

Ijaw and Ilaje Relations since 1960: A Historical Discourse

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Abstract

One intriguing fact about Nigerian History is its evolutionary trend. The Country went through various phases before arriving at her present state. The amalgamation of the Southern Protectorate with the Lagos Colony in 1906 and the eventual Contraction of the Southern and Northern Protectorates were all actions by the Colonialists to bring "Strange bed fellows" together for their interest. However long before the European incursion into Nigeria, the people have long had contacts of different types one of which was the Ijaw and Ilaje relationship. The Ijaw and Ilaje communities of present Ondo State have had a long standing relationship, unfortunately this long standing relationship began to witness "Cracks" from 1960 which eventually led to a pro-long disagreement between them. This Study examines the relationship between the Ijaw and Ilaje ethnic groups from 1960 to date. Their age long relationship will be examined which x-rays all aspects of their contact- marriage, trade, religion and the events that eventually led to the conflict between them.

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation, with arguably over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups living together as a nation. Most of these ethnic groups have their uniqueness in terms of culture. This cultural differences played a

significant role in their later interactions with groups around them. Long before European incursion into Africa, there had been social interactions which made them rely on one another for one thing or the other. Due to these social interactions, no ethnic group can stand on their own, hence the need to inter-relate. Groups identify in Nigeria, like elsewhere in Africa, is extremely complex, with national identity, religion, ethno-linguistic group, tribe and clan allegiances all competing for scarce resources. As posited by Adebayo (2013) ethnic groups in Nigeria inter-relate and depend on themselves on a variety of things, even historically, any of the ethnic groups cannot be alienated from each other, hence the main crux of the current study would be to examine the relationship between two ethnic groups in Nigeria, which are the Ijaw ethnic group and the Ilaje group. Both ethnic groups are situated along the coastal line of the Nigerian nation in present day Ondo State.

The Ijaw are not a member of the Yoruba ethno-linguistic group that includes the Ilaje. Minorities at Risk (2003) describes the Ijaw as distinct ethnic group, an elaborate historiography of the Ijaw goes to great lengths to explain that the Ilaje sought refuge among the Ijaw in Ondo State and therefore the Ijaw presence in Nigeria predates that of Ilaje, a claim which was outrightly rejected by the Ilaje. The same historiography claims that the Ijaw are not only the autochthonous people of the Niger Delta, but in fact of the entire country. Eferusua, J.E. B et al (2010) while elaborating on that holds that despite the political nature of such a version of history, it is useful in so far as it highlights the clear perception of ethnic difference between the Ijaw and the Ilaje. The current study would embark on an historical trip, tracing the interaction between the two ethnic groups since 1960 up till date. Although history has identified series of wrangling between the two ethnic groups, which according to Alabi (2010) is almost normal because individuals, groups, associations, clubs, and societies, local, national and even world communities continue to experience conflicts and crises in one way or the other. Conflicts and crises are

features of life and they have been since the beginning of creation. Conflicts between darkness and light and even between and among the first set of human beings created on earth. So, conflicts and crises are permanent features of life which we have come to live and cope with from time to time. Their existence cannot be terminated in life unless we want to terminate life itself, but focus would also be placed on the other aspects of their interaction such as culture, economy, and spiritual life.

Adebayo (2014) in his model of symbolic interactionism identified the concept of dynamism in interacting situation which entail the changes between the interactor and the interacting situation, hence between 1960 till date many factors could have contributed to changes in aspects of interaction between the two ethnic groups. Ogunleye (2012) was of the opinion that ethnic group conflicts could bring about changes in relation, and it must be noted that the ethnic divide between the Ijaw and the Ilaje erupted into violence in the later part of 1990. In 1998 and 1999 violent clashes broke out in Ondo State between the Ilaje and the Arogbo-Ijaws, leaving hundreds dead, At the end of July 1999, the Ilajes reportedly launched a series of raids against the Ijaws to re-capture villages held by the Ijaws since the problems in 1998/99. Ilaje spokespersons claimed to have recaptured 51 out of the 58 villages and towns they had lost previously to the Ijaw (Maier, 1999). A report by a fact finding committee in 1999 stated that the cause of the fighting was due to the ownership of "disputed land that is rich in oil and located near the Atlantic coast. However, since the deadly clash of 1981 there have been no reports of similar Ilaje-Ijaw clashes in Ondo state elsewhere, but it could have actually redefined the interaction system. Nigeria been a heterogeneous nation, with flashes of violence across the geopolitical zones, the current study could serve as a blue print for the government and all stakeholders in preferring a lasting solution to various cases of ethnic conflicts in the country and also engender more cordial inter-ethnic group relations in Nigeria, which is of utmost important in ensuring peace in Nigeria. More

so the study would add to the body of knowledge on inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria.

Geographical Description of the Study Area

The Ijaw people of Ondo State are found in the Ese-Odo and Odigbo Local Government Areas. While the Ijaw Apoi and the Ijaw Arogbo are in the Ese-Odo Local Government, that is, the north-eastern side of Ilaje land, the Furupagah Ijaw are located in the Odigbo Local Government. Essentially, there are three stocks of the Ijaw in Ondo State-Furupagha, Apoi and Arogbo. Like their counter-parts, the Ijaw are predominantly riverine people, found mostly in towns and villages around the creeks and the lagoons. Such include the creeks between Fiyebasintei and Ogidigba, between Awodikuro and Ogidigba, between America-Zion and Ebiaye, between Ogidigba and Ajapa and between Biagbini and Akpata. Others include Igbekebo through Kalaji to Kiribo in Afogbo and Apio Kingdoms, and from Ebijo to Taribo in Odigbo Local Government Area.

The Ilaje and Ijaw the communities are located in the coastal and riverine areas of Ondo State, Nigeria. The Ilaje communities are bordered in the West by the Ijebu in Ogun State, to the East by the itshekiri in Delta State, to the north by the Ikale also of Ondo State, to the north-east by the coastline of about 130 kilometers. Formerly known as the Mahin Districtu, the Ilaje land became a part of the Ondo Province in 1915. In the Western front, the boundary between the Ilaje and Ijebu runs for about thirty-two kilometers around the north west of the Mahin District of Ilaje. The Ikale boundary runs a few kilometers north of the Talita River. The Oluwa river to the north separates Ilaje land from the settlement of the Kalashuwe of Ijaw Apoi, while the boundary between Ugboland and that of the second Ijaw group under the new Agadagba of Arogbo is being disputed by all the parties. The boundary between Ugboland of Ilaje and the Itshekiri is a straight line which runs from the shore for about two and a half kilometers south east of Odun Ebighan. There are in existence large creeks

and lagoons inland and one of such is the waterway at Atijere which is about 365 metres wide. To its north are many tributaries of River Talita. At Agerige is the Alape Lagoon which is even wider than the one at Atijere and its narrow neck at Igbokoda divides the Talita from an offshoot of the Oluwa River. The Oluwa River also flows from Idiogba to Igbokoda and the Idiogba-Gbennefa waterway is a narrow but busy canal through which people, goods and services are transported to all parts of Ilaje land.

Historically like most Yoruba sub-national groups, the Ilaje believe that their progenitor Oronmaken migrated from Ile-Ife to their present place of abode around 7th and 8th centuries. Their perception of their historical origins is however slightly different from the rest Yorubas who usually trace their ascendancy to Oduduwa who is widely believe to be the Progenitor of the entire Yoruba race. According to them, the Ugbo Kingship had already been in existence in Ile-Ife before the migration of Oduduwa to the place around the 8th century. With the arrival of Oduduwa in Ile-Ife, the political situation of the Ugbo changed dramatically as Oduduwa was believed to have seized the reins of governance there and pronounced himself the new ruler. The assertion of the exponents of this position is that, on arrival, Oduduwa in Ile-Ife, the political situation of the Ugbo changed dramatically as Oduduwa was believed to have seized the reins of governance there and pronounced himself the new ruler. The assertion of the exponents of this position is that, on arrival, Oduduwa did not meet on empty land mass, but rather, a group of people (the Ugbo) had already occupied the place. The ensuing political disputes from the change of leadership in Ile-Ife, compelled Oronmaken whose father was the King of the Ugbo-the original inhabitants of Ile-Ife to migrate to the present places of abode of the Ilaje. (Erejuwa, 2000).It is believed that Oshun who held the title of Omaranpetu (Ifa Priest) migrated from Lie-Ife about the time of his kin Oranmiyan, the first Oba of Benin left Ife and migrated to Oge near Benin where he

became the Ogenikara. His children, however sojourned at various places including Umumaran, Ujomo and Uparamolado. The most popular and perhaps also controversial of his children was Alagwe. After having quarreled with the Oba of Benin and the Olu of Warri, he was driven from Abalagwe (which he founded near Benin River). Subsequently, he took refuge at Iparamo (a hiding place) on the Ajapa creek, about seventeen kilometers south east of Mahin which is near to Ahaja. Later Ahaja introduced Alagwe to Olugbo who permitted him to live with the Itshekiri prince (Ahaja). Eventually Alagwe's son, Agoro, became the fourth Amapetu. One pertinent point here is that Oshun's children that settled in various locations before arriving at Mahin, largely constituted the aborigines of the land and the different quarters into which Mahin has been divided. Finally, the Aheri Ilaje's oral tradition traced a historical linkage with the ugbo people, and in fact, Aheri regarded as a half-brother to the Olugbo. Aheri first settled at Ileoja near the Oropo Lagoon before moving to the hinterland. Later his descendants founded Uhapen Lila along the shores of Alape Lagoon. From there also they founded Agerige and other villages that constitute the Ilaje Aheri within the Ilajeland.

On the other hand, the Apoi and Arogbo Ijaw are neighbours to Ilaje and Ikale (two sub-groups of the Yoruba). The Apoi have established the following nine towns over time: Igbekebo, Igbobini, Kiribo, Oboro Igbotu, Shabimi, Inikorogha, Ojuala and Ikpoke. Their Kinsmen and women, that is the Arogbo and Furupagha live to the south and to the east across River Siluko respectively; and also to the north and to the west live the Ikale and Ilaje respectively. In view of the prolonged exposure to the Yoruba culture, most of them have been socialized into the Yoruba language and culture.

In his History of the Niger Delta, Alagoa argues that the Apoi had located the Brass Division of the Rivers State as their place of origin, that is central Delta. Alagoa however submits that Kolokuma was their particular place

of origin. The legend of the Apoi people has it that Apoi, one of the seven sons of Kalaokun (who was the fore-father of Kolokuma and founder of the Opoidani lineage of the Kolokuma) left with his grandfather, Ijo (Kalasuo) for the Apoi Creek and established the Apoi clan in the Western part of Ijo, that is Ukomu in the region of Furupagha. After a prolonged stay, a row broke out between them and the Oba of Benin, and eight out of the nine lineages had to leave for Akpaka, about one and a half kilometers from modern Kiribo. With time, these lineages began to migrate to other areas and subsequently founded the new settlements of Igbobini, Inikorogha, Igbotu, Obore, Ojuala, Shabomi, Kiribo and Ikpoki (an offshoot of Kiribo) was promoted to a new status of the ninth in the new area. According to Alagoa, the period of acculturation into Yoruba way of life began during the early 19th century or late 18th century (Alagoa 1972). In the opinion of Alagoa, the Arogbo Ijaw migrated from Kolokuma Gbaran to Ujo Gbaran. From Kolokuma Gbaran, they also moved further to Obroza Gbaramatu and to Iparama which is the current location of Apata, Opuba, Ajapa and Upe towns. From Iparama, after a prolonged stay, they moved westward to the present town of Arogbo. The three lineages believed to have migrated from Gbaran are Aguobirin, Egbesuburi and Kapabibi. Among the Ilaje, it is believed that the Ijaw's arrival coincided with the reign of the tenth Olugbo of Ugbo, Oba Akereti who granted them (Ijaw) permission to settle with the prince Ugbo (Prince Omodogbe) at Orogbo. The Ijaw leader that was believed to have been granted this permission was Fayaweh.

Meanwhile, the Ilaje have argued that Fayaweh and his followers were a troublesome lot that had earlier settled around Warri and Benin areas but were later driven out by the Olu of Warri and later by the Oba of Benin. Specifically, the row broke out when Lodeoma Subagene (an Ijaw clan leader) gave his daughter (Dahume) to the Olu of Warri who was later accused of killing her for rituals. Subsequent investigations revealed that the woman died naturally, as opposed to being a victim of ritual killing.

Consequently, the Olu of Warri had to expel Fayaweh and his group from Warri. Fayaweh and his followers were believed to have migrated from Ofunama to Kansa and Ikere under the protection of the Olubini or the Oba of Benin. Upon being informed of the deeds of Fayaweh and his followers by Olu of Warri the Oba of Binin, without hesitation also expelled Fayaweh and his group. It was at this point that Fayaweh and his followers arrived at Akotogbo where they met Akennugbe, the then Alarogbo who agreed to introduce them to Prince Omodogobe, a representative of Olugbo of Ugbo at Orogbo. From there, the Alarogbo and Prince Madogbe accompanied Fayaweh and his followers to Oba Akereti who was the tenth Olugbo of ugbo. It was there this Oba granted Fayaweh and his team permission to settle at Orogbo. This was how Fayaweh and his people became known as Ijaw Orogbo which the Ijaw mispronounced as 'Arogbo', hence the concept of 'Ijaw Arogbo' emerged. The Arogbo Ijaw then worshipped Egbesu (a god) whose Chief priest is Agadagba. The title of "Agadagba" is what the overall traditional ruler of Arogbo Ijaw has currently adopted.

There are also other sides of the story about the historical background of the Ijaw ethnic group according to the stories, the 1st migration out of Otu-Ife (or Ile-Ife as it was later to be known) was led by Prince Ujo (alias Idekoseroake) mentioned in the ancestral tradition as being the first son of King Adumu. Prince Ujo along with the warlord Ogu (Ogun) was war commanders in the military alliance, who took part in the battles that were fought to subdue the hostile Ooyelagbo communities and established the Yoba Kingdom. Between 650-700 AD Prince Ujo led his migration out of Ife to the Benin region, where he encamped and established a settlement (Uzama) that later was to become the basis of Benin City. At this time other Oru people, as well as the Efa people were settling the Benin region. Prince Ujo's instructions were to go the Niger Delta, and established a strategic base from which to defend the coastal region. Clearly his father King Adumu, regarded the whole southern

region as a virgin territory which he would bring under his direct control. Prince Ujo proceeded to the central Niger Delta with his followers and came across isolated ancient communities of Oru people in remote settlements of the central Delta. Together with these people they formed viable communities in the central delta originally based on the City-State formation. This was the birth or genesis of the Ijo people. The Kumoni-Oru who settled the Niger Delta with the most ancient inhabitants known as the Oru (TOBU OTU) gave birth to the Ijos. The original settlements were in the western & central delta, from where they spread out to people the whole Niger Delta. This period has been estimated to have occurred between 500BC to 100AD. These original ancestors were spiritual initiates of the ancient African spiritual initiation system of the CREATOR TEM (TEMUNO). They made heavy symbolic ritualistics use of the water, and hence have been referred to as the “water people” (beni-out). Later on between 1200/1600AD the Ijos of the Niger Delta received immigrants from their relatives living at Benin and the lower Niger regions, who were fleeing the various upheavals and power struggles of Benin City during the time of the 2nd dynasty. They collectively gave birth to the Ijo nation with its City-states and collective Clan communities. Thus the birth of the Ijo people, otherwise known by the ancient name of ORU. Some of the Kumoni/Oru remained behind at Benin region, indeed a section of the Oru known as the Beni, who had come from the Sudan (NupaTU or Napata) through Nupe, gave the name Beni to some of the newly emerging settlements. These were the Oru or Ijos of Benin City who later on between the 12th/15th centuries AD fled into the delta to escape the upheavals of Benin City. Along with the EFA people they were quite prominent at Benin during the 1st Kingdom between 650-1150AD.

Ijaw Clan Ancestry/Tribes

The ancestor UJO, IJO (alias IDEKOSEROAKE), also known as UZON, IZON, IZONOWEI, KALASUO, ORU, INDO-ORU & OGULABIOWEI. THE FIRST PERE (RULER) and ancestor of the whole ethnic nationality.

The ancestor ASAIN seer/priest and companion to UJO and founder of the original Ijo community at Abo.

The ancestor GBARAN, ancestor of GBARAN town in Apoi (Southern-Ijo), GBARANMATU, AROGBO, TUOMO, KABO, KUMBO AND GBARAN CLANS.

The ancestor OPU-BENI, ancestor of the MEIN, IBENI (OYAKIRI), OBOTEBE KALABABRI CLANS

The ancestor OPU-OKUN, ancestor of the OPUKUMA CLAN

The ancestor KALA-OKUN (alias ALUKU-DOGO), ancestor of the KOLOKUMA, APOI, IBANI CLANS, and sections of NEMBE, TUNGBO, BUSENI, OKODIA.

The ancestor APOI, ancestor of the APOI, UKOMU & AKASSA CLANS

The ancestor TARA, ancestor of the TARAKIRI, & ANDONI CLANS

The ancestor OPU-OGBO, ancestor of the EKPETIAMA & SEIMBIRI, EPIE-ATISSA CLANS and sections of WAKIRIKE & NKORO

The ancestor KALA-OGBO (alias OGURU), ancestor of the IDUWINI & EGBEMA CLANS

The ancestor OPORO, ancestor of the OPOROMA & OPEREMO, BASAN, FURUPAGHA, OGBE-IJO, CLANS

The ancestor OLODI (alias IGBEDIGBOLO), ancestor of the OLODIAMA CLANS, and sections of NEMBE

The ancestor OGULA, ancestor of the OGULAGHA CLAN

The ancestor OGULA, ancestor of the OGULAGHA CLAN

The ancestor KURU, ancestor of the KRUS? of Liberia

The ancestor OYAN, ancestor of the OGBO-OYAN (OGBIA CLAN)

The ancestor BOMOU, ancestor of the BOMA CLAN

The ancestor IBI (OBI), ancestor of the OGBOIN, WAKIRIKE CLANS, and sections of NEMBE

The ancestor KENI-OPU-ALA, ancestor of the KE

The ancestor ORU, ancestor of the KULA CLAN

The Ijaw speak nine closely related Niger-Congo language, all of which belong to the Ijoid branch of the Niger-Congo tree. The primary division between the Ijo language is that between Eastern Ijo and Western Ijo, the most important of the former group of languages being Izon, which is spoken by about four million people.

There are two prominent groupings of the Izon language. The first, termed either Western or Central Izon (Ijaw) consist of Western Ijaw speakers: Ekeremor, Sagbama (Mein), Bassan, Apoi, Arogbo, Boma (Bumo), Kabo (Kabuwei), Ogboin, Tarakiri, and Kolokuma-Opokuma (Yenagao). (Citation needed) Nembe, Brass and Akassa (Akaha) dialects represent Southeast Ijo (Izon). Buseni and Okordia dialects are considered Inland Ijo (Alagoa:1972)

The other major Ijaw linguistic group is Kalabari. Kalabari is considered an Eastern Ijaw language but the term "Eastern Ijaw" is not the normal nomenclature. Kalabari is the name of one of the Ijaw clans that reside on the eastern side of the Niger-Delta (Abonnema, Buguma, Bakana, Degema etc). who form a major group in Rivers State, hence their involvement in the fight for greater oil control. Other "Eastern" Ijaw clans are the Okrika, Ibani (the natives of Bonny, Finima and Opobo) and Nkoroo. They are

neighbours to the Kalabari people in present day Rivers State, Nigeria. Other related Ijaw subgroups which have distinct languages but very close kinship, cultural and territorial ties the rest of the Ijaw are the Epie-Atissa, Engenni (also known as Egene) and Degema (also called Udekama or Udekaama). These groups speak Delta Edoid languages. The Ogbia clan, Andoni people, as well as residents of Bukuma and Abuloma.

It was discovered in the 1980s that a nearly extinct Berbice Creole Dutch, spoken in Guyana, is partly based on Ijo lexicon and grammar. Its nearest relative seems to be Eastern Ijo, most likely Kalabari (Kouwenberg: 1994). The Ijaw were one of the first of Nigeria's peoples to have contact with Westerners, and were active as go-between in the slave trade between visiting Europeans and the peoples of the interior, particularly in the era before the discovery of quinine, when West Africa was still regarded as the White Man's Graveyard because of the endemic presence of malaria. The relationship that exists between the Ijaw and the Ilaje would be examined in two phases, which will be the pre-crisis relationship and the post-crisis relationship. This invariably will be the relationship that exist between them from 1960 till 1998 (before the crisis and from 1999 till date (after the crisis).

Relationship between the Ijaw and Ilaje form 1960-1998

Although the relationship between the Ilaje and Ijaw ethnic groups predates this era, the current study would attempt to examine it starting form 1960. The relationship between the two ethnic groups could be describe as a symbiotic relationship, in the sense that both ethnic groups inter-relate and interdependent on themselves in almost every aspect of life, in terms of trade, religion, and socio-cultural relationship.

Trade

Being an aquatic environment, most people of the Ijaw/Ilaje extracts are mostly into fishing and this is what they have done for years but the Ijaws are predominantly fishermen and therefore, occupied greater part of the

stretch and labyrinths of creeks and rivers therefore it could be arguably proven that the Ijaws are more into fishing than the Ilajes, hence a form of pattern ship between them, while the Ijaws do the business of sorting the fishes from the waters, the Ilajes owned the market. Fish traders from the Ilaje axis of the divide goes on the water to procure the goods fishes and other aquatic animals from the Ijaw's and bring same to the land, process it and sell to other traders from the mainland. This has been the symbiotic relationship that exist between the Ijaw and Ilaje then. More so, the Ijaw tribe have been occupying the swamps of the coastline of Nigeria including nearly the whole of the Niger Delta area, a frontier of opportunity, from very early times (Dike, 1956:20; Talbot, 1969, 12-13) hence there is little space for farming, the Ijaw people live by fishing supplemented by farming paddy-rice, plantains, yams, cocoyam's, bananas and other vegetables as well as tropical fruits such as quava, mangoes and pineapples; and trading. Smoke-dried fish, timber, palm oil and palm kernels, which are mostly gotten from the Ilaje side. Traders from the Ijaw side, comes to the main land, to get farm produce needed for their survival. Other goods that the trader between the two ethnic groups also includes local gin called (Ogogoro) and other types of exotic fruits.

Socio-Cultural Relationship

The Ijaws has area very traditional and culturally oriented stock, the retention and strict observance of their culture and customs to preserve their identity and worldview was very strategic to Ijaws anywhere they find themselves. Ijaws gave their way of life (cultural practices) enormous pronouncement through their dress codes, their language, periodic display of cultural dances and masquerade like Owugiri and Owugbene, the observances of traditional funeral and marriages rites (Owei, 20/04/2006). However, the idea of separate settlements from other ethnic group to protect their customs and traditions could not impede the wheel of inter-cultural exchanges and integration. There are flourishing inter-

cultural marriages and unofficial exchanges between Ijaws and the Ilajes, it is a common thing to find an individual with Ijaw father and Ilaje mother, and this was very common when the researcher made a visit to the place for the purpose of the research. Although the marriage rites of the two ethnic group have some differences, but the both families are usually compelled to make a compromise to the benefit of both parties. For instance, in the Ijaw marriage traditional rites, there are two forms of marriages, both involving bride-wealth. In small marriage, the groom must offer a payment to the wife's family, which typically cash. In this type of marriage, the children trace their line of inheritance through their mother to her family. This means that when they grow up the children have more choices as to where they can live: with their father's or mother's people. The second type of marriage is a large-dowry marriage, which means that the children belong to the father's family. These marriages are rare, and wives are not usually from the local community, the latter type of marriage is usually the type that is operational in the Ilaje side, hence if there is any form of inter-marriage between an Ijaw and Ilaje person, the second type of Marriage is usually been adhered to by both families. Even in the aspect of religious festivals, there are lots of things they share, whenever there is any religious festival in the Ilaje side, seeing the Ijaws there would not be a strange sight. The Ijaws traditionally believe in the efficacious power of Egbesu. Egbesu is the god of warfare and the spiritual foundation for combating evil. The Ijaw belief it can be invoked in defense or to correct an injustice by people who are in tune with the universe, the Ilaje also keyed into this belief and they do come to sort protection and justice from Egbesu. The Ilaje on the other hand have a powerful god that has similar power like Egbeus, which also corrects injustice, the Ilaje call it Ayala, the Ijaws also does consultation with Ayelala whenever the need arose.

Although the Ijaw are now primarily Christians (about 95% profess to be), with Catholicism and Anglicanism being the varieties of Christianity most

prevalent among them. The Ijaw also have elaborate traditional religious practices of their own. Veneration of ancestors plays a central role in Ijaw traditional religion, while water spirits, known as Owuamapu figure prominently in the Ijaw pantheon. In addition, the Ijaw practice a form of divination called Igbadai, in which recently deceased individuals are interrogated on the causes of their death. Ijaw religious beliefs hold that water spirits are like humans in having personal strengths and shortcomings and that human dwell among the water spirits before being born. The role of prayer in the traditional Ijaw system of belief is to maintain the living in the good graces of the water spirits among they dwelt before being born into this world, and each year the Ijaw hold celebrations in honour the spirits lasting for several days, this is a pivotal religious practice they share with the Ilaje people that are situated around them. Central to the festivities is the role of masquerades, in which men wearing elaborate outfits and carved masks dance to the beat of drums and manifest the influence of the water spirits through the quality and intensity of their dancing. Particularly spectacular masqueraders are taken to actually be in the possession of the particular spirits on whose behalf they are dancing. The Ijaw are also known to practice ritual acculturation (enculturation), whereby an individual from a different, unrelated from a different, unrelated group undergoes rites to become Ijaw, this they have done for some individuals of Ilaje decent. On the whole, both the Ijaw's and Ilaje had similarly culture due to their age-long relationship.

Ijaw/Ilaje Relation From 1998 Till Date

The relationship between the Ilaje and Ijaw from 1998 till date could be said to be that of suspicion, blametrading, and living on the edge. These is as a direct results of the clashes that occurred between the two tribes in 1998/99 which claimed thousands of lives and properties worth millions of Naira. The crises left in its trail unforgettable damages on both sides. On visiting the places for the purpose of gathering firsthand information, there was still a high sense of suspicion between the two tribes and from

the words of individuals from tribes, hatred and memory of the past was still fresh in the minds of people from both sides. The relationship between them has seriously deteriorated, it can even be said that no relationship existed between them again. Inter-marriage is now strictly forbidden among people, this is as a result of allegations and counter-allegations during the crisis that women from the Ilaje side married to the Ijaws were killed during the crisis, and they also retaliated by killing a good number of Ijaw women married to the Ilaje. Ever since, this massacre, inter-marriage between the two ethnic groups is now like a taboo. From the information gathered from the places visited, the Ilaje accused the Ijaw of being too violent and criminally minded, while the Ijaw also accused them of being too over-bearing, land grabbers and too egoistic. They accused them of looking down on them. These were the notions that led to the 1998/999 crisis and even till now an Ijaje person would still see an Ijaw person as violent and criminally minded while the Ijaw would see an Ilaje person as too egoistic. There is still a high sense of insecurity and suspicion in the area. Some people were reluctant to grant interview, in the Ijaw areas, the researcher was suspected to be an Ilaje spy, while also in the Ilaje area, the researcher was also suspected to be an Ijaw spy. These impressions revealed the level of suspicion between the two ethnic groups, at the slightest provocation, another round of violence could engulf the entire area, because vengeance is still in the air.

Trade has drastically reduced between the two ethnic groups, the little trade that still exist is done in the atmosphere of fear and extreme suspicion this is not good for the economy of an environment that has been hitherto impoverished by the state of funds disbursement in the country. In the light of the above, the State and Federal Government should take all necessary steps to calm down the two groups as their mutual suspicion must be affecting the oil production in the area. The situation and relationship between the Ijaw and Ilaje of Ondo State is a litmus test

for conflict resolution practitioners to bring back the relationship that existed before the 1998/1999 crises.

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