Orashi Inter-Group Relations in Pre-Colonial Times with Her Neighbours.

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Abstract.

The focal point of this paper is to examine the intricate network of relationships between Orashi region and her neighours of Igbo, Ikwerre, Aboh, and the Niger Delta city-states prior to the invasion of European imperialism and colonialism. Orashi people interacted with their neighbours, which was accompanied by contacts of culture as well as infrequent wars. These wars were centred on the diplomatic and military struggles to gain and maintain control over fertile land, trade, trade routes and economic resources, which resulted to conquest and over-lordship or enslavement. The implication of this development in the past was that no society was autarkical to fail to interact with other society. This made one society to appreciate past linkages, improve on them, denounce the negative

elements and promote the positive values. In spite of the centripetal and centrifugal forces on the Nigeria state, the study of intergroup relations has a great role to play in the quest for mutual co-existence, nation-building, national integration, national development and sustainable development.

Introduction

Orashi is derived from one of the rivers within the areas of South-South and South-East parts of Nigeria. The river criss-crosses three states of Nigeria namely: Anambra, Imo and Rivers State. We have limited our study to Orashi of Rivers state, which comprises four local government areas, viz: Ahoada east, Ahoada west, Abua/Odual, Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni. This river served as the trade routes, migration, communications, carriers of trade and idea in the past than they do in modern times. Before the coming of highways, railways and airways, Orashi river provided the only thoroughfares for the cheap transportation of large quantities of commodities over long distance in many parts of Orashi region. It is because the role played by this great river that conflicts evolved leading to warfare.

Orashi people interacted with their neighbours of Igbo, Ikwerre, Aboh and Niger Delta city-states, which was accompanied by contacts of culture as well as infrequent wars even before the incursion of European imperialism and colonialism. In subsistence economy, trade developed between areas with different natural endowments. The salt and fresh/dried fishes of the coastal delta were exchanged for the agricultural produce of the hinterland. These interactions were vitiated with high level of insecurity such as attacks from animals, kidnapping, head-hunting, pirates, and marauders. To curtail the excesses, traders travelled in groups purposefully to ward off attackers. In spite of inter-communal warfare, trade relations were re-established. Inter-group relation is an unavoidable phenomenon because it

is hinged on complementarity, interdependence, foster peace, stability, friendliness, inter-marriages.

The Socio-Cultural and Economic Relations of Orashi Region and Her Neighbours.

An inter-group relation sociologically refers to the process of interactions between different social groups. Inter-group relations entail contact and interaction between groups. Such interactions could either be friendly or hostile. In spite of certain negative forces that led to hostilities that eventually culminated to warfare, communities were not isolated from each other; instead they interrelated peacefully and also were never self-sufficient (Falola et al, 1989 , Alagoa,1989). No community was abundantly satisfied or rich not to associate. This insufficiency led to interactions that took the form of trade, diplomatic ties, management of trade routes, boundaries and water resources, wars, peace, marriage, culture, migration, mode of dressing etc.

Economically, inter-group relations make those resources that were unevenly and inequitably distributed by nature, to be redistributed through economic interaction among states factored by differences in climatic conditions, levels of industrialization, differences in skills and quality and quantity of labour force. Man began to work, cultivate, harvest, and barter or sell his products to eke out a living. This is why economics from age past and even now has always been the study of how man earn his daily bread, confirming the economic mind of man's efforts through ages or centuries towards the provisions of and satisfaction of his material needs, want and sustainability of his material progress and development. (Osaih, 2009, Tamuno, 1996). This is the major reason why different scholars like Ake (1981), Hopkins (1973), Austen (1987), Zeleza (1993) etc., have proved beyond reasonable doubt that economic factors conditioned and determined the superstructure of any society. They also opined that economic factor is the primary reason for inter-group relations. Scholars

like E. J. Alagoa (1970, 1971) and Ikime (1977) stated that social relations in Niger Delta were hinged on interdependence. Inter-group relations rested on the axiom that no society or world economy was *autarkical* (a Greek terminology connoting self-sufficiency). Jones averred that neither the Eastern Delta nor their hinterlands were self-sufficient in their economy (Jones, 1963:).

Geographical and ecological variations led to the production of diverse crops as to satisfy local needs. This essentially led to mutual aid as people cooperate not just for the sake of social community but indeed out of necessity (Samuel, 2011). When the need for local commerce could not satisfy the needs of the expanding population and the innate desire to grow led to the emergence of internal long distance trade. This was basically because of natural endowments and complimentary. To overcome the insecurity of head-hunters, pirates, kidnappers, marauders and brigand vitiated with internal long distance commerce, traders secured the helps of the brave, bi-linguists, armed themselves with wooden clubs (*akube)* for less dangerous spear (*okia*) for dangerous journeys and sometimes travelled in groups in order to ward off attackers (Ellah, 1995, Azuma, 30/5/2015). Human porterage along the narrow bush parts or forest areas and canoes were the most viable means of transportation which necessitated the movement of people, goods, services and ideas out of and into Orashi region (Ajayi and Alagoa, 1980). Dike extended it further that buying and selling of commodities is almost always accompanied by contacts of culture, the exchange of ideas, the mingling of peoples and has led not infrequently to political intrigues and wars (Dike, 1956).

These political intrigues and wars became forcible and real because of commercial interests. Trade, viable trade is a catalyst to prosperity while violence or war ruined what has already been built, and impedes progress. Asuk (2013) saw trade and violence as contradictory metaphors. The former, the propeller of prosperity and the latter, an author of culture of

poverty. Many scholars have theorized that trade and war were "ultimately and reciprocally-related to each other". War systematically follows trade or trade follows war. Both terms are inseparable and twin-like because the pursuit to excel another in the conflict of economic and commercial interests instigated commercial rivalries (wars) and disintegration of societies. One of the Niger Delta historians, Youpele (2008) opined that trade and violence were twin characteristics in the Niger Delta for over five centuries now. In much of mercantilist point of view there cannot be trade without war or war without trade. Power is the only language that determines who wins in conflict of economic interests. It stabilizes the economic situation for trade to blossom. This was the major reason why European administration was much content with double objectives of stability and trade (Naanen, 2015). Pacifications were speeded up and consuls dispatched that resulted to bloodshed and gun-boat device to restore peace while trade accentuated and forged on unhindered. Trade either locally or internationally is a lifter to nations and those who understood its workability becomes buccaneers vying to occupy certain trade routes, which becomes a critical milestone in the quest for development. The desperate bid of who owns the Orashi markets and Orashi, Engenni and Sombreiro rivers (the main waterways that inter-link the coastal people to the hinterland axes) resulted to full-blown wars.

According to Erekosima (1991) cited in Charles (2013) posited as follows:

> *Unfortunately the Orashi markets were parts of what Nembe regarded as its own age-old marketing zone.*
> *And by the last few years of Karibo's reign, Kalabari traders were being attacked by the Nembe and their Engenni and Ogbia allies resulting into full-blown war in 1863 and the Engenni total blockade of the Orashi River at Okarki which completely paralyzed Kalabari trade in the north-west.*

The construction and formation of ad-hoc alliances in Niger Delta and Orashi respectively became a major landmark event in competition for

commercial interests, which advertently beefed up state or community capabilities against perceived mutual security threats with mutual and reciprocal obligations. Alliances heralded some ill-feelings or distrust against one another and so, it became significantly necessary for covenants (*ovo*), and solemn leagues that played the role of treaties cemented by juju-swearing and oath-taking took prominence in olden days. Economic rivalries and alliance formations were the fundamental factors that brought diplomacy (the management of inter-state relations) to the fore and it took diplomacy, the fulcrum of most states to gain control of a trading zones. Diplomacy and trade are symbiotic and reciprocal to each other.

There are mammoth evidence that Orashi of the Niger Delta fringe had peaceful, good and congenial relationships with her neighbours of Igbo, Ikwerre, Degema, Brass, Nembe, Biseni, etc with the exception of Aboh and Kalabari, which had sustained and un-sustained hiccups and inter-tribal wars. Available oral and written sources contended that before the arrival of the Europeans on the shore of Orashi, indigenous products of the riverine communities such as dried and fresh fishes, oysters, lobsters, periwinkle and salt, were exchanged for Orashi agricultural items such as yam, cassava, maize, plantain, banana, cocoyam, fruits etc. Orashi, Engenni and Sombreiro rivers were the main waterways which provided access to the inland from the coast and these were the main arteries through which this trade was conducted (Orugbani, 2005) This trade resulted to inter-marriages, inter-cultural borrowings of dressing patterns(Uziri or George, don, etibo and Egenebite (Engenni wrapper) and masquerade dances, Owu, Aganipele, Egbukele etc. and adoption of riverine names like Sunday Petro in Obieti, Dakoru family in Obakata, Wokoma and Benibo families in Usomini, Braide family in Kreigani, Torubo, Amachree, Dikio, Alayana, Igoniko, Obu, Dokubo, Wariboko, Igoniwari,Opuwari,Amutebo etc in Ogba and Engenni axes respectively.(Nwala et al, 2009). These trading relations brought about market places in Abonnema, Elele, Egbada, Omoku, Akabuka, Engenni,etc. Markets in Orashi and those of her

neighbourhood favoured inter-group transaction of business and the exchange of commodities either by barter or by money. They also served socio-political and religious purposes. Socially, markets exist for entertainment and amusement purposes. It provided a vital opportunity for estranged friends, lovers, and partners to discuss issues bordering on love, marriage and business. Also, in the markets, there were traditional display of dances, festival, and ceremonies. Drummers, singers, folklorists, and poets often practiced their arts in the markets. It was a place for dissemination of information and circulation of news and rumours of the current event in the society (Falola et al, 1989). Politically, institutions like family, lineage and village councils stressed a common political unity among different communities. And religiously, markets were sacred institutions believed to be owned by certain divinities or gods. This explains why certain taboos forbid people from stealing, quarrelling, fighting, gossiping, backbiting, fornicating etc., in the markets and are strictly adhered to, otherwise, severe judgment are meted out to defaulters. Despite all these trading relations, the Orashi people never migrated because of hunger and drought.

Some of the inter-ethnic marriages were entered into for the sake of security and this promoted cordial and long-lasting relationships across ethnic and cultural zones especially through the coming and going of in-laws, grandchildren and other kinsmen on both sides. In the course of inter-visitation, the husband's or the wife's peoples bring along some elements of their languages, dances, folklores, world views, and special dishes. When these are properly absorbed, it promotes cultural exchanges. Some of these marriages became important instrument for settlement of disputes. In terms of reconciliation, influential men who had married from the enemy community or the children born of such marriage connections, were respected, honoured and welcomed. They had immunity and could not be harmed by his mother's kinsmen, being regarded as part of their blood relation (Isichei, 1976). There was also high degree of cultural interaction in

the social and sporting activities. There were wrestling exchanges among the Ikwerre, Ogba, Ekpeye, and the Engenni people. Visiting groups were not expected to carry any food stuffs and equipments as such were alien to sense of African hospitality. This also existed in burial ceremonies. However, it is an exaggeration to conjecture that such exchanges of wrestling contest between groups were absolutely peaceful. There were times when two rival contestants broke into open conflict. This could be resolved by the conductors of the game. Where the conductors were unable to handle the conflict, the elders of the two villages could sit together to resolve the issue peacefully. Conflicts beyond their capacities were taken to Ibini Ukpabi in Arochukwu, Amadioha in Etche and Igwe-Ka-ali in Umuneoha (judicial institutions) were justice could be obtained. The general acceptance of these institutions as appeal judicial bodies could not but helped in facilitating inter-group relations. Some of these conflicts escalated into war, viz: Erema an Ogba village with Abarikpo, an Ekpeye village in about 1700 (Sam, 1979). Ogba and Ekpeye regarded themselves as descendants of a common ancestor called Akalaka. This was expressed in their sayings, Ekpeye Nwa-Akalaka, Ogba Nwa-Akalaka. There was a traditional non-aggression pact between Erema town in Ogba and Ihugbogo in Ekpeye till date. Most of these wars were not carried out with the philosophy of total or full-scale war and so did not cut gory consequences. They were civil wars and were undertaken only with the purpose of proving their superiority over one another. Any person who killed his enemy was required to hang himself. (Richard, Chief Isabu and Abonnema, 4/6/2013). This inters and intra cultural activities resulted to bilingualism and mutual intelligibility in their dialects. A good example to this linguistic affinity are demonstrated below:

Igbo	**Ogba**	**Ekpeye**	**Ikwerre**	**English**
Offo	Owhor	Owhoh	Owhoh	Staff (Symbol of divine authority).
Ala	Ali	Ele	Ela	Land

Aka	Eka	Eka	Aka	Hand
Ebo	Akwu	Akwu	Mgbo	Door
Oche	Ngida	Agida	Ngada	Chair
Akpa	Ekpa	Ekpa	Akpa	Bag

Engenni	**Ijo**	**English**
Abadi	Abede	Guana
Akpa	Akpa	Bag
Aba	Aba	Type of fish
Ekashi	Ekasi	Chair

Isoko	**Engenni**	**English**
Oto	Oto	Ground or land
Omo	Omo	Child
Oko	Oko	Canoe
Obo	Obo	Hand
Ovo	Ovu	One
Ikpe	Igbe	Ten

Engenni	**Nembe/Kalabari**	**English**
Abili	Abili	Chest draft
Belema	Belema	Love
Boma	Boma	Praise
Edeke	Edeke	A type of fish
Efere	Efere	Plate
Sokie	Sokie	Clock
Songu	Songu	Sardine
Egberigba	Egberigba	Story

English	**Ogba**	**Aboh**
Head	Isih	Ishi
Feet	Uku	Uku

Mouth	Onu	Onu
Money	Ego	Ego
Fish	Azhu	Azu
Meat	Anuh	Anu
Fear	Egih	Egu
Land	Ali	Ani

(Courtesy: Abiobio, 2011, Sam, 1979, Ngozi, 2014 and fieldworks)

It is crystal clear that from the foregoing examples, there is similarity among Orashi languages and their neighbours.

Diplomatically, Orashi people are peace-lovers and beacon of hospitality, facilitated their relations with common understanding and covenant which became the bedrock upon which treaties, alliances, establishment of boundaries, development and protection of trade and trade routes, payment of tributes were made. These were express indications discerned to promote peace and mutuality.

These diplomatic relations were broken down and wars became rift. When communities and states could not convince one another through diplomacy, war became inevitable. War was an integral part of inter-group relations. War has been described as diplomacy by other means (Falola et al, 1989). Before the outbreak of any war, concerted efforts were made to prevent war. Diplomatic envoys made up of chiefs, elders, war captains, Umuada etc., were sent for amicable settlement of conflicting issues at stake (Dawood and Aghalino, 2012).When diplomatic approaches had failed, an ultimatum was sent by one of the communities to the other asking whether it wanting peace or war. When it was certain that the other community wanted war, the king, elders, chiefs and the entire people were called for an emergency meeting for mass discussions. War was declared after mass approval. The wars fought in Orashi region was caused by: disputed and

undefined boundary (Erema-Akabuka c. 1680), Idu-Biseni, Kalabari-Abua, Kalabari-Odual, (Erema-Akabta and Okporomini war of settlement/dislodgement), disputes over trade route and forceful application of the blockaded trade route (Kalabari- Engenni 1864), adultery and abducted women (Erema-Obite ,1895), injustice neglect and envy (Ubio and Ubeta), constant raids, envy, oppression/ subjugation (Aboh-Ogba 1895), strains in commercial relations led to the Ogbogu-Kalabari war c. 1862, Ogbogu-Oboburu 1893, Ahoada-Elele caused by land and population movement, Nembe-Odual war over constant attacks on Odual by Nembe etc. Slave raids and legitimate trade intensified inter-ethnic wars.

The consequences of these wars were: heavy or mild casualties, insecurity, destabilization of social-economic relations, promotion of unhealthy tension and unrest in the community, distrust, post-war trauma etc. The war of settlement provided the Erema people their present abode and gave them heroic names- *Umu-ochumanbabirih* and *Igrabuenih* (Osaih, 2007) ,which they are still answering till date. It delivered the Ogba (Omoku) and Engenni people from the tyranny of Aboh kingdom and Ekelewa of Ekpeye respectively. It brought a common understanding and big brother role of Nembe-Brass over Odual communities against their enemies (Michael, 2016). It ushered in a new era in the socio-political history of Ogba people from a stateless to a state society epitomized by the appointment of an Eze-Ogba. It strengthened the economic and military affinity between Nembe and Engenni people.The Orashi wars produced military heroes such as: Akalisuo of Okarki, Egine of Engenni, Nworiza of Ogbele, Isoma (minister of defence), Okoya Nwaebe (general commander), Akogu (group commander), Owerre (ADC), Ekelewa of Ombor, etc. (Orji, 2011, Abiobio, 2011, Osaih, 2007, Personal communications with Abiobio, July 8, 2014, Richard, November 21, 2013).

In these wars, trade relations were re-established as fast as possible. Orashi people were never warrior stock; they were only known to have gone to

war for self-defence. They were non-aggressors and were never conquered or enslaved by any Nigerian communities (Orike, 2008). The constant affrays between Kalabari and Nembe merchants over trade routes (Engenni, Orashi and Sombreiro rivers), monopolization of trade and extension of trade empires at the rival expense caused a lot of damage on trade and human wreckage. Alagoa stated that the Orashi "communities served as buffers between Nembe and Kalabari. The communities claimed protection of one the rival states when threatened attack from the other. If the attackers were so near, however, that speedy up help would not be expected, they succumbed for the powerful neighbours". Alagoa's exposition above is at variance with what we have on ground. From the oral and written sources defied the above postulation. According to one Mr Opuwari, my informant, our people whatsoever were never dependent or claimed protection of any states. They were manly, bold, warrior and ready to face any challenge (Nwala, 3/7/2014). According to Abiobio (2011) that "the Kalabari camps or settlement and their larger canoes of cargo were attacked constantly by hostile gangs of the Engenni people either as reprisal or sheer marauders. Thus, the Nembe and the Kalabari settlements subjected themselves to Engenni chiefs through whom they could obtain redress and under whose names they could go up and down the river unmolested. They, therefore, paid homage to the Engenni chiefs in cloth, heads of tobacco and gin".

From Alagoa's statement, Orashi communities contiguous to the eastern and western delta served as buffer zones, there was no time, they succumbed to any powerful states or potentates when threatened. There were indications that some sorts of elementary vassalage or squabbles existed between Nembe and Odual people (Eferebo, 2014). My informant Akeutol said that there was no vassalage, that the Odual's territory was not forcefully acquired rather, it was mortgaged. Based on this, we have identified basic principles to territorial acquisition in the Niger Delta. They are: inheritance, settlement or usage, gift or mortgage and conquest.

Conquered communities or states often times ceded their territories to superior neighbours to avoid tributes and constant predatory onslaught.

Alliances were basically entered into for mutual benefits either rallied upon for selfish and/or collective interests mainly to exclude rival communities from trade routes. Some states or communities entered into trade relations with others, some have to subdue their neighbours and some had to cooperate with others to obtain weapons. For instance, the Nembe middlemen who were ousted by the Kalabari, supported Engenni people with canons, gun powder and other logistics during the Kalabari and Engenni War of 1864. Wars were ended by formal agreement to restore peace. In the course of any truce, states or communities come together either as the victor or the vanquished and this brought them closer to one another as friends or even as enemies. This destructive and constructive force called war, no matter how severe or fierce it might be, did not create a break in inter-group relations. War by itself, it is a form of inter-group relations which encouraged cultural exchanges. Even enemies learned from one another military strategies and tactics, borrowed or stole war medicines, gods and charms, weapons and warlike social institutions like the closely integrated age-grades and secret societies which emphasized manliness, self-reliance and training in martial arts. It is also possible to learn the enemy's language and borrowing of his dressing habits and other cultural traits for reasons of military reconnaissance, intelligence and espionage. The essence of all these was to be sophisticated militarily in order to exploit and attack their weaknesses for victory (Gobo, 2007, and Personal observation).

From what we have theorized above, inter-group relations is all-ramifying and includes all facets of human endeavours such as war, peace, trade, dance, marriage, mode of dress, culture, and the wide-ranging network of interrelations, mainly economic and religious activities which bind Orashi people and her neighbours together. Pre-colonial inter-group relations of

Orashi people and her neighbours were friendly, cordial, ambivalent, and intermittent conflicts and wars were rift. In view of the centripetal and centrifugal forces, the study of inter-group relations has a vital role to play in the quest for mutual co-existence, and national integration. It is also important because it debunks the claim that Africa was a non-historical part of the world and the Negro was incapable of producing anything of value. They labeled Africa as a "dark continent", savage, evil, inglorious, helpless, passive etc and the most appalling of it, was that to study Africa before the coming of the Europeans was to "pry into the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe". Worse still, development in Africa was attributed to the Hamites, Caucasians, Europeans etc. Prior to the incursion of the European imperialism and colonialism, Nigerian communities have attained different levels of development. Casely-Hayford affirmed further-"before even the British came into relations with our people, we were a developed people, having our own institutions, having our own ideas of government" (see Rodney, 1972).

Conclusion.

The Orashi people interacted closely with their coastal and hinterland neighbours. The people of Orashi region were linked together in various ways. There were forcible links created by wars which resulted in conquest and over-lordship or enslavement. Political intrigues and wars became forcible and real because of commercial interests and personality clashes. There were more beneficial links of trade, viz: cultural fusion or borrowings, intermarriages, movement of people and exchange of ideas from one area to another as a result of wars even before the coming of the Europeans. Like the Niger-Benue, there was constant traffic on the Orashi River as the water way linked various periodic markets as various villages and clans united and interacted to influence one another in terms of inter-group relations.

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