikwerre and Ogba people actually camped in the Owsheshi Island. They carried out farming and fishing activities during the civil war. Edward Umesi from Obioshimiri and Ogwuali Osa from Egbeda were the leaders of the groups who brought relief materials popularly called "ration" from the Nigerian government to the displaced people of Ikwerre and Ogba. Both groups established a small market along Obioshimiri Ikiri Road where they sold and bought goods from their neighbors. The Owsheshi camp is historic in the history of both groups. It promoted bonds, unity and love between them. Omeriji (2018) stressed that during the civil war in the Owsheshi camp, a woman called Ijeoma from Elehia in Ogba was very kind to his mother, which made his mother to name his younger sister who was delivered during the civil war after her.

Nkukurukwu Festival and Ikwerre /Ogba Relations

Ikukurukwu is an annual festival jointly celebrated by Akapta and Obioshimiri people in Ogba land and Egbeda people in Ikwerre. The festival usually holds every 31st of December in the Owsheshi Ireland. Alantri (2018) revealed every 31st of December groups will gather in Owsheshi Island to celebrate their success in the year and discuss on the way forward for next year. The festival is usually hosted by the most elderly man from Obugoor in Egbeda. Corroborating the above, Gas-Gamba (2018) affirmed it was in the *Nkukurukwu* festival of 1937 during the Palm oil trade that it was agreed that the harvest of palm fruit in the Owsheshi area will be rotatory between both groups yearly. Gas-Gamba added that it was still in the *Nkukurukwu* festival of (1958) that Timber in the Owsheshi was Opened for use to member of the group. The festival has played prominent role towards the peaceful co-existence of Ikwerre and Ogba. The people employed dialogue and mutual respect to promote intergroup relation.

Conclusion

This study covers intergroup relations in the Niger Delta with special attention to Ikwerre and Ogba from 1800-1970. Intergroup relations cut across all facets of human life and

group relations, hence cannot be over emphasized in historical studies. To achieve the goal of these studies, Ikwerre and Ogba were examined with special attention to their land and people, economic, political and socio-cultural developments.

Ikwerre and Ogba relations which attracted little attention of scholars before now has been brought to the lime light through our study. This study has established that both Ikwerre and Ogba traced their ancestry to the ancient Benin Empire. From the tradition of origin, it is obvious that Ikwerre and Ogba are related, hence has maintained long years of contact that are mostly peaceful. Their peaceful co-existence could be linked to their history of migration and settlement which stressed that Akalaka the founder and father of the present day Ogba and Ekpeye ethnic groups was a relation to the founding father of Ikwerre.

The study has established that the factors that promoted intergroup relations during this period include: historical origin, proximity, common boundary, trade and socio-cultural activities. The relationship at this level was that of equity and fairness as no group attempted dominating the other. The respect for one another's territorial integrity promoted peaceful co-existence between Ikwerre and Ogba. The study reveals the political, socio-cultural and economic significance as well as the challenges and opportunity encountered by both groups at the cost of their relationship. Our study identified colonialism as a force of change in the relationship between various groups in Nigeria, the Niger Delta, as well as Ikwerre and Ogba.

Furthermore, the amalgamation of Nigeria and subsequent creation and division of districts were identified by our study to have promoted inter group relations between Ikwerre and Ogba by bringing them into one district without any form of marginalizing any groups. The research reveals that diplomacy, dialogue, tolerance and clear boundary demarcations were the strategies applied by Ikwerre and Ogba people to resolve conflict and avert the outbreak of war among them.

It is against this background that the study justified the fact that peaceful co-existence and unity is a panacea to a sustainable peace and development especially in a multi ethnic state like Nigeria where ethnic rivalries, communal conflicts, religious crises are common occurrences.

Finally, our findings have established that the relations between Ikwerre and Ogba was of benefit to both groups. This relationship should be sustained by today's generation for better development cooperate sustenance of these brothers

Primary Sources – Oral Interviews

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Place Of Interview	Date Of Interview	Status
Lawrence Eze	M	60	Civil Servant	Ubimini	17/11/18	
Allen Mma	M	58	Politician	Ubimini	18/11/18	Chief
Onuoha F.U.K	M	70	Retired Civil Servant	Ozuoha	10/11/18	
Sam Woka	M	57	Civil Servant	Elele	2/11/18	
Bright Amirizi	M	64	Retired Civil Servant	Port-Harcourt	20/11/18	
Clement Chukwulabia	M	66	Traditional Ruler	Omoku	16/11/18	Traditional Ruler
Okpara Umunam	M	58	Herbalist	Ubimini	16/11/18	
Esther Umunam	F	89	Herbalist	Ubimini	16/11/18	Chief
Christopher Ogbuji	M	68	Farmer	Egbeda	11/11/18	
Grace Joseph	F	80	Farmer	Egbeda	30/11/18	
Comfort Ogwuali	F	84	Retired civil servant	Egbeda	30/11/18	
James Omeriji	M	62	Retired civil servant	Egbeda	30/11/18	
Ebenezer Abu Ogbuji	M	70	Retired civil servant	Egbeda	30/11/18	
Omah Omeriji	M	58	Civil servant	Egbeda	30/11/18	Chief
Alantri Odi Amadi	M	61	Farmer	Akabta	3/12/18	
Chibueze Orikoha	M	58	Retired civil servant	Akabta	3/12/18	
Gas-Gamba Akuogu	M	60	Retired civil servant	Akabta	3/12/18	
Gabriel Uchendu Onyeri	M	74	Traditional ruler	Obukegi	3/12/18	Traditional ruler
Chijioke Onyeri	M	52	Civil servant	Obukegi	3/12/18	
Gods power Ogbugo	M	72	Retired civil servant	Umudioga	1/12/18	Chief

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