
Political and Economic Relations between the People of Agbor and Owa Kingdom

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Citation: Eborka, N. F. (2022) Political and Economic Relations between the People of Agbor and Owa Kingdom, *International Journal of History and Philosophical Research*, Vol.10, No.3, pp.23-32

ABSTRACT: *Inter-group relations as an academic study has lately attracted attention from scholars and researchers globally. This is not surprising, considering the enormous benefits that this genre of historical research promises. Some of these benefits include the opportunity to expose the rich culture and exchanges that occurred among the indigenous people of Nigeria and in this case, the people of Agbor and Owa located in Delta State of Nigeria. The focus of this study is on the people of Agbor and Owa, who share a lot in common even before the advent of Britain to the African continent. The study discovered that the relations that existed between Agbor and Owa took various forms, some were political, religious, cultural and economic. The study employed the multi-disciplinary approach which makes use of both the descriptive and interpretative approach in an attempt to analyze the facts.*

KEYWORDS: inter-group relations, Agbor kingdom, Owa Kingdom, political organization, kings, quarters

INTRODUCTION

For quite some time now, the subject matter of inter-group relations has vigorously featured in Nigerian historiography. This tendency signifies a radical departure from the previous practices where scholars expended enormous energy, resources and time in an attempt to prove to the world that Nigeria has not just a historical past but one that was functional, dynamic and therefore relevant to the overall existence of the people and their development process (Akinwumi et al, 2006). The preponderance of this new trend in Nigerian historiography could be associated with a number of factors which have greatly affected the evolution of the Nigerian state. The first of these factors is the need to completely get rid of European prejudices from our history. The second factor is the practical reality of our political independence from the British. This has accelerated the need to emphasize the multi-dimensional ways Nigerians related with one another before the advent of the Pax Britannica and how these performed the harmonizing functions of peaceful co-existence between groups notwithstanding their socio-cultural heterogeneity (Ikime, 1980).

A major feature of society that should be underlined is interdependence. Human society is perceived as a collection of economic, social and political groups which provide access to the basic necessities of life, this may be nothing unusual, because man by nature is a dependent creature: he

depends on his environment and other human factors for food, shelter and clothing, all of which gives him a purpose here on earth. No group or human community at its level of development can be an island entirely to itself (Akinwumi et al, 2006).

The history of the pre-colonial societies of Nigeria is replete with a number of powerful kingdoms such as the Benin Empire, Igbo Kingdom of Onitsha, Agbor and others. Archaeological finds have further uncovered the fairly advanced lifestyle of some of these kingdoms. Some were able to work iron, which helped with tool and weapon making. They also showed a vast advancement in cultural expressions; many of the settlements also contained expertly cast stones walls which showed the need for either protection from animals or other settlements (Isichei, 1983).

Some of these settlements developed in the context of the slave trade. Slavery has historically been widespread in Africa, systems of servitude and slavery were common in Africa, as they were in much of the ancient world. When the Arab slave trade began, many of the local slave systems began supplying captives from the slave markets to be sold outside Africa, (Lovejoy, 2012). Slavery for domestic and court practices were widespread throughout Africa.

On its part, Agbor did not at any time, in its history, live in isolation; she maintained relations with her immediate and distant neighbors. As is common with some inter-group relations in Africa generally, the beginnings of such relations are unclear. For instance, Ominije that transformed into Agbor was equally said to have been in contact with surrounding communities during its contemporary times (Otu-Onye Oghani of Agbor, 2007).

The people of Agbor are known to have cherished their own identity and way of life as a kingdom with one faith, one hope and one destiny, so that even when they came in contact with diverse groups, they retained their unique culture that was inherited from their ancestors. Nevertheless, there were some borrowings between the different kingdoms that existed in the pre-colonial era and in this case there was some borrowings between the people of Agbor and Owa communities, this may explain the semblance in culture between them, undoubtedly, this made observers believe that at one time or another, they were one United Kingdom. In reality however, this was not the case as there is no record of subjugation by either kingdom, rather we have a case of mutual borrowings brought about by the proximity of both kingdoms.

Early History of Agbor and Owa

History may be defined as the study of man through the evidence of past events. (Otu-Onye Oghani of Agbor, 2007). The history of many people began with a migration story and a founding father (Isichei, 1983). The tradition of Agbor origin dates back to thousands of years particularly before the Christian era, since there are no written records covering those periods before the 19th century, studies of these early periods have by necessity had to rely on the use of oral traditions and the case of Agbor is no exception. As the story goes, Ominije (Agbor-Nta) which is regarded as the cradle of Agbor, emerged from the movement of the forest belt people in and around the area (Otu-Onye Oghani of Agbor, 2007). It is believed that before the emergence of Ominije,

the area was characterized by incessant wanderings for the purpose of hunting and gathering food to eat for their survival.

Since the appearance of the people, there has been no history of re-location from this land. Thus the land is believed to have been the original habitat where the earliest inhabitants have lived and produced children who also inherited the land from their ancestors in an unending succession. According to Egharevba (1968), the early people of Ishan and Afemail Divisions, who are the Ika and Igbo-speaking peoples west of the Niger are from Benin. He points to the close ties of brotherhood shared between the both kingdoms. He further stated that this brotherhood is evident in the names they bear. These names include Osolobuohein, Ogbebor, Edobor, Iyeter, and others are pointers to this fact, also he stressed that the religious beliefs and the common boundary indicates that this stock migrated from Benin Kingdom. However, studies have shown that religion and the use of common names may not be enough indicators that a people share the same origin, a good example is the fact that a Nigerian of Igbo stock bears an English name, this does not mean that he is an English man, rather it shows that at one time or another, this people have had contact with Englishmen, and this have resulted in some exchanges.

Linguistically, some writers, including local and traditional historians like A.E. Iduwe, strongly believe that the people of Agbor in addition to others who make up the area identified collectively as the Ika people are most likely to have belonged to an ancient Ika stock. Others like Angulu Onwuejeogwu believe that the study of Ika dialect by linguistics show that the language is a dialect closely related to the Igbo dialects spoken around Owerri because, according to him, it retains nasalization and insipient aspiration, which are characteristics of the Owerri dialect. In his work on "Patterns of Population movement in Igbo Cultural Area", Onwuejeogwu has argued that the people of Agbor are one of the earliest migrants from the heart of Igbo land, who moved westwards and became isolated in the western forest zone and developed their own characteristic culture (Otu-Onye Oghani of Agbor, 2008).

Onwuejeogwu goes further to assert that these early settlers might have had relations with the early Nri movements, which may be why they perform similar rituals in festivals like the Osiezi, Agbala, Nze, Nze title, the political ritual importance of the Ofo, the Ikenga, the Chi, and the Muo concepts, the mystical four day system and the occurrence of the Nri lineages of Owa. While there may be some truism in these claims, the origin of these people still remains a mystery.

At an early age the people of Agbor were able to make shelter, these they made from branches of trees and other temporary material, from having stable shelter, they began to domesticate animals after undertaking a careful study of the various species that were available so that they could decipher which were worthy of being domesticated and those that needed to be left in the wild. In an environment such as theirs, goats, sheep's, cows, dogs, among others were picked, while others were rejected for their unfriendliness (Onyekpeze, 2003).

As the society grew larger, social interaction became more complex, so they developed a system of reciprocity in all the activities they undertook, this increased the speed and efficiency at which task were carried out. Simple task like the construction of huts, creating communal roads, and communal vigilance which helped safeguard the lives and properties of the citizens. It is worth mentioning that farming and hunting were the main preoccupation of these people. (Okoro, 2018). Geographically, the land area of this people covers the present villages of Agbor, Oki, Ewuru, Aliagwai and Amahai (Burji, 2005). It is said that the main body of Agbor Kingdom occupies the highland between the Orogodo River and Ossiomo River. The urban offshoot of Orogodo is situated mainly on the western part of another highland, the top of which is now inhabited by the people of Agbor, up to Emuhu town.

Agbor is covered by a fairly good network of roads. The land however is undulating, prone to erosion and is covered with a secondary forest growth. Many years back the land was said to be covered by a thick forest vegetation in which wild oil palms, Iroko trees and Rubber Trees (Nwanne, 2001). Over the years however, an increase in population appears to have put severe pressure on the land and the people have had to resort to the establishment of cash crops like the oil palm plantation.

The Orogodo River and its tributaries used to be the only source of drinking water in addition to the numerous pond and wells. Rainwater was regarded as the best drinking water. The tremendous increase in population and urbanization has caused heavy pollution to these sources of drinking water, thereby rendering them unfit for human consumption (Adams, 2005).

Brief History of Owa

According to available records, both oral and written, Ndi Owa are said to have had a primordial relationship with the people of Anambra State and Benin of Nigeria. These records which are both verbal and written accounts of colonial officers tend to indicate that the origin of the present day Owa could be traced as far back as the 12th century AD. The people of Owa are believed to have come from Nri, which is situated in the Aniocha Local Government area of Anambra State.

The current Obi of Owa, His Royal Highness E.O Efeziomor II, admitted that the migration story of the 13th century may be true. (Obi Efeziomor II, 2004) He claims that he has been to Nri several times on his research studies in collaboration with Angulu Onwuejeogwu. According to the monarch, they were successful in tracing the dispersal process in the course of Owa migration.

It is believed that the original inhabitants founded the present day Ute-Okpu. Efeziomor is quoted to have said that “ History has it that during the Idah war, the ruling Oba of Benin, Oba Eweka, sent an appeal for military assistance, in response to the distress call, Odogwu and Ozomor the first and second sons of King Ijue, left to fight on the side of the Benin army. It is said that their father died while they were away on that military expedition, someone needed to step in to fill up the vacuum that was created by the death of the king, so the youngest brother of the volunteer warriors was installed on the throne.

On the return of Odogwu and Ozomor, they were informed of the unfortunate incident, to avert an imminent crisis, Odogwu, Ozomor and other loyalist migrated westward to establish a new home. Odogwu named the new settlement Owa, under his reign Odogwu unified other towns and kingdoms leading to the formation of Owa in the 13th century. Odogwu however maintained the friendly ties with Ute ("The People of Agbor,"2018).

Political Organization of Agbor and Owa

As expected the political structure of Agbor and Owa kingdom is highly centralized. The head of Government in Agbor is the Dein of Agbor, the headquarters of this place is at the Ime-Obi metropolis. The Dein is aided by his council of chiefs (Uzama) in the administration of the kingdom ("The History of Agbor,"2018).

Some have argued that the earliest inhabitants of this land called Agbor today were unable to evolve an organized socio-political administration; because they were mostly hunter- gatherers roaming the forest and living in small ill-defined units. However, with the emergence of a larger population cluster and the rise of Ominije, four prominent settlements were formed namely: Orhue, Eje, Egbe, and Diai. It may be assumed that this was the time that the rudimentary administration based on a nuclear family system began; nuclear family here meant a man, wife, or wives and their children. The marriage could be monogamous or polygamous. A combination of many related biological families formed what was known as the extended family or Ebon.

As the population of Agbor grew and as new inhabitants were discovered in the process, more and larger lineage groups emerged. The re-location of the headquarters to the metropolis by one of the kings to Igidi made the administrative machinery of the republic to become strengthened and well enhanced (Nwanne, 2001).

The leadership of the Ebon has always been by the oldest male member. The members held regular meetings in the Ogwa (Parlor) of the Head of the Ebon and decisions were arrived at by consensus. The assembly handled all matters concerning inter- relationship among members- judicial, social, political. The offending members were also punished according to agreed sanctions.

The next stage of administration was the Idumu, made up of several Ebons. The Idumu might be based on blood relationships, it may also be based on common historical experiences such as migration, in other words members must not descend from a common ancestor, nor maintain a common shred cult, they must however share a common historical experience, occupy a contiguous space and do things like burials, marriages, reciprocal farming, building of houses as well as the ownership of farmland and farm holdings. The same pattern of leadership as obtained in the Ebon was also practiced; however, each Ebon has its own ritual items which were transferred to the compound of the next man when the leader died (Onyekpeze, 2003).

Two or more Idumus or Units formed a compendium known as Ogbe or Quarters. The oldest of the Ogbe was the Onyechen Ogbe. All the meetings of the quarters were held in the Ogwa or

village square. Beside him were seated the head of the Idumus as well as the title heads known as the chiefs who were the Heads of the various Ebons whose duties included the maintenance of the community for the corporate existence of the kindred's through rituals and periodic propitiation to the gods and ancestors of the Ogbe for the good of the land and its people (Onyekpeze, 2003).

Overtime such Ogbe combined to form a village community (Ali) for efficient Administration of the communities. The polity known as Agbon later became a viable City-State which became a strong federation with a strong center based in Ime- Agbon. At present, the following villages exist:

1. Ime- Obi
1. Ogbemudien
11. Ogbe Isere
- III. Ihogbe
- IV. Ohumere
- v. Obi-Olihe
- VI. Ogbe-Isogban
- VII. Oruru- Idumagbamise
- VIII. Ogbe-Iwase
- Ix. Ihaikpen

2. Ihu- Iyase
- I. Agbor-Nta
- II. Ewuru
- III. Oki
- IV. Alihagu-Amahia
- V. Idumoza
- VI. Aiokpu
- VII. Alihami
- IX. Alifekede

3. Ihu Ozomor
1. Idumuku
- II. Alijemisi
- III. Aliren
- IV. Ahimah
- V. Aliogor
- VI. Idumu-Eno-Almokwe
- VII. Alijemata
- VIII. Umukwem
- IX. Idumu- Eno- Asogban
- X. Ozarra (Oza-nogogo)
- XI. Uvbere

- XII. Owuwu
- XIII. Idumenwa
- XIV. Alibude (Ebuno)
- XV. Aliebi
- XVI. Idumu- eleha

- 4. Alizomor Axis
 - I. Alizomor
 - II. Aliso
 - III. Omumu
 - IV. Alileba

- 5. Ekuku Agbor
 - I. Ekuku- Agbor Main
 - II Alidimm
 - III. Obi-Agbor

- 6. Orogodo
 - I. Ward 7 (including Ali buba and G.R.A)
 - II. Ward 8
 - III. Ward 9

- 7. Emuhu
 - I. Idumu Eze- Akan
 - II. Idumu Aban
 - III. Idumu Obi
 - IV. Idumu- Ngbubgu

The village communities were known to have a lot of functions to perform. Their functions were based on issues relating to the following:

1. Cordial and harmonious living amongst the Ebons, Idumus, and Nmus or biological families with their folds.
2. Inter-communal relations between them and the neighbouring Ogbes.
3. Appeals of legal nature referred to them from the lower segments of administration within their confines.
4. Maintenance of relationship within the palace through the Okoeduale in the past; and now it is performed by the Olotus who are the liaison officers of the palace.

The Government by title and hereditary came about by the foundation of the Dein dynasty in the 13th century, these titles were awarded for the perennial reward of families whose ancestors did great works for the consolidation of the Agbor kingdom. The Nmu, Ebon, and Idumu were submerged under the administrative machinery of the Ogbe. The Ogbe is the representative of the lower organs at the Dein's palace which is deeply stationed in the Ime-Obi metropolis. Due to the

heavy load of duties it has come to perform daily; it is the convergent center of the people for justice, wisdom, and the display of administrative competence (Agbor Kingdoms, 2018).

The Head of Government of the Owa kingdom is the Obi of Owa. The administrative headquarters is at Owa-Oyibu. The Obi is assisted by a council of chiefs. The council of chiefs is made up of the Ison, Osuma, Osague, Ihondor, Ede, Obanor, and Ovia. The administration mode in the towns that make up the Owa kingdom is gerontocracy, a government led by the oldest male in the community called Okparan or Okiba-Ali. They have a form of delegated authority for administration, adjudication, and sometimes function on certain religious affairs (Gbenoba, 2005). Owa is certainly one of the largest Ika communities. It shares boundaries with Agbor, Abavo, Idumesa, Umunede and Ute-Ukpu. Owa is comprised of seven villages: Oyibu, Owa Alidinma, Owanta, Alero, Alizomor, Ufie, Owa Eke, and Boji boji-Owa which is the metropolis.

The Economic Organization of Agbor and Owa Kingdom

Economic organization is a type of social relation that involves the combination of various kinds of human services with one another on one hand and on the other, it combines non-human goods in such a way that they serve their expected “end”

The economic organization of Agbor is one that ensures the material progress of the people, in relation with the efforts made by them to supply their everyday needs through the provision of the basic necessities of life like food, clothing, and shelter as well as the way they lived and organized themselves through the use of socially desirable knowledge, attitudes and skills which they bequeathed to their heirs and successors (Otu-Onye Oghani of Agbor, 2007).

According to Alfred Marshall (Year), in his Principles of Economics, man's character has been molded by his everyday work, and the material resources which he thereby procures, more than by any other influence unless it is that of his religious ideals. Arthur Birnie (1936), in his Economic History of the British Isles is of the opinion that great historical movements like the fall of the Roman Empire, the Reformation, the Revolution, cannot profitably be studied without an adequate knowledge of their economic background.

The Economic life of the early inhabitants of the land thus started in a simple way, when they were hungry they searched their environment for food. If they were lucky, they will find enough to keep them alive for many days without venturing out any further to hunt. But since an individual could not do the work of hunting and gathering fruits alone, there arose the need to form a team that will be saddled with the responsibility of gathering enough herbs on one hand and hunting enough animals for the community.

For high productivity, the people used their brains to work out a better way of cooperation through the division of labor, it was the duty of the men to hunt the animals; the women looked after their children or gathered the fruits from the plants.

Next, the people developed tools, some of which were of stones; the others were from woods and later Iron. As a result of the above, the men stopped wandering and concentrated on the cultivation of the newly discovered crops. Since the land was thickly forested and the rains well distributed between March and November, the people had to stick to the cultivation of the soil through the clearing of the thickly wooded land which entailed a lot of hard work. The animals that were domesticated were dogs, goats, sheep's and others.

From the earliest times the need for exchange had been part of the innate tendency of man, the exchange could be that of the goods and services or of ideas. With the establishment of the kingdom, the wants of man became diversified, hence the need for exchange of goods which he had for those which he had not, this resulted in the rise of trade by barter, but this new system of trade came with its attendant difficulty one of these was that it lacked universality, another was it created a double coincidence of want challenge. Real relief came when cowries was introduced as a medium of exchange between the people of Agbor and her neighbors.

The economic organization of the people of Owa can be studied under three major headings: agriculture, trade and local manufactures. Agriculture was the most important single occupation of the people of Owa kingdom, they produced yam, cassava, cocoyam, palm oil, palm kernel, fruits, and vegetables.

Although trade was not as important as agriculture, it was an important aspect of the economic life of the Owa people. Fishery was also practiced, the people fished along the banks of the Orogogdo River. It is no news that the people carried out both internal and external trade with her neighbors.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is clear that prior to the intrusion of the Europeans on African soil, Africans and other kingdoms especially in Nigeria made contact with each other. While this contact was sometimes hostile and resulted in the breakout of war, at other times it was cordial and peaceful. If we are to use the case of Agbor and Owa for instance, we can see that unless a stranger is told by an insider, you cannot tell one kingdom apart from the other just by studying their institutions. The proximity of their boundaries has led to extensive borrowings that became beneficial to the citizens.

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