

**INTERGROUP RELATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF OKIRIKA-KALABARI
DURING THE POST COLONIAL PERIOD 1999-2009**

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**A PROJECT RESEARCH SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
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SUPERVISOR: DR. UGOCHUKWU OKOJI

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research, titled 'INTERGROUP RELATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF OKIRIKA-KALABARI DURING THE POST COLONIAL PERIOD 1999-2009' was carried out by ONYEMAECHI IRENE OGECHI, with the registration number GOU/U22/HIS/71, under the supervision of DR. UGOCHUKWU OKOJI. I have given the necessary acknowledgement to all the sources from which the research derived its information. This project is absolutely free from plagiarism and has not been submitted anywhere for publication. Therefore, this work will be submitted to the department of History and International Studies, Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu.

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DATE

APPROVAL

This project is approved for the award of Bachelors of Art (B.A) Honourable Degree in History and International Studies, Godfrey Okoye University.

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EXTERNAL EXAMINER

DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my parents, Mr/ Mrs. Vitalis Onyemaechi, whose guidance, encouragement, and support have empowered me through out my stay in school.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines intergroup relations between the Okirika and Kalabari peoples of Rivers state, Nigeria, from 1999 to 2009. It also examine the nature and dynamics of intergroup relations between Okirika and Kalabari communities during the post colonial period from 1999 to 2009. The study relied on both primary and secondary sources of data.

This study finds the democratization and oil extraction after 1999 simultaneously deepened rivalry and created new channels for dialogue. The 2009 Amnesty Programme reduced large-scale violence but left structural grievances unresolved. Kinship ties, trade and traditional institutions remains key peacebuilding resources. the study concludes that lasting peace requires addressing economic inequalit, political marginalization and environmental degradation not just episodic conflict management.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Inter group relations is a common feature of the entire Africa continent as is evident from the long history of interaction that the various ethnic groups had before the colonialism. Many academic studies have been recorded in Nigeria on the dynamic relationship between the ethnic groups. Important to recognize that the relations between groups have continued to manifest in different ways in precolonial, colonial and post-colonial times, and that these social relations are enduring.

Intergroup relations usually entail interactions between neighbouring groups, but there is a point to be made about the fact that they are not limited to interactions between groups that are neighbouring groups. This shows that relations between the ethnic groups are not limited to their direct geographical neighbours, but are complex and wide-ranging, involving social, economic and cultural relations.² There has been a host of Eurocentric historians and writers who have ignored the history of intergroup relationships in African communities or societies. But it is not as old as the study of Nigerian history as intergroup relations, which is the study of the various relationships between communities, kingdoms and ethnic groups. Intergroup relations have great meaning to the history of Nigeria. This has been well documented by other scholars such as Obaro Ikime and Adiele Afigbo, among others. A. E. Afigbo says:

Thus the theme of inter-group relations in Nigerian history is not a recent conception of Nigeria's historians but the prominence attached to it and the manner in which it can be studied with care, sympathy and understanding have been different from one period to another.

In addition, Afigbo shows that through varied accounts of origin and migrations most Nigerian ethnic group are keenly interested in preserving the perceptions of the inter-group

relations between them and their neighbours.⁴ Also J. F. A. Ade Ajayi and E. J. Alagoa underlined the importance of the inter-group approach to the study of Nigerian history. According to them:

It is of course, essential to start with the histories of the individual groups, but there is a need to emphasize inter-group relationships, comparisons of developments within the various groups, and an inter-group cross-reference of developments in each group to the evolving pattern of Nigeria.⁵

This background is the context of this study which takes a look at the intergroup relations between Okrika and Kalabari from 1999 to 2009.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Okrika and Kalabari peoples have long history of interactions which include trade, cultural exchange and political engagement. But, not all of these interactions have been peaceful. Various issues like territorial boundaries, political representation, access to economic resources, government policies, etc. have given rise to conflicts between the two groups over time. These issues were exacerbated in the post-colonial era, especially following Nigeria's independence, as new political institutions emerged and the oil industry was discovered, which led to more competition between neighbouring communities.

Although Okrika–Kalabari relations are crucial in Rivers State for peace and development, very little detailed academic work has been done on the intergroup relations of the two groups during the post-colonial era. Existing literature on the intergroup dynamics in the Niger Delta is either general and covers all forms of intergroup relations or focuses predominantly on oil-related conflicts, largely neglecting to investigate the basic social, political and historical aspects of intergroup dynamics between the Okrika and Kalabari tribes.

This means that, there is currently lack of knowledge about the underlying factors that affect cooperation and conflict between these two groups. This neglect of focused scholarly attention makes it difficult to fully appreciate the nature of the Okrika Kalabari relations and how the historical experiences, political changes and socio economic factors continue to shape their relationships in the post-colonial period.

Hence, more systematic study needs to be done to explore the intergroup relations between Okrika and Kalabar during the post-colonial era to gain better insight into the dynamics of tension, cooperation and possible modes of facilitating peaceful co-existence.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study is aimed at analyzing the nature and dynamics of intergroup relations between Okrika and Kalabari communities in the post colonial period 1999-2009.

Specific Objectives are to:

- Analyze the background of intergroup relations between Okrika and Kalabari in the time frame covered.
- Highlight the key zones of interaction and collaboration among the Okrika and Kalabari in the period of 1999–2009.
- Explore reasons for and nature of conflict between the two groups in the period.
- Examine intergroup relations and its effects on Okrika and Kalabari social, economic and political development.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is noteworthy for two reasons: firstly, it will help to deepen the understanding of the intergroup relations between the Okrika and Kalabari group in the post colonial era and secondly, it will help to analyze the intergroup relations between the Okrika and Kalabari group during the post colonial era. The study will look at the cooperation and conflict factors that have arisen from their historical, social, political and economic relationship.

The results from this study will be useful for the academic community, policy makers and government, community leaders and traditional authorities, general public and future researchers.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study is restricted to the geographical area of Okrika and Kalabari communities in the present-day Rivers State. The study time period is from 1999 to 2009. Nigeria experienced the return of democratic governance from the years of military dictatorship with the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999. The political change presented new opportunities and challenges which had an impact on intergroup dynamics in many parts of the country such as Okrika and Kalabari. The year 2009 is the end point as it was a pivotal year in the Niger Delta region, where the Federal Government's Amnesty Programme had a significant impact on patterns of conflict, security and intergroup interactions.

1.6 Methodology

The study used historical research design as it is a study of the relationship of the Okrika and Kalabari in the post-colonial era. The sources of the data used for the study were primary and secondary sources. Oral interviews with knowledgeable indigenous elders, community leaders and other well-informed informants and archival sources were used as primary sources. Secondary sources included textbooks, journal articles, theses and dissertations, conference papers, government publications and other scholarly works related to the study.

Historical and thematic analysis were used to analyse the data. Data from the different sources were critically analysed, verified and grouped into larger themes of social, religious and economic relations. This helped to reconstruct the past events, and to gain insight into the Okrika–Kalabari interactions, continuities and changes in the period studied.

1.7 Literature Review

The Kalabari of the Niger Delta" by Robin Horton investigates the evolution of the Kalabari Kingdom, focusing on its political structure, economic activities, religious practices and relations with other communities in the eastern Niger Delta. He contends that Kalabari's strategic position on the waterways facilitated it to become the dominant trading state with far-reaching diplomatic and trade relations with neighbouring communities such as Okrika, Bonny and Andoni. Horton also proves that sometimes, the vying for trade routes, fishing grounds and European trade interests created conflict, but it was usually settled with traditional diplomacy and intermarriage.

The strength of the text is the detailed ethnographic observation, and the amplification of the oral traditions, which give very good historical information on Kalabari society before, and during the colonial period. The study, however, is mainly concerned with the internal evolution of Kalabari society and only a little with the wider historical process of Kalabari's bilateral relations with Okrika. The present study aims to do this by focusing on the nature of the Okrika-Kalabari relationship, namely political, economic, cultural and diplomatic relationships, in different historical periods.

The two works titled, "*A History of the Niger Delta: An Historical Interpretation of Ijo Oral Tradition*" by Ebiegberi Joe Alagoa,⁷ carefully present the evolution of Ijo speaking communities historically, with oral traditions as the principal sources of evidence. He suggests that the historical development of the Niger Delta peoples and their interactions with each other were determined by migration, settlement, environmental adaptation and kinship. Alagoa points out that although diverse, the Ijo groups were interconnected by language, religion, and economics and had long lasting relationships. His work is especially significant in providing a historical perspective of the origin of many Delta communities and how they are connected. One of the strengths of the study is its innovative methodology

in confirming the historical reliability of oral sources in addition to written sources. The work, however, takes a broad regional view, so it doesn't make in-depth analysis of the changing nature of the bilateral relations between Okrika and Kalabari. The present study thus addresses this lack by offering a case study of these two neighbouring societies, specifically.

The political economy of the Niger Delta city-states in the 1800s is explored in the work entitled, *“The Trading States of the Oil Rivers”*, by G. I. Jones. Jones⁸ maintains that the success of delta states had much to do with their mastery of waterways, their middlemen trade and their ties with the European merchants. He shows how the politics of the area were determined by competition between states like Bonny, Okrika, Kalabari, Nembe and Opobo, which often led to changing alliances and even conflicts. In addition to this, Jones provides an account of how indigenous institutions adapted to maintain diplomatic connections even after there were recurring conflicts of interest as far as commerce was concerned. Its greatest asset is the extensive documentary documentation and description of the Oil Rivers trade networks. However, the book does not seek to examine the direct historical link between Okrika and Kalabari, rather it considers it as a part of broader regional developments. The present study, therefore, is more specific enquiry into the pattern, cause and effect of Okrika-Kalabari intergroup relationship.

“Kalabari-Okrika Economic and Socio-Cultural Relations in the Eastern Niger Delta, 1800-1950” is an article by Romokere Mgbowaji Benson and Tonye Benibo⁹ that looks at economic and socio-cultural relations between the Kalabari and the Okrika from 1800 to 1950. It is believed that both groups had a common bond to the sea, local exchanges, transatlantic trading and that many of the relationships between the two were established through fishing. The authors suggest that there was initially a common bond between both groups in fishing, local exchange and transatlantic trading, which later expanded to Atlantic

trading and legitimate trade. They are convinced that the business relationship promoted intermarriage, cultural borrowing, linguistic affinity, diplomatic exchange and religious interaction which promoted peaceful co-existence among the two neighbouring Ijaw communities. The study also shows, however, that the competition over fishing grounds, hinterland markets and commercial monopolies arose occasionally, leading to violent clashes that tainted these friendly relations. There is a strong element of excluding the discussion of other relationships other than Kalabari-Okrika and treating both cooperation and conflict equally with the help of historical methodology. However, the emphasis of the article is primarily on economic and socio-cultural relations through 1950 and limited attention is given to the larger political context and the historical trajectory of intergroup relations. The present study, therefore, builds on this discussion by examining the general character and evolution of political, economic, diplomatic and cultural ties between Okrika and Kalabari over a wide span of history.

This intergroup relationship is analysed from the historical perspective by Independence Chinonye Enyindah and Edna Adagogo-Brown in their work, *“Intergroup Relations in the Niger Delta: The Ikwerre and Her Neighbours of the Eastern Niger Delta”*¹⁰. Strategic location of Ikwerre land allowed for broad trade and cultural ties with the city-states both in the Atlantic and in the "legitimate" trade periods, the authors argue. They show that the importance of waterways and hinterland markets allowed Kalabari to exert greater commercial influence over Ikwerreland than Okrika. The article also emphasizes the importance of trade, migration, market settlements, intermarriage, and cultural exchange, all of which facilitated peaceful coexistence and coexclusive relationships in spite of some commercial disputes. The main value of the book is in the detailed reconstruction of intergroup interaction based on oral traditions and documentary sources. The focus of the study is Ikwerre, Okrika and Kalabari, but these communities are not the main focus of the

study as they are only included as neighbouring communities. The present study takes up this lacuna, focussing the bilateral relation between Okrika and Kalabari for the purposes of historical investigation.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study consists of five chapters. The study is introduced in Chapter One with a discussion on the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, methodology of the study and literature review. Chapter Two reviews the history of the Okrika and Kalabari peoples, their origins, socio-political organization, economic life and relationships prior to 1999.

The patterns of intergroup relations between Okrika and Kalabari from 1999 to 2009 is analysed in Chapter Three, focusing on political, economic, social, cultural and religious relations and areas of cooperation and mutual interest.

The intergroup relations between different groups of the study period are discussed in Chapter Four with its associated conflicts, difficulties and dynamics. It emphasizes the sources of conflict, boundary and resource conflicts, environmental problems and the influence of oil exploration and government policies and traditional institutions on conflict management.

The summary and conclusion of the study are provided in chapter Five. It summarises the key findings and points out their implications for peaceful living and further studies in intergroup relations in the Niger Delta.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE OKRIKA AND KALABARI PEOPLES

2.1 Geographical Location and Physical Environment of Okrika and Kalabari

The Okrika and Kalabari are neighbors in the Eastern Niger Delta of today's Rivers State, Nigeria. The Niger Delta is one of the world's largest arcuate deltas, covering some 450 kilometres of coastline between the Benin River in the west and the Imo River in the east. Geomorphologically, the Eastern Niger Delta can be divided into three regions namely western flank, arcuate middle section and eastern flank (which include the areas of Okrika and Kalabari land use). Okrika is strategically located on the Okrika Island and on the neighbouring mainland settlements in the Bonny River estuary. The topography of Okrika is quite varied; fifteen settlements are situated between 15.57–25.58 metres above mean sea level, five settlements are between 26.59–46.60 metres above the sea level and eleven settlements are above 47.61–89.64 metres above the sea level, which has affected the settlement patterns in the town; high land was used as a refuge when the sea level rose during the dry season, whereas low land was used for fishing and maritime activities.

The Okrika territory includes both the islands and mainland. The island settlements are Okrika Town (Kirike), Ogoloma, Ogbogbo and Ibaka and the settlements on the mainland are Ogu, Bolo, Ele, Isaka, Abuloma and Koniju (Koni ama). The settlements are linked together in a complex network of streams and rivers that are the main transportation routes. Major towns in Okrika are: Okrika Town (Kirike), Ogoloma, Abuloma (Obulum/Abulome), Ogu Town, Bolo Town, Ibaka Town, Ogbogbo Town, Ele Town, Isaka Town, Amadi-Ama, Tere-Ama, Okuru-Ama and Koniju Town.

The Kalabari territory is spread between several settlements in the Eastern Niger Delta with historical centre at Elem Kalabari (New Calabar), New Calabar River. After the civil war of 1879 and the subsequent division of Elem Kalabari, three significant new settlements were

made, Bakana, Abonnema and Buguma. The sites are further inland, located along the riverside trade routes, but also on the Sombreiro River and its tributaries, where a strategic move was made to avoid the coastal threats.⁵

Buguma was incorporated in 1883 as the new seat of the Kalabari Kingdom, and Abonnema grew into a thriving seaport in the colonial period when the Royal Niger Company (U.A.C. later) and other big European trading companies opened offices there. The geographical location of Abonnema is 4°43'23" N and 6°46'44" E where it is the headquarters of Akuku-Toru Local Government Area.

The third major settlement of Kalabari is Bakana, founded by the Barboy (Will Braide) faction after the civil war. The three settlements (Buguma, Abonnema and Bakana) are the modern geographical heart of Kalabari land, though many Kalabaria continue to live in Port Harcourt and other cities. Fig 2.1: Rivers State Map showing the connection between Okirika and Kalabari.

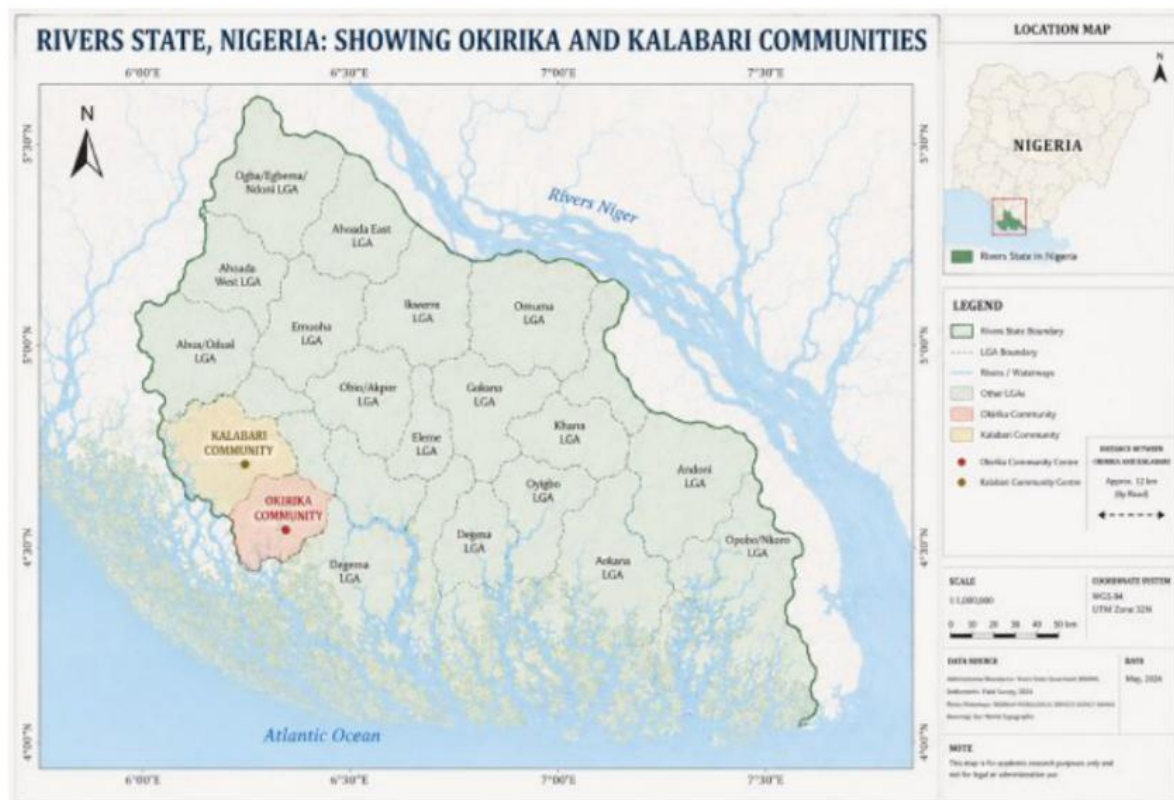


Fig 2.1 Rivers State map showing the connecion between Okrika and Kalabari

2.2 Origin of Okrika

The Okrika people are also referred to as Wakirike in their native language, and their migration history has been traced back through several streams from the Central Niger Delta; but from the oral traditions, there is a disagreement about the exact number of migrations. The history of settlement of the Okrika is diverse, unlike some neighbouring groups who trace their ancestry to one ancestor. The earliest settled location is that of Okopiri (Oko's bush) which is now known as Okochiri located on the mainland, named after Oko who is generally believed to be the first settler from Amasoma on Wilberforce Island in the Central Niger Delta.

There were several migrations to Okrika Island itself. Okrika Town (Kirike) and Ogoloma were the first two settlements established on the island, but there is still some doubt between them on the first. The Okrika Kingdom was not created as a result of single origin migration but was a gradual process of amalgamation of independently established settlements for mutual security against external threats. "Solidarity of various settlements with Kirike settlement was established and developed for defence purposes."⁸

The legitimacy of Kirike's leadership over other Okrika settlements rested largely on its size and strength, and was cemented by cultural similarity and sacred bond (Oboku). This covenant engaged not only settlements but also the individual members, and was believed to have no time or space limitation. The federal model enabled towns to retain their local identity and organise defence and diplomacy.

The latter settlements of Okrika Island were achieved by the internal growth and external migration. The people of Ogbogbo came from the Central Niger Delta region, temporarily stopping at Borikiri near present-day Port Harcourt before relocating to their present place of settlement in Okrika Island around 1670AD while the reign of King Dokube (Ado II) was in power. Likewise, the Ibakans came to settle at their present location on Okrika

Island in the territory of Kalabari state around 1730AD under the reign of their King Boike (Boka) III of Ado. Such migrations suggest that there were extensive population and cultural transfers between Okrika and Kalabari regions prior to colonial times.⁹

2.3 Origins of Kalabari

Since time immemorial the Kalabari were referred to as the Awome, and they believe that their ancestors came from the Central Niger Delta region in Ifoni where their leader, Perebo Kalabari, son of Mein Owei, migrated south. The term "Kalabari" is supposedly derived from the Portuguese pronunciation of "Calabar," used to refer to the early settlements in the area. The first migration from the Central to the Eastern Niger Delta was probably before AD 1000 followed by more migrations in the 15th and 16th centuries in search for fertile fishing grounds and strategic trading position in the Eastern Niger Delta.

The early settlements came up along the New Calabar river and Elem Kalabari was the main settlement. Migrants created canoe houses and wards centered on kinship, that eventually merged into larger village units. The seasonal flooding and changing water course made it necessary to move the site to more stable and higher elevation riverine areas on an occasional basis. Fish and shellfish were plentiful in estuarine ecosystems, and this allowed for subsistence-based livelihoods as well as a mobility-based economy, particularly the use of canoes, that became integral to Kalabari economy and social organization. In the seventeenth century, Kalabari was an important entrepôt in the Atlantic slave trade.

According to history, King Owerri Daba integrated the region into slave trading network before 1699. Records like those of James Barbot show well established diplomatic and commercial exchanges with European merchants and gift-giving customs – including those of Duke Monmouth of Kalabari. Throughout this period, Kalabari served mainly as intermediaries, trading enslaved people to the European traders for shoes and textiles and for alcohol from the coastal traders, and for guns from the Europeans.¹¹ Canoe house (wari)

system was the basic structure of the Kalabari political economy. This system has been extensively described as a corporate institution incorporating commercial, military and ritual elements. Canoe houses organized trade expeditions, kept war canoes for defense and expansion and observed ancestral and spiritual commitments to water deities. Unlike traditional family groups, canoe houses were economic corporations, and people gained membership and power through adoption, alliance, or wealth.

House chiefs oversaw the resources, settled disputes and coordinated activities for each house. If the house grew large enough, subsidiary houses (kalawari) were allowed to be constructed with the approval of the leader of the parent house (opuwari), with continuity and institutional flexibility. This helped to assimilate outsiders, including slave workers from other tribal groups like the Igbo, who were promoted to important roles through a meritocratic, loyalty-based, and entrepreneurial system. The Kalabari Kingdom developed as a loosely coupled cluster of semi-autonomous houses, the amanyanabo (king) being a symbolic figure. In the nineteenth century, the kingdom was involved in conflict with neighbouring polities like Nembe, Bonny and Okrika, the latter conveniently located to command inland trade routes.¹²

2.4. Socio-political Organization of the Okrika and Kalabari people

Adequate demographic information on Okrika and Kalabari populations is limited, because of the way the data are aggregated in the census. There are districts within Okrika Local Government Area, however, which include Kalio, Ogoloma, Okirika and Ogan. Ogu-Bolo Local Government Area has an estimated population of over 119,000 persons in 2020 and occupies about 89 km².

The Kalabari communities can be found in Akuku-Toru Local Government Area (LGA), headquartered at Abonnema, and in Degema Local Government Area (LGA) (that includes Buguma and Bakana), as well as in other urban centres including Port Harcourt. Settlement

patterns illustrate a historical shift from city-states to riverine settlements. Okrika has an island heartland and mainland extensions, and Kalabari settlements are scattered across Buguma, Abonnema and Bakana, often referred to under the term "three R's.

In spite of their geographical isolation, these settlements are culturally and politically unified. The Ijoid subgroup is a part of the Ijaw language family, to which both Okrika and Kalabari languages belong. The Okrika and Kalabari languages are quite different but have high degrees of mutual intelligibility owing to the interaction, trade and geographical proximity that has existed for along time. Linguistic similarities have played an important role in history and in times of political tension. Language shares hierarchical expressions associated with the canoe house system.

The house system is a strong factor in social organization in both societies, but has variations in its structure. The society of Kalabari is more patrilineal than matrilineal, but there are matrilineal features as well, for example, in inheritance. Likewise, Okrika society is patrilineal, with flexible adoption and alliance and defined by the Furo (family) and war canoe house systems.

Historically, marriage systems have served as the means by which the two communities have become integrated. Okrika Igwa (small dowry) and Kalabari Iya/Ya (large dowry) are two different marital systems, wherein the latter had been thought to be limited to the elite family because of its economic and social demands. The borrowing and the signalling of status is exemplified by the adoption of the Iya/Ya system by Okrika. Inter-marriage between Okrika and Kalabari has long been used as an instrument of alliance building, in which kinship bonds are strengthened across political boundaries and in times of tension, diplomatic communication is made possible. In both the Okrika and Kalabari societies, water spirits, community deities and ancestor worship are the focal point of cosmological systems.

Religious practices are festivals and rituals that ensure harmony between the living, the spiritual and the ancestors. Some deities like Owamekaso of the Kalabari Korome ward are thought to have come from outside the region, representing other regional religious connections. Okrika Iria is a festival dating from the sixteenth century that is significant for women who are secluded, ritualized and celebrated in public. Similar initiation ceremonies are found in other Kalabari groups, and they share similar cultural bases in the Ijaw ethnolinguistic group.

Christianity and western education were introduced by contact with the colonists and have greatly affected religious practices. Christianity is widely embraced but the traditional belief system is still observed, especially in matters of chieftaincy, burial and conflict resolution.

2.5 Economic Organisation of Okrika and Kalabari People

Economic life of both the communities is very much linked to water bodies. Fishing is the primary livelihood with the help of canoe navigation, nets, traps and hooks. There are salt making by solar evaporation and construction of canoe by use of Mangrove timber as supplementary activities. Riverine communities used to trade fish, shellfish, salt, and plants with inland producers to get agricultural products like yams and plantains, manufactured goods like cloth and iron tools. Iwofe and Tombia were market centres, which served as nodes in these exchange networks.

By the 19th century, the shift from the slave trade to palm oil trade in the area changed the economic structure but retained the house trading system. Both communities gained entry to the global trading networks by means of credit facilities with European companies, thus entering into economic transformation and dependency. In spite of the rivalry in the past, trade was considerable between Okrika and Kalabari. Their geographic position allowed them to complement each other in their economy with the Kalabari people playing a role in facilitating the trade of the inland communities and Okrika controlling the estuary of the

Bonny River. This resulted in both cooperation and competition in regional trade. The introduction of palm oil trade in the nineteenth century further accentuated these dynamics, bringing both communities into global markets through the hands of European trading companies like the Royal Niger Company. But the unequal access to opportunities for trade exacerbated the unequal economic outcomes, and reinforced the commercial hierarchy of the house, as businesses grew to serve the needs of the upper classes.¹⁶

The Kalabari people's material culture is an expression of environment and symbolism. The art forms are textiles, wood carvings, architectural shapes, and items used in ritual, such as symbols of prosperity, strength, and the unity. Memorials of the deceased war canoe house leader, the notability of cultural artifacts notable due in fubara introduced in the nineteenth century, beliefs about the presence of the ancestors and their continuity.

2.6 Pre-1999 Relations between Okrika and Kalabari

This historical relationship between Okrika and Kalabari dates back to long before colonial times and was influenced by trade, geographical proximity and occasional warfare. As mentioned above, the Ibaka people of Kalabari territory migrated to Okrika Island around 1730 AD, thus illustrating the demographic and cultural relationship between them. These migrations allowed for the transmission of culture, language, and trade skills, and also led to overlapping territorial and fishing rights.

The pre-colonial existence of both groups was as city states, independently trading with other city states in the wider Niger Delta trading system. They were geographically located in such a way that they complement each other economically and also competing. With its control over the inland trade network, notably via Elem Ifoko, Kalabari was well-placed to become a major middleman between European traders and inland producers. Access to the estuary of the Bonny was controlled by Okrika, and it was also the point where trade routes

went into the interior. This strategic location created a cooperation based on shared trade interests, and competition based on control of trade routes and access to markets.

New dimensions were added to the Okrika-Kalabari relations during the colonial era. The British administrative changes, such as the establishment of the Degema administrative district and new territorial boundaries, had the negative effect of interfering with the traditional diplomatic processes and the sharing of resources. The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Okrika Kalabari dispute details the escalation of conflict over fishing rights and territorial boundaries through colonial legal classifications and administrative decisions. The judgment in the 1912 court case (Chief Charlie King Amachree v Chief Daniel Kalio) and the subsequent Full Court judgment in 1914 set legal precedents on riparian ownership and rights to fish in the river.¹⁷ These legal precedents affected post-colonial disputes.

These tensions continued during the post-colonial era under the guise of the federal system of government in Nigeria. The political geography of Okrika Kalabari relations has been redrawn several times, between 1967 and 1996, due to the creation of states and local government areas. Competition for land and resource claims continued to increase due to the discovery and exploitation of petroleum resources in the Niger Delta region which had become a source of contention for both communities to access some benefits from the allocation of oil resources and the development works.

By the end of the 4th Republic in 1999, the relations between Okrika-Kalabari was a complex affair of historical grievances, current territorial disputes, cultural affinities and economic interests. As a result of the shift to democratic governance in 1999, new opportunities for political participation and conflict resolution emerged; at the same time, new dynamics of elite competition and ethnic mobilization were also established that would influence intergroup relations throughout the study period.

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CHAPTER THREE

PATTERNS OF OKRIKA–KALABARI INTERGROUP RELATIONS, 1999–2009

3.1 Political Relations between Okrika and Kalabari

Nigeria's Fourth Republic was established in 1999, which resulted in a complete reshaping of the political context in which the Okrika and Kalabari communities relate. The new constitution established democratic governments at the federal, state and local level, providing a number of opportunities for competition and cooperation. The government of President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 - 2007), at the federal level, aimed at consolidating democratic governance and tackling the continuing Niger Delta problems. Development plans, security measures and political talks were all part of the government's strategies.

Federal government's policies with regard to resource allocation, environmental regulation and deployment of security forces directly influenced politics and the economic reality of Okrika and Kalabari communities. During this time the central part of intergroup relations was played by the Rivers State government. There was increased emphasis on state policies concerning the creation of local governments, chieftaincy concerns and the distribution of development projects, which were both a source of cooperation and conflict.

Activities to shape these processes were a competition between party elites from both communities. One contested space was the local government institutions. Local councils are a source of power, jobs and public money. This has led to complications arising between the Okrika and Kalabari communities when it comes to local government structures.

Tensions between Okrika and Kalabari community increased significantly during the fourth republic in the context of electoral politics. The 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections were politically highly charged and increasingly, candidates and political parties were depending on ethnic bases of support. The overwhelming strength of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Rivers State did not remove competition, rather it created a greater competition

within the party between ethnic groups. Members of the political elites were battling for nominations, appointments and legislative representation from both communities. Rather, the processes of the elections became problematic. News of manipulation, exclusion and violence, particularly in the 2003 and 2007 elections, added to the feeling of marginalisation and led to inter-community resentment.

Representation continued to be an important issue. Equity in political offices was a demand of both Okrika and Kalabari communities and federal character principle was also often challenged; each group claiming domination over the other. Being appointed to ministerial positions, federal boards or state institutions was considered to be a sign of political influence. Imbalances in those appointments often embittered intergroup relations. The government policies at all levels at significant influence on the Okrika–Kalabari relationships from 1999 to 2009.

New opportunities for development were also provided by Federal schemes like the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), which also opened up new arenas for competition. The NDDC was a source of competition for projects, appointments and influence among the communities. Its resource allocation has been subject to criticism as being inequitable, which has been a source of conflict between the Okrika and Kalabari communities.³

State-level policies on issues of infrastructure, education and health care were also debated. Growing resentment was due to inequalities in the distribution of roads, schools, and hospitals. The policies of local government had the most direct influence on life. Local government, market administration and land-use decisions had impacts on access to economic opportunities and public services, which frequently perpetuated patterns of competition and distrust.⁴

3.2 Economic Relations and Trade Networks

During the Fourth Republic, political economy of petroleum extraction was the main economic relations among Okrika and Kalabari communities. Both communities were in the heartland of the Niger Delta oil-producing region and the sharing of oil wealth was a growing source of conflict, as oil wealth was distributed through the federal allocation system, the state disbursement system and corporate involvement. The derivation principle has been implemented, giving a share of oil revenue to the producing communities, which exacerbated competition among them. The location of the oil wells and the amount of oil produced became issues in disputes for increased economic rights. These conflicts were not only technical but also had deeper roots of identity, territory and recognition.⁵

Intergroup relations were also affected by oil company activities as reflected in policies of the host communities. Jobs, contracts and development project were often allocated on a discretionary basis, and people felt excluded and received preferential treatment. Whereas communities receiving recognition as host communities to oil facilities enjoyed many privileges, there was increased rivalry between these communities. The eastern Niger Delta region was a maritime environment, creating another layer of economic competition. The rivers, creeks, and coastal waters were important economic resources and disputes over territorial property rights. Fishing rights, navigation and control over offshore installations became important considerations as exploration of the oil started to move into shallow and offshore waters.⁶

Both communities were impacted by environmental degradation due to oil extraction such as oil spills, gas flaring and water pollution. These effects caused common grievances, but compensation and responsibility issues created divisions, rather than a sense of collective action. Political tensions continued but the two communities, the Okrika and Kalabari communities were still economically interdependent. Trade in fish, agriculture and

manufactured goods was still allowed to cross the boundaries of the communities, maintained by longstanding commercial ties and common market systems.

Constant negotiation between the communities was necessary for the organization of markets and control of the trade route. Traditional economic relations, based on kinship and trust, coexisted with modern relations of competition, which were determined by the changing economic situation. Illegal oil bunkering was a new development in intergroup relations due to the growth of informal economic activities in the port. These activities provided other means of earning a living, but also led to violent competition for access to resources and distribution networks.

During the entire period underdevelopment was a serious issue. Regardless of the region's contribution to country wealth, there was a lack of infrastructure and social service provision to both communities. Tension could have been exacerbated through comparative perceptions of development disparities as each community would have wanted to establish a claim for increased government attention. Additional economic stresses were being felt by the youth, who were also unemployed. The failure to absorb the youth into the formal sector helped to fuel the growth of militancy and criminal gangs, which found another source of income and power other than the formal sector.

3.3 Social and Cultural Interactions

Although there were times of tension and violence between the two communities, family relationships and connections through marriage kept Okrika and Kalabari communities together. The kinship networks were continuous elements of intergroup relations that continued even after formal political relations ceased. The practice of intermarriage was a deeply rooted tradition of the two communities, and is still very common as a means of social cohesion.

Families were interwoven within both communities, revealing intersecting relationships that could be arranged differently to narratives of separation. Marriage across community lines was of special significance for women, who were often key to maintaining communication and social interaction. But these relationships were under pressure in times of increased conflict, particularly in election years. Inter-community marriage was sometimes discouraged by social pressures and existing relationships were sometimes impacted by distrust and insecurity. Inter-community marriages produced complex social situations for children. They might belong to both communities, but at times they were under pressure to side with one side especially when there were conflicts. At the same time they could serve as intermediaries, and act as a bridge across divides.⁷

Participants of funerals, marriages and other social activities with extended family kept communities together. These relationships continued to be strengthened by such factors as financial support within the household and trading relationships. Educational institutions were important places for the interaction between Okrika and Kalabari youths. Secondary schools and higher institutions integrated students from both communities together and provided opportunities for socialization and relationship building, which sometimes crossed ethnic lines. Not all of these spaces were, however, did not exist without a certain tension. Students' attitudes and conflicts can sometimes be a reflection of those found in their communities, and conflicts may occur in the educational environment. Sometimes the location of the school, staffing, and the availability of scholarships were even politicized.⁸

Intergroup relations were also affected by migration. Urbanization to places like Port Harcourt brought about mixed communities and less strict communal divisions. It was in these urban environments that people interacted, but also new forms of competition for housing, jobs, and political representation emerged. Migration was further complicated by forced migration because of conflict. Resettlement and reintegration were a challenge for

people who were compelled to move from their communities, and could lead to further grievances and tensions.

Important avenues of interaction included shared cultural institutions, such as festivals, religion, and language. But at times of conflict, cultural practices based on common Ijaw background provided opportunities for collaboration. Language also contributed to the facilitation of interaction. The dialects of the Ijaws were found to be mutually intelligible and Nigerian Pidgin was used, which enabled people to communicate without problems between communities, but linguistic difference could also be used as a marker of identification.

3.4 Religious Relation and Interfaith Cooperation.

Important avenues were provided by shared cultural institutions, such as festivals, religion and language. Shared Ijaw cultural practices fostered opportunities for cooperation, even during conflict. There were also other structures for peacebuilding, being religious women's organizations, such as Christian women's fellowships and traditional religious associations. These organizations went beyond the provision of spiritual support and included practical help, in order to cover the material and psychological aspects of the impact of conflict. They were cross-community in nature, involving women from across communities, and provided opportunities to build relationships beyond political divides.

Women's peacebuilding activities were constrained by their lack of participation in formal political processes and peace negotiations. Both institutions of old and new were traditionally male dominated, with men often discrediting women's contributions or restricting their roles. Their informal influence via family networks and community groups was also significant, however, and women's advocacy helped to spread a greater awareness of the need for inclusive conflict resolution approaches.⁹

3.5 Areas of Cooperation and Mutual Interest

Activities of civil society groups were also important for peacebuilding, including facilitating dialogue, engaging in humanitarian response, and encouraging non-violent approaches to conflict resolution. Religious organizations, women's organizations, and nongovernmental organizations had significant contributions in these processes. Peacebuilding was a prominent activity of women's groups. Women used their social roles as the basis for engaging in peaceful protest, mediation, and community involvement to foster reconciliation and de-escalate conflict. They interacted across communities and allowed for them to function as intermediaries, in ways that formal institutions could not.

Youth groups, however, were also significant players in peace processes, even when they participated in violence. The 2009 amnesty program provided opportunities for disarmament and reintegration, but had difficulties in responding to the underlying grievances. Peace efforts during this time, in general, had mixed results. Often, temporary ceasefires and agreements were reached, but lasting solutions were impeded by the fact that there were still structural problems that needed to be overcome, such as the issue of economic inequality, political competition, and unresolved territorial disputes.

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CHAPTER FOUR
CONFLICTS, CHALLENGES, AND THE DYNAMICS OF INTERGROUP
RELATIONS, 1999–2009

4.1 Sources of Conflict between Okrika and Kalabari

Understanding the relationship between Okrika and Kalabari communities in the Fourth Republic would be incomplete without consideration of the conflicting historical narratives these communities built to establish their respective claims and political demands on the land. These stories were one of the ways that each community viewed the other and defended their own standpoint in current conflicts, that set in pre-colonial history but continually re-interpreted.

The Kalabari historical accounts focused on the splendor of the Elem Kalabari era and the advanced view of the canoe house system which allowed territorial expansion through legitimate trade, diplomacy and settlement. In these tales, the Elem Kalabari kingdom, centred at the town of Elem, was a golden age of Ijaw political organization, and Kalabari traders and diplomats spread their influence throughout the region by peaceful means, without conquering other people.

Historical stories of Okrika, however, highlighted their role as an early settlement community in the eastern Niger Delta; and their migration narratives suggested prehistoric origins and early development of permanent political institutions. The stories elevated Okrika to a "senior" community with rights to land that was later challenged by the expansion of the Kalabari. The Okrika origin story, featuring migration from the central Niger Delta and establishment of a stable polity at Okoloama, provided foundations for claims to priority in land and water rights.

Such historical incompatibilities established a zero sum game approach to territorial dispute in which compromise was difficult to come by. If both communities made their own valid

historical claims to the same land, there was little opportunity for any negotiated resolution. Academic research on the Niger Delta and its history, especially Alagoa's study on Nembe, had shown the complexity and interconnectedness of regional histories but this scholarly study had little impact on popular historical memory or political debate.²

Periodic territorial flashpoints were endowed with historical significance that magnified current issues. Older-themed stories were used to justify current land claims, demarcation of urban areas, and rights to fish and use oil fields in the river. The island of Bakana, for instance, was occupied by both with contending historical accounts of its original settlement and subsequent occupation. Oral history techniques of both recording and dissemination allowed these historical stories to be flexible and adaptable to the political needs of the moment; new interpretations could be developed to meet new challenges, like oil discovery and electoral competition. In turn, this proved to be both a great asset for political mobilisation and a liability as a foundation for negotiated settlement, as historical narratives could be tailored to meet political ends.³

History also influenced the community's sense of the legitimacy of the other community's claims and actions. The Kalabari people tended to see Okrika territorial claims as a recent and illegitimate claim, which was based on demographic rather than historical priority. The Okrika, on the other hand, saw Kalabari claims as a result of temporary trading villages that exceeded their limits. It was hard to find common ground for conflict resolution because of these mutual perceptions of illegitimacy.⁴

These historical conflicts were complicated in the colonial and post-colonial eras. Colonial boundary determinations were frequently arbitrary to local peoples, thus establishing new administrative realities that communities wanted either to endorse or contest in historical argument. The dispersive nature of post-colonial state-making processes and local government structural changes also produced new territorial entities that began to compete

with one another, and that used history to argue why they should be included or to request their borders be altered.⁵

By 1999, the historical narratives were so ingrained in the collective consciousness of the community, and they were passed down through family socialization, school curricula and public discourse, that these competing versions became entrenched. When the Fourth Republic opened democratic space, it offered new possibilities to express and organise around these narratives: the political entrepreneurs found in the Fourth Republic a new way to mobilize support around community historical grievances. The outcome was apolitical climate which was constantly shaped by the history invoked and territorial disputes were hard to settle based on pragmatic compromise.

4.2 Chieftaincy, Boundary and Resource-Related Disputes

One of the most enduring conflicts that plagued the Fourth Republic period between Okrika and Kalabri communities was territorial disputes issues. These conflicts were over territory, water courses and boundaries, and were based on historical claims that could not always be resolved. Contested islands, fishing grounds, and oil infrastructure areas were some of the specific flashpoints. Normally small conflicts like disagreements between fishermen or fishermen and landowners might easily spread into larger conflicts through the process of mobilization and retribution. Another area of tension was competition for oil related benefits. Host communities, job opportunities and development projects were often assigned, leading to conflicts between them, as they wanted to maximize their access to the available resources.⁶

Conflict was further escalated by the development of illegal oil operations. Violent confrontations and the spread of weapons in communities also resulted from the competition for bunkering sites and distribution networks among armed groups, and from the competition within the political arena. Ethnic divisions were often accentuated in

electoral processes and political mobilization, with leaders calling on community identity to garner support. In traditional conflict management between Okrika and Kalabari, traditional institutions continued to have a significance. Traditional rulers and chiefs' councils continued to have communication lines and to take up mediation during times of tension. They based their actions on existing cultural customs such as negotiation, swearing, and negotiations for reconciliation to resolve conflicts and mend relationships. But at times they faced opposition from youth groups and from political players, which effectively meant they could not solve big conflicts.⁷

There were several levels of government interventions. The Rivers State government has been very instrumental in the mediation process because it involves the security agencies, formation of inquiry panels, and even facilitating negotiation between communities. Federal interventions, though not so common, encompassed security operations and wider policy measures addressing the Niger Delta crisis. There was a formal judicial system for dispute resolution, which had limitations due to delay, enforcement problems, and perceived bias.

Consequently, communities tended to use a mix of formal and informal methods and traditional and legal methods.

4.3 The Impact of Oil Exploration and Environmental Issues

During the Fourth Republic, economic relations between the two communities (Okrika and Kalabari) were dominated by the political economy of petroleum extraction. The two communities are both in the heart of the Niger Delta oil producing regions and the allocation of oil revenues from the federal government, the state government and the corporations became a constant source of friction. As a result of the allocation of a percentage of oil revenue to producing states through the so called derivation principle, competitions became more intense between the different communities. Conflicts over the

placement of oil wells and the quantity of oil produced began to be an important part of the claims for increased economic rights. The conflicts were not only technical but also identity, territorial and recognition issues.

Host community policies also influenced intergroup relations as a result of the activities of the oil companies. Opportunities for employment, contracts and development projects were sometimes given in a selective way which resulted in feeling excluded and favoring certain people. Communities who became 'Host Communities' for oil facilities have been given many benefits, leading to increased competition. Both communities were vulnerable to environmental degradation due to oil extraction activities such as oil spills, water pollution and gas flaring. These consequences led to common grievances but compensation and responsibility issues may have exacerbated divisions and prevented collective action from taking place.

The effects of the federal and state policies under the Fourth Republic on Okrika and Kalabari communities were quite different, which led to divergent performance assessment of government and divergent political strategies to deal with state institutions. To account for the differential effects, it is crucial to grasp the reasons for the different reactions to common issues between the two communities, and why they often came into conflict instead of cooperation. Historical trends of educational progress, and the emergence of a professional and political elite, with national connections, benefited Kalabari communities, especially the communities associated with the ancient Elem Kalabari center. This same superior ability played a role in securing better lobbying for federal appointments, development initiatives, and policy interest. Kalabari politicians held key positions in the Obasanjo government and later in the other governments and facilitated community growth, which the Okrika communities could not achieve on their own.¹⁰

Dr. Peter Odili was one of the examples of such differential advantages when he was appointed Governor of Rivers State in 1999. The extent to which Odili was an Ikwerre as opposed to a Kalabari was unimportant; what was important was that his political network was Kalabari-dominated and that his policies were seen by many Okrika people to be pro-Kalabari.²⁹ This perception of his pro-Kalabari policies, though possibly exaggerated, was a factor that led to Okrika resentment and mobilization.

The interventions and economic development of the state in Okrika communities were different. Oil installations, the course of infrastructure projects, and political appointments were all sited differently, leading to a unique arrangement of opportunities and grievances. The clustering of oil industry facilities in the Okrika territory had a significant impact on the communities, as it led to an uneven distribution of benefits and costs, which influenced community attitudes towards the government and oil companies.¹¹

Federal policies about deriving oil revenues had mixed and conflicting impacts on both communities. The 13% derivation formula in the 1999 Constitution was an improvement on the earlier formula, but it created divergences on how to measure derivation, allocate funds and how to utilise the funds. Both communities wanted to show the nation how they were contributing to the country's oil production, causing technical disagreements and political competition; thus, the communities were competing to capture the maximum benefit they could from the derivation revenues.¹²

Establishment of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000 was a significant federal effort aimed at solving problems of underdevelopment in the region. In fact, according to Idemudia and Ite, such interventions tended to exacerbate, rather than to resolve, intergroup conflicts since communities sought out NDDC projects, appointments to the commission, and influence in the decision making process, and as federal connections

were strong with the Kalabari, they were perceived to be better positioned to secure NDDC benefits, thus creating Okrika grievances.¹³

Both communities felt that state government policies during the Odili regime (1999-2007) favoured their competitors, in different policy areas and depending on who was observing the policies and the communities they belonged to. The distribution of infrastructure (roads, electrification), was conducted via political processes which communities tried to influence, and perceived inequities fostered resentment and conflict.¹⁴ Communities competed for access to public services, whether through the location of public institutions (hospitals, schools) or through how they are funded.

In fact, the formation, restructuring and elimination of local government areas in the Fourth Republic created a lot of conflicts between the Okrika and Kalabari communities, because gaining control of local government headquarters would bring a lot of advantage to people.³⁵ Local government chairmen, councillors and community chiefs were also ethnically contested areas, furthering divisions within communities.¹⁵

Differential impacts also occurred with respect to security policies with regard to the deployment of police and military forces. The Kalabari communities were often thought to have a greater influence over the behaviour of the security forces due to their representation in the federal security institutions. Commonly, however, the communities of Okrika found that they were subjected to security force interference that was perceived as partisan and repressive, especially in times of violent conflict. These asymmetrical experiences of state security had developed community orientations towards the federal state and their receptivity to state institutions.

These differential policy effects culminated in the divergence of political paths the Okrika and Kalabari communities got on the 4th Republic. Alliance formation was complicated in both communities, as the marginalisation they faced led to the development of divergent

strategies for coping with this marginalisation and divergent views on the efficacy of these strategies, which helped to maintain intergroup conflict throughout the study period.

4.4 Government and Community Efforts at Conflict Resolution

The Federal Government's approach to Okrika-Kalabari conflicts during the Fourth Republic also underwent a transformation, based on the Nationally changing perceptions of the Niger Delta crisis and the political priorities of the day. The interventions can be classified into three types: security based, development based and negotiation based, which have varying effects on intergroup relations. The first few years of the Fourth Republic were marked by security-related interventions, which were aimed at safeguarding oil production and the viability of the federal government amidst growing violence. Military task forces and Joint Task Forces (JTF) were deployed to put down violence and to secure oil facilities, which negatively affected the civilian population. Affected communities often viewed these operations as partisan, alleging that there was a bias in favour of Kalabari interests in some operations or in favour of Okrikas interests in other operations, depending on the specific operation and the local context.¹⁶

The Rivers State operations of the JTF in 2003-2007 had an interesting history. Security forces were broadly neutral but sometimes had perceptions of bias due to their composition and actions. Kalabari communities sometimes alleged that security forces were recruited and sympathetic to Okrika interest and Okrika communities felt that security forces intervened oppressively and indiscriminately on them. Whether true or not, these perceptions influenced community attitudes regarding federal intervention and co-operation with security forces.

Development interventions introduced were the creation and expansion of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the establishment of the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, and some presidential initiatives. These institutions provided federal funds to the

region with the aim of twofold: to help end the underdevelopment and to help diminish conflict. But, as Idemudia and Ite contend, these interventions tended to re-create the “omplex postcolonial politics” which caused conflicts in the first place, because of corruption, mismanagement and political manipulation.

The NDDC was a very complicated factor in the Okrika-Kalabari relationship because of the competition for the projects of the NDDC, the appointments to the commission and the influence exercised in its decision making process. The commission's project selection matrix, which had prioritised local political priorities and technical feasibility over the local conflict sensitivity, in some cases added to the tensions. Projects on the outskirts of a community or those that involved obtaining land were the source of conflict, as each community wanted to reap as much benefit as possible and pay as little as possible.¹⁸

In the later years of the study period, negotiation-focused interventions gained in importance culminating in the amnesty program of 2009. These strategies acknowledged the constraints of armed responses to conflict and attempted to resolve the conflict through dialogue, incentives, and institutional change. Fragmentation of armed groups, multiple conflict drivers and the challenge of verification and compliance on commitments and agreements were all factors that hampered the effectiveness of negotiation. The amnesty programme of 2009 was mainly aimed at the anti-state insurgency but it had far-reaching ramifications for Okrika-Kalabari relations.

The program provided opportunities to alleviate intergroup violence through its provision of disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration incentives, but did not specifically target community-level conflicts. The amnesty process highlighted existing inequalities and created new such grievances, as Okrika communities' ability to do so was greater than the Kalabari. The Federal government took steps to resolve disagreements through interventions in the judiciary, such as commissions of inquiry and references to the

Supreme Court. Judicial resolution was, however, hindered by slow judicial processes, by limited ability to enforce the judgments in the face of continuing violence, and by the technical difficulties involved in resolving boundary and resource conflicts. Judicial proceedings were perceived as extensions of a political struggle in the community. Federal interventions had produced a complicated institutional setting in which a variety of security, development and negotiation approaches were not only present but sometimes contradictory. Communities developed a certain intellectual savvy in dealing with this context, aiming to shape the design and implementation of interventions to further their cause. Federal government's failure to come up with coherent and consistent strategies to the Okrika-Kalabari conflicts had a considerable influence on the persistence of the conflicts during the Fourth Republic.

The Rivers State government was a key player in the management of Okrika– Kalabari conflicts because it had a local understanding of the issues and the constitutional power to make decisions on issues of great concern to both communities. The responses of the State government were a mix of diplomatic effort, military deployment and development intervention—all of which were somewhat successful. Under his government (1999-2007), the government built up considerable experience in conflict management, having set up early warning systems, mediation mechanisms, and post conflict reconstruction. The state government policies, however, were also seen as being biased against some communities and interests, creating resentment and in some cases the lack of neutrality in their approach to mediation made them seem discredited.¹⁸

The change of government in 2007 with the election of Governor Celestine Omehia and later Governor Rotimi Amaechi that year brought new challenges and opportunities for conflict management. The Amaechi administration came into power after a lengthy legal battle and was immediately faced with security problems and was looking to stamp its

presence in communities that were involved in conflict. Although Amaechi's Ikwerre background and his core political support outside the heartland of the Okrika–Kalabari conflict gave him some separation from local conflicts, it also meant that he had less first-hand knowledge of community dynamics.

The state government took several security measures, such as sending out mobile police units, setting up special security committees and coordinating with the federal government's security forces. Most of these were reactive not proactive – addressing events after they had reached the crisis stage. Political constraints, limited resources, and conflicts within communities that were too complex to resolve prevented the state government from effectively using preventive diplomacy.

State government diplomatic efforts involved direct mediation with community leaders, formation of peace committees and organizing reconciliation events. Often, such efforts brought temporary ceasefires and symbolic agreements but failed to meet the longer-term needs for addressing structural causes of conflict and grievances. Younger and more strident voices were not always represented through the traditional structures of the state, namely the traditional rulers and established elites, leading to less sustainability for peace agreements. State government development interventions such as infrastructure development and social programmes were utilised as instruments of conflict prevention and conflict resolution. Projects had to be located and timed because of security concerns, with a "troubled" area being a focus to help to minimise violence. Sometimes, however, it led to the creation of perverse incentives, as communities found that violence brought development funds.¹⁹

The state government's activities on chieftaincy issues and traditional government had a profound influence on intergroup relationships. The recognition or de-recognition of the traditional rulers, the readjustment of the boundaries of traditional councils and the

resolution of succession issues were all state government issues that had an impact on community status and intergroup relations. Decisions on these issues were frequently seen as partisan and caused resentment and escalation of conflicts. What state government interventions combined were able to do was to set up a structure for the management of Okrika – Kalabari conflicts more responsive than the federal structures, but still insufficient to the magnitude and complexity of problems. State government personnel gained considerable skills in conflict resolution, although due to political restriction and resource limitation, they were limited in their ability to resolve the conflicts in a full manner.

In the face of the existing political and economic climate of the Fourth Republic, traditional institutions continued to play important roles in managing and solving the conflicts between the Okrika and Kalabari people. The Amanyabo of Kalabari and Okrika, as well as their chiefs' councils, were constantly involved in diplomacy to avoid and mediate conflict. The established protocols and rituals of traditional mediation were utilized that gave culturally accepted structures to resolve grievances. These included: exchanging of palaces; consulting oracles or religious leaders together; purification and reconciliation ceremonies; compensation and restitution for damages. These traditional modes of conflict dealt with aspects of contestation which were not covered by formal institutions, such as spiritual pollution, ancestral grievances, and collective trauma. Ijaw tradition placed great value on hospitality and diplomacy, conflict avoidance, and the peace treaties that were established in the past; these were used as tools for mediation when contemporary political relations were sour. But as in the Fourth Republic the authority of traditional rulers was being challenged.

Traditional authority was not always honored or respected, with youth militants, political entrepreneurs, and outsiders able to either ignore or work around it, severely impacting Amanyabo's ability to secure agreements or regulate community members. In many

circumstances the traditional rulers did not have the material resources to govern effectively, because the economic and coercive resources were concentrated in non-traditional hands. Mediation at times became complicated by succession issues in traditional institutions that sometimes came in the form of intergroup disputes. If a conflict over their legitimacy emerged within his own community, his negotiating power with the other community was reduced. External parties, such as state governments and oil companies sometimes intruded upon chieftaincy affairs, which contributed to a loss of traditional authority and to internal tensions.

Traditional and modern institutions of conflict resolution were intertwined and sometimes conflicting. Traditional leaders frequently used to be engaged for government services, and government officials to obtain support from traditional leaders to carry out their own work, whilst traditional rulers wanted to remain autonomous and relevant in the face of changing times. Coordination between traditional and modern institutions was frequently the most useful interventions, although it was not easily realized because of conflicting interests and practices.²¹

Although women were subordinate to men in traditional conflict resolution, they still played an important part. Women organizations and individual women of status could exert influence on mediation processes by way of back channeling, exerting pressure on male relatives, and arranging reconciliation ceremonies. Women were not as involved in the formal peace talks as men, but they had a significant informal voice. The result of all these traditional forms of mediation has been a constant flow of conflict management activity, albeit sometimes imperceptible, that has kept many conflicts from turning into violence and others from spiraling out of control. Traditional institutions were seldom effective in addressing core issues of land and resources, but were used to handle the everyday nature of relations and to keep intergroup civility at a minimum.

During the Fourth Republic, traditional leaders like the Amanyabo, chiefs and titled men were in limbo when it came to conflicts between Okrika people and others. At the same time, they played the roles of watchdogs for the community, conciliators in intergroup conflicts, and subjects for youth criticism and challenge. For understanding their roles, attention is needed to the internal political of traditional institutions and its external relations. Even when there was a lot of conflict, the Amanyabo of Kalabari and Okrika kept in touch by sending messages and negotiating via intermediaries. Such diplomatic efforts were frequently clandestine or subliminal in nature, since if negotiations were made public, the negotiators' position in their society would be weakened.

The ability of traditional rulers to be involved in such diplomacy was a reflection of their institutional roles and historical experiences of intergroup relations. But the traditional authorities were faced with a number of limitations in their conflict management function. They had no independent coercive power and were reliant on community youth or the state security forces to enforce. They were frequently viewed as politically party or economically oriented, and therefore as biased against their neutrality. They faced opposition from within their own society, from those who opposed their rule and denounced or accused them of treason.

During this time, traditional leadership has become obsolete, presenting further challenges. Younger groups began to doubt traditional political channels and demand new channels for political expression. Younger generations began to doubt traditional political channels and demanded new channels for political expression. In some cases, however, the struggle of competing individuals for traditional roles had a cross-over with intergroup conflict, with aspirants for traditional offices appealing for outside assistance or rallying ethnic support through ethnic rhetoric. The economic interests of traditional authorities influenced their conflict management function. There was a widespread conflict of interest between the

chiefs and other titled men who were also engaged in business, such as with the oil companies and government bodies, and their mediation work. The attacks on the traditional leaders' motives, normally on their personal economic motivation rather than on their community welfare, were frequent and cast doubt on their legitimacy. In spite of these difficulties, the traditional authorities were still key players in conflict management during the Fourth Republic. The most capable traditional leaders were those capable of maneuvering the intricate politics of the day, building support among the community and interacting with the state institutions and the other community in a productive way⁹¹.

Youth became the main protagonists in Okrika-Kalabari conflicts during the Fourth Republic affecting the nature of intergroup relations and undermining the existing structures of authority. Youth organizations and militia groups assumed very complex organizational structures and voiced complaints which were distinct from those of the elite representatives of the community. Multiple factors were at play in the formation of youth groups: demographic expansion (large cohort of youth; educational expansion (high expectations from education, low expectations from economy; political liberalization (provide a space for youth mobilization); resources from oil industry and illegal economies (fund to organize youth). These factors worked throughout the Niger Delta region and led to similar youth movements in Okrika, Kalabari and other areas. Youth militias acquired military skills by stealing and buying weapons from the security forces, international arms trafficking networks, and by local manufacture. The small arms were used to shift the balance of power in and between communities, and youths were able to push back against traditional authorities and state security forces.

Youth militancy was not always directly linked with offences and was also a subject of contention. Youth leaders frequently saw their activities as political opposition to oppressive state and corporate power, and some people viewed them as criminals taking

advantage of the chaos for personal enrichment. These characterizations had a certain measure of truth, for one – youth groups had a political agenda as well as an economic agenda and, within the groups, there were ideological, ethnic and personal conflicts. Youth groups voiced a set of grievances which were not covered by the traditional or elite political systems. These consisted of: need for jobs and economic gains; resentment against elderly dominance of community resources; frustration over lack of success in peaceful protest; and need for recognition and respect in a society that was not responsive to young people. Such grievances transcended community barriers, and fostered the potential for youth intergroup solidarity, which seldom manifested itself in reality.

The 2009 amnesty programme was a significant step in youth politics, and it was a programme of disarmament and rehabilitation for armed struggle. The program had a complicated effect on relations between Okrika and Kalabari youth, with some of the combatants being taken off the battlefield, and some issues not being resolved. Access to amnesty to young people in Okrika vs. the Kalabari increased existing differentials and created new tensions. Women played unique roles in Okrika-Kalabari conflicts, and are especially vulnerable— yet they have also acquired particular peacebuilding and advocacy skills.

Gender analysis also uncovers aspects of conflict which are likely to be invisible if only considering the political and military realm, which is dominated by men. There were several ways in which women faced conflict; through direct violence, such as sexual violence including assault and killing; displacement and loss of livelihood; loss of male family members due to death, injury, or incarceration; and heavier workloads for women, particularly their economic role, within the household. These gendered impacts were deep, but often unreported, as women were stigmatised and retaliated against for speaking up about their experiences. However, women built up their own peacebuilding roles and roles,

despite these vulnerabilities. Women planned, led, and facilitated peace marches, mediation and reconciliation ceremonies through their roles as mothers, wives, and traders who established cross-community networks. The women groupsoffered humanitarian aid to the victims of the conflict and advocated for peaceful resolution by using traditional and modern means.²³

The market women's associations played a special role in ensuring the continuity of intergroup links in time of conflict. Women traders also exchanged information and participated in economic networks which men were unable to do. They engaged in everyday transactions at markets, which facilitated opportunities for dialogue and relationship-building, in addition to formal peace processes. Christian women's fellowships and traditional religious bodies were other vehicles for peacebuilding and offered a blend of spiritual and material support, encompassing the physical and psychological effects of conflict. Their cross community nature, with women from different communities coming together, helped to foster opportunities for the building of relationships across political lines. Women's political exclusion and lack of participation in peace processes restricted their peacebuilding efforts. The traditional and modern institutions that women were involved in were both male run and male dominated, with often demeaning speech about their contributions or their status in subordinate roles. Informal influence of women, however, through their social networks within the family and in social circles was significant and women's advocacy helped to raise awareness of the need for inclusion in conflict resolution.²⁴

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CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The study has focused on the intergroup relations between the Okrika and Kalabari community in the post-colonial era especially in the period 1999 to 2009. The study has shown that the ties of these two Ijaw communities are historical, geographical, economic and socio-cultural in nature and extend beyond the colonial period and much influenced by the political development of the colonial and the post-colonial period. The results indicate that the relations between Okrika and Kalabari have been complex, with cooperation and conflict occurring throughout the history between the two groups.

The pre-colonial era set the tone for future trade, diplomacy, and territorial negotiation, which gave both opportunities for the growth of cooperation and the roots for continued conflict. In the colonial period, indigenous diplomatic systems were entirely changed and new administrative and legal systems were introduced that further complicated pre-colonial conflicts and also introduced new ones. Competition grew during the post-colonial era, especially in the Fourth Republic, with the democratic politics, resource exploitation of oil, and administrative reorganization.

The study concludes that the shift to democratic rule in 1999 neither managed to solve the underlying tensions between the Okrika and Kalabari community, nor did it ensure peace, but rather raised new challenges of competition and opened up new opportunities for dialogue and negotiation. Ethnic identities were politicized in electoral politics, the competition intensified over resources due to oil extraction and local government institutions were restructured, all of which led to increased conflict. Kinship networks, trading ties, and common cultural traditions, though, ensured long-lasting avenues for cooperation and reconciliation.

The 2009 Presidential Amnesty Programme was a major development in the overall pattern of the Niger Delta conflict scenario which had impacted the relationship between the communities of Okrika and Kalabari. The programme had some success in minimizing large-scale violence and boosting oil production, but by targeting individual militants instead of structural changes, it was not very effective in dealing with the underlying causes of intergroup tensions. The 'payment for peace' model of the programme could encourage more violence in the future and fail to recognize lawful youth that did not join the military. The research also finds that traditional institutions, despite their own conflicts with the state of authority, are still significant in the process of managing conflict and peacebuilding. Community-level peacebuilding efforts can build on the continuity of chieftaincy institutions, traditional diplomatic channels, and cultural practices of reconciliation, in addition to formal governmental and judicial processes. The success of these institutions, however, can be influenced by their capacity to adjust to the new political and social context, such as the growing importance of youth groups, and the general influence of oil politics.

Lastly, the research finds that attaining sustainable peace between Okrika and Kalabari communities demands attention to structural inequality (economic, political, and environmental) issues. Any temporary ceasefires and agreements will be fragile and the cycle of conflict is likely to persist if there is no meaningful progress on these underlying conditions. The results highlight the importance of inter-sectoral measures involving institutional change, economic development, environmental rehabilitation, and dialogue at the community level, to shift the conditions that foster intergroup animosity.

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2	Benibo Iboroma	49	Kalabari	Teacher	17/5/26	Direct	Reliable
3	Briggs Friday	71	Obigbo	Retired Teacher	20/5/26	Direct	Reliable
4	Godswill Princewill	55	Okrika	Civil servant	18/5/26	Direct	Reliable
5	Ogolo Matthew	53	Port Harcourt	Business man	14/4/26	Direct	Reliable
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