

**TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES AND PRE-COLONIAL SECURITY SYSTEM:
INTERROGATING THE EKPE SOCIETY IN SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: *Traditional societies had long developed indigenous methods of maintaining law and order in their communities. For the multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities of south-eastern Nigeria, unity was not based on central government, but rather in little chiefdoms and settlements, each having its own lodge of the highest authority known as 'ekpe' society. Ekpe is a traditional society, indigenous to the people, strengthened by the corporate authority of the community, from where it also derived its authority to govern, since the members were representatives of the communities. The paper attempts to draw lessons from this society whose knowledge of governance in relation to traditional security was indigenous. It concludes that its effectiveness made it become a strong tool for intergroup cohesion. By way of recommendation, the paper advocates for security establishments to open their doors and collaborate with traditional societies for effective security, just as other fields of endeavours like medical practice is doing with traditional medical practice.*

KEYWORDS: traditional Societies, Pre-Colonial Security System, Keep Society, Southeastern Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Studies of indigenous African institutions that exercise control and social cohesion as well as governmental functions have been analysed based on kingdoms on the one hand, and on the other hand, ritually sanctioned political chiefship. This was the bases of the well known classification of African political system into two types, "lineage or segmentary and centralize or statelike"¹ by Evans-Prichard and Fortes. The result of their selection showed that "apart from small autonomous bands of kindred, the only alternative to acephalous and segmentary village systems was a centralize society in which officers and political powers were hierarchically arranged."²

In this context then, political, administrative and judicial institutions were treated as concomitants of centralized authority. This classification limited in its range of communities chosen, failed to consider communities in which neither of the classifications was dominant, but rather, self perpetuating societies and associations exercising autonomous ritual and secular authority over part or all of the population.³ In such communities, governmental powers especially judicial decisions and political action could be distributed among overlapping associations⁴, or in another context, the co-ordination of political action in government was achieved through societies. The role of *ekpe* society in the little chiefdoms in south eastern Nigeria affords an instance of control and cohesion of this kind from the late seventeenth century to the nineteenth century.

¹Evans-Prichard E.E. and Fortes M. in their introduction to *African Political System*, London: Oxford University Press 1940, p5.

²Ibid pp 6-7, 11-12.

³Criticism of this limited classifications have since been made by Paula Brown, 'Patterns of Authority in *West Africa*', xxi, 1951: Middleton and Tait, in their introduction to *Tribes without Rulers*, London, 1959.

⁴Forde, Daryll. *Yoko Studies*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964, pp165 - 209

EKPE: WHAT IS IT

The leopard society of the Cross River variously known as Mgbe, Ngbe, Ekpe and Egbo (anglicized) is 'traditional' to the people of the area. Traditional here is used in the historical sense, since it existed in time past and its knowledge is indigenous to the people of the area. Many writers of communities in south eastern Nigeria in the period under review have stressed that it is devoid of western influence, rather, it "is essentially a product of internal development."¹

Its origin is believed to be Ejagham, but it later spread to the south eastern neighbours of the Ejagham before being adopted by the Efik of Calabar. It was from here, it spread over a large area stretching from Calabar to the Cross River bend, from the easternmost Ibo and Ibibio to the Bulundu and Mbo of the Cameroons, an area roughly corresponding to that whose immediate trading connections were with Calabar.² It's membership did not follow automatically by birth or adaptation into a kin unit and by the nineteenth century it was opened to all men, children and women be they nobility, freemen or slaves when slavery existed.³

Originally Ekpe was for religious purpose,⁴ but owing to the new wealth which the West African trade bestowed on the Old Calabar community; ekpe was quickly adapted to fulfill other economic and civic functions. Its spread from people of one culture or language to another and by the fact of adaptation, it gained

¹Anwana,A.O *Ekpe Emporium in South Eastern Nigeria, 1600-1900*, Calabar: African Pentecost Communication, 2009, p79; Basse, B.E. *Ekpe Efik*, Calabar, Logical Operation Printing Press,2012, pp 22-31; Talbot, P.A *In The Shadow of The Bush*, London: Heinemann, 1912, p37

²In view of the important role they played in the hinterland trade, the Aro Igbo and their *Uturu* and *Ihe* neighbours are reported to have had the society, Talbot, *The People of Southern Nigeria*, London: OUP, 1969. p 782

³Nair, K.K sites an example of "wealthy kings like Great Duke Ephraim, at times bought ekpe titles for their enterprising slaves in order to encourage them to great industry." in *Politics and Society in South Eastern Nigeria 1841-1906*, London: Frank Cass, 1972, p18 .

⁴Aye, E.U *The Efik People*, Calabar: Glad Tidings Press Limited, 2000, p70; Akak,E.O *Efiks of Old Calabar*, Vol. 3, Calabar: Akak and Sons, 1982, pp 292-3.

importance has not distorted the main ostensible features of the society- the leopard voice; the stone set in an assembly house and arranged in different emblems; the mask figures; its main political use as a sanctioning agent for community laws or for the protection of individual rights and most importantly, its values which indicates how flexible the society is in adapting to local conditions and pressures, while maintaining their basic structure and teaching¹

The society's highly formalized constitution serves to emphasize solidarity and minimize the chance of an individual obtaining personal influence. This is achievable since in the first place the constitution is impersonal, it does not concern individuals as such but "defined the

prerogative of those occupying particular status categories,”² and Secondly, the rules of secrecy are design to preserve the association. The society is not a ‘secret society or a cult,’³ what is secret is the representations of its emblem in material symbol – the *ekpe* stone and the nsibidi (sign language). But most importantly, it should be mentioned that if its members did not support the ostensible reality of *ekpe*, as a thing to be feared and appeased, then the association would lose the very base of its formal organization.

The esoteric nature of the society “concerned the spirit of the forest... symbolized by the masquerade was a mystic figure never seen by the uninitiated”⁴ which has earned it the name of a secret society, is not covered in this paper. Rather,

¹ Ruel, Malcolm *Leopards and Leader*, London: Travistock Publications, 1969, p251; Miller, Ivor. *Voice of the Leopard: African Secret Societies and Cuba*, University Press of Mississippi, 2009.p18.

² *ibid*, p242

³ Bassey, B.E has argued this point noting that its existence is not secret since the determining factors are purity of purpose, size of group, coverage and area of influence. It has at least 15 million adherents. See Ivor Miller p xx; Akak,p291

⁴ Offiong, Ekwutosi E. ‘The Ethical, Social and Judicial significance of the Ekpe Fraternity shrine among the Efik, *SOPIA; An African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.9, No.1, 2006, p46

it’s the visible representation dressed in a multi-coloured costume with a bell around the waist, a staff in his right hand and a bunch of leaves in the left hand with a feather stuck across the forehead, that the paper focuses on. It was this visible representation and it’s given endowments reflected in its activities that was able to serve as the ‘traditional’ police in pre-colonial south-eastern Nigeria and left an indelible mark not only in the communities in which it was adapted into, but also in the lives of the Europeans.

EKPE AND THE COMMUNITY

For the multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities of south-eastern Nigeria, political action was based on the united agreement of the members of the settlement concerned and this united agreement accommodated the collective action of the diverse interest of the people who made it. Thus, while a community was ‘one’, any action concerning the community was agreed by everyone ‘all the people’. When one looks at the powers *ekpe* had especially as its lodges were spread all around south eastern Nigeria and up to the Cameroons; one is apt to ask where its authority comes from. To this question, a leader replied, “societies do not come down from the sky, it is the people of the community who sit down to create or buy one.”¹ In the case of *ekpe*, it is the community,”² since it is the agreement of the community that buys it, and gives it authority to act on behalf of them. This is so since every *ekpe* lodge contains the ‘people of the community’ including its leaders and the elders who collectively hold authority over it, thus. It is this oneness in the

¹ Etiyin Eniang Essien, 93 years, interviewed 9/06/2013

² Ruel, *op cit*, p 242

community that determined the success of the *ekpe* society since in the first place; the *ekpe* society organized the community in such a way that solidarity action is more likely to be achieved. Secondly, *ekpe* is seen as a set of values or common idea which can be held unto by diverse groups, irrespective of their local interest.¹ Reverend Hope Waddell’s observation in 1847 that “the towns of Old Calabar, in fact, a number of small republics each with its own

chief and council, united only by the egbo confraternity, so far as they have joined it for mutual defence”² sums up the oneness of these communities.

With these authority vested on *ekpe* it becomes understandable how *ekpe* was able to perform political, economic, social and religious functions in the community. This was especially so since in pre-colonial south-eastern Nigeria, communities were not fragmented into social, economic, political and religious function, but linked together to make up the totality of experiences through which men and women interpret their situation, define their goals and seek to realize them.³

Politically, *ekpe* operated as a sanction agent used to uphold community decision but announced as *ekpe* law. For instance, if the village council made a law, it is announced by *ekpe* drum and it is called *ekpe* law. The sounding of *ekpe* drum, the means of communication “demanded prompt response from all *ekpe* members and non members, irrespective of the community they belonged to.”⁴ Originally, this is not an *ekpe* law but an order from the village council, promulgated through *ekpe*.

¹ Ruel, op cit 242

² Waddell, Hope. *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa*, London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1963,p 314.

³ William, Gavin. *Nigeria Economy and Society*, London: Rex Collings, 1976, pp1-2.

⁴ Anwana, op cit, p 157.

In the same way any infringement of the law becomes a crime to *ekpe*, but it is really a crime for disobeying the village council since it is the village law made through *ekpe* society that is either obeyed or disobeyed. This point is very important since the legal processes taken over by *ekpe* are rarely, if ever initiated from within the society. The rights which *ekpe* society protects therefore are not the society rights but ‘community rights’. A close examination of Reverend Hope Waddell’s account of the law to abolish human sacrifice especially of slaves, at the death of a chief in 1850, is an example of how community, in this instance two independent ones agreed on a law and gave *ekpe* authority to announce it. After preliminary negotiations by Mr Anderson a missionary, king Archibong of Duke Town and King Eyo of Creek Town and European traders, he states further that:

On the 12th of February... the two kings and 26 of their principle men signed an agreement to abolish forever by Egbo law, the practice of human sacrifice in Old Calabar. Three days after that meeting, the law was proclaimed, with all due solemnities, in Duke Town by a procession of Creek Town Egbos (more than one lodge), and in Creek Town, the day after, by a similar procession from Duke Town. Thus the two towns became guardians of each other, and guarantee for the observance of their engagement.¹

From the above quote it is evident that it was the collective decision of independent communities that was sanctioned by various *ekpe* lodges. This collective political action of independent communities was possible because of the

¹ Waddell, op cit, p 422

common values shared by the society. Therefore the assertion by G.I. Jones that, “Egbo, not a general assembly of lineage elders was the body that made the laws of the community,”¹ or that “*ekpe* made the laws and executed them”² by K. K. Nair’s or P.A. Talbots insinuations

that “the many sided character of Egbo may be judged from the immense powers which it has arrogated to itself in almost all directions”³ are reflections of Eurocentric misjudgments of an indigenous society with a firm cultural base, which was able to hold its civilization in the face of external and especially European opposition. This misjudgment was based on the frustration the colonial administration faced since according to them, *ekpe* has more influence in many ways than government itself, and has caused endless difficulty to administration.”⁴

Initially, it appears that *ekpe* had been turned to a special solution for the protection of the lives of those of established status, especially the rights of the ‘free born’ *vis a vis* the large class of slaves. The clash of interest between these two classes which expressed itself in the formation of another society known as “Blood Men” whose main aim was the protection of the rights of slaves in the face of the oppression that *ekpe* until 1850 served to enforce is taken up by other writers.⁵

Worthy of mention is the reduplication of *ekpe* lodges in different communities, which expressed one of the most important value, that of respect to

¹Jones, G.I ‘The Political Organization of Old Calabar’ in *Efik Traders of Old Calabar*, D Forde (ed), London: Oxford University Press, 1956, pp 140-41

²Nair, op cit,p19

³ Talbot, *In the Shadow*, op cit, p39

⁴ ibid, p37

⁵ Kenneth Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956; Jones, pp148-157

community authority, hence the society allowed for the independence and separate authority of each community in the society. Each community was autonomous and decided what political action to support. This was evident in the incident which followed the law jointly proclaimed in 1850. A number of human sacrifices had occurred in Old Town, a community associated with Duke Town and Creek Town. When a captain informed king Eyo of Creek Town about it, king Eyo pleaded that “he could not control the affairs of that town, as its chief was independent; any usurpation of his authority would be a violation of *ekpe* principles and be repelled by *ekpe* penalties”¹. The chiefs of Old Town had to consent before *ekpe* was sent there with the law.

This political importance of *ekpe* made it mandatory for the king to “take his place among the highest officials of *ekpe*...if he was not the head of the society”². This was so because as *ekpe* became the primary institution of government especially from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, “any such power as he enjoyed amongst the efik population was guaranteed him by virtue of his position as an important *ekpe* member.”³ Therefore, since authority rested in *ekpe*, all who mattered became members of *ekpe*. At the same time, the elaborateness meant that should any member try to overreach himself by seeking undue influence, personal arrogance or flaunting his wealth, he was disciplined to temper his behavior.

This disciplinary effect of the society is illustrated in *Besongabang* a community in Cameroon where a particular headstrong youth of one village was

¹ Waddell, op cit, p423

²A. K. Hart, Report of the Enquiry into the Dispute over the Obongship of Calabar, Enugu: Government Printers, 1964, p89. This was the case for other communities that embraced *ekpe*. See E.O.Uya, on the Oron in *A History of Oron People of the Lower Cross River Basin*, Oron: Manson, 1984; on the Ibibio and Igbo see Anwana, op cit; for Ejagham see Talbot *In The Shadow*, op cit, Chapt IV.

³. Nair, op cit, p19

made to purchase membership of the best run lodges in another section to humble him. It did precisely this since “no more fight was left in him”¹ and he became financially exhausted. This distribution of power to a large group and to people who had no power including its inclusion of adults males in the community widen the franchise and made it difficult for the wealthy to oppress the poor.

The constitution showed that nobody was above the law, irrespective of status. E.A.Aye² has shown how King Eyo Honesty of Creek Town, a king and a title holder of *ekpe* society had to pay an exorbitant fine imposed on him by *ekpe* council. By this, the society played a vital role in the maintenance of political equilibrium, and was able also to exercise control over political leaders, thus making it impossible for “powerful men to enter into political rivalry with each other and much more build up factions which could split up maximal lineages and eventually the community,”³ as was the case in the Oil River areas.

It has already been shown that *ekpe* of independent communities could come together for a joint agreement on a sanction that fostered intergroup cohesion. A political impasse involving Henshaw Town and Duke Town occurred in 1875. The impasse was so intense that Prince Duke of Duke town was held hostage for three weeks. The attempt by the lodges in Creek Town and Oron to broker peace was unsuccessful and the impasse degenerated into war, with victims offered asylum especially in Creek Town and Oron.⁴ This political rivalry is just a case in point

¹Ruel, op cit, p243

²Aye, *Old Calabar*, op cit, p45

³ Forde, Daryll. (ed), *Efik Traders of Old Calabar*, London: Oxford University Press, 1959, p144

⁴Anwana has shown how intermarriages occurred between the two communities and enhanced strong family ties, p150.

which resulted in serious breach of the peace of the area but this was so because “by this time, the British law was beginning to be menacing and *ekpe* was losing its authority.”¹ Up to this point, although political rivalry existed in Old- Calabar as in the oil rivers, it was never allowed to develop into any serious breach of peace.

As the highest society in the area, *ekpe* was also used to protect the rights of individual members of the community be they initiates or not. In the case of none initiates, or people too poor to buy the privilege of being initiates, if wronged, they must hire an *ekpe* gentleman to bring their case before *ekpe* court with a fee proportionate to his success. An *ekpe* case is judged in very much the same way as other community cases, except for certain formalities especially the one that only the members of the association can participate, while the aggrieved non-initiate stays outside the lodge.

The individual rights which *ekpe* protects are those of land and property. An *ekpe* sign is placed on the property especially when the claimant fears trespass, misuse or even theft.

Various marks including a square lattice woven from a palm frond; two joint horns of a goat and a plaited and sliced loop of fiber cord are used for this purpose. An elder responded in this manner when asked about the effectiveness of the mark; “the mark is effective because the people of the community are watching to take action if the sign is removed.”² In Cross River Igbo, an *ekpe* song: *o daru ilu ekpe kwere ike, obu o magina-obu onwu?* Meaning “he who goes against the rules of *ekpe* and is obstinate about it does he not know that, it is death.”³

¹Aye, *The Efik People*, op cit, p78

²Ruel, op cit, p235

³Anwana, op cit, p152

demonstrates the important the *ekpe* laws. A case of death sentence was handed down on a condemned criminal because according to the king “he be thief.” Reverend Hope Waddell’s attempts to save the life of the criminal was refused by king Adam when he stated categorically that “this is our country law and u kill people in your country too.”¹

G.I Jones² has listed the many ways in which *ekpe* laws were enforced and includes the following:

1. *Ekpe* could boycott an offending person or group by having *ekpe* blown against him and thereby restraining anyone from transacting business with the culprits.
2. *Ekpe* could seal the offender’s property by placing *ekpe* mark upon it. In such circumstances the property was prohibited from being used by anybody until the mark had been removed.
3. *Ekpe* could impose and collect fines
4. *Ekpe* could arrest an offender and detain him or hand him over to the party whom he had offended.
5. *Ekpe* could execute an offender, either by decapitation or by fatal mutilation.
6. *Ekpe* could confine people to their own houses by hoisting the yellow flag of Brass *ekpe*.
7. *Ekpe* could also use force by attacking an offender or destroy his property.

Before the formal imposition of colonial rule especially among the Efik European traders and missionary were subject to *ekpe* laws. Chief Bassey Effiong

¹Anwana, op cit, p152

²Jones, op cit, pp 140-411.

Bassey¹ has shown how in 1876 *ekpe* was used to paralyze work by sealing up a missionary compound in Duke Town. This missionary outfit had refused to hand back to the community three suspected criminals who had sought refuge at the mission. The five point *ekpe* proclamation against the missionary read thus:

1. No one to carry provisions to the mission house for sale or otherwise
2. All gentlemen who had son or slaves residing with the missionaries must take them away instantly
3. No one must visit the missionaries
4. No child or slave be sent to school
5. No one to attend church or Sabbath meetings on the Lord’s day and no gentleman to allow God’s word to be preached in his house.

In 1950, Jones summarized *ekpe*’s political impact thus:

The institution on which, in default of other political machinery they (people of Old Calabar) and everybody else (in other Ekpe communities) depended, was *Ekpe*. Political functions were developed by *Ekpe* to a degree never attained by other secret societies in this region....²

Economically, peace and order aided trade hence, *ekpe* made sure there were no political feuds and even when they existed they were settled amicably. *Ekpe* guaranteed protection which became the major means by which traders rights were safe guarded and the passage of persons between communities protected. In this way, trade routes which *ekpe* controlled became the avenue for the further dispersal

¹Basse, op cit, p 38.

²Jones, op cit, p 135-36

of the society. *Ekpes'* importance to the flow of commerce has been attested to by many writers,¹ while the benefit that membership gave to trade would appear to have prompted some European traders to join. An example was captain Burrell of the ship *Heywood* of Liverpool who found it exceedingly to his advantage as it enabled him to recover all the debts due to him by the natives.²

But long before this time, the society's resourcefulness showed in the monies it made from fines, appropriation and fees from new entrance and initiates especially the European traders because of the 'trust system' of trade. but their rights were limited. An agreement between king Eyamba VIII and Harry Hearty, a European merchant who bought *ekpe* grade, stated that "his right and claim did not include becoming like the indigenous people"³ who had political rights and privileges as their exclusive rights.

Among the Cross River Igbo disturbance broke out in 1887 between trading groups from Amanagwu and Ibom in the Cross River Igbo axis and the Assang in an area down the Eniong Creek, was settled by the intervention of *ekpe*.⁴

Socio-culturally, *ekpe* was known to put children on guards especially in the care of their fathers. This was so "since children who neglected their aged fathers or had brought shame to their families were usually made to pay for such acts of negligence and insolence."⁵ The debts included beating, giving animals, drinks and

¹Patridge, Charles Cross River Natives, London: Hutchinson and Company Limited, 1905, p37; Wadell, p784; Noah, Monday .E. *Old Calabar: The City States and the Europeans, 1800-1885*, Uyo: Scholar Press, 1980, p72

²Noah, "Efik Expansion and Influence in Cross River Basin, 1884-1935," *Calabar Historical Journal* Vol.2, No.1, June, 1978, p68.

³Anwana, op cit, p182.

⁴Dike Kenneth & Ekejiuba, Felicia (eds) *Aro of South Eastern Nigeria 1650-1980*, Ibadan: University Press, 1990, p289

⁵Anwana, op cit, 165

the most severe, was depriving the culprit from seeing the fathers corpse. This deprivation was believed to be a curse, so culprits paid the fines.

Ekpe was also used for the execution of communal labour which was compulsory for males. *Ekpe* drum was on hand to remind the community members a day before labour and any absentee without cogent reason was fined. It also played the role as the repository of arts and

culture with skill acquisition as a necessary feature.¹ This is clear from the *ekpe* cloth *ukara* and the masquerade costumes of different designs and colour combination which “was created out of the need by this people to have their beliefs embodied in a concrete form.... The colours were so chosen in an attempt to present a symbolic representation of leopard spotted skin.”²

Closely related to this was the education which the society bestowed on all males from childhood to manhood. One of the remarkable characteristics of the society which often compared to a school was the many different grades which differentiated members. In this case “u enter in the first grade and move upward until you reach the top.”³ Thus while elders and leaders have reached the top only after a period of time, juniors have equal opportunity to reach the top. Grades defined position in relation to others, but made it difficult for an individual to pursue his interest without the solidarity of the whole. As the regulator of the community for the overall good of all, from initiation an *ekpe* member was not educated away from but into his community as “self realization, human relationship,

¹ Anwana, op cit, 172

² *ibid*, p 169-70

³ Ruel, op cit, p243

economic efficiency, public service and civil responsibility”¹ were emphasized. Members saw themselves as leaders, protectors of the poor and weak and also of the cultural heritage. Non-initiates were also educated in the supremacy of the norms of the community, as punishment for violation was imposed on all.

The education was intense since initiates were expected to be perfect in *nsibidi- ekpe* act of writing and medium of communication which P.A. Talbot defines as “a primitive secret writing much used in this part of the world,”² and his attempt to pay a sum to study the script was rebuffed. The man remarked: “if I taught DC *nsibidi* he will know all the *ekpe* signs and the secrets of the animal.”³ This shows that Africans had a form of writing which Europeans attempted to learn. Elizabeth Isichie also noted “that *nsibidi* had the additional advantage that it could be used between ethnic groups who could not understand each other’s speech.”⁴

As a recreational and entertainment society, *ekpe* had festivals which held at certain periods in the year. This promoted the social life of the people, reaffirmed the solidarity of the community and most importantly, on a historical note “the songs are historical hardware which a curious researcher could glean historical facts about *ekpe* institution...and other information pertaining to the peoples cosmology perceived through the society.”⁵

Religiously, central to the believes of the people of the area, was the existence of the supreme being and then deities which Anwana posits is the level were *ekpe*

¹Anwana, op cit, 176

²Talbot, In the shadow,op cit p 39

³ *ibid*,p39

⁴ Ishiechie, Elizabeth. *The Ibo People and Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship to 1906*, London: Faber, 1970,p 35

⁵Anwana, op cit, p 161

belonged. In this way, it seems the communities in south-eastern Nigeria who bought *ekpe* lodges were able to adapt it to suit their environmental needs. It was easy to fit in *ekpe* since it had physical and material proves of their spiritual quest hence “it became a pivot on which all else revolved since it was a successful attempt to reduce the all pervading spiritual world to an organization in which the members could contact the spiritual world and interpret it to non-initiates.”¹

A pointer to this adaptation is reflected in the prayers made during pouring of libations or incantations. These prayers although not recitable, start with a call on the supreme being and other deities to come and be part of what ever activity they are about to embark on.

LESSONS FROM EKPE SUCCESS

1. The political and judicial use of *ekpe* which is believed to be independent in its judgment by the community demonstrates to a potential culprit his potential isolation from the community to whom he owes his identity and status. Disputes became isolated and converted to one of a culprit accepting group authority. The confrontation becomes that of a political group, an individual or members who threatens ‘the good order’ of the incorporate community. It is this vital relationship that is given unequivocal support and clearly expressed by *ekpe* constitution and the judicial process.

2. These support is not limited to one community but comes from all independent communities owning *ekpe* lodges since they shared same values. If for example a

¹Anwana, op cit, pp 190-206

man was ostracized through *ekpe* in one village, no other *ekpe* village will receive him. By failing to accept the authority of one *ekpe* lodge, he fails to accept the authority that all seek to preserve.

3. It is important to emphasis the discipline which the internal activities of the society imposed on members. This includes the need to observe the rules of the society and that of group authority. Such a discipline moved without discontinuity from the more relaxed recreational context of playing *ekpe* to the context in which entirely serious central, political issues are discussed. “Many people have learnt to their cost the danger of not treating seriously an apparently serious injunction made within or by the association. Taking the *ekpe* society seriously is the same as taking the community seriously, since what is learnt in one context applies equally to the other.”¹ This is the bases in which *ekpe* is seen as “a society whose authority is sacrosanct and is above challenge. it could condemn a whole town to heavy fines, punish or forgive even a king as it could also give and take life.”² As old *Ekpe* Jack said in 1852, “*ekpe* law is the same to Calabar as Gods law. If a man breaks it, all Calabar must make war on him till they kill him.”³ Consul Beecroft observation about *ekpe* summarizes its role in the communities of south-eastern Nigeria: ...egbo is at once the legislative and police force establishment of Old Calabar: “... they make laws for peace and order in the community and both members and non-members are subject to their laws. They settle disputes, investigated and exposed evil or forbade acts committed by citizens and levied punishments on the culprits.”⁴

¹Ruel. op cit, p 234

²Aye, Old Calabar, op cit, 72

³Waddell, op cit, p 313

⁴Anwana, op cit, pp 148

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to interrogated the *ekpe* society of south-eastern Nigeria and two points come out clear; firstly the importance of group or community solidarity as opposed to that of an individual which made it difficult for “one man to win judgment against his clan;”¹ secondly, and most importantly the ability of these pre-colonial communities to adapt *ekpe* to their environments is worthy of mention as *ekpe* called *abakua* in Cuba has been adapted to the Cuban context and “has been enriched through its encounters with other cultural ideas there.”²

The need to find answers to our security problems by studying our previous endeavours and experiences should not be a subject of controversy, especially as the denial of our tradition, culture and civilization has not been successful in the face of the imposition of alien ideas to our unique environment. A cursory look at the history of subsequent changes in the west reveals how invention and changes owe much to earlier practices. Worthy of mention is Japan industrialization which is characterized by a Japan element, leaving much of the basic structure of traditional Japanese society intact, they adopted and assimilated all the scientific, technological and industrial achievements of the west in order to build a strong and unique Japan.

The significance of indigenous knowledge and practices in securitization fulfils one of the functions of history of history which is the preserve of the past achievements for the benefits of the present and future.

¹Achebe, Chinwe, *Arrow of God*, Ibadan: Heinemann 1974, chap.2

²Miller, op cit, p5



