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A HISTORY OF OKRIKA-OGONI RELATIONS IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the intergroup relations between the Okrika and the Ogoni people in the 19th and 20th century. The study made use of historical research design in both data collection and analysis. Thus, in sourcing for data the study made use of both primary and secondary sources such as oral traditions, oral history, archival materials, academic journals, text books and among others. The study revealed that during the 19th century with the end of the slave trade economy in 1807, and the rise of the legitimate trade for palm oil as the new article of trade, the Okrika people continued to play the role of middlemen like they did during the slave trade economy that lasted for 400 years. The Okrika middlemen, relied on their long-standing relations with the Ogoni people, to conveying palm produce from Ogoni to Bonny, where the products are then shipped abroad. The study further revealed that one remarkable trade relations between the Okirika and the Ogoni people was the high degree of exchange on pottery with Ogoni pot traders who regularly trade locally made waterpots and cooking pots for the Okirika people. The study also revealed that during the transatlantic slave trade, slaves procured from Igbo heartland passed through the major trade route of Ogoni to both Okrika and Bonny garrisons. Thus, the slaves that were taken to Okrika through the North-Eastern routes were first kept at the slave camp Agbonchia in Mboli (Eleme) and from the slave camp to Okrika through Alesa or Onne routes. It further revealed that the people of Ogoloma, through preventive diplomacy, have an age long covenant consummated through traditional oath with the people of Bodo, to live in peace and harmony and never to go to war with each other. Thus, regardless of the protracted land dispute between certain Okrika and Ogoni communities, the people have lived harmoniously over the years, from the pre-colonial to the post- colonial Nigeria.

Keywords: Economy, Intergroup, legitimate trade, Middlemen, Relations, Slave trade, Trade

Introduction

It is an established fact that the Niger Delta has an interesting history of inter-group relations, with attendant interchange of ideas and influence that reflected its heterogenous and multipolar character. The intermingling of peoples and cultures and attendant exchanges produced varied and complex interrelated outcomes tinted by “symbolic inter-dependences, mutual accommodation and co-operation” in the economics and cultural flanks (Nu-e, 2017). Okrika, is located in the eastern Niger Delta region of

Nigeria with a rich history of cultural and economic exchanges with other communities, both within and outside the region. Intergroup relations as a means of interactions between individuals in different social groups, as a means of conducting relations between societies, played a crucial role in shaping Okrika's history and development. The Okrika nation, which ordinarily cannot live in isolation, interacted with other neighbours such as Ibani (Bonny), Opobo, Kalabari, Nembe- Brass, Andoni and other groups such as the Ogoni, Ikwerre, Ibos and Europeans for survival.

Before 1900, the various city states of Niger Delta of Nigeria, regardless of their rash environment, had contacts among themselves and other kingdoms inside and outside of the Niger Delta. They were linked together during the pre-colonial period and this linkage were influenced by commerce, political and cultural relationship. The people of Niger Delta of Nigeria, who are in occupation of the mangrove swamp zone or region of Nigeria, live in a difficult terrain too swampy for cultivation and who in corollary are predominantly fishing people and in salt making (Alagoa, 2005). The relative compactness of the Niger Delta geographical environment extensively encourages intensive group interactions, movements and exchanges of peoples, goods and ideas, due principally to the high complementarity of the coastal and hinterland communities, and this was the case between Okrika and her Ogoni neighbours.

Literature Review

Derefaka and Orugbani (eds) (2009) *The Eastern Niger Delta* in Alagoa, Tamuno, and Clark, The Izon of the Niger Delta, focused their discourse on three distinctive groups; Okrika, Kalabari and Ibani. They delved into their history, from the perspective of Pre-Colonial to Post-Colonial periods. At the centre of their discourse were traditional politics, socio-cultural history of the people, and their religious institutions that became forces of change. The Atlantic trade and diplomatic relations among the Niger Delta group and the European traders, as well as the effect of the trade on the region, came into their conversation.

Alagoa (2004), "*The Use of Hind Sight as Fore Sight*," is a reflection of the work of an historian to teach, reflect or simply tell stories of the past for public enlightenment. The work is a collection of papers for documentations to harness oral historical sources and academic study of the past for public education and understanding of the present. It is concerned with learning from history: The relevance of looking back for contributory answers for contemporary questions. The book has particular regards for the history and current situation of the Niger Delta, offering a view of Nigeria's history from a marginal position

Okorobia (eds) (2009) *The Central Delta* in Alagoa, Tamuno and Clark, The Izon of Niger Delat, examined the Central Niger Delta as the natural habitat of the vast majority of the Ijo people. The history and culture of the Ijaw ethnic group, the role played by the Trans-Atlantic trade, the effects, as a direct consequence of British colonialism as well the process leading to the creation of Bayelsa State, were adequately covered. The study discussed the economic, political and social history of the people, as well as the relationship that bonded them together, internally and externally, were also brought to the fore.

Akekue's (2004), *Who are the Ogoni?* showcased who the Ogoni are and explain further that Bonny, Opobo, and Okrika are the nearest neighbours to the Ogoni, and specified that intermittently, the relationship that existed between Ogoni and her neighbours is bereft with occasional tense moments of disagreement and competition. This is especially true of the relationship between Okrika and Eleme and Onne, both Ogoni towns, over land. The work supported Alagoa's (2009) view in linkages.

Igbara, (2015), *The Emergence of Bori Town: The Ogoni Heartland*, is a work that attempts to document the formation, growth and development of Bori from the cradle to the present. He asserted that the pivotal location of Bori endeared it to Ogoni neighbours, far and near, and that accounts for its cosmopolitan status, bearing in mind infrastructural developments, especially the Rivers State Polytechnic, Bori, which has been a rallying point of inter-group relationship in Rivers State.

Another work that is instructive to this study is Ejituwu and Okarafor, (2009), *The House of Skulls: A Symbol of Warfare & Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial Niger Delta and Igbo Hinterland*. The work unearthed one of the lost cultures of the Niger Delta and the hinterlands with focus on one aspect of their tradition, which boards on human sacrifice and head hunting, as was the practice long before the arrival of the Europeans. The work shows that war, peace and diplomacy in the Niger Delta was gifted towards archieving economic and political gains and was part of the daily existence of the people. Little wonder, according to the authors, Pereira, a caption of Portuguese origin, observed that: “Delta people were war like and their intelligence affected adversely the peace of the area. To say the least, they were often at war”

Ngofa’s (2006), *The Complete History of Eleme*, captured the relationship that existed between the people of Eleme, Ijaws, others, and particularly the people of Okrika. The author brought to fore the unique relationship between Eleme’s and Okrika communities and asserted that it was very cordial and occasionally characterized by wars or disputes involving the loss of lives and properties. According to Ngofa, the Eleme’s have been more in touch through trade, with the Okrikas, which did not stop the Okrikans from exploiting them and also from hindering the spread of Christianity and education in Eleme, for fear that it would bring their supremacy to an end.

Significantly, from the studies reviewed above a gap exist in knowledge, hence the motivation for this study.

Trade and Economic Relations between the Okirika and the Ogoni People

As noted by Fiberesima (1990, p. 24), Okrika people were deemed wild and turbulent. They were said to be powerful fighters and were in enmity with their neighbours; strong at sea; strong on land. It was said that Okrika people were born with the strength to survive the rigours of the deep so they could live under sea water for days and were as fierce as sharks in the deeps. On land, they were ferocious as leopards. The baleful imputation stems from Okrika inevitable struggles for economic survival. It is worthy of note that the geographical situation of Okrika was such that people had not enough arable land for growing food nor had any big river for extensive fishing. So, the people’s life consisted of continuous struggles to get food. They continuously challenged their neighbours, such as the Ogoni people on sea and on land, to catch fish, to grow food and for commerce (Fiberesiam, 1990).

However, while they had enough catch in fish, they struggled with food items. Thus, they have always depended on their hinter land neighbours like the Ogoni for their basic food requirements. The Ogoni communities of Alesa, Aleto, Ogale, Onne, Alode, Gio, Nonwa, Kporgor, Eteo, Dere etc. provided, and till date still provides, Okrika with their required food items such as yam, cocoyam, fufu, three leaved yams, cassava, Taro-yam, maize among others.

Albeit, Okrika practiced subsistence farming on the “small portions of land round their settlement” and it is predominant among settlers of new settlements referred to as ‘Iwo-ama’. The Eleme (Mboli) clan of Ogoni and others “traded their surplus yams in the market of Okrika and on the other hand, Okrika supplied, the Ogoni of the mainland, with products from the rivers basically fish, shell fish, other sea foods and sometimes salt, for which they were known. However, with the coming of Europeans in the 15th century, European goods like tobacco, pipes, foreign spirit (whiskey, brandy etc.), hats, walking stick, eating and cooking utensils and other essential materials, were also supplied to the Ogoni by their Okirika neighbours. Eventually Ogoni became a ready market for Okirika goods. Okirika did not only supply their internal food requirements, but it also produce for the overseas trade through Bonny (Alagoa, 2005). Mention must be made here that before contact with the Europeans was made, the only available means of transportation in the Okrika-Ogoni local trade, during the pre-colonial era, was by foot and human crag, and in rare cases, canoes were employed as means of transportation to markets, which were held on rotational basis (Nu-e, 2017).

The means of transportation was said to be very tedious and really not adequate for the conveyance of large quantity of traders. After sometimes, tradition has it that the people of Okrika and Ogoni developed distributive and relay trade from one point to another suitable for trading and convenient for the people on both sides, which also revolved on the period or ring system of traditional Ogoni market days. Through these ways and means, centres of trade were established among such a place as Comonobie, but it is called and known among the Okrika as Omonobie, a latter name given to the market as it was used as a local slave market during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, originally pronounced as “Omoni-bie” which translates to slave abode.

Mackenzie (1932) suggests that Okrika claimed to have obtained “Omono-bie” market “by right of conquest from Alesa” as Echii Alesa. Other markets to which Okrika and Ogoni traded were Echii Olobolo situated between Ekporo and Ogu Bolo/Okrika (now extinct). Dugio situated between Tai and Okrika, kinwiga (named after the founder, Kiwinga), Kissala, Kisao, Kigbe and Nomaka markets in Gokana axis (Nu-e, 2017). It is important to note that the above-named markets were all border trade avenues, where Ogoni communities, Eleme, Gokana, Eteo and Tai traded with their Okrika neighbours. Items so traded at these markets where food stuffs, crafts and other essentials exchanged for fish, and later, European goods, brought by the Okrika through their Bonny trading partners (Kpone-Ntonwe, S. and Gbenenye, E. (2009).

In all of the above-mentioned economic relations that existed between Okrika and her Ogoni neighbours during the pre-colonial era, fishing activity was the driving force towards the economic activities of the Okrika people as fishing was the main occupation of the people. Evidently fishing activity among Okrika was as a result of their riverine environment, as an

Island. It is important to note that since antiquity, man’s endless effort to meet his fundamental material needs has pushed him to use productive agents, usually known as factors of production, especially natural resources found in his immediate environment, thus, Okrika, among their neighbours, have been compelled by their geographical position and environment to organize their means of survival which engendered the people’s predominant occupation which is fishing. The predominance of fishing was as a result of their proximity to the sea and the surrounding creeks (Abam, 1999, p. 19).

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that given the dictate of ecology, Ogoni communities bordering the sea or rivers, were inclined to fishing like their Okrika neighbours. In order to satisfy their food requirements, they took to fishing, few of such Ogoni communities include: Bodo, Kpor, Mogho, Bomu, Lewe, Kegbara, Baranyoma, Dere, Cube (all found in Gokana clan) practiced artisanal fishing, which complemented farming (Gobo, 2008). Since no one can lay claim to ownership of the sea to some extent, the Ogoni fishing communities apart from co-existing with Okrika, Owu-Ogono, Oraberekiri situated around present day Onne/Ekpokiri wharf oil and Gas Free Zone, fish with Okrika people through the use of local dug-out canoes. Commonest implements used for fishing at the time were simple gears like, hooks and traps. Orugbani (2009) succinctly averred that cast nets, set nets and drift nets were as well used.

There are also set hooks and hook line. The traps used for fishing are usually in different shapes of basket (Ikata-a). The effective use and the mastery skills of the fishermen led to their bountiful harvest. However, since it is usual for some species of fish to migrate seasonally from the brackish to the fresh water, and vice versa, this movement caused both the Okrika and Ogoni migrant fishermen to continually establish constants which enhance inter-group relations, as sometimes the Ogoni and Okrika fisher folk live together in some fishing settlements such as the ones mentioned above, for months and sometime years, and return home during festive periods to sell their catches. This contact relation between Okirika and Ogoni led to huge and significant inter- flow of culture, ideas, and goods between Okirika and their Ogoni neighbours.

Another aspect of trade that was remarkable between Okirika and Ogoni was a high degree of exchange which was on pottery with Ogoni professional pot traders regularly trading locally made water pots and cooking pots with Okirika. Tradition suggests that Ogu one of the traditional nine clans that make up Okirika kingdom, was a pottery center. Specifically, there was a cordial relation between Ogu and Nonwa Tai as a result of trade in pottery products, a relation that date? (Nu-e, 2017). An oral source narrates how traders carry pots in canoes to Okirika:

“We used to carry the pots in canoes to a market in Okirika. When going to Okirika, we often pass-through Bodo town, before entering Okirika. At Okrika, the only customer was by name Ezinwayi. She was a woman from Okirika and she was a bulk purchaser who buys in wholesale form to resale by retail”.

The Trans-Atlantic Trade and the Okirika-Ogoni Relations

The trade in slave, otherwise known as the trans-Atlantic slave trade was a trade in human cargoes which lasted nearly four hundred years. It was abolished in the early 1800s, after an estimated thirty – five million people from Africa had been sold into bondage to North and South America and the Caribbean Islands, with countless others killed and maimed during slave raids in the African hinterlands. This inglorious business occupies a prominent place in the annals of European incursion into the African territory (Uyah, 2007). The economy of the Atlantic slave trade was such that the plantation produces of the Americans were shipped to the distilleries, refineries and factories of Europe and North America for further processing or consumption. In the same way, the benefit of European manufacturing sector’s shipping across the Atlantic Ocean was a common denominator of these trading eras in West African. The produce was shipped in barrels, hogsheads, sacks or bales while slave ships were also constantly redesigned to keep abreast of challenges of the trade (Uya, 2007).

Albeit, the transport of slave was entirely scandalous and beyond the part of human treatment. It was called the triangular trade because of its connection with the three continents of Africa, America and Europe. To make a round voyage, slaves were loaded in West African slave ports bound for America. With the proceeds of slaves, the merchants purchased molasses, cotton, tobacco or other commodities produced by slaves in the plantation therefrom. They are shipped to various European ports to supply the factories of Britain and main land Europe the raw materials needed to fuel their textile mills, sugar factories and all other machinery churning the wheels of Industrial Revolution. The six to eight-week voyage from Africa to the New World, called the middle passage, became notorious for its inhuman conditions, described as one of the worse of the entire slave trade era.

Slaves were locked in irons to the lower deck, binding fifty or sixty men to the ship and to one another. When the doctor ventured below deck to attend to the sick, he was forced to step on chained bodies, as slaves covered the entire floors of the ship. It was reported that the slaves were fed “chiefly of horse beans, boiled to the consistency of a pulp; of boiled yams and rice, and sometimes of small quantity of beef and pork”. Just as modern maritime trade is an organized industry with many stakeholders and service providers; the slave trade was also organized around established companies and accepted procedures among the trader. Prominent baulkers, insurers, politicians and even the royal houses of Europe became involved in the slave trade at various times during its time. Some of the well-known state-sponsored slave traders include the Dutch East India Company, Royal Africa Company of Britain, the English royal family, two mayors of Liverpool and a host of other European national corporations (Uya, 2007). In Africa slaves were procured by the chiefs and hawked by their middlemen to European slaver merchants based at the coast.

When the slave trade became intensified, it exploited the previous internal long-distance trade routes between Ogoni and Okrika. It is important to note that the basic requirement of seventeenth century European Trade, which was chiefly slaves, were supplied to the Europeans at the coast through the Bonny intermediaries. To the Ogoni people in the hinterland, Okrika was the only means through which large quantities of food stuffs needed by those concerned with the “White” trade were supplied. The supplies were made through the instrumentality of the Okrika middlemen, in fact Okrika could be likened to entreport during this time.

Consequently, the slave’s commodity procured from Igbo heartland went through the major trade route of Ogoni to both Okrika and Bonny garrisons. The slaves that were taken to Okrika through the North-Eastern routes were first kept at the slave camp at Agbonchia and from a slave camp in Agbonchia in Mboli (Eleme) country they were taken to Okrika, through Alesa or Onne routes (Nu-e, 2017). Cooney (1974) averred that “Okrika community to the North of Bonny (Ogoloma) traded exclusively at the Mboli (Eleme) fair, to which also both the Aro and Ogoni participated”. It is important to note existing records suggests that Okrika did not trade directly with the Europeans until about the last decade of the eighteenth century but acted as agents for their Bonny allies.

It was a similar scenario at the start of the legitimate trade which substituted the slave trade. In the Nineteenth century when European powers made tropical products their essential commodities of trade, Okrika continued to function as middlemen like they did during the time of the slave trade. Okrika middlemen, relying on their long-standing relationships with the Ogoni, conveyed palm produce like oil

palm and palm kernel from Ogoni to Bonny, where the products were latter shipped abroad Porter (1933, p. 12) opined:

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was recorded that Okrika people were the middlemen between the interior and Bonny during and after 1832, in the oil trade. Bonny later became even more dependent on Okrika for their trade. Between 1869-1870, Bonny experienced Civil War. Consequently, the Civil War led to Chief Jaja's migration with his followers from where he extended his influence far into the interior. He prohibited and prevented any trade with his enemy country men (Bonny). Thus, Bonny largely depended on Okrika exclusively as medium of trade (p. 12).

As major participant of the palm oil trade which was an essential commodity to the industries in Europe, Bonny based European trading firm called African Trading Company (ATC) established a trading station at "Opu Amakiri Okrika within the first decade of the 20th century through a bilateral agreement Oju Daniel Kalio had with the African Trading Company (ATC) of London. Oju Kalio's negotiation with Arthur Prest, the ATC manager at Bonny, resulted in an agreement which included a guarantee that Okrika traders would sell to the company a minimum of 400 puncheons of palm oil a year (Tammuno and Alagoa, 1980, p. 148). The obligation to honour the ATC agreement helped Chief Daniel Oju Kalio to explore and exploit palm oil markets in the hinterland off Okrika. Records suggests that the first ATC agent at Okrika lived with Oju Kalio before the company building on the island was ready. It is noteworthy that the palm oil trade was brought to the door step of Okrika and it produced a wealthy class which influenced the political status of Okrika. Notable among such personalities is Chief Daniel Oju Kalio, Chief David Olunwa Koko and Chief John Altraide. The trade also attracted the influx of Igbo traders into Okrika. As trade expanded, Okrika employed Igbo migrant labourers who were latter absorbed and assimilated into Okrika society. Palm products were purchased by these Igbo employees from market points in Eleme (Mboli), Gokona and Boue areas and from these points the products were shipped to Bonny and eventually overseas (Nu-e, 2017).

Being an active player in the palm oil trade, Okrika also acted as middle men in the legitimate trade with Ogoni communities for European wares such as metal pots, metal rods, eating utensils, manila, kerosene, matches, candles, and so on through Okrika middlemen. Alagoa and Fombo (1972), pointed out that the Ogoni, Okrika, and Bonny, traded on the produce of the hinterland. The point of contact of Bonny and Ogoni were through Ogu, the Imo River and Bodo city. The route between Okrika and Ogoni was Nonwa, bordering Ogu/Bolo.

Okrika-Ogoni Socio-cultural Relations

So far it has been observed that Okrikans and her Ogoni neighbour had, and still share cordial economic relations which was mutually beneficial on both sides, thus Okrika and Ogoni became economically interdependent on each other. These existing economic relations brought about socio-cultural interactions and inter-relations between Okrika and Ogoni since no single group can exist in isolation of the other. It is important to note that the economic and political survival of a community depended on the relationship, whether friendly or hostile, which it had with its neighbours (Otite 2006). Evidently, Okrika have had a good socio-cultural relation with her Ogoni neighbours. They took the form of inter-marriage, language borrowing, naming, pattern of dressing etc. As mentioned earlier, the commercial intercourse between Okrika and Ogoni certainly generated strong ties between the two groups which led to and exchange socio-cultural borrowing in each other's culture. Plainly, Okrika and Ogoni share the culture of

somersaulting, which is known to the Ogoni's as Karikpo (in Khana dialect) while in Okrika a masquerade called Akrikpo is known for somersaulting. Sports known as Ikpotein among young ones in Okrika is also carried out as part of evening games. The Karikpo in Ogoni and Akarikpo in Okrika are popular plays which are mostly staged for the purpose of entertainment, especially during burial and other ceremonies, and state functions which are social performances done by youthful acrobats. Other socio-cultural borrowings are manifested in the Ogoni borrowings of Okrika's masquerade like Owu and Ekpete masquerade display. Tradition suggests that when works on the farm were less tedious, Okrika people taught their Ogoni neighboring communities how to exhibit these masquerade plays.

Similarly, both ethnic groups invited their business partners, associates and trading colleagues during the outing ceremonies of their respective masquerades. Okrika invited their Ogoni neighbours and friends during the celebrated display of Odum (Bua snake). The Ogoni on the other hand, extended their invitation to their Okrika friends and partners during the annual Aminikpo masquerade display. In this regard, Nu-e (2017) suggest that friends, in-laws, trade partners, and other invited guests were opportune to spend days or weeks with their hosts and are treated well. The hosts were also treated as such in their guests' homes when the occasion arises. Through these invitational and re-invitational displays, cordial relationship is maintained and new friendship ties are maintained and initiated.

Christian Activities and Education

Following the establishment of Christianity in Okrika in 1878 by Chief Atorudibo, the growth of the church thereafter led to the establishment of "St. Peter's" Okrika in 1881, as a result of the visit by Bishop Crowther and his son, Venerable Crowther, St. Peter's (Ang) Church, Okrika's structuralism - functionalism sparked off as a district right away (Kalio, 2023). Accordingly, the church positioned Okrika as a mission and evangelism hub of the province of Niger Delta and church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). In a broader sense, as a district, St. Peter's Church Okrika became the abode of many ethnic national minds including those in Okrika, Eleme, Etche, Ikwerres of Aparara and Evo. One may not go into details of the control St. Peter's "Okrika – London exercised over the churches of these ethnic nationalities, but suffice it to be pointed out that in 1928, about 40 churches of Etche group alone came under the superintendence of Okrika, with St. Peter's church, as the Headquarters of all under reference. In 1898, Chief Daniel Oju Kalio, together with Chief Ikiriko Daka and Samuel Ogan, financed missionary exploration to Eleme, Ogoni, Akwete, Ohambele, Azumini and so on.

In December 1905, as a result of revivalist meeting conducted in Okrika by Bishop Johnson, the Chiefs and people denounced the worship of traditional deities, and admonished the juju priest in order that their activities would be abated. Abam (2005, p.3 9). St. Peter's church, Okrika was also the venue from where the idea of establishing, St. Cyprian's church, Port Harcourt, was first mooted and it is important to note that a group of evangelists from Okrika opened St. Cyprian's Church, Port Harcourt, in 1916. It became a Parish in 1928.

One of the early agents sent to Akpajo who was instrumental to the establishment of St. Luke's Church in 1913, under the Niger Delta Pastorate (NDP) by Chief Daniel Oju Kalio, was Lazarus Koko of Amadi Ama, Ogoloma, later chief L.T.J. Koko. St. Luke's Church Akpajo remained under Okrika district up till 1940. During this period, the Christians in Akpajo were made to travel to Okrika for baptism and any other function that will require the services of an ordained priest. After the departure of L. Koko as an

agent, several other agents from Okrika were posted to Akpajo. His missionary activities are still appreciated around Akpajo and other Eleme communities.

On the educational side, St. Cyprian's (Ang) School was established in 1916 with Elder W.W Peter (Later Chief Iyenengi Daka) of Okrika, as the 1st Headmaster of the school. In 1907, the missionaries opened St Peter's Primary School in Okrika. On its heels, came the Government Primary School Okrika in 1909. It was also through missionary activities that Okrika Grammar School (O.G.S) was established in 1940. The establishment of these schools aided the process of evangelism, promoted literacy and Okrika relationship with her neighbors. At the moment, all these ethnic nationalities have gained their autonomies as districts, Archdeaconries and Dioceses, Okrika remained the city upon the hill, a shining light in the Niger Delta to the glory of God.

Pattern of Dressing

Cross-cultural interactions between Okrika and Ogoni are clearly demonstrated in their pattern of dressing and fashion styles. Evidently, the Ogoni adopted the pattern of putting on a *krukru-bite*, *Fani-bite* (plain George) and *peleingiri* (plain George with design) during burial ceremonies, chieftaincy installation/coronations and other ceremonial events. Ogoni Chiefs, and elders have also adopted the pattern and mode of dressing of Okrika Chiefs and elders like *adoring etibo*, *woko*, *don* etc. (i.e a *don* with a rectangular muffler collar and a hat).

Similar Fattening Room Practice (Iria Ceremony)

Another important cultural practice of Okrika people adopted and modified by their Eleme neighbours is the Iria ceremony. It is important to note that in both Okirka and Eleme cultures, *Bogoko* (Ogoni) ceremony to prepare maidens into womanhood for marriage (Nu-e, 2017), and the Iria ceremony help to checkmate and educate young maidens on how to take care of their husbands. Talbot (1967) throws more light on the Iria ceremony: the Iria ceremony is performed for young girls at the coming up of breast. This takes place every year from the tenth to eleventh month of the year. During this time, the girls are confined to their houses and fed three times a day.

They are dressed in bright coloured cloths and parts of their bodies are also hung round with beads and native ornaments of all kinds. According to some accounts, the Iria girls also take part in the Okrika new corn festival, which was one of the chief religious' ceremonies in the pre-colonial era. It is considered as a grave crime for a man to induce a girl to yield to his advances before the Iria ceremony has been performed on her. It is important to note that circumcision is not practiced among Okrika people but after the Iria ceremony has been performed, the "big cloth", dyed with cam-wood is tied and brass ornaments may be as well worn. About three weeks, latter the girl may come out dressed in very fine cloths. A great feast is given at this time, which is paid for by parents, relatives, and the intended husband. Black plantains are painted on the girl's skin by a woman who receives money in return for her services. Very ancient songs are sung during the ceremony.

The evening before the feast is called *kurye Mie Ene* (waist painting days). The feast day itself, is called *Buruma Mie Ene* (dye-panting day). The festival was formerly held during the time of harvest, and not during rainfall which will eventually affect the ceremony. After the day of feast, everyone involved in the ceremony is meant to rest for a day, then on the next day, which is called *Chiri Mu Ene* (Day of

procession), the Iria girls wear the costliest cloths of all, carry a mirror and puts on coral beads and anklets. A particular type of drum called Ommaw, is played for the procession.

The drum is often times rubbed over with cam-wood and swathe red round the base of the drum with white cloth. It may not be set on the ground but must be placed up on a small platform of sticks. Other drummers come out to join playing a small instrument called Okrika. The procession begins at one o'clock. All the virgin participants go singing behind one of them, chosen to lead them because she is adjudged to have the most melodious voice. They dance in tune to the drum beats about a hundred and twenty or more together, wearing their cloths in roll around the waist. Above this, nothing was worn, so as to show the painting upon their bodies, to indicate that the girls are well-looking. On the third day, the participants are expected to go on another procession, albeit, the procession of the third day is optional. As soon as the third day is over, the girls are free. Although it is not thought good for any of the maiden girls to immediately go into any intimate relationship, but this is now a matter which only concerns the virgin girl and her parents. To yield to any wooer is a shame and reproach to the girl and her parents that can never be wiped out (Talbot, 1967).

Like the Okrika, the Eleme communities adopted the Iria ceremony as their daughters made use of the brass iron rings on their legs like the Okrika people. Also, Okrika professionals in the art and drummers are invited to Eleme, by the Eleme women, for “the big wrapper” required for the ceremony. Artists, especially women who specialize in body painting, tattooing and cicatrizing were also hired from Okrika to design the maiden and vice versa.

Inter-Marriage between Okrika and Ogoni

Since the pre-colonial times, African marriage system is viewed as a complex institution because of the diverse ethnic groups and localities. However, one basic function of marriage in Africa is that two kingship groups are invited in relationship that outlive lives of the original individual spouses. As trade and economic relations established inter-group relations between Okrika and Ogoni groups, there is hardly any compound in Ogoni coastal communities without Okrika daughters as wives or concubines. Ogoni daughters are also married to Okrika men (Nu-e, 2017). Gomba (1981) suggests also that due to inter-group marriages, there are families in Okrika who can today trace their roots to Eleme and vice versa”. Inter-group marriage became an engine-room of inter-cultural borrowings and inter-group contacts as the wives married to Okrika men bring the elements of the culture of her people into her husband’s culture, like languages and naming as will be discussed within the next subheading of this discourse.

Language Borrowing and Naming linguistically

It is understood that the two groups fall into separate language families, however, trade and economic interdependence brought about language borrowing between the two groups, especially their women folks. As a result of years of trading together, Okrika and Ogoni women spoke and understood each other’s languages or dialects. For instance, Okrika, especially Bolo women speak Eleme, while Eleme, Khana and Gokana women are also speakers of Okrika language. Both languages were used interchangeably for commercial transactions. People of Oba-Ama in Okrika have a few populations that speak Eleme dialect fluently. There was also assimilation of each other’s name’s appellations, nomenclatures

and sobriquets. Some of the Okrika names found in Ogoni are George, Wokoma, Abbey, Gogo, Ogoloma etc, on the other hand there are families in Okrika that also bear Eleme names such as Olungwe.

Similarly, inter-dependence on economy and trade led to the Eleme clan introducing and teaching Okrika men and women some aspect of their indigenous technology and necessary skills required to make thatches, mats and local broom. Mention must be made here, that mat making was a lucrative venture due to its aesthetic and utilitarian values. Ogoni weavers use fibers, raffia, screw pine leaves and fresh palm-fronds as raw materials for the production of assorted types of mats and brooms. This craft was adopted by Okrika people which they used to solve their immediate needs as it concerns mats for sleeping as well as thatches for roofing.

Acquisition of Fishing Skills

Since Okrika was predominantly a fishing society, men and women alike, are skilled in fishing. Okrika fishing folk use several fishing methods in fishing. Due to their knowledge in fishing, they also learned how to calculate the time of the day through a simple technique of calculating the flowing River and the time it spends to ebb. This simple calculation of seas and Rivers enabled the Okrika people to know and understand which species of fish exist and the season any specie will be in abundance at any particular time. It is important to note that the fishing activity of the Okrika people was basically intertwined with several techniques and methods of fishing. The rivers and the surrounding creeks stored abundance of various species of fish, ranging from cartilaginous, bony or Jawless fish, tilapia, gastropods, millet, sardine etc. as there were various methods the people used to catch fish. For instance, sea creatures that crawl, such as sea snails, and periwinkle were caught by picking or gathering, while oyster was picked or detached from the mangrove tree to which it got itself attached (Tubobereni, 2021).

Okrika people use various types of trap and gadgets for fishing. Such local implements include: Ikate, Chua, Bala, Obe, Ongoro and Ovukuma. The above fishing implements had their various fishing specification. Like the Ovukuma fishing gadget was used to catch fishes like mudskipper, tilapia and shiny, while the Ongoro fishing gadget was used to catch the Cray group, consisting of the lobster, prawn and shrimp. The bala consist of Oblong-shaped mats made from palm fronds and used to fence rivulets. This is done so that when the tide recedes, entrapped fishes are picked up. The chua trap, also made up of same material like the bala, is similarly placed. Only that the chua trap is strategically placed at shallow points of the rivers but not usually placed close to the river banks (Tubobereni, 2021). The chua trap is constructed in a circular form, with an entrance having two long arms positioned to face the water tide.

For fishing, Okrika implored various techniques to get big catch, such as the usage of akpa, a type of net smaller in size and meshes and it is often used at very shallow points. It is probable that certain fishing techniques must have diffused from Okrika to Ogoni fishing communities and perhaps vice versa. This is based on the fact that the opportunity of fishing together must have divulged new fishing skills, techniques and unusual attributes which Okrika and Ogoni fishing communities share together to advance their fishing expedition (Nu-e, 2017)

Introduction of Cassava and Specific Delicacy:

Available records indicate that trade relations between Okrika and her Ogoni neighbours, just like in every other aspect of life, also brought about the introduction of cassava (manwe) locally called

Ekpakpuru into Eleme community through Okrika from Andoni and Bonny communities. Nu-e (2017) suggests that it is of a more recent provenance, probably, in the 18th and 19th centuries that the specie of cassava introduced to Eleme spread to other parts of Ogoni, through the commercial activities of her southern neighbours. As a result of trade, Okrika traders sensitized the Eleme people on the propagation, processing, and usage of the new crop. Evidently, at the present, cassava production and its allied cottage industries have become the mainstay of Ogoni local economy. Eleme on their part taught Okirka, especially those who lived initially on the settlement which dotted the coastline, the techniques, principles and methods of cultivating, nurturing and growing farm crops like sugar cane of different sorts, vegetables, as well as other essential crops.

It is important to note that in the process of the exchange of knowledge on the cultivation of different crops, the Eleme people introduced to their Okrika neighbours specific easily prepared delicacies such as “Ikpurukpa”, Ogoni pan-cake and “Ifuba”. These were meals that were prepared basically with corn and cassava. Till date, the Okrika people still prepare these meals although the knowledge of preparing such meals is gradually going extinct among Okrika people.

Group Conflicts

Intergroup conflicts occupy a special place in the interaction of social groups and of necessity form the basic building blocks for the integration of previously fragmented groups. It is crucial to note that man's interrelationship with his environment is often tied to his survival. He must exploit the land to survive in so doing, the exploration and exploitation, and control of nature and natural resources for human development, are not possible without the exertion and breakout of some form of conflict or the other. Man's needs for exploitation gives rise to the issues of access to land and exploitation for economic benefit and the issue of ownership and control of the environment. These no doubt are the major reasons for conflicts. This particular scenario describes the relationship between Okrika and her Ogoni neighbours.

Apart from the periodic fighting and alliances that Okrika had with their rival neighbours, Okrika's principal trade participants like King Ibanichuka, before his deportation in 1896, and Chief Daniel Oju Kalio, surly exploited Okrika Ogoni neighbours. Fiberesima (1990, p. 78) supports this notion when he affirms blatantly that “King Ibanichuka wielded power not only in his own territory of Okrika, but also over a wide tract of neighbouring inland districts such as (Mboli) or Okoni - Eleme, Obigbo, Ogoni and Isiokpo at which places were Okrika oil markets and acculturation of that Okrika dress, dance and manner by all the peoples of those trade market places. During the reign of King Ibanichuka “harvested Palm trees on Eleme land, determined oil price through overt and subtle aggression. Gomba (2013) noted that powerful merchants from Okrika did not only cheat, they sometimes raided the Echii Alesa (Alesa riverside market) in their well-armed and well-manned war Canoes. Okrika early contact with the European merchants notably during the slave trade and legitimate trade enabled them to exploit the Ogoni making them benefit minimally from the international trade even when their service sustained the trade (Nu-e, 2017).

One important aspect to note in the Okirka-Ogoni relations during the pre-colonial era was the high degree of socio-economic competitiveness between the two groups which climaxed to intergroup conflict. Okrika, as a belligerent state, usually exploited Eleme intra-communal disagreements. Whenever disagreements arise among Eleme communities, the Okrikans take advantage by supporting one Eleme

community against the other instead of ensuring peace between the warring parties. Some of the pre-colonial disputes, as noted by Nu-e (2017, p.340), occurred between Ebubu and Eteo, and between Alesa and Alode. In 1890, Chief Daniel Oju Kalio, was a member of the Abolition of slavery conference at Bonny in 1901, representing Okrika, Eleme, Ikwerre and as well was the head of native courts at Degema division that heard the intra-communal dispute between Alode and Alesa of Eleme clan. The dispute which negated the intervention of chiefs and elders from other communities in Eleme was orchestrated by claims and counter claims over farmlands. It was believed that Oju Daniel Kalio's mediation in the said conflict escalated the dispute to a very high and intolerable level in 1908, as he has previously supported Alesa. In the intra-communal rift between Ebubu and Eteo, two communities of Eleme, which affected petty oil palm trade and economic activities of the Okrika people, Okrika did not keep quiet and accordingly intervened in the interest of its palm oil traders. According to Ibulubo (1991, p. 62), this was an episode in which George, the Okrika war-chief, used two Eleme villages as baits to wreck vengeance on Eleme.

It is noteworthy that the occasional intra-communal wrangling and conflicts between Eleme communities had caused very serious indelible consequences on the Eleme clan. One of such consequence is the creation of dichotomies, disunities and dissenting voices which resulted in fundamental state of weakness in the face of Okrika external aggression. The second is demographic effects. The incessant intra-community disputes led to the artificial configuration and setting of Eleme communities whereby some communities are forced to move upward or downward from their original settlement to another as a result of incessant intra-community rivalry.

In 1890, as recorded in existing written documents, another gory debacle happened between Okrika and Eleme. It was said that Alesa people of Eleme clan discovered, as they claimed, that Okrika had encroached on Eleme land when King Ibanichuka allowed his Igbo slave, called George to cultivate more farmland belonging to Alesa Eleme people. Gomba (2013, p.26) averred that "they also trespassed into Eleme farmlands, harvested Palm trees and some of Okrika middlemen seized many puncheons of oil in the riverside market" (Echii Alesa otherwise called Omono market). In the insuring debacle, the Alesa-Eleme warriors attacked and killed many Okrika buyers and sellers in their numbers, including children and pregnant women. Ibulubo (1991) averred that Okrika pregnant women were forced open and their fetuses used as caricature. Okrika oral tradition recorded this as "Omono Killing" (Nu-e, 2017). After the matter came to the knowledge of the Okrika people, fearing a reprisal attack, the Eleme people sent emissaries to King Ibanichuka for a peaceful resolution of the issues at stake. Unfortunately, Okrika mourned its deaths and strategized on counter attack. As was expected, after four years of planning, Okrika warriors retaliated against the people of Alesa in 1890.

The counter attack, which took place in 1890, was so devastating that Ngofa (1994) wondered how this could have been possible opined that Okrika, enjoyed the aid of "an army drawn from other coastal city states such as Kalabari, Andoni and Bonny", possibly as a result of series of treaties they entered into, that an attack on one is an attack on the others. Tradition also has it that Okrika sought the assistance of medicine warriors brought from Hausa land. Alesa was utterly destroyed. Record has it that it was only the Ajjaa shrine which could not set ablaze that survived the onslaught. It is important to note that at this time, Okrika entered into several treaties (alliances) with other coastal city states against an enemy. Instances of such is that of 1875 where Okrika sought the assistance of Bonny against the Eleme people in which the Eleme people could not easily forget that defeat, Webber (1931). This account of Webber, is

corroborated by Gobo (2008) who agrees that “one common practice between Okrika and her neighbours is the habit of inviting members of another clan to help them in fighting their wars”.

Okrika and her Eleme neighbours continued to have incessant inter-group wranglings and conflict, even in the post-colonial era. Notable among such conflicts is the Okrika-Eleme intercommunal conflict of 1977, 1993, 1999, and most recently in 2013. It is important to note that land has been the major cause of disputes between Ogoni and Okrika. It is crucial to note that several Okrika communities share boundaries with Ogoni communities and live side by side for centuries. For instance, the Ogu people share boundaries with Eteo, Nonwa, Gbarale, Nokpo and Ekporo. Wakama people in Ogu/Bolo Local Government Area share boundaries with Gio and Kpokor in Tai Local Government Area while Bolo share boundary with their Bodo neighbours in Gokana Local Government Area

With existing ineffective land laws, it is therefore inevitable that the above-mentioned communities that share close boundaries will enter into land dispute. One major land dispute that have had severe impact on Okrika and Ogoni is the 1976/77 communal conflict when Onne people invaded Ele community, one of the traditional (eseniase) nine clans of Okrika (Wakirike). In retaliation the people of Ogu attacked Ekporo community. This singular event of conflicts had serious devastating effects on Ele and Ekporo communities. The 1977 conflicts led to the Ele people deserting their settlement at their home town in Ele to settle at different places in Ogu and Okrika, to seek refuge as internally displaced people. Similarly, as Ekporo people suffered the same faith till date. As at the time of this paper, there has not been proper land allocation made to the Ele or Ekporo people owing to the fact that their original abodes have been taken over by other interests caused by lack of truth and government interest.

Apart from the 1977 conflicts between Okrika (Ele) and Eleme (Onne), and Okrika (Ogu) and Eleme (Ekporo). It can be stated clearly that the 1977 conflict is the remote cause of the Ogu and Ekporo conflict of 2013, which is the most recent conflict between the two communities, with a devastating effect. For a proper understanding of the Ogu and Ekporo conflict of 2013 it is imperative to provide a historical background of the conflict, which orchestrated claims and counter claims for the ownership of land.

An account provided by Opuda; A. Ngoda (Appendix 22) suggests that Ekporo derives its name from the founding father of Ekporo community. It claims that the founding father of Ekporo was an Eleme wizard chased from his community in Ogoloma, Onne because he had been causing problems by killing people for unsanctioned rites, which resulted in the people of Onne requesting that the man be exiled from their community. After been exiled, he moved to Ebubu, another Eleme community about 10 Kilometres from Onne. Upon discovering this news, the people of Onne sent emissaries to Ebubu to warn the people of Ebubu of the evils that follow Ekporo.

They informed the people of Ebubu of what Ekporo had done in Onne and warned them that the people of Ebubu would face a similar fate unless they expelled Ekporo from their community. For the second time, Ekporo was expelled from his community and he passed through many other Eleme communities before finally arriving at Ogu. In Ogu, a man called Tende, out of sympathy, offered Ekporo residence. On arrival, Ekporo and his followers were settled first at an Island called “Ogu Chuku” however, after few years of settlement at “Ogu, Chuku” Ekporo and his followers suffered starvation as they could not fish and wanted a place where they could farm. Upon consultations with his hosts about the struggle he and his people who are land dwellers faced on the river bank, Ekporo and his followers were relocated to dry habitations next to Ogu, this space is where the present Ekporo community is found.

The account of Opuda Ajumbo Ngoda (2022) was supported by the account of the Amayanabo of Ogu. The Amayanabo corroborates this narrative by claiming that the people of Ekporo had to be resettled by their Ogu hosts. He repeated the earlier account of Opuda, affirming the request of Ekporo people who asked to be relocated to dry land. According to the account of the Amayanabo of Ogu, Ekporo people, like the rest of the Eleme Community, are known land dwellers and farmers, whilst their hosts, the Ogu people are fishermen who preferred to reside in riverine areas. Upon arrival at Ogu, the Ekporo people complained about loss of life in the surrounding waters and their inability to farm in the riverine areas, this led their Ogu hosts to allocate the new settlers to a more suitable location that would allow them to live safely and carry on with their farming activities. To show their appreciation, the people of Ekporo were said to have paid an annual tribute every December to the people of Ogu for granting them residency.

Accordingly, Opuda affirmed he had witnessed the Ekporo elders and Chiefs come to Ogu to pay tribute to their Ogu hosts. He noted: I witnessed that thanksgiving in my life time. Ekporo people often come to do that thanks visit, what do they normally come with? A Calabash of palm wine, a goat and some yams. They will come to a particular compound that the (descendant) family of those who helped them settles down (still reside). They will come there to present those gifts, and our people in turn will wear our traditional attire called don. After putting on don, music will be played, (people) will dance and while they are coming there is a particular song they used to sing. I witnessed it, (they sang) in my language, though they were not very well versed in Ogu language, they use Ogu language (to sing) “Tapu wa ya nanoo, Ogu apu wa yaname” which translates to: “Ekporo people who owns you? Ogu people own us”.

This tribute stopped after the end of the Nigerian civil war after a teacher from Onne witnessed the event and discouraged Ekporo people that they are originally from Onne, how then will they say Ogu people own them. Another version has it that the tribute stopped because the father of the former minister of state for Water Resources, Chief Precious Ngelale, enlightened his people that ‘in this modern era, the people of Ekporo do not need to do the thanksgiving anymore. It was from that point onwards, that Ekporo people became antagonistic towards Ogu people. Further, investigation into the disputes between the two communities show that the narrative presented by Ekporo people fell within a broader Eleme versus Okrika dispute for the ownership of land. According to available records, the people of Okrika and Eleme lived amicably next to each other for a considerable number of years. As we have noted earlier, the two neighbours traded by barter: the Okrika people trading their fish for the Eleme’s (Mboli) farm products and those of other Ogoni communities.

The land disputes between the two communities started to emerge when the Okrika and Eleme people were in the Degema Division where taxes were collected from the fishermen by the Divisional Administration. This change between 1935 and 1937 when Eleme was moved from Degema Division to Opobo Division. This decision, by the then colonial administration complicated the collection of taxes from Okrika people who lived at the mainland very close to Eleme. Even after the Eleme people had become part of Opobo division, Chiefs of Eleme went to ask Okrika people who lived at the mainland for taxes. Okrika people apparently refused to pay land taxes to Opobo Division knowing that Okrika people had already paid their taxes to Degema Division, there was the claim of Eleme people that Okrika people were expanding their territory, upland, into Eleme territory. That led to many small clashes between the two communities but nothing significant was recorded until 1946. On May 7, 1946 the Okrika people were reported to have attacked Eleme community in Alesa, as claimed by the Eleme people. This to a

greater extent marked the point in history where the banter over land had come to a violent head (Rivers State of Nigeria, 2000).

This reflection provides a history of the relationship between Ekporo and Ogu. An observation that is worth noting is that the conflicts between the people of Ekporo and Ogu, though part of the broader Eleme and Okrika conflicts, appears to be one of the few conflicts between the two ethnic groups that remained constant. Historically, both from an Ogu perspective, as well as from the Ekporo perspective through a broader Eleme prism, we can start to see those conflicts between Eleme and Okrika date back to the late 1930s and early 1940s, almost two decades before the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta. This observation is relevant because the two ethnic groups, from contemporary narratives, the representation of the conflicts have shifted from what was primarily boundary disputes to become a dispute about access to oil and gas royalties (Bassey et al., 2003).

Understandably, this has influenced government's reaction to the conflicts between the two groups. The Ogu and Ekporo conflicts are unique because whilst they share some similarities with broader ethnic strife between Eleme and Okrika, they stand apart because both Ekporo and Ogu do not have natural crude. This lack of oil in either Ekporo nor Ogu is apparent in the cyclical conflicts between Ekporo and Ogu, and have largely remained about the ownership of land. As stated above, land to these two neighbours was more than just economic commodity. To a varying degree, both communities claimed autochthony.

The fact that conflicts between Ekporo and Ogu have always been about land should have led to a permanent peaceful resolution between the two towns. Rather, the two communities engaged in another conflict with Ekporo people suffering a high degree of devastation. As a result of the conflict, Ekporo people were displaced in 2007. These hostilities have continued in spite of the agreement between the people of Eleme and Okrika to live in peace in 1947. As can be seen, it is obvious that long before the advent of Europeans and subsequent colonization, the people of Okrika and Ogoni related on several fronts as independent entities to foster their interests. By their proximity, it was only natural that because they were never self-sufficient, they needed and depended on each other's specialized fishing of their menfolk and on the exchange of their smoke-dried fish and salt with the people of the hinterland for bulk foodstuff, tools, clothing and domestic gears.

An oral interview with Chief Ibifuro Anthony (2022) and Prof. Orunaboka (2023) (see Appendix 24,25) corroborated the assertion being made here that the people of Okrika entered into various forms of relationship, not only with her riverine neighbours, but also with her upland neighbours and beyond. For Orunaboka, Okrika's position as a gateway to both riverine and upland neighbour makes relationship with her neighbours inevitable. The relationship between Okrika and the Ogoni was very complex and intricate. Notwithstanding, the two neighbouring ethnic nationalities have a very strong and robust relationship that has been beneficial to both parties. It has come through trade, culture, missionary activities, educational relationships and politics. In this regard they have created political, social-economic and cultural impact on each other. There have also been occasional cases of conflict with this close neighbours especially over land and this can be attributed to greed, lack of truth and failure of government.

Summary and Conclusion

It is pertinent to point out that neither Okrika nor Ogoni have had any conflict relations leading to war, but that rather Okrika and Ogoni villages and towns, such as Ogu and Onne, Wakama and Ekporo etc. have had strain relations, based on land dispute, at one time or the other. The absolute generalization of issues between two neighboring villages or town to include the entire ethnic nationality is erroneous and should be discarded. The people of Ogoloma, through preventive diplomacy, for example, have an age long covenant consummated via juju oath with the people of Bodo, to live in peace and never to go to war with each other. Overall, regardless of the protracted land issues between certain Okrika and Ogoni communities, the people have lived harmoniously over the years, from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial Nigeria.

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