

## **YORUBA AND IGBO INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS IN IBADAN, 1945-1970**

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### **Abstract**

*Human interactions are necessary for the development of human society. Over the years, this fact played a profound role in building Africa as a close knitted society driven by ethos rooted in brotherhood. In Nigeria, therefore, the Igbo and Yoruba have largely demonstrated this reality in their interactions. Apparently, the Yoruba and Igbo share some historical affinities and have related well in the past. However, due to the nature and partner of Nigeria's post-colonial politics rooted in self-centredness, the Yoruba and Igbo began to experience some strains in their interactions at the post-colonial era created by politicians from both groups. Nevertheless, Ibadan has over the years become a home for the Igbo as well as provided the enabling environment and atmosphere for Igbo-Yoruba relations. In another vein, the Igbo have contributed immensely to the socio-economic development of Ibadan through their peaceful comportment, industry and ingenuity. Be that as it may, the unique Yoruba-Igbo inter-ethnic relations are largely neglected by scholars. This study, therefore, analyzed the relations between Yoruba and Igbo with a view to understanding the mechanism employed in their relations and how they were able to explore and maintain cordial relationship with fewer clashes of interest. Both primary and secondary sources were utilized. Historical-analytical method was adopted for the study. It is observed that Yoruba and Igbo had robust interactions in Ibadan except for some isolated cases of mistrust and betrayal largely associated with the 1966 political crises in Nigeria.*

**Key words:** Ibadan, Inter-Ethnic Relations, Nigerian Civil War, Igbo, Yoruba



## **Introduction**

Human beings of all races are created by God and share the same human traits in physiological and morphological variation. Science has proven that all humans emanate from the smallest unit of life called cell.<sup>1</sup> In the context of religion, the holy books, including the Bible and Quran are of the view that all humans share the same ‘adamic’ nature and parentage from creation.<sup>2</sup> This timeless and historical reality has indeed influenced the relations of all humans across the globe at all stages of human society or evolvment since the Stone Age era.<sup>3</sup> In Africa, the understanding of brotherhood has been established among different ethnic groups who see themselves as brothers and sisters even before the incursion of different races into Africa, such as Arab, Europeans, Americans and a host of others.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, therefore, the Igbo and Yoruba enjoyed long-standing inter-ethnic relations during the pre-colonial era through social interactions and economic activities, such as trade relations. However, during the colonial era, the politics of ‘divide and rule’ practiced by the British adversely affected this African brotherhood such that in Nigeria, different ethnic groups began to see themselves as ‘enemies’ due to the kind of politics and indoctrination peddled by the colonial masters. In Nigeria particularly, due to the influence of the colonial politics anchored on divide and rule policy (which promoted tribalism for the purpose of their colonial suppression), vast majority of Yoruba and Igbo began to see themselves as ‘enemies’ in the realm of politics. This reality, no doubt, dovetailed into the post-colonial era and became a weapon utilized by the indigenous political leaders of different ethnic groups in Nigeria.<sup>5</sup>

Be that as it may, the Igbo and the Yoruba are closely related based on historical realities and facts. The two powerful African ethnic groups (Igbo and Yoruba) share some historical affinities and have interacted at different periods.



### **Yoruba-Igbo Connections**

Based on the current politics of Nigeria driven by selfish politicians, the Yoruba and Igbo are portrayed as ‘enemies’ to one another in terms of political struggles at the national level. This unfortunate reality is said to have resulted in unhealthy competition between political actors of both ethnic groups. In the real sense, however, the Yoruba and Igbo have a serious connection which should have knitted the two groups together for better inter-group relations. According to historical account, the Yoruba and Igbo have a historical link and relationship that has existed since the pre-colonial period.<sup>6</sup>

Majorly, this paper is aimed at examining the various ways the Igbo and Yoruba have related and interacted in the time past that have positively impacted on their intergroup relations with particular interest in Ibadan as the case study. According to historical account, the Igbo and Yoruba belong to the kwa subgroup of the larger Congo family in linguistic classification. Other members of this group are Edo, Igala and Idoma. In this vein, therefore, the Yoruba and Igbo share serious linguistic traits in their language composition cum language classification as it were. Based on this findings, it suggests that in the time past during the pre-colonial era, the Igbo and Yoruba have interacted very closely linguistically. Some researchers have even posited that the Igbo and Yoruba have similar place of migration based on the kwa sub group family which both ethnic groups have been classified.<sup>7</sup>

The Yoruba and Igbo are not strangers to each other over centuries ago before the coming of the Europeans. Though it is true that other ethnic groups in Africa have in like manner interacted together in the time past, but the linguistic evidence between the Yoruba and Igbo remains a valid assessment and point in the location of the intergroup relation between the Yoruba and Igbo. This is the reason there are some words that are similar in both languages- Igbo and Yoruba. <sup>8</sup>



In this regard, linguistic evidence is crucial in examining Igbo-Yoruba connection in intergroup relations. Also, in classifying African languages in general and West African languages in particular, renowned scholars of linguistics have placed the Yoruba language among the kwa group in the Niger Congo family of languages as earlier established. Besides, through the use of glottochronology, linguists have been able to assert that Yoruba, Edo and Igbo began to evolve as separate languages from a common parentage about four thousand years ago. The similarity and relationship between these languages makes the expert opinion on their relationship plausible even to non-linguists.<sup>9</sup>

In a recent fascinating study, Adetugbo has convincingly argued that because of the genetic resemblance or inter-relationship between the Yoruba language and other kwa family language like Igbo, the people speaking these languages must have had a common origin, that in view of the time-depth required to accomplish the existing difference among these languages, their common origin must have dated back to pre-historic times; that “ it was unlikely that the shared linguistic features among these languages were acquired outside Africa, especially when these resemblances include the designations for tropical flora and animal” and that, in the circumstances, a theory of migration tracing the original abode of the Yoruba to the Middle East (eg Mecca) or Egypt is not tenable.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, the position of the above scholar suggests that those groups of family in the linguistic categorization have closely interacted in time past. However, in the case of the Yoruba and Igbo, their socio-political interactions since the early colonial period and the post-colonial period have not been smooth. Nevertheless, the reflection of the socio-political interaction is not enough to dismiss the said aged-long relationship and intergroup relations between the two powerful ethnic groups (Igbo and Yoruba).<sup>11</sup>



In all, a common trend in all the arguments about the Igbo and Yoruba relationship or intergroup relations is that both people have a close linguistic connection since the pre-colonial period. The categorization and classification of their language coupled with the existence of similar words used by both languages are strong indications of their connections.<sup>12</sup>

### **Ibadan as an Ancient City and the Inflow of the Igbo**

Ibadan is one of the oldest cities in West Africa. Even before the formation of Nigeria as a single entity or a country Ibadan has been notable. The location of Ibadan, the culture of its people and the place it occupies in the history of Yoruba people demonstrates the value of Ibadan to the Yoruba and the people of Nigeria since the pre-colonial period.<sup>13</sup>

The people of Ibadan are traditionally warm and non-violent to their guests or visitors as it were. There may be some misunderstanding among groups of indigenes which at some points lead to clashes but this kind of occurrences are not being extended to the visitors or guests in their midst. With the buildup of nationalism in Nigeria around 1945, when the Second World War ended, the quest for the independence of Nigeria became a very serious concern for all and sundry. The hope and faith of Nigerians at this point rose so much that various groups sprung for the sole purpose of Nigerian independence or independence movement. Mass migration of people from the rural areas to urban centres became common at this period. Indeed, Ibadan as one of the emerging cities in Nigeria became a choice for many people. The Igbo who are said to be lovers of travelling and adventures began to move into Ibadan for various reasons which majorly were for trading purposes and search for other types of jobs.<sup>14</sup>

Generally, Ibadan as a city became a centre where the elite constantly converged for political talk or nationalist activities. Such euphoria encouraged Nigerians to relocate to the cities. At



those periods, outside the old eastern region, Ibadan was indeed one of the choicest places the Igbo preferred to relocate to.<sup>15</sup>

According to Obi Okafor, some of his grandparents lived in Ibadan before Nigeria gained her independence. However, according to him also, the actualization of Nigeria's independence on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960 served as a floodgate leading to the further migration of the Igbo into Ibadan.<sup>16</sup> Another respondent, Beatrice Amadi, is of the opinion that Ibadan is no doubt a second home for the Igbo. There are still some areas in Ibadan till date that show a clear sign of Igbo presence for a very long time in Ibadan. In such areas, there are a large number of Igbo population and all manner of activities in those areas that depict Igbo culture.<sup>17</sup> Some of the people interviewed have recounted how they lived in such areas since their childhood days. Some of them have testified that they were born in those areas. There are some categories of people who just believed that Ibadan is their home on the account that they have not lived in Igboland since they were born.<sup>18</sup>

According to Patrick Obi, he has witnessed many of his aged uncles, aunties, other relatives and some Igbo neighbours relocated back to the East since his childhood days. He believes that the trend has been on for a very long time since he said he cannot specifically quote the date. Therefore, the fact remains that the Igbo have been migrating into Ibadan way back before the attainment of Nigeria's independence in 1960.<sup>19</sup>

In Ibadan today, places like; Dugbe, Mokola, Okoro village, the traces of Igbo presence is very evident which corroborates the assertion with regards to the inflow of the Igbo into Ibadan before Nigeria's independence. According to Chukwuma Ikenna, the Igbo are genetically wired to explore places unknown to them, especially places where their lives are not endangered. According to him, the Igbo culture supports what is known as *onye aghana nwaneya* (Be your brother's keeper). This, according to him, was what promoted the idea of inviting



more Igbo relatives to various communities in Ibadan in those early days of Nigeria's formation.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, the Ibadan people are no doubt hospitable and very welcoming to their guests or visitors. This philosophy of theirs on hospitality for guests is not a frivolous or careless culture as is being sometimes misinterpreted. It does not mean, therefore, that the Ibadan people are naïve or layback such that they welcome 'all' irrespective of their conduct or character in their community. In other words, what played out among the Igbo and Yoruba as part of their intergroup relations of those days was that both groups had a mutual respect for each other. The Igbo in those days were allowed and encouraged to invite their relatives from their Igbo villages considering their role in value addition to their host communities in Ibadan. The Igbo according to their tradition believe that *ala bu ofu*, meaning that they soil is one. This philosophy of Igbo people make them to see their host as part of their lives such that they seamlessly integrate and play part in the development of their host communities through their private investment<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, it is a taboo to betray or harm a visitor according to the culture of Ibadan people. Therefore, in the intergroup relations between the Igbo and Yoruba people, it is very important to emphasize that both parties had deep mutual respect for one another. For the fact that the Ibadan people love visitors or guests, it is also apt to state that the Igbo who chose Ibadan as a second home also maintained a good relationship with their host. At this particular era, the kind of toxic relationships that exist between ethnic groups in Nigeria is a clear indication of the nature and pattern of intergroup relations of the post-colonial and post war Nigeria.

The nature of intergroup relations between the Yoruba and Igbo in those days of migration before the attainment of Nigeria's independent shows that the political leaders of Nigeria have succeeded in sowing the seed of discord in the minds of



different ethnic groups of Nigeria. Having made this point, this study is not a claim of perfect intergroup relations between the Igbo and the Yoruba. Uche Chijoke asserts that what could be deduced in the conversation is that the intergroup relations between the Igbo and Yoruba in the past as considered in this study was not malicious as compared to the current trend in Nigeria. According to him, ethnic politics has completely taken over Nigerian politics such that all ethnic groups now see themselves as strangers. The sense of nationalism has been lost long time ago.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, the Igbo inflow into Ibadan was essentially facilitated by railway and road networks. The railway and road network in Ibadan in those days served as links to the Igbo who came to Ibadan in those days. The presence of Lagos and its proximity to Ibadan was another factor that encouraged some Igbo to migrate to Ibadan. Ibadan had been a very moderate and calm city without the usual bustling of Lagos and in some cases high cost of living. Since those days in the 1940s, some of the Igbo who originally left Igboland to Lagos as migrants ended up relocating to Ibadan for a number of reasons.<sup>23</sup>

With the presence of active railway line in Ibadan that connected to different parts of Nigeria, including the Northern, the Igbo who are known for their passion for trade and all sorts of enterprising activities found those railways environment very important for their day to day activities. Ibadan in those days was a melting pot of some sorts as people across Nigeria and some West Africa area converged for trade. Animals were brought to Ibadan via train among other article of trade. In other words, the railway economy of Ibadan on its own boosted the commercial engagement of the people which the Igbo people became beneficiaries of such venture.<sup>24</sup>

It should be recalled also that the Europeans had also established their trading stations or shops in Ibadan which later became the biggest West African city. Different foreign





nationals registered their presence in Ibadan at different locations especially in the Ibadan West and Ibadan North. With the road construction that took place before Nigeria's independence and the presence of the railway line, Ibadan was linked to places like Onitsha which fervently encouraged the inflow of the Igbo from different parts of Igboland who came to Ibadan as an emerging city.<sup>25</sup>

With the accelerated growth of Ibadan as a city in its own right as well as the population increase of its inhabitants, the Igbo began to prosper in their trading activities. Igbo traders from Lagos and some other areas in the old Eastern Region began to migrate to Ibadan. Varied Igbo food stuffs such as stock fish, crayfish, processed cassava (akpu) and a host of other items were traded by Igbo men and women. As the days went by, these traders who were mostly male began to go back to Igboland to bring their families which often consisted of their wives and children. With the growing number of the Igbo people in Ibadan as observed, the social relations of the Igbo and the Yoruba soared high, yielding to deeper intergroup relations in other aspects of life such as marriages and trade partnership.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, there are many factors that could be considered as the attracting forces that brought the Igbo into Ibadan within the period of this discourse. However, the trading activity in Ibadan was the most potent forces that attracted the Igbo to Ibadan. The inflow of the Igbo in the 1940s influenced the demography of Ibadan city such that apart from Lagos, it was affirmed that Ibadan recorded highest number of the Igbo in Yorubaland.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, in the early days before the independence of Nigeria, the Igbo traders who mainly came through the roads traded majorly on palm oil, brooms and other Igbo kind of items not found or popular outside Igboland. In other words, the trading activities as acknowledged promoted the intergroup



relations between the Yoruba and the Igbo which encouraged the Igbo living in Ibadan to extend invitation to their loved ones in Igboland to come over to Ibadan.<sup>28</sup>

### **Ibadan as *Ile* (Home) for All**

Ibadan just like other parts of Yorubaland is a land of peace and hospitality. The Yoruba people of Ibadan are known for their peaceful nature which is being misunderstood as cowardice sometimes. It is this very reality in the culture of Ibadan people that encouraged the migration of people across different parts of Nigeria since the pre-colonial era. Peace is indeed one of the most essential needs of man and of course, a requirement any one needs in a place that could be called *ile*. Ibadan since the pre-colonial era has been regarded as *ile* (home) for not just the *omo* (children of) Oduduwa, but for all human races. This is deeply reflected in the ethos of the Ibadan people in particular, and the Yoruba in general. *Ile* for Ibadan people is more than home. It is considered as a place of peace of mind and succor. The same ideology also influenced the disposition of Ibadan people towards the Igbo in their interaction within the period of this study<sup>29</sup>

The peaceful nature of Ibadan led to its increase in population and settlement of major groups in some areas even before Nigeria's independence. Based on the consistent historical antecedents of Ibadan over the years, it could be therefore argued that Ibadan is a unity centre and a home for all. Unlike Lagos State, Ibadan had never recorded any form of ethnic profiling of the Igbo being experienced in Lagos.

In line with the foregoing, the Igbo people started migrating to Ibadan in a large number in the early 1940s. In other words, even before the period of Nigeria's independence, Ibadan had already become *ile* for all. The period of nationalism in Nigeria also helped in de-emphasizing ethnic nationalism. Interestingly, the period of nationalism up to the era of independence witnessed serious inflow of the Igbo into Ibadan.



For many reasons, Ibadan has remained a home for all. Since the colonial period till date, Ibadan has not recorded any major clash of interest leading to the killing of the guests or visitors by the indigenes in their midst. There have been some examples of eviction of guests in other parts of Yorubaland, like Lagos and some other parts of Nigeria but Ibadan cannot be accused of such act even for ones. Ibadan has remained a melting pot of some sorts over the years for different ethnic groups in Nigeria who also see Ibadan as their *ile* too, by all standards.<sup>30</sup>

Apart from the Igbo people, there are also other ethnic groups who are living in Ibadan such as the Hausa community who are heavily represented in Ibadan, especially in an area called Sabo in Ibadan. Various Hausa people from different parts of Northern Nigeria have been equally living peacefully in Ibadan, of which it has been said they migrated to Ibadan since the colonial era. Just like the Hausa, the Igbo people have also made Ibadan their *ile*. The only difference between the Hausa and the Igbo is just their ideology of home and culture. The Igbo based on their culture go to their home land or ancestral home from time to time especially during December period or during any important festival like new yam festival, burial of their loved ones etc. Such periods or occasions offer the Igbo the opportunity to still maintain their links with their people at home and also connect their children back to root. Unlike the Hausa who do not bother much about their place of origin or root, they in some cases do not link back to their places of origin like the Igbo people. Be that as it may, the point being made here is that Ibadan has been a home for all irrespective of ethnic background.<sup>31</sup>

In view of the above, the factor of Ibadan been the home of all is a very vital aspect of this discourse which should be carefully examined in the intergroup relations among groups in intergroup relations. As observed in this study, various persons have granted interviews as respondents or observers have affirmed that Ibadan has been indeed *ile* for all.<sup>32</sup>



### **Yoruba-Igbo Social Relations in Ibadan**

The Yoruba-Igbo social relation is an interesting aspect of interaction between the Yoruba and the Igbo. As established in this study, the Igbo people considered Ibadan as a home away from since the 1940s when the influx of the Igbo into Ibadan began increasing with the aid of network of roads and railways.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, the Yoruba and Igbo known to have different cultures and world views began to relate as neighbours living in the same localities or communities. In those early days of their intergroup relations, most Igbo and Yoruba people lived in the same compound popularly called 'public compound' or face-me-and-face-you compound. Those kind of housing pattern was such that families lived together in rented apartment in a cluster manner wherein privacy was completely defiled due to the compactness of rooms built together where people shared same facilities such as toilets and bathrooms. With the independence of Nigeria and growth of press across Nigeria, the Igbo increased their migration into different parts of Nigeria in search of a greener pasture.<sup>34</sup>

Surprisingly, between 1940 and 1967 before the Nigerian civil war began, the Igbo were known to have settled in major communities in Ibadan West and Ibadan North. As part of their social relations, both ethnic groups lived together. It was a fact that both children of Igbo and Yoruba interacted without extreme discrimination. Though there were some reservations in terms of some stereotyped stories told about each ethnic group but such stories did not make them see one another as enemies.<sup>35</sup>

As a matter of fact, it could be said that healthy social relationship of the Yoruba and Igbo was one of the major factors that encouraged the Igbo to invite their relatives from their villages to Ibadan since the period before the Nigerian independence up to the period of the Nigerian civil war.<sup>36</sup>



Throughout these periods, there was not any record of any major clash or violent conflict between the Igbo and the Yoruba in Ibadan. What existed as some of the social misunderstanding could be regarded as individual strive but not a group or an ethnic confrontation.

The Igbo and Yoruba shared appreciable social sentiments and value system that have helped in building their social relations since the pre-colonial era. For example, it is a fact that both groups have tremendous regard for the sanctity of human life. Thus, this in itself restrains them from unnecessary clash that could lead to loss of lives and property. Again, both ethnic groups have so much value for hand work. Therefore, one visible attributes of Yoruba-Igbo intergroup social relations is that both ethnic groups engaged in competition aimed at outshining one another. This is of course one of the human tendencies in human social behaviors and interactions.<sup>37</sup>

With the political view of Obafemi Awolowo at the wake of the Nigerian civil war which was in consonant with the position of the Federal Government of Nigeria, the Igbo perceived the Yoruba as saboteurs as they expected their support with regards to political issues associated with the Nigerian civil war. However, despite the misunderstanding that existed in the inter-ethnic relations between the Yoruba and Igbo, the Yoruba demonstrated enormous sympathy and offered shelter to a good number of Igbo during the 1966 to 1970 crises.<sup>38</sup> As a result of the nature of the Yoruba-Igbo intergroup relations, the Yoruba helped in hiding a good number of the Igbo away from their attackers during those days of crises leading to the Nigerian civil war of 1967 to 1970.<sup>39</sup> Such act from the Yoruba at those periods could be described as demonstration of sympathy and empathy in an intergroup social relation which minimized the spate of massacre that took place in Ibadan spearheaded by the military and civilian unscrupulous elements in 1966 before the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war.<sup>40</sup>



There is no doubt that some Igbo were killed during those social upheavals in Ibadan and some other places in Nigeria as established in this study.<sup>41</sup> However, it should be noted that it was not Ibadan people that spearheaded or executed such heinous crime called pogrom.<sup>42</sup> Already as noted in this work, Ibadan was already notable city in Nigeria and across the African continent, which in that light attracted huge population considered as a mixed multitude. In the real sense, the Ibadan people having lived with the Igbo people saw them as brothers and sisters and not as enemies to be killed. Those who however, maltreated the Igbo were rascals that were used as tools in the hands of political class, especially those from the Northern extraction. Killing of fellow human beings in Ibadan and elsewhere in Yorubaland is considered as a taboo.<sup>43</sup>

According to Idris Kola, it was a very difficult situation for the Ibadan people at those critical moments. The Igbo had already established a good intergroup social relation with the Yoruba people. He added that some of the Igbo business men in those areas had already adopted some Ibadan boys who became more of their sons in their business enterprises. So, the mutual relations between the Igbo and Yoruba became a connection between both ethnic groups. Nevertheless, it was a difficult thing for the Yoruba to completely stop the mob action carried out against the Igbo as the region was heavily militarized by the Northern leaders who seized political power all over the nation.<sup>44</sup>

Apart from the interaction of the Yoruba and Igbo as neighbours, some of the men and women from the two ethnic groups had marital relationship despite the cultural differences that existed between them. Those were early years of Igbo-Yoruba relations. As a result of the cultural differences that were very high, people in those days tended to exaggerates narratives on both ethnic groups which discouraged some people from getting married to one another.<sup>45</sup>



In other words, the cases of marriages between the two ethnic groups were not so much common at that moment due to some factors as explained herein which of course hinged on cultural matters. Nevertheless, with the few cases of such inter-ethnic marriages between the two groups, the Yoruba-Igbo intergroup relations were positively impacted. As far back as the 1940s, a good number of Igbo people in Ibadan had already started speaking Yoruba language which deepened their deep social relations. In another hand also, some Yoruba people also developed the interest of speaking Igbo language in those areas there were large numbers of Igbo people living. All these experience of language interaction especially as it concerns the learning of both languages, were mostly promoted by the children from both ethnic groups who were said to have more time and attention to learn skill in new language. The social interaction of children from both ethnic groups was effectively carried out in schools and in their neighbourhood. The children grew up and saw themselves as children from the same parentage. Generally, language is said to be a very veritable tool in the cementing of human relationships. The language interaction between both ethnic groups also cemented their intergroup relations<sup>46</sup>.

Igbo people are known for their social life since the pre-colonial era. The idea of hard work is a common phenomenon in the Igbo society. As such it is also a common belief that people are to be rewarded or treated well after a day's hard work. In the same vein, the Igbo people who came to Ibadan in the 1940s through 1970 established restaurants and other places of relaxations in the evening after their day's job. These places of relaxations became a social avenue for the gathering of people of all ethnic groups. Though such places were being majorly patronized by the Igbo people who sometimes hosted monthly meetings of their villages, people of other ethnic group also visited such places as they were not strictly meant for the Igbo alone. The Yoruba people are also known for having a robust



social life. The Yoruba cherish good meal and believe that one should give him or herself a good treat from time to time. In other words, Yoruba people interacted with the people in such centres of relaxations. In such places, individual and group relationships were built over the years as they kept interacting together.<sup>47</sup>

In areas such as Mokola, Dugbe, Okoro village and other areas in Ibadan and its environs, the Igbo communities had established their own kind of restaurants and bars where they occasionally invited live musical bands who displayed in those relaxation centres. As established earlier, those centres were opened for all. Some Yoruba visited such centres for various reasons such as meeting new friends, relaxations, enjoying Igbo delicacies, pleasures and a host of other reasons. With this kind of fervent interaction between the Igbo and Yoruba, the social intergroup relation of the two groups was greatly strengthened.<sup>48</sup>

### **Yoruba-Igbo Economic Relations**

In the early days around 1940s, the Igbo were not found in Ibadan trading as compared to the immediate post independent period where the Igbo began to flood in Ibadan as road transportation became more effective after Nigeria's independence. Movement of people and goods gained momentum upon the realization of the prospect of economic activities in Ibadan. Ibadan has been a friendly city since those days of early migration into the city by the Igbo and other ethnic groups.<sup>49</sup>

The major economic activities of Ibadan were majorly facilitated by the road network of Ibadan. Ibadan's proximity to Lagos and the connection of Lagos to Ibadan encouraged Igbo people to explore Ibadan who at that time had already established trade link with Ibadan. Transporters from the Eastern Nigeria actively moved goods from the East to Ibadan.





Some of the goods were palm oil and various food stuffs of Igbo origin.<sup>50</sup>

The activities of Igbo transporters led to the increase of Igbo population in Ibadan. In the same vein, as the Igbo men who were drivers of lorries and luxurious buses were moving goods to Ibadan, some Ibadan people also developed the interest of visiting various parts of Eastern Nigeria through the direction and guide of those early drivers that were coming to Ibadan. The drivers developed good relationship with their Ibadan friends who later became business partners with them. Some Ibadan men and women began to use the opportunity of the friendship to also buy goods in major markets in the East such as Onitsha and Aba markets.<sup>51</sup>

At the later days before the Nigerian civil war, Ibadan just like some other states in Nigeria became a second home to the Igbo. Apart from the good reception of Ibadan people, another very vital factor of attraction of the Igbo to Ibadan is the economic viability of Ibadan. The population of Ibadan gave her an edge over many places in Nigeria. Therefore, the goods sold by the Igbo men and women enjoyed a good market in Ibadan such that the Igbo themselves enjoyed some items from the East as if they were in they originated from Ibadan.<sup>52</sup>

With the increasing rate of the Igbo business in Ibadan shortly before the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war, various Igbo families had brought in their wives and children to Ibadan who in turn also engaged in different types of trade such as the operation of restaurant at major spots in Ibadan. The Igbo at this stage had started mixing up with the Yoruba people in their major markets, such as; Old Gbagi, Agbeni, Sango, Dugbe, Mokola Markets. Apart from the sale of Igbo kind of food stuffs by Igbo men and women in Ibadan, they began to engage in other economic activities such as sale of spear parts. This was particularly at the later years when road transportation became a very reliable means of transportation.<sup>53</sup>



The Igbo in Ibadan before the Nigerian civil war did very well in terms of their trading activities. The economic activities of the Igbo and their business acumen pleased the Yoruba who had built a mutual relationship with one another. The respect for one another was maintained while areas of partnership between both ethnic groups took place also. Some of the Yoruba men released their children to learn some act of trade from their Igbo neighbours and tenants of their building in Ibadan.<sup>54</sup>

Be that as it may, the economic relationship between the Igbo and Yoruba was very cordial before the Nigerian civil war. According to the general account on the business partnership that existed between the Igbo and Yoruba before the Nigerian civil war, both ethnic groups trusted themselves to an extent compared to the present times. It was also a reality that the Yoruba loved having partnership with the Igbo because of the hard working nature of the Igbo and their determination to succeed in whatsoever they do. Already before the Nigerian civil war, some Igbo traders had already built houses in Ibadan while some of them bought houses or shops from their landlord. Such economic relationship between the Igbo and the Yoruba further helped in building ties between both ethnic groups.<sup>55</sup>

As a matter of fact, there were some Yoruba landlords who did not sell their landed properties at all due to some strong cultural belief. However, it was a common knowledge that Yoruba landlord liked giving out their properties for rent or lease to the Igbo for their usual habit of prompt payment without delay. Nevertheless, there are some cases whereby some Ibadan lord lords for one reason or the other disliked renting their houses to the Igbo for reasons best known to them. This therefore suggests that the economic relationship between the Yoruba and Igbo before the Nigerian civil war was not a perfect situation so to speak. Put differently, what could be deduced is that the economic relationship between the two groups was healthy to an extent. What to a very large extent had brought the existential misunderstanding and disharmony between the



two groups till date could be traced to the nature of Nigerian politics of injustice of the political elite of Nigeria.<sup>56</sup>

The economic relation between the Yoruba and Igbo yielded much fruits as it was actually a symbiotic relationship. The Igbo who were welcomed in Ibadan and given the space to operate their trade or business as it were prospered. Their prosperity positively impacted on their immediate family and the region where they came from because they also reached out to their people back home with their gains. In another hand, the Ibadan people also enjoyed the enterprise of the Igbo who brought with them ideas and industry that translated into wealth. The wealth of course trickled down to their immediate society where they found themselves as guests. The wealth or money the Igbo people made and spent in Ibadan boosted the economy of Ibadan in various ways.<sup>57</sup>

Through the economic relations between the Igbo and Yoruba of those days, their relationship in all aspects began to grow well such that during the period of the persecution of the Igbo in the 1966, their Yoruba host in Ibadan demonstrated some level of sympathy to the Igbo. The 1966 massacre of the Igbo was purely a political motivated action that had no link or correlation with the economic relationship of the Igbo and Yoruba.<sup>58</sup> The economic relation of the Yoruba and Igbo had never at any point led to such a bloody action against any of the ethnic group-Igbo or Yoruba.<sup>59</sup>

### **Yoruba-Igbo Political Relations in Ibadan**

Ibadan was indeed the political power house of the Yoruba people. Since the pre-colonial period, Ibadan has been known as the political headquarters of Yorubaland. In the colonial era also, this recognition and understanding played out such that political attention was given to Ibadan. From the colonial through the post-colonial era, great political leaders from the Yoruba extraction lived in Ibadan and wielded so much political powers from the land of Ibadan. Yoruba leaders such as the



Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Boal Ige lived in Ibadan and made their marks in Ibadan and Nigeria at large. The opinion of the above Yoruba leaders shaped the opinions of Yoruba people and Nigerians at large.<sup>60</sup>

In the days of NCNC and AG as political parties, the two parties were strongly represented in Ibadan. The NCNC was considered as a political party dominated and controlled by the Igbo while the AG was also a party dominated and controlled by Yoruba people. In this regard, the NCNC and AG had alliance in Ibadan which was known as the headquarters of the Western Region of Nigeria in the 1950s. Such political arrangement afforded the Igbo and Yoruba the opportunity to further advance their political relations. Indeed, the Yoruba and Igbo had the opportunity of relating together as ethnic groups considering the composition of the two political parties. However, their political intergroup relations cannot be compared with other kind of intergroup relations of the Yoruba and Igbo. Despite their political understanding, the two ethnic groups still had relationship as individual and group. The alliance NCNC had with the Action Group helped in fostering relationship between the Igbo and Yoruba in Ibadan as both political parties had meetings together and shared some political values in their association and interactions.<sup>61</sup>

However, the relationship between the Igbo and Yoruba did not enjoy the level of smooth intergroup relationship experienced in the realm of economic relationship and other aspects of their interactions. The constant misunderstanding between Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo as a result of their political interest deeply affected the perception of each ethnic group in their political relations. In other words, it could be said that the political relations of the Yoruba and Igbo was not smooth due to the unresolved misunderstanding between Awolowo and Zik. Both Awolowo and Zik were highly revered as ethnic champions of their ethnic groups. This kind of disposition influenced the reaction of both the Igbo and Yoruba who considered the above-



mentioned political giants as the pillars of the ethnic groups or their ambassadors as the case may be.<sup>62</sup>

### **Yoruba-Igbo Religious Relations in Ibadan**

The Igbo who came to Ibadan in those days of early 1940s and 1950s were majorly, Catholics, Anglicans while some of them were traditional worshippers. On this basis, the Igbo and Yoruba did not have a deeper religious relationship. The Igbo in those early days preferred worshipping in Catholic and Anglican churches where in most cases were dominated by the Igbo. As established, the Igbo were majorly Catholics since their encounter with Christianity. On the other hand, the Yoruba belonged to Islam, Christianity or Traditional religion. However, the Yoruba people had their own kind of churches too which were not like Igbo Catholic and Anglicans in those days.<sup>63</sup> In those early days of 1940s and 1950s, the Pentecostal churches were not common with the Igbo. As a matter of fact, the prominence of Pentecostal churches among the Igbo is a recent development which became common in the 1990s. Unlike in the recent times where different ethnic groups relate with one another under the roof of big Pentecostal churches, that was not the situation in those days as there were not big or mega Pentecostal churches.<sup>64</sup>

However, it should be noted that there were some Yoruba and Igbo people who against all odds worshipped in the same church or belonged to the same denomination. Some of these people were the ones who broke all barriers and limitation in their religious relations with each other. Some of them who followed their neighbor or friends to worship with them in their places of worship were able to do so as a result of the friendship they had built over the years.<sup>65</sup>

### **Yoruba-Igbo Educational Relations**

As established in this study, the peaceful nature of Ibadan encouraged the inflow of other ethnic groups into the city.



Again, with the wave of nationalism in Nigeria around 1945, Nigerians developed confidence in Nigeria such that they made efforts to establish their career wherever they found themselves. In this regard, the educated Igbo in Ibadan who worked in the educational sector gave their best in term of their services in the sector. At the early stage of Nigeria's independence, the Igbo formed a good percentage of the University of Ibadan community. With the reputation of University of Ibadan around that period, the University became a centre of attraction for intellectuals from different parts of Nigeria and across the globe. It was on this note that Kenneth Onwuka Dike (an Igbo man from Awka, Anambra State) became the first indigenous vice chancellor of the university. The Igbo community in Ibadan grew to a large population up to the period the Nigerian civil war started. The commencement of the Nigerian civil war was a dark era for the generally. It was a period they lost their wealth and career they had built over the years. At the University of Ibadan, Kenneth Dike vacated his position as the vice chancellor of the university unceremoniously due to the impending war then. In the same vein, all the Igbo lecturers in the university also lost their positions including the non-academic members of staff of the university due to the war. Unfortunately, there were some intellectuals at the University of Ibadan who mocked the Igbo and said to them to leave their 'university for them'.<sup>66</sup> For such category of persons, hate and ethnic bigotry had been their trade mark. Those perilous and trying times for the Igbo were just an opportunity for them to express their aged-long resentment against the Igbo. Be that as it may, the Igbo and the Yoruba had quite interesting time in their inter-ethnic relations. As it applies to all forms of relations, there are bound to be moments of mixed feelings of which the Igbo-Yoruba inter-ethnic relations are not exception.<sup>67</sup>

In view of the foregoing, it could be establish that the secret behind the Igbo-Yoruba inter-ethnic relations is largely hinged



on the peaceful comportment of both groups. This peaceful comportment is no doubt part of the characteristic of both groups. This, therefore, suggests that both ethnic groups have respect for each other. Such gesture is indeed a catalyst for peaceful co-existence. Again, another observation is that Ibadan as host community offered an enabling environment to the Igbo which was demonstrated by discouraging attacks on settlers community or making them feel unaccepted in their midst. In another vein, the Igbo lived up to expectation by adding serious value on the society of their host through their peaceful comportment, industry and socio-economic activities.

### **Conclusion**

This study clearly established that humans are one and from the same source irrespective of their ethnicity or nationality. The realities binding humanity are unquantifiable demonstrating the oneness of human beings irrespective of primordial attachment. Unfortunately, politicians and ethnic bigots have succeeded in manipulating people against one another based on tribal sentiment. It is, therefore, important to assert that those things being underscored and projected by politicians (or used in the past by the colonial masters) as stools for division are insignificant. The so called stools used for the division of Nigerians are inconsequential compared with unfathomable qualities being humans share which also portray their humanity.

In the same light as established above, the Igbo and Yoruba have far reaching linkages and historical ties that cannot be suppressed or down played. The resultant positive effects of the Yoruba-Igbo inter-groups in Ibadan as observed, is a great testimonial that cannot be over emphasized. The Yoruba and Igbo share some ideals and philosophies in common even before the colonial era. The Europeans, through the British colonial policy of divide and rule indirectly set the Yoruba and the Igbo against themselves. Thus, such muster created by the



colonial master is currently affecting every Nigerians negatively.<sup>68</sup>

The Yoruba and Igbo have been relating as seen in Ibadan at different times. The acceptance of the Igbo by the Yoruba in Ibadan signifies that both ethnic groups had fruitful and lovely intergroup relations in their interactions.

The large inflow of the Igbo into Ibadan has clearly demonstrated the relationship between the two groups. Within the foregoing, therefore, it could be argued that the continued misunderstanding/ bickering between the two ethnic groups is a creation of the political class who use the weapon of ethnicity or tribalism to keep the people divided and harvest from it at the expense of nation building.

In view of the foregoing, there is the need to tackle the challenge of tribalism being sustained by the political class of Nigeria. Just like in Ibadan, every part of Nigeria should be made a home for all Nigerians. The constitution of Nigeria should expunged the idea of state of origin and let every Nigerian live anywhere he or she chooses to live as an *ile*. The concept of *ile* as highlighted in this discourse should be extended to every nook and cranny of Nigeria as a matter of necessity,





## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Oral interview with N. Ugo-Onumonu, c 35, on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2021 at Health Care International, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
- <sup>2</sup> Holy Bible: Genesis Chapter 1-3
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- <sup>4</sup> Ibid
- <sup>5</sup> B. Nwabueze, 2010. *Colonialism in Africa: Ancient and Modern*, Ibadan: Gold Press Limited. PP269-305
- <sup>6</sup> E.A Afigbo, *The Igbo and their Neighbour*, Ibadan: University Press, 1987.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid
- <sup>8</sup> Oral interview with Professor I. Kamalu, 63, on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2022, at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
- <sup>9</sup> J.A. Atanda, *An Introduction to Yoruba History*, Ibadan University Press, 1980. Pp. 1-18
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid
- <sup>13</sup> Oral interview with Chief R. Popoola, aged 78, on 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2022 at Mokola, Ibadan, Oyo State
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid
- <sup>15</sup> I. Bola, *People, Politics and Politicians of Nigeria (1940-1979)*, Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Plc
- <sup>16</sup> Oral interview with O. Okafor, aged 66, on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 2022 at Dugbe Area, Ibadan, Oyo State.
- <sup>17</sup> Oral interview with Beatrice Amadi, aged 55 on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2022 at Okoro village, Ibadan, Oyo State
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid
- <sup>19</sup> Oral interview with P. Obi, aged 80, 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2022 at Dugbe Area, Ibadan, Oyo State
- <sup>20</sup> Oral interview with C. Ikenna, aged 67, March, 2022 at Dugbe Area, Ibadan, Oyo State



- <sup>21</sup> Ibid
- <sup>22</sup> Oral interview with U. Chijioke, aged 66, March, 2022 at Dugbe Area, Ibadan, Oyo State.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid
- <sup>29</sup> J.A. Atanda, *An Introduction to Yoruba History...*
- <sup>30</sup> I. Bola, *People, Politics and Politicians of Nigeria (1940-1979)...*
- <sup>31</sup> Oral interview with C. Okeke, aged 71, April, 2022 at Challenge Area, Ibadan, Oyo State.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid
- <sup>33</sup> R. Bourne, *Nigeria: A New History of a Turbulent Century*, BookCraft, Ibadan, 2016
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid
- <sup>35</sup> Oral interview with A. Ola, aged 70, on 13<sup>th</sup> March, 2022, at Okoro Village, Ibadan, Oyo State
- <sup>36</sup> See: National Archives Enugu (N.A.E.) N.A.E./SD/o/6, *As We Go to Kampala: Speeches by His Excellency Lt Col. C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Republic of Biafra*
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid
- <sup>38</sup> Oral interview with Dr M. Ugboju at the Department of History and International Studies, Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria on 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2023
- <sup>39</sup> N.A.I., *Special List on the Nigerian Civil War of 1967- 1970*
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- <sup>44</sup> Oral interview with K. Idris, aged 66, on 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2022, at Challenge, Ibadan, Oyo State



- 45 Ibid  
46 Ibid  
47 Ibid  
48 Ibid  
49 Oral interview with A. Kolawole aged 55, on 18<sup>th</sup> May, 2022, at Challenge Area, Ibadan, Oyo State  
50 Ibid  
51 Ibid  
52 Oral interview with A. Kamarudeen, aged 60, on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2022, at Okoro Village, Ibadan, Oyo State  
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54 Ibid  
55 Ibid  
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57 Ibid  
58 N.A.I., CWC/2/1/1/ Nigerian Crisis 1966: Eastern Nigeria View Point  
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61 Ibid  
62 Ibid  
63 Oral interview with O. Okafor, aged 67, 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2022, at Mokola Area, Ibadan, Oyo State  
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