

INTER- COMMUNAL POLITICAL RELATIONS OF ATANI PEOPLE OF OGBARU, IGBOLAND, SOUTHEAST NIGERIA

Mbalisi, Chinedu N. Ph.D

Department of History and International Studies

Paul University, Awka

chinedumbalisi@gmail.com

Abstract

Ogbaru is located in Igboland southeast Nigeria, precisely, present Anambra State. Her location within the riverine area confers on her a special privilege in human relations. Situated near the River Niger, the area is largely endowed with natural resources from both the River and rich soil that favours agricultural production. The availability of enormous resources attracted people from far and near. In fact, colonial overlords were not excluded from the scramble for the resources of the area. Their relations also stretched beyond the Igbo interior to Western Igbo areas across the River Niger into present Delta State. The people had had their relations with their neighbours until colonial interjections impacted on the contours and dynamics of their relations. Nonetheless, the people continued with the political cum economic relations with their neighbours. This study interrogates the nature of inter-communal political relations of Atani people of Ogbaru, Igboland. It argues that the nature of relations in the area despite interruptions and colonial incursions, the people still retain the kinship and some indigenous aspects that characterised relations in most Igbo such as pockets of internal migrations, shifts and political reorganisations. The study applies the orthodox historical narrative and analytical method of writing. The qualitative research methodology is used and the work is presented chronologically.

Keywords: Inter-Communal, Relations, Ogbaru, Igboland, Nigeria

Introduction

Atani is one of the communities in Ogbaru situated in Igboland. Hence, her political relations would seemingly not differ so much from what obtains in other communities in the Igbo enclave. Disparities however exist in terms of geographical location and tradition. The political structure in Igboland begins from the family- *Umunna* as the smallest unit, and extends to community - *Obodo*, which is the largest unit. In the different levels of political structure, different forms of relations prevailed. For instance, M.O. Olisa observed that,

The family is very important in the political and social development of the individual. It is in the family that the spirit of individual achievement for which the Igbo is known is gradually inculcated into the children. The political importance of the family, lies, first and foremost, in its being the basic membership unit within the Igbo social structure and its being the centre of political socialization of the individual. It is with the family that the individual, in the course of his/her development, learns the relationship between his/her kindred and other kindred and those between his/her villages and other villages at the town level¹.

Similarly, F.C. Ogbalu explained that “the individual pricks up the proverbs of wisdom from his/her father and elderly relatives or neighbourhood. He/she is tutored in the avoidance and compliance of the land. At the usual critical events of the community such as birth, marriage, funeral, title making, festivals, he observes and learns the multitude of the traditional laws and customs. Finally, at adult stage, he/she enters into the positions of participating directly in all those that he/she has learnt at a stage he/she usually enters by marrying”².

On inter-communal political relations, C.N Mbalisi noted that “training in civic responsibility begins with the recognition and performance of duties for elders of the family, beginning from parents to titled men, *ndi Nze na Ozo*, to ritual leaders of other men/women of influence. These duties also lead to contact and interaction between the individual and his/her neighbours. As the individual attend to these duties, new friendships are made. In some cases, such interactions resulted in marriages between people from different communities.”³

Atani and her contiguous neighbours no doubt, fits into the views described above. In a more specific discourse, Atani is a community in Ogbaru. Therefore, it is a micro-village located with her contiguous neighbours as integral part of a larger Ogbaru except for Ozubulu and Okija towns that are not in Ogbaru.

The levels of inter-communal political relations between Atani and her neighbours is exemplified in the numerous traditional political title holders, the *Igwe* or *Eze*, the *Nze na Ozo*, the *Ndi Ichie Ukwu* and *Ndichie Nta*, *Chiefs*, among many others. These groups form the nucleus of the political structure of Atani. Hence, in their meetings and other political activities such as coronation, *ofala* celebrations etc, they interact. These interactions form the bases for inter-village or community relations between Atani and her neighbours. Among their

neighbours include; Odekpe, Ohaita, Ozubulu, Oko, among others. These villages are further divided into various units for effective interactions.

On the political divisions of Ogbaru of which Atani is an integral part, Ngozi Orjiakor provides a detailed description of these divisions and their workings. It is in performing the functions by these divisions between the various units that the political interactions occur.

Orjiakor writes thus:

Ogbaru is made up of fifteen towns (Obodo). Each town is an autonomous basic political unit headed by an Eze (King). In some communities like Mputu, Umunankwo, Ochuche, Ogbakuba, each town claims to have descended from one ancestor who had migrated to their present settlement. In other communities, the Obodo consists of the various immigrants who came at different times. In many cases each of these groups of immigrants forms an *ogbe* (village) within the town⁴.

Orjiakor's description explains the beginnings of the political interaction in Ogbaru and by extension, Atani. Being a microcosm of Ogbaru, Atani has its smaller units or villages that obviously interact with other contiguous villages that form their neighbours.

According to Ngozi Orjiakor,

Umezeatani consists of four villages (Ogbe), namely Umudike, Umuekeke, Ibelenta, and Ibeleobi. The Ibeleobi village is now completely extinct. Umudike and Umuekeke are said to be brothers, and therefore, the children of Afe, while Ibelenta is the descendant of Afekeocha. Afe and Afekeocha are brothers. The Okpala-Ukwu of Umudike or Umuekeke is known as Oduah while that of Ibelenta is known as Onowu. The Okpala-Ukwu of Ibelenta is referred to as Ogene⁵.

The point here is that kinship played important role in the nature of inter-communal political interactions of Atani. Hence, as Atani communities attended meetings and other political cum social functions, new contacts were established and interaction with other political units that form Ogbaru, under an Eze or Igwe or Okakwu. The Atani political system is rotatory, which offers ample opportunity for the communities to share in their common political heritage.

Atani political traditions inform that their kinship was introduced by the last immigrants from IDU (Benin) known as Afe and Afeekaocha who had left Benin because Afeekaocha was refused the Obaship crown due to his deformed finger. It was speculated that after the reign of the first king (whose name remains unknown), other villages became interested in kingship (Ichi Eze) and declared their intention to participate. The result was the decision to rotate rulership among the whole villages of Atani⁶.

The rotatory nature of traditional rulership in Atani suggests that political interaction could be peaceful or chaotic or even both. The different political title holders perform different function in accordance with their position. In Atani it is the Onowu who crowns the king. The king also performs judicial, executive and spiritual functions with his Ndi-iche uku and Ndichie Nta. They form the traditional government and are also members of the political assembly that rule their communities⁷.

Besides, in Atani political structure, the interaction cut across sexes. There is the *Ada* (women Chiefs) which comprises the eldest daughters in the communities vested with titles. She was called Oduah Nwanyi/ Ogene in Odekpe, Gegeli in Osamala, and Omu among others. The *Ada* was the political head of all the women. She also had ritual and judicial functions to perform. To take this title, she would kill a cock and give an elaborate feast. As a political head of all Umuada, she saw to it that peace was maintained among both women and men in the community. Umuada of the various neighbours of Atani usually supported each other in running the affairs of their communities. Their active role in Igboland would not be overemphasized. Hence, in Atani, they are given a pride of place due to their peculiar nature and operational milieu in Atani political structure and interaction with their neighbours. The Umuada in conjunction with the male title holder and age grades, plan and perform various traditional festivals and ceremonies. These avenues serve as platform for inter-communal interactions and or relations between Atani and her neighbours. Their roles cut across maintaining peace and setting inter-village disputes and conflict as we would discuss subsequently.

In fact, it could be safe to say that inter-communal, political interaction of Atani and her neighbours appear to be in tandem with MacFarlane's description of sovereignty. In his words, "sovereignty resides in the whole body of members of the community meeting in the public assembly for the purpose of laws and authentic acts of the general will⁸.

It suffices to say that inter-communal interaction of Atani and her neighbours may not have differed so much from what obtains in other Igbo societies. The various title holders gathered at different levels to discuss social-political and economic interests of Atani people. It was an effective platform for intra/inter-group interaction.

Conceptual Clarification

1. Conflict & Conflict Resolution

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction. Human beings in the course of their daily interaction would have to agree and disagree in certain decisions. Such disagreements could be on political issues, economic transactions, during social and cultural ceremonies or festivals or even conflict arising from marriage. There are many other conflict scenarios that are caused mainly by land disputes. These aspects of conflict usually cause occasional skirmishes or feuds and even inter-communal fight or war in extreme cases. The situation accords with the fact that “different communities in their actual day to day experiences have had to co-exist and interact in peace and in war”. Therefore the conduct of inter-group relations is neither dependent on peace nor war situations”⁹.

It needs be emphasized that every plural society is bound to experience one form of conflict or the other. What makes a society an ideal polity is the extent to which the conflicting interests and needs in a society are constructively managed, so that violence does not threaten its continued existence. Conflict changes the rational man to think of alternative ways of meeting human needs and interests. What is to be emphasized, therefore, is not conflict *par se* but the ways man and societies responds to it. If constructively handled, it can become an agent of growth and development for all parties. To this extent, conflict when it occurs, is not to be demonized but confronted with efficient procedures for co-operative problem solving.

2. The Atani People of Ogbaru

Among the people of Atani in Ogbaru and their neighbours, as in many Igbo communities, the spilling of human blood for instance, is regarded as an abomination against the earth. Land and boundary disputes as evidenced in traditions resulted from the desire for more land to meet the demands of the

growing population. This formed important sources of quarrels or conflict situation between the different groups and communities surrounding Atani.

Ngozi Ojiakor in her book on Ogbaru presents deep insights on aspects of conflict/disputes resolutions traditionally. She describes in some details, the workings of the pre-colonial judicially system as regards dispute resolution.

In her words:

In each community (including Atani and her neighbours), the same elements performed both the judicial and administrative functions. There were three courts. The lower court was headed by Okpala Nta of each Umunna. Disputes arising from within the Umunna were settled at this level. The village or divisional court was headed by Okpala Uku, Senior Council of each Ogbe (Village) and the judicial body consisted of all members of the junior councils of Ndichie within the village were settled at this level and the court was held at the Senior Council's Obi. The Supreme Court which was the King's Palace and the judicial body consisted of all the Senior Ndiche in the town supported by the Junior Ndiche and presided over by the king himself. Inter-village disputes were normally brought to this court¹⁰.

The above extracts, exemplifies the nature and trajectories of conflict and conflict resolution in Atani. The Eze (King) with his council of Ndichie Uku and Ndichie Nta and other title holders formed the nucleus of conflict resolute at the time. Conflict ranging from the Umunna to inter-village disputes, including land disputes, marital issues, and other forms of skirmishes and disagreements are resolved at this level. The resolutions followed traditional mechanisms aimed at righting the wrongs and to ensure the sustenance of relative peace within the communities and those of their neighbours. In fact, the courts as a strong traditional institution, attended to very serious issues that could truncate the peace and impinge on progress of the people. Ikenna Nzimiro corroborates this view when he said the task of the courts were "to right wrongs, to adjust claims, to defend norms and where permanent relationships are concerned, they have to strive to prevent them from being broken"¹¹.

Besides, various conflicts followed some known traditional processes involving rituals. It would be remembered that the efficacy of Igbo traditional systems owed much to Igbo traditional religious belief systems. Hence, the involvement of certain rituals seemingly appears to ascribe more power and authority to the

king and his council. Writing on the processes and procedures of conflict resolution in Atani, Ojiakor stated that:

Disputes between kinsmen were settled with the ritual called 'Ijiaka'. In such cases, the disputants were made to eat kola nut dipped in each other's blood. This kola nut had prior to the eating being sacrificed to the ancestors. Another way was where the disputants were made to swear to an oath or Alusi not to harm each other through the use of sorcery or witchcraft. The Okpala both at the Umunna and village levels tried as much as possible to settle all cases and maintain law and order¹².

These institutions thrived during the pre-cultural times, survived colonial incursion and are extant in post-colonial Atani society, though with some modifications. The mechanisms put in place in Atani were to ensure conflicts between the people were settled as quickly as possible.

Another important body in conflict resolution in Atani is the court of Umuada which was presided over by an Ada also known as Onowu or Oduah. The power of Umuada in conflict resolution in Igboland would not be underestimated. This is because, apart from handling conflict among the women folk, they go beyond women to intervene in far reaching village and inter-communal skirmishes. Usually, the Umuada appealed to the parties in conflict to embrace peace. The process involved sometimes, carrying palm fronds to meet the parties in conflict at a neutral place, arranged for the purpose. Umuada were used to enforce settlements and their decisions were the final in which the disputants were made to comply with. Failure to comply, the culprit would be subjected to harsh penalty. For instance, such a deviant was not mourned at death, hence the saying; "*iju okwu nwada nye ga-akwa gi*"¹³

In some case, contravening of such settlement by any party or group in Atani carried serious punishment from the gods or ancestors. Acceptance of such settlements arose from the people's belief in the presence of the ancestors and their power in all aspects of their lives. Through these settlements, mutual relationships between Atani communities and their neighbours are maintained.

Another aspect of conflict resolution in Atani is the use of modern or western systems that is, the Western Court Systems. These Western systems differed significantly from the traditional Igbo methods. They provided alternatives to the known methods of conflict resolution among the people and their society as the process, procedure and outcome had different consequences. For instance,

the Western court systems involved the hiring of Lawyers or legal practitioner to defend an accused. The accused usually is not allowed to defend himself in court. The outcome of such court cases most times created a “win-lose” situation. The Western court system of conflict resolution would appear more controversial than the Igbo traditional methods. Hence, the legacy of court settlements creates an atmosphere of rancor and perpetual hatred between brothers, kinsmen and even different villages.

The European incursion in Atani paved way for the introduction of Western systems/methods into the area. Hence, a clash of the two civilizations/systems ensued. The economic, political and socio-cultural relations of the people began to witness unrest. The conflict had started between European merchants and Atani people over trading system called the trust system. Orjiakor noted that “as time went on; trading relationships were marked by a chronic conflict of interest. Differences of economic interests were resolved, not by bargaining, but by violence. In the 1870s, these sporadic threats of violence gave way to a deep-seated and endemic enmity which sometimes amounted to a state of war¹⁴. Also, Elizabeth Isichei had stated that, “trading factories” were at this time attacked at Oko, Osomala, Atani and Alenso”.¹⁵

In 1879, misunderstanding between the merchants and Ogbaru people result in the usual act of plundering of the factory at Atani. In November 1880, Atani and Osamala were bombarded on the orders of Macintosh because they would not trade with the company on its own terms.¹⁶ From the point of trade, a new system of conflict resolution, - violence, was introduced in Atani and the neighbouring communities. Over time, these Western systems snowballed into colonialism and administrative restructuring. It was during the colonial rule in Atani that Western courts were built to take over or replace most of the traditional methods of conflict resolution in Atani and its neighbouring communities. For the purposes of continuity and change in human society, some conflicts are resolved within the communities by the town unions, Eze in Council, Umuada etc. On other climes, some prefer to have their conflict and misunderstanding resolved by the court of law. Conflicts are resolved in Atani to maintain peace, law and order and mutual relations necessary for progress.

Colonial and Inter-Group Relation of the People

The British conquest and occupation of Igboland was obviously not achieved in a day. It indeed, followed a gradual albeit a forceful process. By the early 1900s, the British had penetrated, conquered, occupied and set up their administrative

systems in Igboland. It could arguably be stated that the occupation process began in 1885, when the Oil Rivers Protectorate was proclaimed by the British. The ultimate aim of the colonizing power was to extend their political sway to the rich agricultural and palm producing region of the hinterland occupied mainly by the Igbo.¹⁷

In 1901, Major A.G Leonard took a small force of soldiers to Ogbaru. He put an end to the war which was then in progress between Osamala and Aboh. Thereafter no escort or patrol was necessary in Ogbaru.¹⁸ By implication, Atani people being part of Ogbaru had be conquered and pacified by the British, the stage was set for administrative re-organisation and its implications. In fact, the people were to witness the entrance of new systems into their environment, hence new components in their relationship with the colonial people.

The change began with the introduction of Native Court System, which marked a paradigm shift in the political relations of the people. The courts automatically took over the age long traditional laws and customs under the control of the king or Eze. The reforms by the British resulted in the control of various aspects of the Atani way of life. An intelligence report on British activities min Onitsha District recovered thus,

The reforms of Sir Donald Cameron officially constituted both Atani and Osamala native courts in 1933. The Atani native court was a grade D Court, with five towns already mentioned attending the court. The court had full jurisdiction over civil actions in which debt demand did not exceed twenty-five pounds. The court also had jurisdiction over matrimonial cases, land cases, criminal cases which could be punished with twelve strokes of cane or a fine or the equivalent by native law and customs. The court had a quorum of fifteen court members, six from Atani, two from Akili Ozizor, Ohita, and two from Umuzu and three from Odekpe.¹⁹

Colonial Native Courts re-ordered Atani and her neighbours as they attended courts together. The action changed the contour and dynamics of their age long pattern of relationship. Cases previously handled by the Ndiche Uku and Ndichie Nta, and other titled men and Eze, were centrally handled by the courts and colonial appointees.

Atani and their neighbours did not have smooth relations with the British colonial officials. First, their entry into Atani and its environs was by the use of force. Secondly, the activities of the British officials failed to recognize the age

long traditions, custom and laws of the people. They imposed their Western system on the people without regard Atani traditional systems. Worrisome, also was the fact that the centuries of being ruled by Eze or King or Atamanya were replaced by the Warrant Chiefs. These appointments were not done in tandem with the people's permission and approval.

Orjiakor writes that "in choosing warrant chiefs in Ogbaru, the colonial administrators appointed people whom they felt were loyal to them. The people themselves thought that it was an abomination for their Okpala to serve the faceless intruders. In Atani, for example, an elder recalled how the first warrant chief was chosen. "Though Atani, people had been in contact with the European traders, the Atani people were not prepared to sell of their freedom, so nobody took them serious when they asked us to nominate a chief."²⁰ One chief Odunze Eze Otutu of Atani was said to have been given warrant later in 1904. Such appointment in many communities unsettled the existing peace among the people. For instance, in Atani tradition, kingship is not hereditary in turn but rotates among the royal families of Umueze Atani and Umuiyasele. The warrant issued to Chief Odunze Eze was challenged in court by Chief J.J. Ezeolisa. The reason being that Odunze's son, Henry Odunze reportedly, acted as a reagent under the misconception that the warrant issued to his late father was transferable.

Elsewhere in other neighboring villages to Atani, warrant chiefs were appointed following different patterns. In Osamala, unlike in Atani, the warrant chief was chosen among the clan heads (Okpala). Warrant Chief Odugwu was appointed in 1907. In 1910, Animosa was appointed followed by Anyeka. Similarly, in Umunankwo, an informant informed that "they and asked them to bring a chief." They did not listen to them, the British gave a warrant to Isagba who followed the British about.

Odekpe neighbours of Atani had a first warrant issued to Ossia and the Ohaita community saw Nwokocha appointed because he was fair, tall and handsome. These appointments were arbitrarily done by the British which created uneasy relations between Atani, her neighbours and the colonial British officials or administrators. These arbitrary appointments without consultation with the people "shook the old idea of political leadership based on gerontocracy, with most of the leaders being lineage heads."²¹

Not surprising as Mbalisi wrote, many a time their authority was not readily accepted by the communities which they administered. The position of chiefs

created a kind of wealthy and influential class of individuals in the society who were above the village council of elders. Consequently, the traditional sanctions, coercion and rural democracy which held the people together lost their sway in the British Colonial Era. The warrant Chiefs did their master's bidding.²² They helped in constructing and implementing policies and Western culture through Western Education and Christianity. Of course, colonial infrastructure also advanced inter-group relations as we would discuss in the session.

Impact of Christianity and Western Education on Relations between the People

Two major institutions introduced into Igboland by the Europeans were Christianity and Western Education. These Institutions were introduced into Africa by European merchants and missionaries alike. Over time, they spread into other parts of Africa including Igboland. The spread was not just by Europeans alone, but also by freed slaves. Chinedu Mbalisi had stated that, "freed slaves were instrumental to bringing Christianity and its spread in West Africa and Igboland in particular".²³

On the arrival of Christianity in Igboland, Edmund Ilogu wrote thus:

The definitive date was 27th July, 1957, when an agreement was finally executed between a missionary group led by Samuel Crowther, and Obi Akenzua of Onitsha and his councilors to establish a Christian Mission at Onitsha, an Igbo town on the Eastern Bank of the River Niger.²⁴

It was from Onitsha that Christianity entered into the interior of Igboland. Hence, Onitsha has the pride of place in becoming the place of active beginning of the evangelization of Igboland. Before the arrival of Christianity, the Igbo interior was under the grip of the Aro and Nri religious and commercial influence.²⁵ The entrance of the British into the interior was by the use of force. The expeditionary forces had freed slaves held in the Aro enclaves and the Delta areas. It was after the expeditions that the British settled inland and began the spread of Christianity and building of schools in the villages. The schools built by the missionaries, and the churches, challenged the very fabrics of Igbo traditional life. They questioned the basic foundations of Igbo religion, culture, and traditional practices. These areas formed the nexus for interaction between the Igbo and their neighbours and between different villages and towns in Igboland.

The British Colonial Administration often followed the path paved by Christian Missionary groups in various towns and villages in Africa. It was against this backdrop that Chief Henry Odunze in 1904 invited the Church Missionary Society (CMS) at Onitsha to Atani²⁶. As in most parts of Igboland, this first attempt by the C.M.S appear not to have yielded the expected result. Hence, overtime in the same year, 1904, the CMS Mission re-entered Atani for the second time. A parcel of land was allocated to them at the outskirts of the town where they built a Church and a school. From Atani the C.M.C Mission spread to Ohaita, Akili-Ogidi, Umunankwo and Ogbakuba, between 1905 and 1906.²⁷

Similarly, the Catholic Mission were said to have reached Atani in 1917 and also built a Church and a School. From Atani, the Catholic Mission also spread to other neighbours of Atani in Ogbaru. It would be worthy to mention here that Churches and Schools were not built in all the communities surrounding Atani. At this point, new vistas were opened in the nature and form of relations between Atani including their far-flung Ozubulu and Okija neighbours.

Ojiakor had observed that “by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the Roman Catholic Mission had gained most towns in Ogbaru despite the fact Church Missionary Society was the first to arrive Osomala. Catholic Mission station at Osamala served the adjoining towns of Ogwu Ikpele, Umunankwo, Ogbakuba, Ochuehe, Amiyi, Umuzu, Obagwe and Ogwu-Aniocha. Atani C.M.S Mission Station served Ohita and Akili Ogidi.”²⁸

By implication, it meant that primary school pupil and converts had to move from their communities to attend school and church service/mass in Atani. Attending the schools and Churches marked a paradigm shift, significant to the culture, tradition, norms and values of the people. Christianity as known in the history of European or British activities in Igboland disparaged the Igbo belief systems and way of life. The British in fact, placed a ban on oracular consultation and declared aspects of the people’s cultural activities and festivals as barbaric and fetish. The rivalry between both religions was palpable in most communities.

It is safe to state that the years 1920 to 1960 witnessed the establishment of mainly C.M.S and R.C.M and other denominations in almost all communities that are neighbours of Atani.

The impact of the Christianity on inter-group relations could be seen through the numerous Church activities such as youth programmes, conferences, women association meetings, anniversary celebrations, church harvest program among

many others. Through these various activities, interactions were made and new relationships created. The interactions helped foster greater interaction between individuals and communities within and without Atani, reaching to Ozubulu and Okija. One major consideration that encouraged these interactions was the grouping of these churches into different parishes and Dioceses. These interactions have a continuum.

Besides, as been noted earlier, the missionaries, alongside the Churches, introduced Western education in Atani and her neighbours of Ozubulu, Ohaita, and Oko among many others. One of the most revolutionary influences operative in Nigeria since the beginning of the European intrusion had been Western education²⁹. It is a fact of history that Western education was monopolized by the Christian missions.

A.U Murray observed that:

To all intents and purposes, the school is the Church Right away in the bush or in the forest, the two are one, and the village teacher is also the village evangelist. An appreciation of this fact is coordinial in all considerations of African education.³⁰

There were not many schools built in Atani and the adjoining neighbouring towns. By implication, pupil from other towns would have to cross borders to Atani or Osamala to attend classes. The scenario provided a vent for interaction between the different people from various villages and communities. During the period covered by this study, the C.M.S Central School Atani and the Roman Catholic School, Osamala were the only schools that had pupils up to either standard four or at best standard five. This meant their pupils had to go to either Atani or Osamala to complete their Primary School Education³¹. Through education, new breed of 'Eurocentric thinkers,' elites with Western orientation emerged. New associations of 'Old boys' (who were school mates) were formed to encourage greater interaction. This trend had continued beyond 1960 as veritable means of group relations in the area. Such interactions had led to greater corporation and contributed to the growth of Atani in relation with their neighbours. Educated people had also helped to attract modern infrastructure to Atani thereby enhancing communication and mobility between Atani people and their neighbours.

Suffice to say that the introduction of Christianity and Western education brought remarkable changes in the nature of relations extant in Atani and their

neighbours of Oko, Ozubulu, Okija, and Ohaita among many others. It impacted significantly on the socio-political, economic and cultural relations of the people.

Ikenga Ozigbo had noted thus:

Since man is mortal, every society must perpetrate itself physically by procreation and socially by process of education. Through education, the customs, values, beliefs, skills and so on, are passed on from generation to generation. Without this, the society would disintegrate. The new generation must be taught the way of thinking and behaving which preserved the society in the past and are believed to keep it in the future. The function of education is to mould individual to the social norm³².

Despite the influences of Christianity and Western education on Atani and her neighbours with regards to aspects of their culture, traditional belief systems, norms and values, some have remained resilient. Most cultural festivals like the New yam festival, masquerades, Ozo title taking, local brewing of gin (Kai kai), though modified, have survived the new wake of Western cultural Imperialism. Changes in the forms of group socialization through schools and churches only introduced new areas of interaction. The people of Atani and their neighbours have remained largely mutual and symbiotic even in the face of seeming Western intrusion and interferences in their traditional living. Atani relations with their neighbours have remained and continued with obvious modifications.

Modern Transportation & Communication

Movement of people and communication has remained vital to interaction among humans in the society. Interactions as necessity for progress start with contact between individuals, villages and towns. Roads and Bridges enhanced the movement of people, goods and services in traditional Igbo society. Farmers, Fishermen, traders, skilled and unskilled labourers moved from one place to another in the course of their socio-cultural, political and economic activities. In Atani society, farming and fishing are integral part of the people's economic life. Therefore transportation was important for effective maximization of these activities. Modern transportation and communication quickened inter-group relations between Atani and her contiguous and far-flung neighbours of Ozubulu, Okija among others. On the importance of modern transportation and communication to inter-group relations, Mbalisi averred that:

The social and economic importance of roads and bridges built between communities is enormous. They enhanced motorized transportation in and out of communities. Mobility between communities became faster and relations and communications improved. Motor cars and buses conveyed people from one community to another and from one market to the other more efficiently. Movements and distances that would have otherwise taken a whole day by trekking were completed in a matter of minutes or hours³³.

The introduction of motor transport no doubt quickened human movement, interaction and made communication more efficient. Since inter-group relations involve interaction between humans as they carry out their day to day activities, modern transportation help improve the movement between Atani and her neighbours. For instance, it took a longer time to move from Atani to Ozubulu, Okija or Oko neighbours, by way of trekking. The introduction of motor transport made Ozubulu appear closer to Atani than it had been.

Besides, the opening up of access roads in most communities within Ogbaru community impacted on inter-group relations in the area. Modern transport development enables man to harness existing and new resources and to release labour and capital previously tied in less productive enterprise or isolated by distance. Atani is known for its production capacity in farm produce such as yam, cassava, palm oil, and fish among many others. It was modern transportation that helped Atani to take their produce beyond Atani. The expansion created by modern transportation and communication increased as it were, the interaction Atani people had with their neighbours and other town in Igboland. Over time, the new transportation system became desiderata for improvement in movement, communication and the development of trade and markets. Trade was a key factor in the native and form of interaction between Atani and their neighbours.

Between 1920 and 1960, there was some sort of transformation in the movement of goods and services in and out of Atani. The people's way of life tilted more towards the innovations brought by the British. New articles of trade and materials reached the local Atani Markets in the interior through the new roads and motorised means of transportation. The increased network of roads and trade routes allowed for easy movement of people. Information was shared faster between neighbours. In addition, the motorised transport system increased the safety and risk of travelers. The improvement in

safety no doubt impacted massively on trade, it increased trade flow from the interior of Atani to other communities and areas of surplus production to areas of want. New articles such as cosmetics, clothes, soap, drinks and kitchen utensils reached local markets in Atani and their neighbours. Modern transportation and communication in Atani and their neighbours caused people to come into constant contact. Hence, making new friends and building relationships improved significantly. The mutuality of their relationship was not in doubt as the changes brought by the new systems impacted on the nature of relations between Atani and their neighbours.

Conclusion

The nature of inter communal relations of Ogbaru people presented a spectacular perspective. This assertion is so made because the environment and geographic location of Ogbaru conferred on the people numerous natural resources that attracted people of diverse races and cultures. The presence of migrants into the area due to the abundance of resources created several challenges for inter-communal relations for the people. Agricultural and trade in various commodities especially oil palm, fish and other sea food, yam among many others where in large quantities. The movement of goods and services, and cultural festival formed the nucleus of the people's relations. Their relations thrived beyond the River Niger.

Besides, British incursion into Igboland nay Ogbaru in the late 19th century and colonial intrusion in early 20th century also impacted the inter-communal relations of the people. At least, the nature of their entry introduced militancy and intimidation. The introduction of Western cultures and systems in the area challenged the existing status quo in the way of life of the Ogbaru people. By implication, the indigenous custom, tradition and culture came under attack by colonial forces. Trade and agricultural produce of the area were forcefully controlled by the British administrators. Political interactions became subject to the colonial systems that challenged the fabrics of the traditional political order of Ogbaru people. The introduction of British court systems and other administrative machinery, Christianity and Western education and modern infrastructure influenced relations. Despite the impact of the Western systems and modernization Ogbaru exhumes buoyant and healthy inter-communal relations that have sustained their rich tradition and cultural heritage of the people over time.

Endnotes

1. M.O Olisa, "Igbo Traditional Socio-Political System" in Ofomata, *A Survey of Igbo Nation*. p.97
2. F.C Ogbalu, *Omenala Igbo*, Onitsha: Versity Press, 1960, p.97
3. C.N Mbalisi "Inter-Group Relations of Mbano in Imo State, Nigeria and its Neighbours, 1906 to 2006", Ph.D Thesis, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2015. pp 66-67.
4. Ngozi E. Orjiakor, *A Cultural and Political History of Ogbaru Community of East Lower Niger from Pre-Colonia Period to 1960*, Enugu: Mason Printers and Publishing, 2006 p. 28
5. Orjiakor p. 29
6. Orjiakor p.33
7. Orjiakor p. 44
8. L.J Macfarlane, *Modern Political Theory*, London: Nelson University; 1970, p.232.
9. Mbalisi, "Inter Group Relations..." p.111
10. Orjiakor p.49
11. Ikenna Nzimiro, *Studies in Ibo Political System*, London: 1972, pp. 118-119
12. Orjiakor p.49-50
13. Orjiakor p.53
14. Orjiakor p.129
15. Elizabeth Isichei, *The Igbo and the European - The Genesis of Relationship*. London: 1970, p.109
16. Isichei, p.112
17. Ikenga, R.I Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland in the 20th Century*, Enugu: Snap Press Ltd, 1999, pp, 30-34
18. N.A.E Ondist, 20th January 1924, File No. 204 "Intelligence, Report on the Riverain Villages of Onitsha Division and Osomala Native Court by B.G Stone
19. Intelligence Report cited.
20. Orjiakor, *A Cultural and Political History...*, pp. 137-138
21. A.E Afigbo, "Indirect Rule in Southern Nigeria: The Era of Warrant Chiefs 1971-1929", *Tarikh*, Vol. 4, No. 4, London: Longman, 1974, p.23.
22. Mbalisi, "Mbano and its Neighbours....." p.165
23. Mbalisi, "Inter Group Relations..." p.170

24. Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture: A Study of the Interaction of Christianity and Igbo Culture*. Onitsha: University Publishing Company, 1974, pp. 148-149
25. Mbalisi, "Inter Group Relations..." 171
26. Orjiakor, *A Cultural and Political History...*, pp. 148 - 149
27. Orjiakor *A Cultural and Political History...*, pp.149
28. Orjiakor *A Cultural and Political History...*, p. 149
29. Mbalisi, p. 182
30. A Victor Murray, *The School in the Bush*
31. London: Penguin, 1929, p.65
32. Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland*p.119
33. Mbalisi, "Inter-Group Relations..." p. 268