



COLONIALISM AND CHANGES IN URHOB0 CULTURE, 1892-1991.

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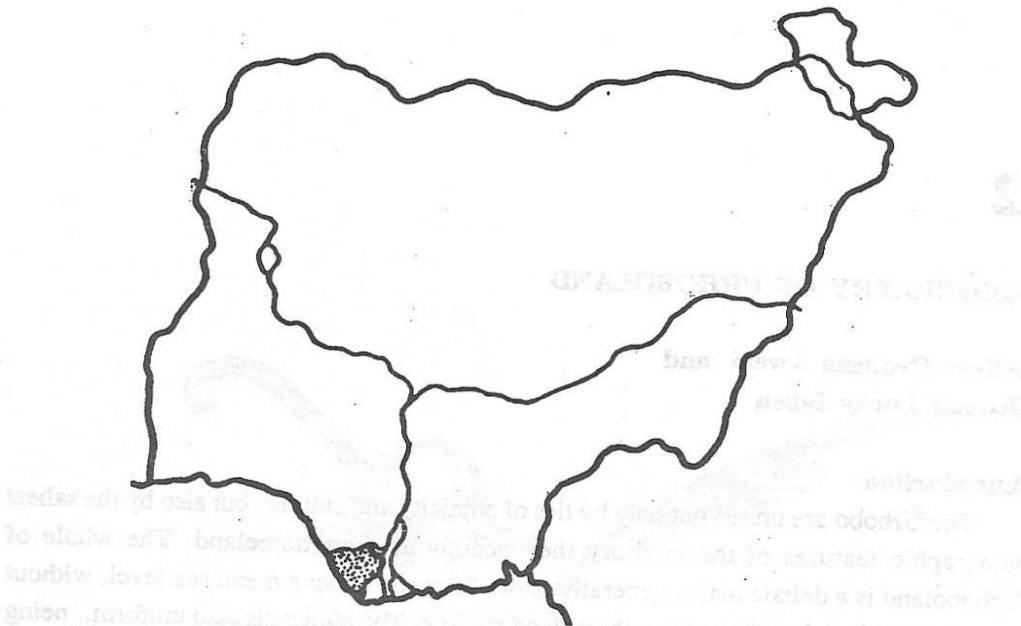
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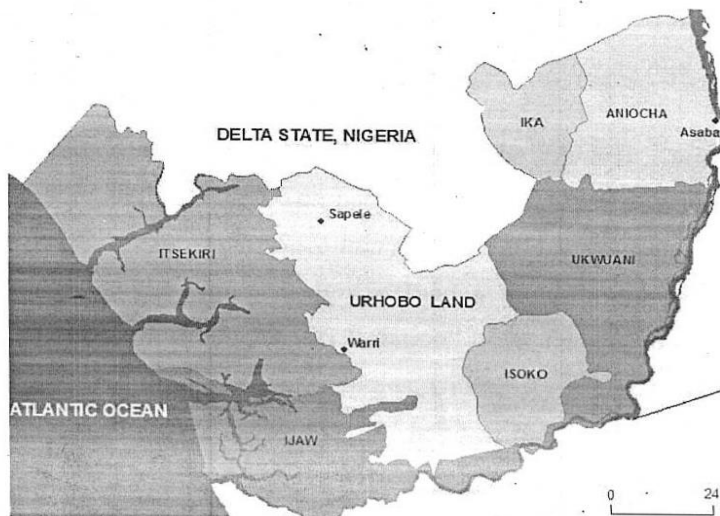
Colonialism,
Changes, King
(Ovie) , Elders and
title holders,
Native Court
System, Warrant
Chiefs and Urhobo
Taboos.

Abstract: Before Colonialism, Urhobo was autonomous and independent in their socio –political, economic and cultural life, but with the arrival of the British into their territory, they lost their autonomy and independence. The kings, chiefs, elders, ancestors, priests and priestess are the custodians of culture and tradition of the people. The Urhobo society was governed through native laws and customs which was basically judicial and legislative in nature, though the laws and customs vary from one community to another. The chiefs and elders etc are well versed in the knowledge of ordeals, taboos and oracle for dispensing of justice during the pre- colonial period. The colonial intervention led to the establishment of Native court System that was accompanied with the introduction of Warrants chiefs, court clerks, messengers, interpreters and other colonial government employees. The paper focused on colonialism and Changes in Urhobo Culture, 1891-1991. The purpose of the study is to examine the role of Urhobo traditional practices of ordeals, taboos, human sacrifices, totem, oracles and deities before colonial period and what happened to Urhobo tradition practices during colonial rule and after colonial rule. Although scholarly attention has been given to various aspects of Urhobo history, the socio- political, economic, and cultural influences of colonialism on Urhobo society, to the best of knowledge of the researcher, have not been subjected to critical historical evaluation. It is this gap in knowledge the study tries to fill. Method of data, relying on interviews, written sources of information to ascertain the position of existing literatures and other historical sources in private and public libraries in Urhobo and elsewhere in Nigeria.

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Map I: Map of Nigeria Showing The Location of Delta State.



Map of Delta state showing the location of the Urhobo territory

Source: Peter, P. K, (2005), (ed) *History of The Urhobo People of Niger Delta*, Oxford: African Books collective, P.5.

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INTRODUCTION

The European colonization of Africa has a long history because of the many and varied changes it brought to the continent. The prelude to this was the European Scramble for and the partition of Africa during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the process of colonization, colonizers may impose their religion, economic, politics, social and other cultural practices. Collin Andrew defines colonialism as the practices by which powerful nations directly controls less powerful countries and uses their resources to increase its own power and wealth (Idudu, 2003). Africa experienced major culture clashes which derived from the impact of economic, political, social and religious factors on the indigenous societies of Africa of which Urhobo was an integral part. European brought their tradition to implement and justify their presence in Africa. Africa offered Britain, France, Germany and other countries an open market for trade; a market that bought more from the colonial powers than it sold overall (Otite, 1973). From 1884-1885, African territory was randomly divided between European countries that tried to impose elements from their culture.

Nigeria came under effective colonization around 19th century. The British, having established a foothold in the areas surrounding the River Niger, after years of extensive trading and Christianization, began actively putting in place formal structure of colonization by way of government institutions and other political arrangements. In this way, the systematic

usurpation of the sovereignty of the various peoples living in the west, east and north of the River Niger by the British during the 19th century was ultimately achieved culminating in the colonization of the entire area. The British influenced, conditioned and patterned the political, economic and social system of the eventual Nigerian state.

Urhoboland which is the focus of this study is found mainly in Delta State of Nigeria where they constitute the largest ethnic group. They are spread over nine local government areas, namely; Ethiope East, Ethiope West, Okpe, Ughelli South, Ughelli North, Sapele, Udu, Uvwie and parts of Warri South. These local government areas are part of the twenty-five local government areas which make up Delta State. The Urhobo people inhabit the area lying roughly between latitude 5°15' and 6° north and longitudes 5° 40 and 6°25'.

The kingdom is made up of twenty-three clans, amongst which are Agbarha-Ame (Agbassah), Agbarhor-Otor, Agbarho, Agbon, Arhavwarien, Avwraaka, Ephron-Otor, Oghara, Ogor, Okere (Urhobo), Okparebe, Okpe, Olomu, Udu, Ughelli, Ughievwan, Ughwerun and Uvwie. The neighbours of the Urhobo are the Isoko to the south east, the Itsekiri to the west, the Benin to the north, the Ijo to the south and the Ndokwa to the north-east (Aghogho, 1989).

The Urhobo consist of over more than 2million people, according to the 1999 census. In both their homeland and other places in Nigeria and overseas in 2002, their population was estimated to be over 3million in



2002(Aghogho,1989). They belong to the people whose early history is shrouded in legends. Patrick Jakpa puts the area occupied by the Urhobo people to approximate 1870 kilometers. There are two main climatic seasons in this tropical area: the dry season from November to March, during which most of the streams dry up and the rivers ebb, and the wet season from April to October, when all the rivers and streams are full and parts of the land flooded. A short dry spell in August has the effect of creating two long and two short periods each, both rainy and dry seasons.

The Urhobo live in an area of land consisting of evergreen forests, now cleared in parts for farm and large numbers of oil palm trees. Between 1839 and 1840, Dr Daniel and John Beecroft navigated the Benin River, learnt something about Urhobo country and its people. Daniel Johnson tells us that "the Sobo country consists of an extensive series of fertile plains, thirty miles above Reggio beautifully ornamented with park-like clumps of trees and verdure of the freshest tint" (Otite, 1973). There are few low-lying swampy areas with mangrove forests. The physical feature of the territory shows the networks of rivers and streams, the most important of which are the Rivers Ethiope, Jamieson, Warri and Forcados, whose tributaries flow over virtually to all the lands of the Urhobo people. Until the construction of roads under the British colonial administration, the rivers provided the main physical routes through which social contacts with the Urhobo were possible.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION AND ECONOMY OF URHOB

In the traditional African society, government was based on the established customs and tradition. Though there were no written constitution as in the case of modern societies, the political organizations in each of the kingdoms, particularly in Urboboland were responsible for the administration of the societies(Okotie,2012). Thus, every society at one time or the other evolved its own peculiar or unique political system whose structure and functions were relevant to the institutionalization of social order and harmony. The idea of kingdom not only run through Africa in general, but also became the most dominant traditional political institution to the Urhobo in particular (Okotie,2012). The pre-colonial political organization of any Urhobo kingdom was built around a king known as Ovie and his Council of chiefs. Each kingdom in Urboboland has different titles and names for the Ovie. For example, in Agbon clan the Ovie known as Ogulimerime.

Like in other Urhobo kingdoms, the Ovie title is hereditary and indicates royalty with relationship to Bennin, the progenitor of the Kingdom. The political system of any of the clans in Urhobo operates patrilineal as from 1516-1530 under the rulership of Uzezi, the first Ovie, who was said to be a princess from Benin (Numa,2007). The pre-colonial Urhobo political system organization was built around the Ovie and the Oghowore the council member



In the economic matters, there were no major difference between the economic activities of the people of Urhobo kingdom and their counterparts in other Urhobo kingdoms in the pre- colonial period. Thus, before 1891, some of the economic activities the people engaged in included agriculture(farming), trade, manufacture, goldsmith and traditional industries such as weaving, black smithing, pottery, palm-wine tapping, wood work among others (Ikime,2003). The economy of the people of the kingdom changed from food crop production to cash crop production, especially 1890 due to the event of the era. The period 1890 onward has been described as the age of imperialism by some scholars such as Gallagher and Robinson (Gabriel, 1998). It has equally been stressed that the period 1915 and 1945 was significant in the economic history of West Africa of which Urhobo is an integral part. This is because, the period witnessed the growth of “cash economy” Which had its foundation in the development of the agricultural export product usually referred to as cash crops or exports crops (Ekundare,2005). From 1900 when the charter of the Royal Niger Company was withdrawn, however, the administration sought to exploit the access into Urhoboland which the Niger water way offered. As a result, Sapele, Abraka and Warri became the basis for advance into the Urhobo interior (Ekundare, 2005).

On the whole, therefore, there were three fronts along which British advances into Urhoboland took place. Of these, the Sapele – Abraka fronts was certainly the most important. In any case, it

was along that the first significant encounters between the administration of the Niger Coast Protectorate and the Urhobo took place. By 1890 or so, the states of the Oil Rivers had ceased to pose a serious threat to British imperial pretension. In fact, to such an extent that these states had accepted British imperium, that British consuls came to see it as part of their legitimate duties to champion and advance the interests of coastal traders especially of the Warri traders in the Southern Urhoboland (Odiete, 2010) In order, therefore, to establish itself, the Government was obliged to tackle the hard tasks of:

- (a) Pacification of the Urhoboland
- (b) Establishing a machinery for Indirect Rule through chiefs and Headmen
- (c) Clearing and improving the rivers and creeks to facilitate trade;and
- (d) Constructing Roads to Open up the Country.

Pacification of the Country.

Whether the more interior Urhobo would have resisted the government, if ever they could, is a question which admits of no consideration here at present, but it seems correct to say that the four punitive expedition two of them major, undertaken towards close of the 19th century facilitated government’s passage to the interior (Akpomudjere, 2007). The two major expeditions, namely, the Nana and the Benin Expedition, though not directly connected with Urhoboland, had a very far-reaching effect on the Urhobo people as a whole. Nana was respected and feared for his wealth and power,



and the Oba of Benin for his suzerainty and juju power. Most Urhobo did not believe that the Oba could be, and was in fact, captured by the White-man because of their belief in his juju power to transform himself into a spirit. With the captured, therefore, of those two acknowledged powers, the Urhobo people had no choice but submit to the conqueror (Akpomudjere, 2007).

The two other punishments, in the form of setting fire to each of the two Urhobo towns, clearly brought home to the people the practical evidence of the whiteman's superior power. Effuru was set on fire just a little over two months after concluding a protection treaty with the government. A dispute leading to stoppage of trade and the refusal of the head chief to answer charges connected them with were given as the cause for the action. The head chief, AnogboroOkpako, who was said to have caused the dispute was believed to be staunch adherent of chief Nana, and his actions were regarded as demonstration in favour of the chief Nana. (Akpomugdedjere,2007).

Accompanied by two other officers and 12 armed men from the Warri consulate, Major Copland-Crawford set fire to a town in the east, destroying only a part of it. (Onajite,2000). The local inhabitants known to the seizing traders and produce passing through a creek nearby had shot a man. The refusal of the Local Chief to surrender the offender, and the beating up of the Consulate Messenger sent to them necessitated the action.

Between 1901 and 1909, the Government was involved in a number of patrols. Beginning with Orhobor in 1901, the Kwale Patrol followed in the first quarter of 1904. In order to be able to bring under effective control that part of the country, however, it became necessary in 1905 to barrack the Patrol unit permanently at Abraka, where, as stated earlier, a Government post had been established since 1896. (Onajite,2000). The appointment of a District Commissioner to the station shortly after basing the unit strengthened the operation of the scheme for the administration of that part of the Urhobo country.

In April 1907, it became necessary for a patrol from the Warri district to visit Agbassa and Iyede. The people of the former place had refused to receive the Government and were said to be likely menace to the people of the surrounding country. Captain Beamish, with Mr. S.D. Simpson- Gray as Political Officer, visited and quieted the towns until early in 1908. When, owing to a further distributed state of Agbassah, a small force under Captain Wayling, with Major H.O. Swainton as a political Officer, entered the town on the 4th February (Ikime.2003). After a few days, the people expressed willingness to submit to Government. The two head chiefs captured were not allowed to return until the town became quiet again.

As the whole area had been effectively controlled, the Kware patrol unit was withdrawn in April, 1909 and replaced by a civil Police. One of the remarkable consequences of



those patrols and police movements reported, was the large number of cases of impersonation as Government Police or messengers in the inland towns. (Ikime, 2003). The impersonators took payment for settling cases, inflicting fines, seizing and flogging people, and causing trouble in different ways.

Establishing a Machinery for Indirect Rule through Chiefs and Headmen

With 1900 came a spate of enactments one of which is relevant here. It was “The Natives Courts Proclamation, No 9 of 1900” emended in the following year by the Native Courts Proclamation No 25. (Ikime, 2003). The Proclamation legalized the status and regularized the function of native Councils and Native Courts, a few of which had been in existence as far back as 1895. Two such Native Courts, serving the Urhobo country, were at Sapele and Warri. In 1900, however, more courts were established in the more In-land areas of the country.

The Native Councils and Native Courts system were the most important integral part in the machinery of the indirect rule. Whatever the critic may have to say against the system, it is doubtful whether he can deny the hard fact that the Native Councils and Native Courts were the only means which the government had then of reaching and governing the people. The need for the Councils and Courts were such that between 1900 and 1904, Government established in the Urhobo country not less than 9 Native Courts, appointed 174 Warrant chiefs with jurisdiction over 329 towns and villages. (Onajite, 2000).

Two of the Courts (Sapele and Abraka, later Okpara Waterside) were in the west and the remaining seven in the east of Urhoboland.

Religion, Socio-Economic, Political and Cultural changes under Colonial Rule, 1915-1951

The coming of Christianity in Urhobo has brought a lot of changes in the religious, social, political and cultural activities of the people. While missionaries helped to introduce new changes, they did not totally succeed in destroying some traditional practices in the town. For examples, the worship of traditional gods like *Omanuku*, *Ovughere*, *Eni* and others is still being practiced by the people. B.H. Thomas observed that it was in the religion area that Africa has seen the greatest changes and religion is the most important factor of traditional African life. (Etakibrunu, 2003). He goes on to explain how religion was in the heart of African culture since every aspect of Africa's life is given meaning and direction by religion. The disposition for religion or the belief in the divine in Africa culture resist change (Reginal, 2005). Some traditional festivals also continued to be celebrated. Even then, we have some Christians still participating in these festivals. For instance, Edubi family are members of Anglican Church in Okurekpo but they are also involved in *Ovughere* festival. (Ochuko, 2002). However, one thing is certain; most of the children of these religionists did not follow the footsteps of their parents. This is because of the impact of western education brought by the missionaries. The traditionalists realized the



importance of education and majority of them today, send their children to the mission schools and colleges, all of which had been taken over by the government. (Ekeh, 2006).

In light of these, some Urhobo people were converted to Christianity. The observance of some of their customs and traditions began to diminish and some hitherto held belief became obsolete though never completely. Several traditional taboos(taboo) were broken, forbidden forest (bad bushes) was cleared and converted to rubber plantations, sacred sports were discretely under colonial regime. These are the changes that colonialism brought into Urhobo culture. In the pre-colonial period, nobody plays with the norms and values of the Urhobo because those who violated them were punished by the deities. In Urhobo's belief, the 1953 census showed that out of a population of 1.2 million representing 96% were pagans,200 were Christians representing 2% of the population-insignificant number of the population but nevertheless an indication of the growth of Christianity. Father Catchman regards the above as conservative estimate. According to him, nowhere do people's culture and custom prevent them from taking to Christianity than in Urhobo. (Okpako,2003). To the titled men of Ughelli, Okpara Inland and Aghalokpe, conversion would mean the renunciation of their titles. These titles bestowed much respects on them and placed them in the position of the custodian of their people's culture. (Iboyi,2010).

However, there is peaceful co-existence between the Christians and the traditionalists in Urhobo today. Both of them have come to realize that they are out to achieve the same goal though by different processes. The Christians worship God, through His son, Jesus Christ, while the traditional religionists worship the same God, but through other mediums. Today, in Urhobo, some of the traditional systems of worship have been introduced to the churches, especially the indigenous churches. These deal with clapping of hands and drumming during services (Apona, 1978).

In fact, it is to this extent that the Pentecostal churches have thrived in Urhobo, with tremendous impact on the people. Indeed, the Pentecostal movements are by products of the orthodox missionary churches. Thus, the Pentecostals are not fresh convert from paganism, but deserters from the orthodox churches, namely, the Anglican and Roman Catholic from which some of the people had derived no religious satisfaction or spiritual consolation. In order words, the Pentecostal movement came into being because the exiting churches, they thought, were not Christian enough. Meanwhile, it is significant that even though the origin of the Pentecostal movements could be traced to the middle of the twentieth century, the current revival within Christianity in Urhobo started its movement proper in the 1980. (Okotie, 1980).

It is worth mentioning that some of these Pentecostal churches in Urhobo includes, the Christ Apostolic Church, the Redeemed



Christian Church of God, the Gospel Faith Mission International and to mention a few, all spread across the length and breadth of Urhoboland (Otite, 2003).

It is significant that the town of Urhobo also has sizeable number or population of Muslims. Indeed, Urhobo, like other ethnic groups in Delta State, is a mixture of adherents of Christianity and Islam. As well known, the town has produced well-meaning Muslims and radicals including the late Chief Akoro Odumagbo. (Ayomano, 1967). Islam too has made its impact in the town, even though not at the level of Christianity. Be that as it may be, the Urhobo are now enjoying the benefits of Western education brought by the missionaries. The town could boast of many educationists, professionals like doctors, engineers, lawyers and accountants, while many of her children, because of their education now hold responsible posts in the society and government. The health facilities provided by missionaries are still part of the cultural changes that took place in Urhoboland during the colonial rule and also being enjoyed in Urhobo. For example, the Eku Baptist Hospital is still the best staffed and the most well-equipped hospital in Urhobo, and the hospital offers its services to Christians, Muslims and pagans alike. (Arawore, 2010). Though Urhobo benefited from the health facilities provided by missionaries they still visited Urhobo native doctors, massagers and usage of native herbs for solutions.

Another area of cultural change was the attack on Urhobo traditional religion by the

missionaries. Urhobo did not witness any attack on their traditional religion until the coming of the missionaries into their land. The assaults were in difference dimensions. The churches were places where Urhobo traditional religion, culture and custom were roundly condemned.

Polytheism.

The Christians assailed Urhobo polytheism (Ekudare, 1973). The gods and goddesses were regarded as nothing but mere idols which possessed no powers. The Christian preached that there was one and only one God. God so loved the world that He gave His only beloved son that whosoever believed in Him would have life and abundantly. In spite of the cultural changes brought by colonialism, some Urhobo were committed to the worship of indigenous gods and goddesses such as *Omanuku*, *Ovughele* and *Oriri* etc till today. They strongly believe that these dieties serves as intermediaries between them and Almighty God (*Oghene Osonobrughe*) like Jesus Christ that played the role of intermediary between man and God Almighty (*Osanobrua*). Apart from the worship of these deities, there was also Igbe religious movement among the Urhobo people. It was a revolutionary movement in Urhobo traditional religion as result of the presence of Christianity, education, colonialism, science and technology in Urhoboland in found.

The first and the most popular among these sects is the one generally referred to as *Igben Oren*, (also known as *Igbe Orise*, *Igbe Oweya*, *Igbe Uku* and *Igbe Ubiesha*). It has a fixed day of worship in Urhoboland. The fixed day in the



week is called *Edewor*. It is regarded as holy day in Urhobo. Despite the changes brought by colonialism, many Urhobo people are still worshippers of Igbe religion. They have their shrines in Urhoboland and abroad where Urhobo are found. There is Igbe shrine in Britain. Former Deputy Senate President, Ovie Omogege is a member having his own shrine in Orogun, Delta State (Ekudare,1973).

Ancestor worship

Ancestor worship which was *an* aspect of Urhobo traditional religion witnessed cultural changes under colonialism. All ancestors are believed to live in the spirit world (*erivwi*). They are members of the family before their death. The Urhobo believe that even though they are dead physically, they are still living in the world of spirit seeing those they left behind in their family. The power of an ancestor to punish of fenders or to reward good behaviour is believed to be limited to his matrilineal descendants only. The ancestors, Christianity asserted, were dead, powerless men who would never come to the world again (Ekeh,2005). Thus, the whole idea of reincarnation in the eyes of Christianity was without basis. One thing that is fundamental about their belief system, Urhobo believe the existence of the ancestor in the spiritual world, from where they look at the affairs of men on earth. Though, there was an assault or attack on ancestral worship by the missionaries, many Urhobo still believe in ancestral worship till date.

Polygamy.

Other aspects of Urhobo's cultural life that came under attack and condemnation was the practice of polygamy. Urhobo believed in marrying many wives. Traditionally, a man's status is assessed and known not only through his wealth, but also through the numbers of wives, children and the size of his compound (Akpobi,2000). For the man, having many wives helps him to satisfy his sexual desires. Thus, when one or two wives are under menstruation, he still has other women to have sexual intercourse with.

The Urhobo did not believe the monophsite doctrine of marriage of "one man one wife" which the Christians believed in their religion but believed in polygamy, . This was the situation on ground before the arrival of the Christian missionaries. Those who at first held on to monogamy, later on changed to polygamy. Nevertheless, some of the die-hard monogamists eventually divorced their wives and marry new ones (Akpobi,2000).

This only indicates that an average African man is a polygamist, whatever the influence of Christianity on him in that aspect. According to the missionaries "a man should marry only one wife and vice-versa and the hands of the two should be joined in the church. After the marriage, the two would continue to live together until death separate them (Afigbo,1983)." Despite the missionaries' assaults of polygamy, Urhobo are still practicing it. The missionaries ruled against traditional burial ceremonies, which were seen as another



manifestation of “paganism” and superstition from which the people should be delivered as a matter of duty and very urgently too.

Marriage: Marriage is another area that witnessed cultural changes during colonial rule in Urhoboland. The western marriage system brought in by missionaries into Urhobo has affected Urhobo traditional marriage. This is because the western system of marriage is based on the doctrine of monogamy, which is alien to traditional Urhobo culture. Monogamous marriage consists of the exchange of mutual vows by the couple to the exclusion of other women. In this process, court marriage and wedding in the church became involved which is difference from what is obtainable in Urhobo tradition and culture. The tradition only stimulated payment of the bride price and others things to the family of girl and accepted by the girl family As soon as they are produced and accepted by family of the girl with prayers in the presence of the people, it become your wife. Urhobo culture only allowed the payment of the woman’s diary according to Urhobo tradition and culture and woman become your wife.

This has implications for the traditional concept of Urhobo marriage that allowed the husband to take other wives. The marriage is terminated on the death of either of the partners. This system of marriage confers properties rights upon the woman in the event of the husband’s death, as the next of kin (Akpore,2001). This is contrary to polygamous traditional Urhobo marriage system. In contrast, polygamous marriage

allows for family intervention or mediation in sharing the properties of the dead husband. On this perspective, the Urhobo men finds the western system of marriage as gross and unwanted interference upon their cherished tradition. They see it as a restriction and an infringement of what they have come to believe as their natural right to enjoy the marriage of many wives as they choose.

Widow Inheritance

The issue of inheritance was another factor of change in Urhobo culture during the colonial period. In the pre- colonial period, the issue of inheritance was very paramount in socio-religious life of the Urhobo people irrespective of the people’s background. When a man was age in Urhobo, the next people to inherit his properties and his wives after the death of the man were his family people. The first question people asked, if the deceased person has children and male child. If the deceased person has male child among the children the problem was solved, if not they continued to search within the family (Anene,1952). It does not require much debate if the first son was around because he will be the one to step into his late father’s shoe. This was the position of the Urhobo indigenous institution before the arrival of the colonial masters. Some of the Urhobo Christians found it difficult to inherit his late brother or father’s widow, which he considered to be a taboo or against his faith. Apart from this religious view advanced by them, western education also contributed to this refusal of accepting widow inheritance of their father and



brothers. To some christians, they did not cherish that aspect of the culture dealing on inheritance. (Akpomudjere,2007). On the part of Urhobo, the illiterates and educated agree to inherit the widow of their dead brother or father. Others who do not, however assist with the education and maintenance of their late brother's or father's children whenever they can. (Ekudare, 2001). If the first son refuses the offer from the family elders, the son authorized the family elders to look into the family to take over the widow. They take the responsibility to look for somebody in the family, if they cannot get someone, they allowed the widow to go home and re- marry as she wishes to do. But she is required to refund bride wealth made on her. When this has been done, she is then free to marry anyone she likes outside her late husband's family. Despite the assaults and condemnation of widow inheritance in Urhobo, both educated and uneducated Urhobo still practice widow inheritance (Ayuku,2006)

Urhobo People and Taboos

The belief of the Urhobo about traditional practices was another area of cultural change experienced during the period of colonialism. In the pre-colonial period, there were killing of twins, trials by ordeal, human sacrifice and facial scarification etc. Apart from these obnoxious practices, there were also the expulsion of women who gave birth to twins from the community, use of oracles for settlement of cases and others (Agbabune,1992). These were the taboos observed in Urhobo before the coming of the Europeans. There was

peace and harmony in the society when these taboos were being observed and celebrated festivals were attached to the worship of some of deities in the land. This was the picture of some of the taboos that was in place before the arrival of the missionaries and colonial masters. The missionaries were against these values and norms of the society and the courts were used as an instrument to stop these customs and traditions by inflicting injury on those who refused to submit to the law that abolished those practices (Atubi,2013). In pre-colonial period, there were no such courts to try taboo cases since what they were doing was normal to them and not against the norms of the society. In 1909, the Native Courts in Ughelli instituted proceedings for desertion and non support against men who drove away their wives for giving birth to twins. The ones found guilty of the offences were punished and others sent to six months imprisonment with hard labor. The men agreed to take back their wives while many other men learnt their lessons from the fate of their neighbors (Ikime,1969).

The colonial government intervention succeeded to some extent to wept out this practice through the Native Courts but there were still cases of human sacrifice, trial by ordeal and facial scarification and other rituals done secretly during the celebration of this festivals, though security agents were always on ground when these festivals are celebrated. The Christians also condemned murder in all its forms. In fact, they noted that God's fifth commandment was that" thou shall not kill"



This was a direct attack on Urhobo's practice of killing twins or cassava thieves. The rituals and sacrifice accompanying title takings and second burial ceremonies were regarded as unchristian

Death and Burial

Death triggers sorrow and mourning except abnormal death in Urhobo. A person who died leaving children behind leaves a good life and such was given full burial rites. It was abnormal death, if the deceased was a young man and had many children yet to bring up. The death of this young man was not given a benefiting burial. (Ayuku,2006). This was how it was done during the pre-colonial period, but with the arrival of the missionaries there was a change to some extent in the burying system. Though the burial was still done according the Urhobo tradition and culture. In pre-colonial period, once a man is dead, the person is buried immediately or they used local ogogolo or gin to preserve the body for some time before burial. The missionaries did not classify death into categories, once you are dead, the deceased person will be kept in the mortuary for sometime depending on the children purse and then take deceased person to commentary for burial irrespective of his social and religious belief (Arawore, 2010). There was nothing like evil forest or bury close to the river. The final thing to be done after the cemetery, they return home for entrainment of guest and the burial ended.

In Urhobo indigenous institution, they believe the first and second burial, which the missionaries ruled against, as another

manifestation of" paganism" and superstition from which the people should be delivered as a matter of duty and very urgently too (Davidson,2000). In Urhobo tradition institution, first burial take place immediately after the death of the man without being announced to the public but the second burial takes place depending on how wealthy the children of the deceased are. It is believed that without the second burial, the deceased person would not be properly introduced to his/her ancestors in the spiritual world called "*eriwin*". He will not be eating where they eat since they would personally drive him/her away from their mist. It was believed that the deceased person will be eating on dunghill or midden (*everunu*) (Brown, 1931). This was another area that Urhobo experienced a change in their culture due to colonialism.

Another area of conflict was the number of days the burial lasted. The second burial lasted for a native week (four days) and is uniform throughout Urhoboland. This period witnessed the shooting of guns and cannons from time to time. It is noted that a well-prepared food was also served and put inside the coffee of the deceased person that will be eaten while on his journey to the world of spirit. Funeral songs were sung and the occasion also witnessed slashing of trees and plantain leaves in that environment. (Ade-Ajayi,1965). Throughout the native week of four days, there would be, feasting, dining and dancing. The burial ceremony would be rounded off on the fourth day by firing the last gunshot and cannon called



ajerivwikpo (chasing away spirits). It was believed that there were as many spirits as there were many human beings attending second burial ceremony. After the ceremony was rounded off, a goat was killed immediately and the blood would be used to rub the wall of the deceased compound (Onisuru, 1987).

Changes in Urhobo Traditional Judicial System

Colonialism which was fundamental in the life of the Urhobo also brought changes in their traditional judicial system. Before colonialism, Urhobo was autonomous and independent in their socio- political life but with the arrival of the British into their territory, they lost their autonomy and independence. From that time, they depended on the colonial state for their laws and rules and after their departure, they later depended on Nigerian state for their rules and laws (Akpore,2001). The traditional political system where elders and kings of the Urhobo were relevant was suppressed by colonial regime who introduced colonial laws and rules. Their freedom was curtailed, subjugated and therefore depended on colonial government for their socio-political survival. In the pre-colonial period, the Urhobo practiced gerontocracy being government of the elders based on age grade organization. The elders are the custodian of the culture and tradition of the people. They governed the people under its unwritten laws and constitution (Afigbo,1983). The machinery for decision- making and implementation were structured along the

various segments of the Urhobo society. These are the family, village and the clan.

The people were usually tried by those who knew them very well during the pre-colonial period and not foreign judges from Itsekiri, Ijaw, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and Colonial Officials as they witnessed during the colonial period (Ikime,1969). They also used their local language to try them in Urhobo Village Assembly and not English language as it was done during the colonial regime. This was a sharp contrast to what obtains under colonial government with the establishment of Native Court and Native Councils. (Otite, 1973). These courts were not only expected to serve as tribunal of justice but were also regarded as the local executive arms of colonial government.

The establishment of these courts are very strange in Urhobo traditional judiciary system, which are also part of changes in Urhobo culture and tradition in Nigeria. In the pre-colonial period, trial was by ordeal especially cases involving witchcraft. The hand of the accused was rubbed medicine and he was ordered to pick a heated head of an iron axe from a huge fire and to walk about twenty-five yards with it. If the accused did it without sustaining any blisters, he was considered innocent (Ekeh,2005). Again, the establishment of these Native courts was accompanied with the introduction of Warrant chiefs, clerks, messengers and interpreters into Urhobo judicial system which are not found in Urhoboland during the pre-colonial period. Punishments for offenders were stipulated.



These included imprisonment with or without labor or flogging and fines. The court clerk of the native courts determines the gravity of the offence whether case to be tried a civil or criminal in the colonial judicial system. In Urhobo traditional judicial system, it was the village elders, chiefs or the Ovie (king) and his council of chiefs in the clan that determines cases that are civil or criminal because they are the custodian of culture and tradition of the people and not the clerks, who did not know the culture and tradition of the Urhobo. Majority of the clerks are from Ijaw, Itsekiri, Igbo, Yoruba etc hence there was miscarriage of justice. Ekeke, an Itsekiri man, who until 1916 was a member of the Warrant Native Court, had his warrant transferred to Okpare Native Court in Urhoboland, because he decided to settle at Okpare as a trader. The District Officer commented:

I cannot quite understand why he (Ekeke), an Itsekiri man should hold an official position as warranted chief in a town which being composed entirely of Sobo he by no means represents (Ikime, 1998).

In spite of the changes brought by the colonial government into Urhobo judicial system, some aspects of Urhobo culture and tradition were upheld in colonial judicial system. For example, in native court presided over by a native authority, which is known as minor court. In this native court, the Urhobo were allowed to use their own local language as means of communication and also applied Urhobo culture, custom and tradition in the native court

of the colonial government despite the changes brought by colonialism.

Changes in Health Sector.

Changes also occurred in the health sector in the form of cultural revolution in Urhobo and this was mainly engendered by the missionaries. In this angle, efforts were made by the British towards the prevention and treatment of diseases. In pre-colonial Urhobo, leprosy was a scourge. Small pox was endemic and took a great toll on life to the extent that it acquired the bad name of *Ogalo-whiwo brubu* – “the disease that kill in large numbers” (Okotiebo, 1983). Since the belief was that the diseases were incurable because they were inflicted by some supernatural powers as a punishment, patients were not treated and were allowed to die in the event of which they were thrown into the “bad bush” without burial rites. To alleviate the sufferings, the missionaries-built dispensaries, clinics, maternity homes and hospitals in addition to mounting a campaign designed to show that the belief was a mere superstition.

In 1939, land was acquired at “Oshomo” along Eku-Abraka Road by Catholic Mission and there, a leprosy settlement was started with Dr. Duncan leading four other medical personnel-Sister Dr John Mabel and three other sisters (Otite, 2000). Clan segregation centers for leprosy patients were later opened at Ughelli, Isoko, Itsekiri, Kwale and Ijaw. Further control of the diseases and sanitation was encouraged through the enforcement of certain health rules. Again, small pox had taken the lives of many in Urhoboland. Onigu Otite put the number of



those who died in the process to be 420 people (Ade-Ajayi, 1965). Its epidemics occurred in 1928 and 1943 with serious outbreaks in Okpara Water Side and Ughelli respectively. Vaccinators were sent from Oshiomomo and Ijaw to handle the situation. The outbreaks were on each occasion brought under control to the pleasant surprise of the Urhobo. There was the provision of good water through the digging of well as encouraged by the British. As regards treatment of the diseases, dispensary was set up at Ughelli. This unit was then using the house of Ekewho, S.A for its services. Mr J.O. Akpomudge was permanent dispensary attendant in charge of the dispensary unit that was transferred from Orerokpe, the then headquarters of Western Urhobo Division. (Okotiebor,1983). By 1940, a permanent dispensary was built at Eku and Sapele.

In the pre-colonial and part of colonial Urhobo, there was adequate but dirty and unhealthy supply of water for seven months of the year and for the remaining five there was scarcity. Water was stored in the period of scarcity in large shallow pools or drum “*Ikuru*” which became foul. As a result, water borne diseases, especially guinea-worm, were alarmingly prevalent. In fact, in 1932, Chapman estimated that about 75 percent of Urhobo population suffered from the guinea worm. (Anene,1952). Besides medical treatment of the guinea worm, a campaign against bad drinking water, a simple and inexpensive form of water supply (well boring) were measures taken to combat the guinea worm disease, but many Urhobo still

continued to believe that guinea worm was something in their blood and not caused by bad drinking water.

With the successful treatment of these diseases, the type of belief which the Urhobo previously had about them changed. The result was healthier attitude towards western medicine as expressed in their greater patronage of hospitals and dispensaries, although in some cases, the traditional medical clinic was patronized alongside with them. Part of European explanation for the increase of African population during the colonial period was improved medical services. If this claim is anything to go by, Urhobo population rose from 569,895 in 1928 to 878,978 in 1953 (Afigbo, 1983). It is true that better medical services were a factor responsible for the rapid increase of Urhobo population but not exclusively. Natural population increases, better form of enumeration and Urhobo’s improved attitude towards census may have accounted for the increase than improved medical services

Recommendations

1. Urhobo people and taboos: In this area, there were killing of twins, trial by ordeals, human scarifies and facial scarification during the pre-colonial period until the British Colonial government stopped it. Though, there was peace and harmony in Urhobo Society but the system was bad. On this ground, the culture should be discarded.
2. On the issue of widow inheritance: Christianity and western education had influenced this aspect of the culture to accept a



widow. Christianity was seriously against it. Urhobo believed in a continuation of the family lineage after the death of the husband. People should be encouraged to accept widow if the need arises.

3. **Death and Burial:** The normal expectation among the Urhobo is that a death person must be buried properly for easy passage of the spirit of the death person to great beyond. Traditionally, the expenses connected with burial was not much but now, it involves much money to foot it especially the death of a prominent man or a titled chief. People should be encouraged to go back to the pre-colonial period that involves less amount of money to do a burial.

4. **Marriage:** Marriage is another area that witnessed a culture change during the colonial period in Urhoboland. The Urhobo people believed in polygamous marriage that allows marrying many wives while the missionaries believed in monogamous marriage, which consist of exchange of mutual vow by the couple to the exclusion of other women. For the men, having many wives helped them to satisfy their sexual desires thus, when one or two wives were under menstruation, he still have other women to have sexual intercourse with. This aspect of the culture should not be undermined by the western influence.

Conclusion

Against this background, it is understood that in spite of the pervading influence of British Administration, the socio –political, economic and religious system of Urhobo was not entirely

swept away. Though some aspects of the socio – political and economic system were resilient to the corroding influence of colonial rule, a few aspects of the system still endure till the present day. Thus, in order to appraise the impact of colonial administration, one can submit that though British Administration was exploitative and disruptive to some pre-colonial indigenous institutions like marriage institution, indigenous system of judicial, death and burial, among others a number of benefits which were accrued to Urhobo society, Urhobo town in particular during the colonial period led to urbanization of the town. Practically, every part that made up the division was affected positively by these changes. However, the degree intensity of these changes varied from community to community in the division.

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Advance Journal of Education and Social Sciences

Adv. J. Edu. Soc. Sci

Volume: 9; Issue: 9

September, 2024

ISSN: 2237 – 1470

Impact Factor: 6.81

Advance Scholars Publication

Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development

<https://aspjournals.org/ajess>



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