



ELEME AND IKWERRE (ELELENWO) RELATIONS; 1800-1960

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Abstract

This paper examines Eleme and Ikwerre relations with emphasis Elelenwo during the pre-colonial and Colonial eras. Eleme and Ikwerre have been in contact since the pre-colonial era. Both groups have over the years depended on each other for economic, political and socio-cultural survival. The paper discussed the relationship between both groups with emphasis on trade, politics, religious activities, education and social ties. The used primary and secondary sources of information to generate the needed data and the qualitative approach to data analysis was employed in the analysis. The study reveals that the relationship between Eleme and Ikwerre that started since the pre-colonial era has provided friendly relationships that have cut across all aspects of human society. The paper establishes that the relationship between Eleme and Ikwerre during the pre-colonial and Colonial eras promoted economic, political and socio-cultural ties that impacted positively on the economic and socio-political developments of the affected groups which have endured to present. The paper recommends that group relations should be devoid of political and economic domination, marginalization and subjugation and that in moments of conflict and confrontations, diplomacy and tolerance should be adopted to ensure peaceful co-existence.

Key words: Pre-colonial, Colonial, Intergroup relations, Eleme, Ikwerre.

Introduction

Nigeria is made up of over 300 ethnic groups situated within the various geographical belts of the country. For many centuries and decades before what became Nigeria, the ethnic nationalities actively engaged in huge historical contacts and activities, substantial intermingling of cultures, a good deal of symbolic inter-dependence, mutual accommodation and co-operation within and across ethnic boundaries, dating back to early times (Ajayi and Alagoa, 1980, Afigbo, 1987, Orugbani, 2003, Effah-Attoe, 2007, Ikime, 2006, Akinwumi, Okpeh and Je'adayibe (Eds.), 2006). This phenomenon of harmony, accommodation, co-operation and solidarity which gyrated (and is still gyrating) around their origins and migrations, cultural, socio-economic and political variables in spite of their autonomous and independent nature was not a new innovation. Of great significance is the fact that the links which inextricably bind the people together was so ancient and diverse that "there is no part of Nigeria where a line can be drawn and it can be said here the North ends and the South begins" (H.R. Palmer cited in Afigbo, 1987:2). Poignantly, a composite history of any ethnic group in Nigeria cannot be complete without meaningful reference to the intricate linkages with her neighbours in antiquity (Ogbogbo, Olaniyi and Muojama, 2012:1). The point, therefore, is that no community could claim to be distinctive, self-sufficient and isolated without any conscious or unconscious relations with other Nigerian societies.

Evidently, the complex network of contacts and connections between and among the peoples of Nigeria resulted in profound inter-ethnic, cross-cultural and cross gender dividends. Consequently, there were (and there are still) borrowings and the admixture of cultures and traditions such as inter-marriages, long distance trade, inter-linguistic assimilation, cultural cross-fertilization and exchange of ideas, leading to peaceful co-existence, co-operation and compromise (Apenda, 2006: 188, Amadi and Okpeh, 2011:ii, Afigbo, 1987:3, Sokari-George, 2006: 264-268, Ogbogbo, Olaniyi and Muojama, 2012:2). Obviously, there is hardly any community in Nigeria which does not exhibit traces of 'outside' influences on their culture. Nnoli (2008:27) powerfully stresses "that the various pre-colonial societies evolved over the centuries as a result of successive population contacts in the same area, that various aspects of life are identical across ethnic groups, that there is a great deal of overlap in the activities of the groups even where differences exist".

The point to be made, however, is that the peaceful, congenial, and harmonious relations between and among Nigerian peoples was not without challenges. The contacts were punctuated and truncated with occasional tense and anxious moments of disagreements, hostilities, and skirmishes as well as competitions. As Okpeh (2006a:18) persuasively argues

“when competition heightens and the contradictions generated between groups cannot be amicably and mutually resolved, interactions result into conflict”.

It has to be noted that conflictual relations in pre-colonial period were generally short lived, easily resolved and not totally destructive. They were used to form various types of alliances, ensure peace, incorporate the warring parties into the existing states, contact marriages, penetrate and spread new ideas, and pay commensurate compensation for casualties (Odoemere, 2011: 45, Isichei, 1983:197, Gobo, 2008:297). Conflicts in pre-colonial societies, according to Nnoli (2008: 27), “do not necessarily have to create difficulties in political relations among the group”. Ikimi (1977b:12) makes bold the point that these wars in pre-colonial Nigerian societies “were usually terminated with an amicable settlement of the land in dispute and a ceremonial bond of friendship which drew lately contesting clans together”. The argument, therefore, is that hostilities in Nigerian communities before the European contact were not as exaggerated as they were presented in colonial historiography by European writers and colonial administrators.

Implicit in the foregoing analysis is that no Nigerian community or group lived in “splendid isolation” devoid of inter-connections, contacts and networks with both their immediate and far neighbours before the advent of the European imperialists. As Afigbo (1987:xi) succinctly puts “the pre-colonial world in which their (Nigerian) ethnic ancestors lived was not a close approximation to the Hobbesian state of nature in which life is said to be inevitably nasty, brutish and short”. Against the background of the above evidence, it is historically faulty to argue that “Nigeria is a mere geographical expression” with diverse socio-economic, political and cultural opportunities, without contact with each other. Put differently, Nigerian communities were “strange bed fellows” that were forcefully brought together by the British colonizers at the dawn of the twentieth century.

Interestingly, too, Niger Delta is a region with intense relations with their hinterland neighbours. Propelled chiefly by economic considerations and ecological differences, the Niger Delta communities engaged in a wide ranging network of inter-ethnic relations which were highly characterized by economic, social and in some cases political contacts. They were not self-sufficient societies like other Nigerian groups. So, they never lived a life of solid separation and isolation from their neighbours (Jones, 1963, Dike, 1956, Northrup, 1978, Ifemesia, 1978, Alagoa, 1970, Sokari-George, 2006, Gobo, 2008).

Most significantly, these historic contacts were seriously facilitated by the ecology of the region. The river system, lakes, rivulets, creeklets, and many more do not constitute severe impediments to movement of goods, persons and vital ideas from one group to another in the

Niger Delta. They served (and are still serving) as highways of commerce, contacts, communications, and sluice gates for substantial volumes of trade (Ajayi and Alagoa, 1980: 229, Kpone-Tonwe and Gbenenye, 2009: 601-602, Afigbo, 1987:12). According to Dike (1956:20, 30-31) the penetrability of the geography of the Niger Delta necessitated the “mingling of peoples” which transformed the population beyond ethnic entities. Again, the argument is that despite the socio-economic, political and cultural heterogeneity, a variety of vital links anchored on tolerance, mutual trust, cooperation and solidarity existed (and still exist) between and the diverse Niger Delta peoples from the earliest times. It is against this background that this study examines Eleme and Ikwerre relations in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

The People of Eleme, Location and Environment

The people of Eleme otherwise called “Oku Eleme” form one of the minor ethnic group that make up the present day Rivers State. Eleme is bounded in the North by Oyigbo – Asa Ndoki Community in Imo River, East by Khana and Gokana, South by Bonny & Okrika & West by Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt Local Government Areas. Eleme comprises of ten towns with Nchia as its Local Government Headquarters. The dialect spoken by the people is Eleme. The location is Eleme and the people are Eleme (Ngofa, 1987).

The area also experiences the same climate conditions as other areas in Rivers State. These are the dry (harmattan) and the wet (rainy) seasons. The area also experiences prolong and heavy rainfalls like other coastal towns in the Delta areas. Farming is the main occupation of the people of Eleme.. this is so because of the vast area of fertile land which they occupy. It is said that seven years shifting cultivation was practiced. This is no longer possible because of the acquisition of most of the land for federal government projects. The variety of crops grown include yam (esaa), coco-yam (etoo), cassava (ojakpo), sugarcane (mminao), three leaf yam (ochu), cowpea (adenkpo) and many more. Regrettably, however, many of these names have been lost because the present generation has less to do with farming (Ogboru, 2018). The harvest from these crops, especially yam, cassava, sugarcane were used for both local consumption as well as sales to neighbouring communities like Elemenwo, Okrika, Oyigbo and Aro traders. Infact the amount of yam an individual (male or female had was used as a measure of wealth and evidenced by the different yam tittle held by individuals in Eleme (Ngofa, 2006). The people of Eleme are also fisherman. Fishing is mainly done by netting, throwing of hooks & fish traps in the fresh water streams in the area as well as the bigger salt water that separate the neighbouring Okrika from the Eleme in the south.

The people are also involved in hunting of animals in the bush & forest around them. The hunting method include setting of local traps & use of locally made guns. The animal seen in the area range from smaller to larger ones like the wild cats (leopards & elephants) it is worth nothing that these large animals are no more seen in the area because of the deforestation of their habitat for the federal government projects, (Ngofa1988). Trading is another important economic activity of the people. There is a market called 'Echieta' which presently is on a daily basis. This market serves as a place for sales of the farm produce. People from far and near attend this market and it also serves as a means of communication with the neighbouring communities.

Origin & Migration of Eleme People

Eleme is referred to in all colonial records an 'Mbolli' and this nomenclature was given by the Arochukwu slave agents who were virtually administering the territory like an imperial power. They were agents of the then famous Aro long Juju and backed by the ferocious Abam warriors, these Aro slave merchants described Eleme as 'Mba oli di iche' in Igbo language which mean 'one country that is different'. This name 'Mbolli' was taken by the Aros people into the surrounding territories as well as other distant places. (Ngofa, 2006).

The people of Ibibio, Eleme (Mbolli), Ogoni and others lived together in this ancient habitat of the semi Bantu which is the cross river Region in Eastern Nigeria There were also Efiks, Ekoi, Annang, Ibino and others that co-existed in that religion. In the course of time, there was migratory movements that brought Eleme out of that ancient habitat. Gradually, new formations were coming into existence. The Ogoni people also fanned out, reaching down to where they now occupy by a very gradual process. Even the Munshi of the present Middle Belt area of Northern Nigeria also meandered out of the same habitat. These continuous waves of migration also saw the Abua, Andoni and Abuloma people (among others) emerging form this ancient habitat and settling in their present locations after very long time. The journey into the present territory of Eleme was not a direct movement. In those distant time, when might was righty, only the exceedingly brave could lead a family or a group of people through the dangers posed by wild animals and cannibals. It also involved living in a particular location for a period of time and then moving out if for any reason that location becomes insecure. By and large, many died in this process and some others were born. At last, one group settled at a chosen location and enjoyed the protection of the warriors who led them and the conduciveness with minimum labour. That territory or settlement now bears the name of the warrior that was their leader and mentor.

The warrior called Eleme is believed to have led his people from among the Ekoi and meandered into the present Eleme territory in about 1460. He had two sons whose names were Nchia and Odido, and they settled with their followers in the vast area between Ogale and Ebubu, a little North of Mgbala lake in Ogale. Nchia the first son, later moved away from his father and founded his own settlement which bears the name Agbomchia, meaning Nchia's large settlement. Some monumental structures confirming the reality of the existence of Nchia are Mbie-Nchia, Ejian Nchia and Okerewa Communities to Akpajo, which is known as Ogbere Nchia. The town that have emerged from the initial settlement of Nchia are Ogale, Aleto, Alesa, Alode and Akpojo. Each of these major towns consists of several villages. Odido himself has the credit for the eventual development of the four major towns of Ebubu, Onne, Eteo and Ekporo. Each of these major towns similarly consists of several villages at varying levels of development.

Political Organization of Eleme

The Political Institution among the Eleme pre-date both the colonial and Christian missionary eras. Apart from the family heads who took care of the affairs of their larger families, there was at the clan level, a well instituted administrative authority that saw to the day to day running of the affairs of the clan. There were rules and regulations governing the people of Eleme.

To enforce these rules and regulations are elected or chosen people like the paramount ruler of the clan (eneh-eh-eta), the land priest (oneh-Nkiken) who is the spiritual head of the clan and is in charge of the ancestral relics of the clan on which the welfare of the clan depended.

The third person is the spokesman (one-mkporon) who is also elected and must have the power of oration. The intelligence report of Mr. Dewhurst also highlighted these political functions and stated that apart from what is obtainable at the village levels the collective administrative authority of the entire Eleme clan is different. The administrative authority of the clan as a whole was a meeting of the representative of all the villages at "Echieta" the place where Eleme first settled. Each village came to this meetings with 'Oneh-eh-eta', the 'oneh-eh-mkporon" and one or two members of the "mkporon". The "Emere-Nkiken" did not attend as he was not supposed to go out of his domain but send representatives (Dibiah, 2008). In meetings the 'Oneh-eh-mkporon' Ogale, the senior town acted as spokesman on behalf of the head. The specific functions of the Emere-Nkiken are also a major component of the political life of the people of Eleme and Dewhurst did not overlook it but went further to state that "A further bond of union was the annual meeting of the "Emere-Nkiken" at a place called Nchie, near Echieta clans" (Dewhurst, 1937). However, with the effective

occupation and the introduction of new political institutions by Christian missionaries which favoured literates; the educated elites were employed to manage administrative offices. The traditional rulers with new political structures replaced the old system controlled by traditional rulers to a large extent.

Age Grades/Groups

Long before the colonial era, the Ikwerre Communities, Elelenwo inclusive were said to have strongly organized social groups, some of which can still be identified even today. Popular amongst these are the age grade system, dance groups, women organization, youth organization, and special interest groups such as hunter union. Nduka (2003) has it that organizational leadership in Ikwerre land, whether it involved family lineage grouping or professional or special interest group concern, was usually by gerontocracy whereby the oldest person in the group becomes the leader. The strength or characteristics and extent of influence of leaders of these groups determined the level of respect that was accorded the groups. Thus very strong leaders stirred their groups to prominence in society. Similarly, achievements attributable to kindred or groups brought honour and fame to the leaders of such groups.

The functions of the various human organizations were often indispensable for the growth and development of their various communities during the pre-colonial period. Contributions of traditional leaders were unrecorded and therefore not fully appreciated. Apart from community development, they offered unique services in various forms (Okigbo, 1984). For instance, the age grade system was a sound vehicle for communal labour, the hunters union trained war lords and spied enemy positions during inter-tribal warfare, while the Elders councils served as appeal court in case of litigation.

Age groups

Age groups exist in Eleme. Male and female are grouped according to their birth years which are determined by the farming session. People admitted into their functions are similar in both Elelenwo and Eleme. Some of which are 'Mba e-era' and 'Ogbo Ade'n, Apart from ensuring that there is peace, they also maintain law and order in their domains. They also give scholarship to people who are willing to learn and cannot afford the expenses. Some age groups with young member extended their vigilance to O-Opee during the period of habitation there. The age group system is of immense benefit and facilitated community labour and general discipline. They also clear farm lands and carry out the physical labour associated with community welfare projects. They clear farm roads during the planting and

harvest seasons, road construction, digging of local well water, building community town halls among others. (Dibia, 2008).

Religion

The traditional religion as practiced by the people of Eleme in pre-Christian society affected their pattern of life even after the introduction of Christianity in 1910. Although they have knowledge of the Supreme Being whom they all worship, they worship the deities called Yor. They also worship the earth spirits called Nkiken and the ancestral spirit called Ajin. They see the deities, the earth spirits and the ancestral spirits as God's representation because of their benevolence and therefore worship them through sacrifices of any sort and libation (Dibia, 2008).

The two channels for intercession on behalf of men therefore are Ejin and Ejor. People who exercised power and authority while living on earth therefore use such influence to solicit assistance from Obari in favour of men or women whom they want to help. But while it is known to help or punish any person, there is the handicap that they cannot see or hear. Talbot (1967) opined that "Ojukwu is worshipped among the Mbolli under the name of "Nda Owa" and sacrifices are made in his honour once a year about the time of new corn, at the beginning of the rains. Another juju among this people at Asakura is Ejelle. If a man has a palaver with another man, or a wife or slave think themselves badly treated, they can run there for protection. If there is a dispute about land or other property, one of the disputants can say: "I will give the thing to Ejelle". Then neither can touch it, unless the men who gave it to the juju sets the property free again by making sacrifices. Hence, the people of Eleme are known to worship deities such as Onura, Ejelle, Ndowa, Ebaajor among others (Talbot, 1967).

Elenenwo History, People and Culture

Elenenwo is an Ikwerre clan in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The Elenenwo clan inhabits an area which is bounded on the south by Eleme beyond which is Okrika island, on the West by Oginigba and Woji beyond which is Trans-Amadi, on the North by oil mill market beyond which is Rumukurushie and on the East by Iriebe, beyond which lies the Oyigbo local government area. Elenenwo is a prominent town in the larger Oropotoma kingdom in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. By every indication and verification evidence, the town and its residents is progressive and dynamic having transformed from a village setting in the 1960's and early 70's to an urban status (Ordu, 2017).

Elelenwo migrated from Rumuomasi. Ogwutum (2016) opined that Oro-Opotama is made up of Rumuomasi and Elelenwo. Chuku (2018) asserts that after Woji and Rumuomasi, there was a vast land used for farming by the Rumuomasi community so Elenwo moved to the vast area to farm and hunt. Weli (2018) opined that Elelenwo present location was a farm land for Rumuomasi Community as the practice was in those days, living in 2 homes, Elelenwo decided to stay back in the farm not the normal practice of staying one or two weeks in the farm with his kindred due to the distance (Weli, 2018). He had 3 sons namely Eheleze, Oduwere and Odeni and these are the 3 communities in Elelenwo. In course of his farming and hunting he met a man, both of them did not harm each other but introduced themselves, one from Okrika and the other from Rumuomasi called Elenwo. They agreed to meet on a particular day. On that day, the man from Okrika brought fish, periwinkle and other sea food while Elenwo brought cocoyam, yam, and vegetables from the farm which they changed and that place was called Odulukwu. That place became “Ahia Odulukwu”. The Okrika people went home and told his brothers and sisters, on return, they also exchanged items by barter (Andrew, 2018).

The three (3) sons of Elenwo formed the communities in Elelenwo namely Rumuoden, Rumueleze and Rumuoduwere all in Oropotoma-nde-Azumiri. There is one central chief, the Nyeweli Elelenwo and other Eze’s of the three (3) communities, the village council of chiefs and the Owhor holders and the Nyenisi-Oro (head of families).

Preliterate societies and traditions have remained an important source of the early histories of the ethnic groups inhabiting defined geographical areas of political entities (Nduke, 2003). The early history of the Elelenwo people indeed portrays a good deal of contacts between them and their neighbouring communities within Rivers State. A sample of their oral traditions throws useful light on the subject of the close contact with their neighbours in the pre-colonial period.

The people of Elelenwo speak Ikwerre, the language factor is recognized as an indispensable element in the study of “culture change and contact in the past” (Alagoa, 1978). Linguistic analysis shows that the affinity between the Ikwerre and other languages spoken by such communities as the Ekpeye, Ndoki, Etche and Ndoni, reveals marked similarities with the Igbo parent stock and are thus classified as Igboid or lower Niger group of language (Williamson, 1973; 1988).

This linguistic affiliation is a strong indicator not merely of historical contact but indeed close kinship with Igbo land. The people of Ikwerre has very rich culture ranging from marriage ceremony, new yam festivals, wrestling among others (Peter, 2018). The Elelenwo people are

predominantly farmers, they cultivate cash crops such as uncooked cassava (fufu), cocoyam, vegetables, okra, maize to mention but a few. They are also fisher men, though on a small scale. They are peace loving people and have not had any major conflict with their neighbours.

Culture

A people's culture is in essence the sum total of their way of life, their civilization, the state of their instruction in arts and refinements and the collective customs which give them a unique identity (Nduka, 2003). Some common features observed today in some of their cultural practices such as wrestling, traditional arts and crafts, music, dances and masquerade displays are the result of a long period of mutual relationships, exchange of ideas and indigenous technology and cultural land marks which were established through the arts of peace. The Elemenwo people an active agricultural community valued leisure and therefore occupied themselves with recreational activities in the form of wrestling contest after the normal planting and harvesting seasons. The Elemenwo wrestling is called Egelege or Oregbu (Chuku, 2018).

The Elemenwo normally go to Eleme and stay a week and you are fed throughout the period with yam and big fish and you can even get a girlfriend. While staying for those number of days, some young girls will come around to prepare meals (Weli, 2018). Being skilled wrestlers they encouraged and stimulated wrestling techniques as well as the accompanying Egelege and songs and dances among their neighbours in Okrika, Ogoni, and Eleme. They fostered the Oregbu and Oduma xylophone music and dances and gave traditional cultural displays meaningful colour and (Nduka, 2003).

An average Elemenwo female or male dresses in a typical Ikwerre format. The female tie two pieces up and down George wrapper (Pricilia, 2018) while the male wear Don Etibo, Woko and hat during ceremonies. A handful of the Elemenwo people speak Eleme language and their language of trade was mostly Ibo language due to their early contact with the Aro traders. Only close friends name their children after such friends but it is translated into Ikwerre (Weli, 2018).

Political Development of Elemenwo

From precolonial to post-colonial times, internal political authority in Elemenwo was on the shoulder of the Nyenwe-Eli, who is considered as the overall ruler of the community (Weli, 2018). However, there are Eze's who head the three communities – Rumuecheleze, Rumuoduwere and Rumuodan. There are also Nyerisi-Oro who are the heads of families. They make sure that there is peace and order right from the family to the community level

(Elechi, 2018). They are also incharge of sharing of lands (Peter, 2018). Another important stool in Elelenwo is the “Owho”. It is the oldest and most sacred in Ikwerre and unlike chieftaincy which has over the years been transformed into a brain-child of court decision (Nduka, 2003). Owbor holders constitute the council of Owbor holders presided over by their leader Nyerisi-Owbor who is usually the oldest direct descended male. The Owbor sticks can only be carried by men and not women because Ikwerre is a patrilineal in its family system (Nduka, 2013).

All Owbor holders in Ikwerre held their appointments for life, except in real cases of ill health or crime. Owbor holder who lies, cheats and distorts justice not only loses respect among his people but will surely come to grief. This is why a known criminal in Ikwerre would normally decline to carry the Owbor symbol when it is offered to him. Owbor holder act as intermediaries between the living and dead (ancestors) and they pour liberation to the goods (Ihuda, 2018). During the colonial period, most of these chiefs were used as warrants. For example, Chief Woga was a warrant chief who was in charge of cases and tax (Chuku, 2018). They give account to the colonialists, in their areas of jurisdiction.

Age Grades

During the pre-colonial era, the Elelenwo people were said to have strongly organized social groups, some of which can still be identified even today. Popular amongst these are the Age-grade system, Dance groups, masquerade groups, women organizations, council of elders and many more. Organizational leadership in Ikwerre land whether it involved family lineage grouping or professional or special interest group concern, was usually by gerontocracy whereby the oldest person in the group becomes the leader. The strength of character and extent of influence of leaders of these groups determined the level of respect that was accorded the groups. Thus, very strong leaders stirred their groups to prominence in society. Similarly, achievements attributable to kindred or social groups brought honors and fame to the leaders of such groups (Nduka, 2003).

The functions of the various human organization in Elelenwo were often indispensable for the growth and development of their various communities during the period. Okigbo (1984) observed that contributions of traditional leaders in community development activities in their various villages were largely unrecorded and therefore not fully appreciated. Apart from community development, they offered unique services in various other forms. As Chuku (2018) noted, some groups that are well to do even sponsor orphans in their education. Priscilia (2018) corroborates that in those days youths organized themselves and clean market squares, farm road and playing grounds. Sometimes, they act as vigilante groups who guide

the village against external aggression. For instance, the hunters union trained war lords and spied enemy positions during intertribal warfare, while the elders council serves as appeal court in case of litigation.

Eleme and Elemenwo Economic Relations

Fage (1969) cited in Michael (2017) posited that the environment influences the economic history of the people. This is the more reason why economic history has to deal with the various economic activities carried out by man in various environments. Economic history is also concerned with the nature of tools made by men, crops planted and his nature of relating with others, how men cultivates the land for food, his inventions and various times, his method of trade and many other aspects of the economy. This is applicable to Eleme and Ikwerre people. However, the people of Eleme are for the most part, farmers deriving their living from the sale of yams and to a lesser degree of palm products. It has been noticeable that they are materially much better than their Ogoni brethren in the Opobo division. This may be accounted for by the fact that there is no shortage of land among them. They are able to employ a 7 year farming cycle which very few of the Ogoni's in Opobo Division are able to do (Dewhurst, 1936). According to Dewhurst (1936), the country is flat and fertile and excellently suited to the growing of yams which find a ready sale in the markets of Okrika and more recently, Port Harcourt is moderately rich in oil palms. It experiences heavy rainfall and as such has thick forests. That is why the Eleme people are hunters and gatherers

The people of Eleme have since their origin been very strong farmers. Life in each of the villages is securely linked to the land and the farming cycle has a seven years duration. As a child grows up, his first lessons are how to work in the farm. A young man must only show aptitude for farm work, he should also be able to trek long distances with heavy loads on his head. Farming is an occupation that is continuous almost all the year round. Some of the distant has to be covered twice a day. There are period when labour is more intensive, such as the month of March through May when the farm crops need the greatest care. Some people began to reason that a mid-way house where temporary shelter could be had for one or two nights when farm work is pressing could be helpful and such will save long journeys and allow more time for work.

The idea was put to practice by a few persons and was found to be useful. Many more families joined and a temporary settlement was built. But these huts were scattered one from another, each person building his hut within his own farm area. Because of fear of wild animals and more seriously the menace of head hunters, there was a general agreement to come together in one area and establish the huts in open spaces. When yams were harvested,

they were stored in the farm as all could not be carried in cradles from the farm to the homes and later carry them back to the new farms for planting. Later the idea of storing all yams produced by all the villagers in one area was suggested. The temporary home came to be known as “O-opee” meaning a place of hut while the area for presenting yams was called “O-ogun” meaning a place for barns.

“O-opee” was nearer to forests, fresh water swamps and in some cases to mangrove swamps than the villages. Because of this proximity, it became easier to inspect traps or hunt for animals, similarly catching fish in the swamps or tapping palm wine. Staying at “O-pee” had its own disadvantages as houses in the village were left unoccupied as long as six (6) months. During this period, they fall into disrepair and collapse, compound were overgrown with bush, cows roam in the village and defecated everywhere. Any visitor at this time will have a very poor impression of the standard of development among the people. Young persons who ought to embrace education and the new Christian relation were taken to “O-opee” for farming (Ngofa, 1987). The producer from the farm served as articles of trade in the Eleme and Elelenwo trading activities.

Trade Relations

The people of Eleme have been more in touch with the people of Elelenwo through trade during the pre-colonial era. Local markets were established at Echieta in Nchia-Eleme, Ahia Elelenwo and Odulukwu market all at Elelenwo. Both groups buy and sell in these markets but people from neighbouring communities like the Okrika, Ogoni, Ibibio, Oyigbo, Aro, Umuahia, Igwuruta and Items of trade range from farm produce to blacksmith works and the exchange was by barter. These markets were held on a specific day of the week and traders who come from a far arrive days before the actual market day (Osila, 2018).

In the traditional Elelenwo community the exchange of goods was by barter (Weli, 2017) and the commodities sold to their Eleme neighbour were principal farm products such as yams, cassava tubers, uncooked fufu, plantain, cocoyam, palm oil and maize. Other items were livestock and fisheries such as sheep, goats, fowls and sea food which are produced from the creeks, rivers and streams like the mini Woji river and the mini Iloom which they share common boundary with Elelenwo. Elelenwo’s principal trade partners were the Elemes and Okrika’s.

The farm produce were sold in Ahia Elelenwo or the Odulukwu market which holds every five (5) days. People from far and near like the Okrikans, Aro traders, Okigwe, Umuahia come with various items 2 days before the real market day (Elechi, 2018). The Eleme who are their close neighbour come with sugarcane, palm wine, garri (cassava flakes), plantain,

three leaf yam in exchange of clay pot, cooked fufu, three pot-stand, mortar and pistol and blacksmith wares. The trade route from Eleme is a track road from the Ehiete in Eleme through Akpajo to the Ahia Elemenwo.

Importance of Echieta

1. Eleme settled first at Echieta
2. Native court was sited at Echieta.
3. Echieta also serve as a point of trading activities between neighbouring communities like Okrika, Elemenwo, the Ogonis and Oyigbos.

Trade no doubt was a uniting factor in the intergroup relations between Eleme and Elemenwo Communities. Ikwerre played host as producers and routes through which palm oil trade passed to the delta ports. The slave trade era was no exceptions as some parts of Ikwerre become collecting centres of slaves from the hinterland to the coast especially Okrika. Talbot (1967) noted that the principal slave markets were Okrika and Bonny. Elemenwo and Eleme developed good relationship based on trade. The slave trade era was a crucial period in the life of the people of Eleme because many active men were sold into slavery to the Aro traders (Igwe, 2018). According to Alagoa (2005) cited in Michael (2017), the Ijo of the Eastern Delta States embraced four city states of Nembe (Brass), Elem Kalabari (New Calabar), Bonny and Okrika. They were called city states or trading states because of the role they played in the overseas slave trade and their active participation in local commercial activities hence all the slaves captured in Eleme and Elemenwo were sold to the Okrika people.

Ngofa (1994) posits that the Okrika had early exposure to foreigners for trading and were very much enlightened. Local markets were established along the shores. These markets which were held on special days of the week later became centres for slave trade which was introduced by the Aro people. With this development, temporary huts were erected by the Okrika people to provide shelter for the slaves who could not be sold during the market day. At the coast, the slaves were kept in barracoons awaiting the owners to put them on board for onward movement to America. These slaves as were obtained through raids, conflicts, wars, deliberate submissiveness and purchase from kings. The most vulnerable were the youths (the active work force) of the community. The slaves were obtained from coastal and hinterland communities of Nigeria (Michael, 2017).

The slavery came to an end in the 19th century because the missionaries came to the shores of Africa to preach against the slave trade. They came with Bible in one hand and economic exploitation in another. They encouraged Africans to God and also provided them Western Education. The Europeans needed African clergymen to help them in spreading Christianity,

so schools and churches were established. Meanwhile some people believe that the European powers should colonize Africa principally to put a stop to the internal slave trade that still went on in Africa even in the 1880s and to spread Christianity. With the coming of the Europeans, the trans-Atlantic trade on the above item stopped. The people were forced to cultivate crops that were beneficial to the colonialists. Crops such as palm products, were encouraged. The palm oil was used for soap making and as lubricants for machines as a result of the industrial revolution. The Elemenwo and Eleme people abandoned their farming and sought white collar jobs because the use of currency was introduced (Ake, 1980).

The colonial economy was clearly a dependent economy. It was European centred and intended to under-develop Africa. Development that took place were those intended to facilitate European controlled economic activities. Thus, it was a period of economic stagnation for Africa. Economic activities centred on items needed for European industries and the sale of European manufactured goods. As in the days of the slave trade and the early legitimate trade, African traders served as agents and middlemen to European merchant firms. These traders were to ensure that farmers grow and produce only what Europeans needed. The Elemenwo and the Eleme abandoned their trade in sugarcane, cocoyam, yam, vegetables, basket making cassava and many more and traded in palm oil and kernel. Silverline (2018) opined that trade in sugar cane and cassava gave way to palm kernel trade. She confirmed that after school, she goes to the farm to pick kernel in baskets which she sells to local dealers who in turn take it to the coast (Okrika) for sale.

They were forced to grow crops which were demanded by the industries in the European countries. These included crops such as cotton, groundnuts, cloves and palm products. They were termed cash crops because they were produced only for market and not for food. The farmers were not allowed to sell their products to anyone other than the European firms which belong to the colonizing powers. With colonialism, the trade by barter system came to a halt because it is a non-monetised economy. The monetization of a pre-capitalist economy is necessary for its integration into a capitalist one (Ake, 1981). Thus, the people of Eleme as earlier noted engaged in palm kernel products which was supplied to the Europeans. Through the Bonny or Okrika Jetties, this encouraged monopoly, hence monetization of the economy. The Europeans took interest in the development of infrastructure, at least to the extent that it would serve their interest (Ake, 1981). That is why colonization was “popularly” referred to by the colonisers as a civilizing mission. Civilisation of the natives entailed among other things, bring them Western education which will help them to discard their barbaric ignorance, poverty and disease (Ngofa, 1994). As a result of this “civilising missions” alone

and Elemenwo people abandoned their trade in Cassava, sugar cane, vegetables, fufu, cocoyam and so on and started the cultivation of palm kernel hence the establishment of oil mill market. In Europe, palm oil was needed as lubricant for factory machines and soap products and it was obtained in the hinterland of the former slave trading coast which Elemenwo and Eleme were not exception (William, 2018).

Eleme and Elemenwo Socio-cultural Relations

In any given society, the importance of Christian religion cannot be over emphasized. From the earliest times up to the official advent of Christianity in Eleme in 1910, the people worshiped the deity they called Efor, the land spirit called Nkiken and the spirit of the dead called Ejin. With the introduction of Christianity in the area in the first decade of the 20th century, a new way of life and new faith and belief was introduced to the people. Although they have knowledge of the supreme God whom they call Obari, the deities are given some recognition. All the programmes of the people, their activities and even their harvest and child birth, were tied to the benevolence of the deities.

The introduction of Christianity has a sweeping effect on the general life of the people. From 1910 when Christianity was introduced most of the traditional religion were eroded. The Anglican Communion brought Christianity to the people of Eleme in 1910 through the people of Alode with the establishment of St. Stephen Anglican Church, Alode (Dibia, 2018). It was closely followed by the establishment of a school also in Alode in 1912. As Otto (2000) rightly said, it is noticeable that quite often (not all the time) the school came along with the missionaries, was run by the missions and completely controlled by the missions. This school and the church attracted pupils and worshippers from neighbouring communities. However, only head strong boys were enrolled in the school or go to church to correct their deviant characters, parents could not imagine their beloved children joining “outcasts” in what they termed school or church (Gomba, 2018). Nevertheless, Christianity promoted trade between the Europeans and the Eleme and Elemenwo people. The children who embraced the Christian Religion were baptized and brought up according to the doctrines of the Christian faith. They were also taught how to read and write and soon become the middle men between Africans and European traders (Michael, 2017). They were also trained to serve as clerks or local administrators and took European names as Christian names (Dora, 2018).

Religion deals with man’s relationship with God, his creator. As in the case with all other aspects of life, man enjoys a wide range of religious options. People worship the way they consider appropriate (Gilbert and Orluwene, 2018). Thus the people of Elemenwo has different religions but during the pre-colonial era they worship so many deities, for example Ojukwu

and “Mini-Echara” (Nyekuere, 2018). These deities have their shrines and priests/priestess that *libate* to them and people then believe that these gods protect them. People from far and near come to consult these gods, including the Eleme people (Ebenezer, 2018). The deities are still there till date but people are not worshiping them as before (William, 2018). Ordu (2017) stated that before the advent of Christianity, Elelenwo was obviously in the dark as idol worship was the religious norm as obtained in the other neighbouring villages.

With the coming of the missionaries the deities’ evil forest and the shrines were acquired by them (missionaries). Ndukwe (2003) has it that with the emergence or advent of the missionaries, the fear and reverence for the evil forest had been substantially eroded. Communities in Elelenwo grant their evil forests to missionaries to build churches and schools. In Elelenwo for example the first church, St. Mark’s Anglican Church is sited in an evil forest known as “Ohia Bishi Nda Echendu”. Of course, it was a taboo to enter and/or cultivate such land. Members of the church fearlessly cut the trees and cleared the area for worship in 1922 (Ordu, 2017). In the same year 1922 a mini school started in the church and many young men were taught the Bible. Later in 1943, the Archdeacon Crowther Memorial Girls School (ACMGS) Elelenwo was established; it will interest you to know that an informant Silverline Igwe from Eleme attended ACMGS and Vincent Chuku from Elelenwo attended Holy Trinity School Eleme in the 50’s. Both informants admitted that they enjoyed the cultures and learnt a lot from where they attended their schools. These schools as we have seen from the informants promoted intergroup relations between Eleme and Elelenwo.

The Eleme people during the pre-colonial era were very efficient in carving and they produced mortars, pestles, drums, face masks, combs and many other crafts. Traditional music in Eleme was developed out of the desire to transmit information from one community to the other. Later, singing and drumming were developed for different types of ceremonies, like burial, chieftaincy installation and marriages (Ngofa, 2006). ‘Mkpaa Egoni’ was a major talking drum expert. Drummers can sing praises, encourage bravery as well as cast aspersion on other persons through their dexterity of the drum. ‘Mkpaa Egoni’ remains the premier drum that is entirely indigenous to Eleme (Nkpon, 2018).

Egelege on the other hand is a special drum for wrestling and was brought from Ikwerre over one century ago. As a talking drum people who are versatile in playing it can convey a lot of information that can remind one of his past, this triggers him into wrestling or warn him about the consequence of his intended act. The most popular period for playing Egelege music is October and November each year when wrestling becomes competitive as part of ‘Agboresun’ annual ceremony. But Egelege is now on the decline because the generation of

expert wrestlers and drummers have given way to another generation of footballers and disco dancers.

Eleme-Elelenwo Political Relations

Eleme was under the Degema District in Owerri Province from 1894 to 1929. The name by which Eleme was known then was Mbolli and this nomenclature was given by Aro traders and it entered into all official records (Ngofa, 2006). Following some administrative changes, Ahoada District was created in 1928 but still in Owerri province. Eleme was transferred for purposes of Administration to Ahoada District and remained there until 1939. Taxes were paid to Ahoada and through the Eleme Native Court established in 1923, all criminal cases had to be taken to Ahoada where the police were stationed (Ngofa, 2006). In 1937, it was transferred from Ahoada to Opobo District in Calabar province and in 1947 Rivers Province was created. Eleme was transferred from Opobo District in Calabar province to Constitute Ogoni Division within the new Rivers Province with headquarters in Port Harcourt. Thereafter, Elem had its own county council at Ogale as the headquarters in 1956, as created by Eastern Nigeria Government. The colonial administrative units promoted intergroup relations an increased political interactions between Eleme and Elelenwo.

Impact of Intergroup Relations on Eleme and Elelenwo People

The Eleme and Elelenwo had trading relations before, during and after the colonial era. Both are farming communities. The Eleme traded with Elelenwo at Odulukwu and Echiele markets. The Eleme brought sugarcane, palm wine, firewood, cassava, three leaf yam, yam, plantain and many more and brought clay pots for the storage of their palm wine and water. Eleme and Elelenwo also share farm boundaries and there have been no conflict between them. With the advent of western civilisation, Elelenwo community became a gateway to the capital city – Port Harcourt for the Eleme and its environs. The relationship was further enhanced with the introduction of Christianity and the establishment of schools in Elelenwo which Eleme attended and vice versa.

Culture was also a unifying factor between the Eleme and Elelenwo. Wrestling, “concubinage” and marriages were also features that further promoted their relations e.g. the ‘Egelege’ and ‘Aken’ wrestling contests. The contacts were not devoid of linguistic affiliation, dressing, food and naming. Apart from the aforementioned, there were also immigrants from Eleme who came to work on farm during the farming season in Elelenwo (Nyekwere, 2017). The Eleme people enjoyed the hospitality of Elelenwo people through free accommodation. Sometimes, they were fed to reduce the amount of money paid. The Eleme were also engaged in cash crop harvesting. As earlier said, the ‘Agala’, the ‘Egelege’ or

'Eregbu' were adopted by the Eleme artistes. They travel to either side of the communities for wrestling depending on how it is agreed upon. Deities such as Ejilee, Onura, Ndowa, Ojukwu and Minichara were consulted by either communities where they sought justice and protection in times of challenge. This further perpetuated the web in their relationship.

Also, the Eleme and Elemenwo received the Christian faith and subsequently education. The people of Eleme attended church services and schools in Elemenwo community and vice versa. Both Eleme and Elemenwo were part of the old Degema Division and all the Native Courts in Eleme and Elemenwo were under the direct supervision and control of the District Commissioner at Degema. This made the Elemenwo and Eleme attend their court cases at Degema until 1928 when for nearness and administrative convenience, Elemenwo and Eleme was removed from Degema Division and made part of Ahoada Division. Presently each has its own court.

The various groups had commercial contacts and interactions. This is owing to the fact that no group is self-sufficient in terms of human needs and as such contacts were established with each other. These commercial contacts promoted intergroup marriages and cultural ties as earlier pointed out. These commercial relations reveal to us that none of the states was self-sufficient, thus increased need for intercourse and knowledge amongst them. The different groups were not isolationist in orientation; the mundane needs of daily life brought diverse people into close and continuous contacts with their immediate neighbours. The fact that geographically, Elemenwo and Eleme falls into the same vegetation, there was still need in which mutual exchange of day to day requirements became a major determinant of intergroup relation.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above that Eleme and Elemenwo have enjoyed centuries of relationship in the realms of their historical origins, conflicts, migrations and settlements, marriage systems, trade and various aspects of their material cultures. There has been a focus on the mutual benefits of cultural developments, social bonds and other forms of inter-group cooperation in the mastery of the natural human environment as it affected the people of Elemenwo and Eleme. It has been shown that conflicts and tension featured in the relationship between Eleme and Elemenwo as a result of land dispute which was amicably resolved by chiefs of both communities (Weli, 2018) as is natural in all human societies when contending interest bulk larger and get out of control. But the incidence of minor dispute and skirmishes never destroyed the basis of continued peaceful contacts. Therefore, it is evident that Elemenwo and Eleme enjoyed good intergroup relation in terms of trade, historical origin, marriage contracts

and other aspects of their cultures. This relationship no doubt was predicated on trade as no group is an Island. The importance of intergroup relations is relevant especially as it will serve as guide especially not that most communities in Nigeria and indeed Rivers State are engulfed in one crisis or the other.

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S/N	Date	Name of Information	Place of Interview	Age	Occupation/Title	Sex
1.	18-09-18	Sir. Emmanuel EnodDibiah	Alesa-Elеме	55	Oil & Gas	Male
2.	18-09-18	Mrs. OgboruOsaro	Alesa-Elеме	38	Teacher	Female
3.	18-09-19	Mr. Ebenezer Obele	Alesa-Elеме	50	Civil Servant	Male
4.	28-09-18	Mr. ElechiOwhor	Elelenwo	66	Retired Civil Servant	Male
5.	11-10-18	Mr. Nnah Andrew	Elelenwo	34	Businessman	Male
6.	11-10-18	Mr. IhundaaChinda	Elelenwo	72	Farmer	Male
7.	23-10-18	Hon. Johnson Igwe	Alesa-Elеме	97	Retire Civil Servant/Elite	Male
8.	23-10-18	Mrs. SilverlineIgwe	Alesa-Elеме	80	Retired Civil Servant	Female
9.	31-10-18	HRH EzeAmb. Sunny Weli JP	Elelenwo	54	Paramount Ruler Elelenwo (NyeweliElelenwo)	Male
10.	31-10-18	HRH Emere Wellington Nkpon JP	Akpaju-Elеме	90	Paramount Ruler Akpajo-ElемеOneh-eh-eta (xiii)	Male
11.	31-10-18	Chief Christian Nyekwere	Elelenwo	59	EzeOshimini-One of Orukpoto-ma Kingdom	Male
12.	02-11-18	Mrs. OsilaWuwu	Aleto-Elеме	48	Businesswoman	Female
13.	02-11-18	Mr. William Onukwen	Agbpnchia-Elеме	62	Retired civil servant	Male
14.	12-11-18	Elder Vincent Chuku	Elelenwo	68	Retired civil servant	Male
15.	14-11-18	Mrs. Dora Aken	Alode	59	Farmer	Female
16.	14-11-18	Engr. GombaIgwe	Alesa	42	Businessman	Male
17.	19-11-18	Mrs. PriscilliaElechi	Elelenwo	78	Self employed	Female
18.	19-11-18	Deacon Peter Okechukwu	Port Harcourt	68	Trader	Male

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