

Urbanization and Cultural Practices in Isiokpo and Elele, 1960-1970

Dr C I Chinda, Aham, Ijeoma Mirabel

1. Department of History and International Diplomacy, Rivers State University, Nigeria
 2. Department of History and International Diplomacy, Rivers State University, Nigeria
- * Correspondence: Izeoma.chinda@ust.edu.ng

Abstract: This study examines the impact of urbanization on the cultural practices of Isiokpo and Elele, two communities in Ikwerre land, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, from 1960 to 1970. Through a combination of historical and ethnographic methods, this paper was able to analyze the data collected from primary and secondary sources which provided a comprehensive understanding of the Impact of urbanization on cultural practices in Isiokpo and Elele, 1960-1970. This research will focus on the following aspects of cultural practices: wrestling, new yam festival, masquerade, intergroup relations, socio-religious rites, and the changes and transformations that occurred in the cultural values, social structures, and traditions of both regions. The paper will also argue that urbanization had both positive and negative effects on the cultural practices of Isiokpo and Elele, depending on the degree of adaptation, resistance, and innovation of the people. The paper will also suggest some recommendations for preserving and promoting the cultural identity and well-being of the Ikwerre people in the face of urbanization. Additionally, this work includes visual documentation through the incorporation of pictures that visually illustrate the cultural shifts and societal changes experienced during this transformative period.

Keywords: Urbanization, culture, practices, development, community

1. Introduction

Urbanization refers to the process of the growth and expansion of cities, resulting in the migration of people from rural areas to urban centers. It is the process of population shift from rural-urban areas, and the resulting changes in social, economic, and environmental aspects of life. It can have positive and negative effects on culture such as increasing diversity, creativity, and innovation and also eroding traditional values, identities, and practices. In other hand, urbanization could bring about modernization, education, development, and diversity to the communities, which enhance their cultural identity and creativity. On the other hand, urbanization could also cause displacement, migration, acculturation, and loss of traditional values and customs, which threaten their cultural heritage and cohesion.

During the 1960s-1970s, Nigeria witnessed a significant wave of urbanization, with rural areas experiencing rapid urban growth and infrastructural development. Isiokpo and Elele, once predominantly rural communities, were not exempt from this transformation. These changes brought about significant changes and profound impacts on the cultural practices of these communities. However, some modifications that occurred in the cultural practices remain understudied as such there is a lack of documentation of these changes that occurred during the periods (1960-1970). Therefore, there is a need to investigate and analyze the effect of urbanization on cultural practices in Isiokpo and Elele Okaneli during the period under study for proper documentation and for preservation of their history.

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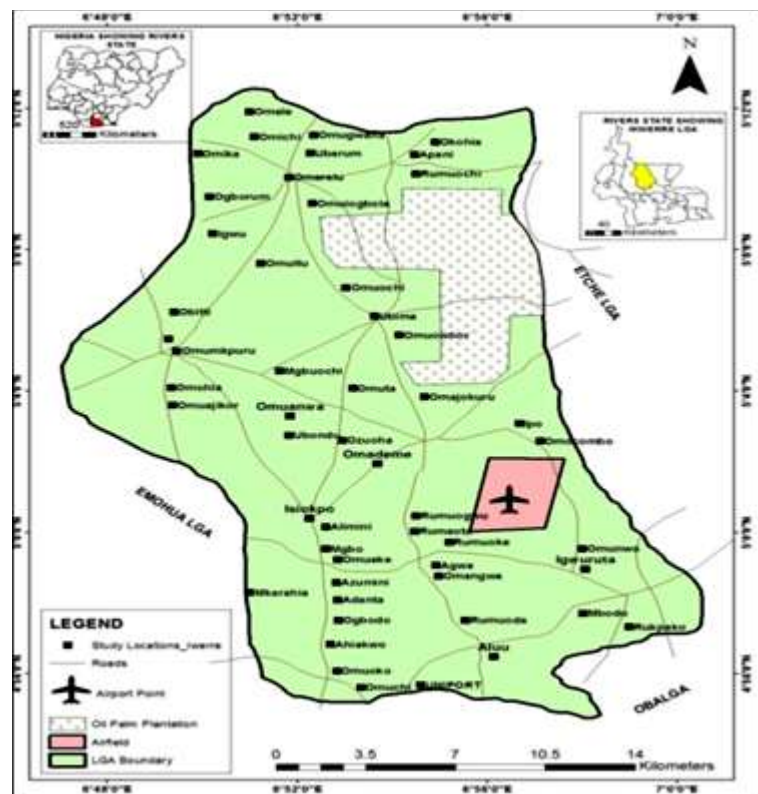


Fig. 1.1. Picture of Ikwerre L.G.A showing the communities Source: River State Ministry of Lands and Survey by Wali Elekwachi, 2019.

The study was carried out in Ikwerre in Ikwerre Local Government area of Rivers state. Data for the study were obtained from primary sources through oral interview with the traditional rulers and chief priest of the study communities. The youths and Church leaders were also interviewed. Materials were collected from historical textbooks, journals and internet on the subject matter, especially the issue of urbanization.

2. Materials and Methods

Data analysis synthesizes gathered information. It entails the analysis of data collected by analytical and logical reasoning to identify patterns, correlations, or trends. One significant aspect of research methodology is the approaches and methods used in analyzing the data obtained from the field. Qualitative methods were used to analyze, interpret, and present the data. To this end, the descriptive and narrative method is a form of qualitative data analysis. The method of analysis also involves theoretical frameworks to explain the urbanization of cultural practices in Isiokpo and Elele.

The descriptive method is used to describe the characteristics and pattern of events. The narrative approach is otherwise called the Scientific method of historical writing. It entails the telling of a story sequentially as the event occurred and writing of history as the event happened without adding any shade. The analytical method emphasizes the interrogation of evidence by the historian using the "why" question, exploring why the event is the way or how it came to be. Here, the researcher analyses available facts and information critically to establish the cause and effect of the problem under study.¹In the context of this research, the quantitative and analytical methods helped the researcher in the analysis and interpretation of historical data obtained in the field.

3. Results

The Ikwerre inhabit a substantial part of the Northern half of Rivers State. They constitute one of the major ethnic groups in Rivers State and the Niger Delta. Due to the abundance of fertile and arable land, farming remained the major occupation of the

¹A. Chinonyerem. *Feminism and patriarchy in Ngwa and Etche from pre-colonial to post colonial era, Rivers State: Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, 2023.*

Ikwerre. Also, served by an abundance of fresh water, rivers and some water creeks, the Ikwerre engaged in fishing and other economic activities like; palm wine tapping, animal trapping, petty trading and wood works among others. The fresh water streams and the salt water facilitated transportation and aquatic activities in Ikwerre land.

According to A. A. Derefaka and Atie M. Okorobia, the position of the Ikwerre land makes her valuable as the different Ikwerre communities play host to all routes of transportation; land, water, air and railway. The Ikwerre are the present day Ikwerre, Emohua, Obio- Akpor and Port Harcourt local government area of Rivers State.



Fig.4. 1

All the same, the Isiokpo and Elele who are the crux of this research are Ikwerre people in Ikwerre local government and their culture have been influenced by urbanization. Thus a brief discuss of their origin is explored and the impact of urbanization on these communities are discussed accordingly.

Isiokpo

Isiokpo is a town in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. It is one of the clans that make up the Ishiali or Esila group of the Ikwerre people. Isiokpo is one of the oldest town in Ikwerre land and is also known for its rich culture and history. It has a traditional ruler called Eze Ochia, who is the head of the Ochia Royal House. The current Eze Ochia is His Royal Majesty Eze Blessing Wagor Nyeche (JP), who ascended the throne in 2014.

The economic activities of Isiokpo are significantly shaped by its natural surroundings. The latter has an arable and rich expanse of land. Consequently, the populace is mostly agricultural, with farming as their primary vocation. Yam, the principal crop, is mostly the domain of males, whereas cassava, maize, and vegetables are produced by women. While farming is the primary employment of the Isiokpo, some individuals either combine it with or specialize in fishing, trade, hunting, palm wine tapping, carving, or other pursuits.² The Isiokpo performs an annual festival that showcases the cultural heritage and identity of Isiokpo people. The festival features various activities such as masquerade displays, traditional dances, wrestling contests, music performances, art exhibitions, etc. Finally, Isiokpo is a town with a proud history and a vibrant culture. It is a place where tradition and modernity coexist harmoniously.

Concerning their spiritual existence, the Isiokpo people believe that various zones of their environment are governed by several kinds of spirits, each with unique qualities and purposes. The person is safeguarded by their Chi. Besides Chi, more deities are focused on the well-being of the person. Consequently, Ikenga, Amadioha, and Agwumagwuare pertain to male accomplishments, while Ekuis pertain to female successes, namely in culinary and marriage skills. Ali, the soil god, is the paramount divinity in the existence

² T. I. George. 'Wherever something stands, something stands besides it: Ritual symbols in Isiokpo thoughts', Department of Religious and Cultural studies Vol 9, no 2, pp. 37-44, 2013.

of the Isiokpo. Ali is the maintainer of social groupings at all levels and is incensed by any danger to their unity and peace. Consequently, she is regarded as the paramount custodian of the Isiokpo moral code.

Elele

Elele is a town in the Rivers State of Nigeria, with a population of about 20,620 people.³ According to DAH Emejuru, Elele had Benin connection, Ochichi: the founder of Elele migrated from Benin with Akalaka, his brother to settle first in Ogba land. But due to the accidental killing of Ogba's son by Ekpeye (both were the sons of Akalaka). Ochichi with Ekpeye fled their stead. And Ochichi finally settled at Elele after crossing the Sombreiro River at Akpabo through Eligbo. Meanwhile Ekpeye had settled across the Sombreiro River at Ula Ahoada. Having settled at Elele, Ochichi begot four sons namely; Ele, Elu, Egbe and Mini. While Ele retained his father's home stead in Elele, Elu, Egbe and Mini were posted to Omerelu land, Egbeda land and Alimini Isiokpo to ward off imminent attacks of enemies.⁴

Elele is divided into two; Elele Okaneli and Elele Alimini. The word "Okaneli" is derived from a word, "Okani" meaning old or ancient. Elele Okaneli was the first Elele. Elele Alimini came after the war at the sombrero river. After the war, some Elele people decided to stay and not return to Okaneli. These people that stayed formed, Elele Alimini which is translated "The Elele people in the River side".

Elele is also known for its research and innovation in various fields, such as neonatal care. Elele has a rich cultural and historical heritage, as it is part of the Ikwerre Kingdom, which has a long history of resistance and resilience against colonialism and oppression. Elele is a town that combines tradition and modernity, education and entrepreneurship, and diversity and unity.

Cultural Practices That Existed In Isiokpo And Elele Prior To 1960-1970.

The human society is identified the culture of their environment, and it is the culture that accords them recognition. Culture is the whole sum of humanity within its environment, including conventions, traditions, values, perceptions, arts, crafts, and religious beliefs and activities. It encompasses both material and ethereal entities and thoughts, manifesting symbolically.⁵

As earlier posited, cultural practices are deeply ingrained in the culture and are often passed down from one generation to the next as they play significant roles in shaping the identity, values, and social structure of the community. What this implies is that, people holds their culture dear and most often tend to refuse change.

Isiokpo and Elele are two towns in Ikwerre land, in Ikwerre Local Government Area, located in Rivers State, Nigeria. The people like any other Ikwerre communities have a strong sense of identity and pride in their culture and also display a multilicant of practice which shape their communities over the period These cultures includes: Marriage and various forms of festivals, such as; New Yam Festival, Masquerade, Wrestling, etc.⁶

Marriage (Olu-nwere or Ogbonzi)

Marriage is an important tradition amongst the Iwhnuruohna/Ikwerre. The Iwhnuruohna/Ikwerre culture has very great respect for the family institution; hence most parents in Iwhnuruohna/Ikwerre- land would not give out their daughter without the traditional marriage ceremony. They place much emphasis on this because it is a way of preserving the rich Iwhnuruohna culture and strengthening the clan.

Marriage is a socially acknowledged partnership between two or more individuals that encompasses sexual and economic rights and responsibilities. Marriage among the

³ S G. Ohadoma and G. C. Akuodor; N. Ikoru; J. L. Akpan (2007). 'Visual acuity pattern of adults in Elele, Rivers state, Nigeria'. *Journal of Health and Visual Sciences*. Vol 9, No 2 (2007):59–64.

⁴ Amadi, K. O. 'The Ikwerre people: A study of their Origin and Migrations : Studies in Ikwerre History and Culture', Otoni Nduka Ibadan: Kraft Books. Vol. 1, pp.26-33,1993

⁵ Chinyere B. Egwuogu, 'Cultural Dynamism and linguistics identity crisis among the Igbo in Western Nigeria', in Abimbola Asojo and Toyin Falola (eds), *African Humanity: creativity, identity and personhood*. pp.17-33.

⁶ Thomas, 'Exploring Socio-Cultural Factors in the Context of Urban Environmental Management in Nigeria', *RSIS International*, last updated on 27th October, 2023, available on <https://www.rsisinternational.org/journals/ijriss/articles/exploring-socio-cultural-factors-in-the-context-of-urban-environmental-management-in-nigeria/> accessed on 16th November, 2023.

Iwhnuruohna/Ikwerre people is a union between families and clans or villages, rather than only between an individual man and woman. Marriage provides the context of parenthood, by which the continuity of life is assured. Marriage is a family or community affair and not a sole concern of the individual(s). Marriage qualifies the participating unrelated parties for forging political, military, and economic alliances. The most notable aspect of Iwhnuruohna/Ikwerre marriage is the manner in which weddings are formalized, since the legitimacy of the union and the social status of women within the community are contingent upon the execution of communal obligations dictated by marital customs.

Girls of marriagable age according to the tradition do not go out in search of husbands; they must wait for "Mr. Right" to approach their family. Thus, the man must look for a wife and appropriate investigation carried out by members of the extended families. The investigation will examine the familial background of the girl, tracing it as far back as feasible, in search of egregious acts, issues of infertility, leprosy or insanity, insubordination, promiscuity, indebtedness, witchcraft, murder, or other societal or marital complications. The bride family also carries out some investigations on the groom family. Once the background check has been completed to the satisfaction of both families then the marriage process will begin.

Marriage in Isiokpo

Chief Chadwick Mpi in an oral interview on explains that marriage in Isiokpo was always at night. Before 1960, the Isiokpo people gave out their children at night so that their children will not know their way back to their father's house if there is a disagreement between the man and his wife but from the 60s, they started to manipulate time; marriage time was no longer from 6. This change came as a result of strangers entanglement and marriage with the Isiokpo people. These strangers are non-indigene who comes from far places to marry their children. The idea behind this manipulation of time was so the strangers can marry off their daughter and go back to their home.

Isiokpo have low rate of divorce as marriage between two people is arranged by their parents. Isiokpo also makes use marriage agreement and this agreement is usually written down or documented and read out in cause of the marriage ceremony. The man (husband) represented by his father would take one agreement and the other agreement would be given to girl's father. The diary is stated in the agreement in case there is a disagreement, it would be returned back to her husband. Many villages have tried to copy it.⁷In Isiokpo, the types of marriages in Isiokpo include;

Monogamous Marriage

Monogamous marriage refers to a marital arrangement where an individual has only one spouse at a time. It is characterized by a commitment to a single partner, often based on cultural, religious, or personal values that prioritize exclusivity in the romantic and/or sexual relationship. Monogamy is seen as a way of promoting love, fidelity, and harmony in the family

Woman-to-Woman Marriage

Chukwuemeka asserts that Woman-to-Woman marriage is "an improvisation to sustain patriarchy," serving merely as a mechanism for the preservation and perpetuation of patriarchal traditions. The central premise is that the male offspring is of paramount significance, and this fixation on producing a male heir to continue the lineage has led to the emergence of Woman-to-Woman marriage. Furthermore, it is noted that when a female husband seeks to marry a wife, a male relative is necessitated to act as her spokesperson. Numerous African communities have historically engaged in Woman-to-Woman marriage and continue to do so.

In this kind of marriage, a woman weds another woman for social and economic reasons. In many instances, women who married other women were either infertile or had beyond the reproductive age without having had a male child. Others were affluent and powerful ladies who wed other women to commemorate their fortune and achieve

⁷Chief Chadwick Mpi, 'Marriage in Isiokpo', [interviewed by Aham Mirabel], Mpi Nworah Compound, Isiokpo, Nkaharia, 23rd September, 2023.

economic benefits. Jeanne Henn noted that social institutions and cultural practices were not static throughout the pre-colonial era, owing to the intermingling of many communities and the history of long-distance trading with other ethnic groups⁸. Woman-woman marriage, indicative of affluence and economic exploitation, was prevalent in some regions of Iwhnuruḡhna/Ikwerre, particularly among the Isiokpo community, where women engaged in maritime commerce with the Ijaw people, where such marriages were customary.⁹

Another rationale for woman-to-woman marriage was to alleviate the home strain. Agriculture was the cornerstone of the Ikwerre economy, with the quantity of yam barns and the yield of agricultural food serving as indicators of a successful Ikwerre individual. The Ikwerre favored polygynous marriages, since this permitted them to have several women. The women, sometimes accompanied by the children, constitute a man's work force. In some instances, men unable to marry several women were aided by their first spouses in obtaining a second spouse. A woman would marry another woman and present her to her husband as a second wife to alleviate her household responsibilities and to have aid with agricultural labor. Polygyny not only offered a man further avenues for sexual satisfaction but also served as a status symbol and an investment that allowed him to enhance his agricultural productivity, the profits from which could be used to obtain social titles, granting him a respected position within his community. Women who entered into weddings with other women on behalf of their husbands, for the aforementioned reasons, participated in same-sex unions that, due to their many benefits to males, received societal endorsement and acceptance.

A childless widow could only assert her right to inheritance from her husband's family via this means. In cases when a widow had daughters, one daughter would choose to stay unmarried in the anticipation of bearing a boy for the family. Any son she had was acknowledged by the family as her father's, and the deceased's estate rightfully became his. Through this agreement, the daughter successfully retains her father's possessions and ensures that her father's family treats her bereaved mother with respect. The childless lady who did not marry to secure a bride for procreation faced the prospect of a solitary existence and the loss of good care in her latter years. This kind of marriage acts as a remedy for loneliness, providing company for solitary or elderly ladies, assistance for the disabled, and securing mourners in anticipation of one's death. Stanley Amadi asserts that woman-woman weddings were established similarly to conventional marriages. Prospective brides were sought from villages away from those of the intended female spouses. Many Ikwerre women who engaged in woman-to-woman marriage ventured far into the Ibo hinterlands and beyond to acquire spouses for themselves. Female spouses provided bride-wealth for their brides, similar to the practice of males marrying women. Possessing a spouse conferred some benefits. In addition to the possibility of procreation via another individual, it elevated a daughter's prestige and enabled some to become leadership of homes. This was especially true when a female spouse had borne children herself. A female husband hired a man to fulfill her wife's sexual desires, while she assumed a maternal role and profited from the arrangement, so increasing her money and riches. The marriage was undeniably financially advantageous, prompting some affluent women to marry many spouses.¹⁰

Marriage amongst women does not imply the presence of sexual interactions akin to lesbianism. It is neither a gay relationship nor a conventional heterosexual marriage. In instances when a female husband fails to provide a male consort for her wife, she permits her the autonomy to choose a male partner of her preference for copulation. Due diligence is undertaken to guarantee that the selected individual for this position have an

⁸ H. Jeanne (1984), *Women in the Economy: Past, Present, and Future*, in Paulme, D(ed). *Women of Tropical Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press. p.1

⁹ A. Talbot, (1932), *Tribes of The Niger Delta*, Frank Cass and company limited, London.

¹⁰ Mr. Stanley Amadi, 'Women to Women marriage', [interviewed by Aham Ijeoma Mirabel], 30th September, 2023.

appropriate public persona and is neither a social pariah nor extravagant. Some married women let their husbands to engage sexually with other women, but not as co-wives. The male consorts are required to visit the residences of their female spouses, particularly in the event of the husband's tardiness.¹¹

The typical connection between in-laws pertains to female husbands and the parents or families of their female partners. Consequently, if an event occurs within the family of a female spouse, the female partner is notified, and she diligently fulfills the necessary responsibilities. Upon the death of an in-law, a female spouse organizes a condolence visit and supplies the customary necessities upon notice. Whenever a lady gives birth, her husband informs her parents and arranges for her mother to assist during the post-natal confinement, after which she is returned home with several gifts. During trips to her family, the wife's male partner may accompany her female spouse to safeguard the genuine stakeholders in the relationship.

Marriage in Elele Okaneli

Marriage in Elele Okaneli, a community in Nigeria, often follows traditional customs and practices that are deeply rooted in the culture of the Elele people. Marriage ceremonies typically involve various rituals, ceremonies, and customs that are significant to their community. These customs often include engagement ceremonies, bride price negotiations, traditional ceremonies, and celebrations that vary in specific practices and may differ from family to family within the Elele community. The customs often emphasize the importance of family, community involvement, and the joining together of two families through the marriage union.

Elder Dimpa Cio Chikwere in oral interview defines marriage as a legally and socially recognized union between two individuals.¹² He explains that there are four principle rites of marriage in Elele; Pawn Marriage, Betrothed Marriage, Exchange/ arranged marriage, Widowhood by inheritance.

Pawn Marriage

Pawn marriage has existed before and after the period under study (1960-1970). Pawn marriage is a type of marriage arrangement in which a person is given as collateral for a debt or loan. The person who is pawned, usually a woman or a girl child, is expected to marry the creditor or someone chosen by the creditor. Pawn marriage can also be seen as a form of slavery, as the pawned person loses their freedom and rights, and may be subjected to abuse and exploitation. The factors that influence this form marriage include; famine, migration, trade, and politics.

Betrothal marriage

Betrothed marriage is a term that refers to a type of marriage arrangement in which a couple makes a formal and binding promise to marry each other in the future. Betrothed marriage is different from engagement, which is only an intention to marry, but not a commitment. Betrothed marriage is usually a part of the marriage process in some societies, especially those that have strict rules and traditions about marriage. Traditionally in Elele, the negotiation were in two ways;

One way is by laying claims on the baby immediately after birth. As they are bathing the baby girl, the family interested would start negotiating with the girl's family. Another way is laying claims on the baby before birth. This negotiation starts when the baby is still in the womb. By the time the baby is born, they would be husband's family will visit the baby's family and the father of the baby would bring an apple. As the baby is growing, whoever comes to marry her, the parents would refuse to give the girl's hand in marriage. The father of the baby would tell the person interested in the girl that their daughter is

¹¹ C. Wanjoku, 'Marriage Traditions Of The Iwhnuruohna (Ikwerre) People (Olu-nwere -literally means the act of marrying a woman. Ogbonzi-literally means the act of marrying a man', Academia.edu, available on https://www.academia.edu/95486808/MARRIAGE_TRADITIONS_OF_THE_IWHNURUOHNA_IKWERRE_PEOPLE_Olu_nwere_literally_means_the_act_of_marrying_a_woman_Ogbonzi_literally_means_the_act_of_marrying_a_man. (accessed on 14th November, 2023).

¹² Elder Dimpa Cio Chikwere, 'interview on Marriage in Elele', [interviewed by Aham Mirabel], Wokoma's family, Omenele, 7th September, 2023.

already married and what they are waiting for now is the time of exchange. This practice happened before 1960 and was still in practice till 1970.

Marriage by Exchange /Ogba nwo

Exchange marriage is a kind of marriage characterized by the organized and reciprocal swapping of spouses between two families or groups. Local rulers and prominent figures arranged marriages to forge political, military, or economic alliances.¹³ Marriage by exchange required two men to swap their daughters in matrimony to establish alliances essential for the political prestige and military might of the primary contractors, who were often lineage or community leaders. This case, adjudicated in Elele Native Court on September 25, 1911, exemplifies such an arrangement. The plaintiff Olu stated on oath:

'According to our custom, we used to exchange women and marry. The one in dispute was thus married'. The defendant Wenwene stated on oath:

'I gave my daughter to the plaintiff to marry by changing her with his daughter. Plaintiff consented and married my daughter; Plaintiff consented and married my daughter; then, after all, refused to hand his daughter to me.'

This form of marriage existed in Elele Okaneli before 1960 up until the civil war, however, after the Civil War, societal changes, economic challenges, and shifts in values began to affect these traditional marriage practices. The war's aftermath brought about changes in the economic landscape, altering the dynamics of marriage negotiations. Families might have experienced difficulties in fulfilling the traditional requirements for exchange marriages due to economic hardships and changes in social structures.

Widowhood by inheritance/Okwu nshi nwere

Widowhood by inheritance is a cultural and social custom that mandates a widow to marry a male relative of her deceased husband, often his brother. The tradition was established to provide financial assistance for the widow and her children while preserving her late husband's fortune within the family lineage. At the inception of the practice, women were tasked with domestic duties, while males served as the providers. If a lady loses her spouse, she therefore lacks a provider for the surviving family. Due to her in-laws' preference against an outsider inheriting her late husband's fortune, she was compelled to marry inside the family.

This practice was common in Elele especially if a woman becomes a widow at early age or the age where she can still bear children, a man from that lineage or household that is younger than her late husband will re-marry her. In re-marrying her, he would do a kind of marriage ceremony, "*Ogowarilaogo*". It is not the regular four (4) days wedding because it takes only one (1) day. On the day of the wedding, he would carry people from their own side to perform their marriage rites. Then when they have done it, that woman that was originally married to his household would automatically become his wife.¹⁴

Also, another practice is incubating with the woman without the "*Ogowarilaogo*". Here, the children given birth to would be for his late brother, they would bear his name. This practice was modified in 1960. The practice also deprives the widow of her inheritance rights, as she becomes a property of the new husband, who may not treat her and her children well. The practice also affects the children of the widow, who may be neglected, mistreated, or disinherited by the new husband.

New Yam Festival/ Oriji- Ike.

The Ikwerre people are mostly engaged in agriculture, fishing, and hunting, with a predominant reliance on farming for food consumption and production. The inhabitants of the Ikwerre communities depend on agricultural output, with yam being one of the cultivated crops.

The Ikwerre people regard the yam crop as holy, and any individual who takes yam faces banishment. The first yam is said to have sprung from the flesh of two children sacrificed during a severe famine to prevent starvation among other Ikwerre youngsters. During the

¹³ P. A. Talbot, (1967) *Tribes of The Niger Delta*, Frank Cass and company limited, London. p. 193.

¹⁴ Chief Chadwick Mpi, interviewed on 'Widowhood by inheritance', interviewed by Aham Ijeoma Mirabel, Mpi Nworah Compound, Isiokpo, Nkaharia, 23rd September, 2023.

fresh Yam Festival, each family sets four or eight fresh yams on the ground and removes little portions off the head and tail. The yams are then prepared with palm oil and chicken, and the dish is seen as a symbolic recreation of the first sacrifice. The New Yam Festival signifies the transition of seasons, a tradition revered globally since antiquity. Numerous civilizations categorized the year into two seasons: the rainy season and the dry season, during which light and temperature started to rise and decrease, respectively. In pre-industrial eras, humanity subsisted by hunting, gathering, and agriculture, reliant on the natural seasonal cycles dictated by their geographical climate. Consequently, they established rituals to guarantee sufficient rainfall and sunlight throughout the wet and dry seasons, facilitating the maturation of crops for harvest, which was then commemorated. Remnants of several old customs are believed to persist in festivals being observed in relation to seasonal themes.

Oriji- Ike in Isiokpo.

Mr Friday Job in an oral interview explains, the new yam festival in isiokpo is celebrated early in the month of September. Consuming the freshly picked yam prior to this day is deemed prohibited. The high priest offers a goat in sacrifice and anoints a symbol of the harvest deity with its blood. The carcass is cooked to prepare a soup, while the yams are boiled and mashed to create fofoo. Following the priest's supplication for an improved crop in the next year, he inaugurates the feast by consuming the pounded yam and soup. Subsequently, all participants engage in dancing, drinking, and revelry. Following the conclusion of the event, it is acceptable for any member of the community to consume the new yam.

Once the event concludes, fresh yam may be consumed by any member of the community. In the Ikwerre culture, women are prohibited from cultivating yams, since yams symbolize masculinity, with only males permitted to produce and collect them. Strangers are permitted to attend when the royal Highness extends invitations to other highnesses. The Isiokpo community adorns themselves with white and crimson attire. They don a crimson blouse or atibo and secure a red wrapping. Strangers may attend when the royal Highness extends invitations to other highnesses. The only change is that a greater number of individuals saw it.¹⁵

¹⁵ Eve Afrique, Rivers Community Celebrate the New Yam Festival, *eveafrique*, last updated on 12th October, 2023, available on <https://eveafrique.com/rivers-community-celebrates-new-yam-festival/#:~:text=Azumini%20Isiokpo%20Town%2C%20a%20community,season%20in%20August%20and%20September/> accessed on 20th November, 2023.



4.2 Picture of the New Yam Festival in Azumini Isiokpo portraying their king Eze Kingsley Chukwuyere Ogundu (JP), photographed by Suoyo Ekubo, 12th October, 2022.

Oriji- Ike in Elele.

In an oral interview with Sir Sam Charles Eke explains, during the period of (1960-1970), Elele was dis-infected. The battle between the Biafran's and Nigeria was fierce in Elele that people had to run. The war took a huge toll on the people of Elele and during that period, many were dis-longed. As a result of this, some did not practice their culture. The New Yam Festival was one of the cultural practice affected by the war because refugees had no space to practice the festival. The New Yam Festival was affected because people could no longer practice farming and the New Yam Festival had to do with farming and yam was said to be the king of all crops and every family celebrated the king of crops.

The date is preceded by arrangements for the celebration. There is a visit by the red cap chiefs. They visit the "Igbo Onene" to make the yearly calendar. When they do so they schedule when the celebration will take place. The date by the modern calendar falls between late August and early September. By that time, the yam planted during February - April must have matured. The New Yam Festival is based on the outcome and end of the farming season and during this period, people enjoyed friendship, unity, happiness. During this period, relations from far and wide exchange visit. The first set is the kindred level and during this period in laws exchanged visit and there was something to eat as well as interaction. During this period, old friends got re-united and new friendship was established.¹⁶

In Elele Okaneli, the yam was being cooked in three different ways for people to relish.

The first practice is called, Ukwu-iji. This process has to do with peeling, washing and cooking the yam with meat, dry fish and pepper. After the yam is cooked, it is then put out of the pot into a big mortar not for pounding but for oiling. Here, oil and other spices are poured into the yam. It would be turned until the oil seep into the yam. The eating was with the soup that came from the process of boiling the yam and it is believed that all

¹⁶ Sir Sam Charles Eke, 'interviewed on the New Yam Festival in Elele Okaneli', [interviewed by Aham Ijeoma Mirabel], Captain Elechi Amadi polythentic, SBS, 15th December, 2023.

the proteins are deposited in the soup. The food is eaten by taking the yam and later the soup to push down the solid yam.

In the second practice, the yam is peeled, washed and put into the water and boiled until it is ready. After this, it is then put into a mortar and pounded into pounded yam. It would be kept aside and a very rich soup would be cooked with fish, meat, and many natural spices.

The third practice involves roasting the yam. After that, the yam is peeled so any remaining part will be removed and it is torn open and the already prepared spices would be used to fill the middle of the yam and the yam is later sheared to the neighbors.

It is important to note, a big part of this festival is done with the fresh palm wine. The period of the new yam festival was preceded with a period of womanhood called, "Oditoadidi". One important fact is that, marriages were nursed during the period of merriment. Also, land matters were established. This is done when somebody has excess of lands which he cannot be able to cultivate, he/she can invite anybody to cultivate on their land. This increases their relations. Then at the end of the farming season, the person will come with fish, yam, palm oil as the case may be to say thank you.

The New Yam Festival had undergone many changes. One change is in the area of dressing. Before 1960, the only dressing available at that time was the wrapper and singlet called "Froko" and use a towel and place it on their shoulder and if they are titled they would be given walking sticks to move around with. They had different caps. Some were carved locally. But by 1960, the elders and people had trousers (European clothes).

Another change was the introduction of European drinks used to accomplish with local palm wine.

Wrestling

Wrestling is a prominent cultural practice among the Ikwerre people, particularly in Isiokpo and Elele within the Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. Wrestling is referred to as "Otna" in Isiokpo and "Ute" in Elele. Wrestling is a combat sport that may be either theatrical for entertainment purposes or really competitive. It is one of the most ancient forms of physical conflict that promotes togetherness among individuals.¹⁷ The Otna wrestling festival embodies the essence of the community, its institutions, and collective experiences. It is predominantly performed by men

Egelege (Wrestling) In Isiokpo

In an oral interview with Chief Chadwick Mpi wrestling is scheduled by the Nyewneli of Isiokpo. The period of wrestling starts from the month of April in Nkariahia.¹⁸

¹⁷ P. Ruti, 'Wrestling context in Ikwerre land- An age long tradition, *Steemit*, last updated on 2018, available on <https://steemit.com/culture/@ruti/wrestling-contest-in-ikwerre-land-an-age-long-tradition-3c8ac52f792e4/> accessed on 14th November, 2023).

¹⁸ Chief Chadwick Mpi, 'interviewed on Egelege (Wrestling) in Isiokpo', [interviewed by Aham Mirabel], Mpi Nworah Compound, Isiokpo, Nkariahia, 23rd September, 2023.



Fig.4.3: pictures of the festival day hosted by Alimini - Isiokpo, photographed by Enefaa, 9th August 2014.

During this period, a committee is set up in each of the village but the Chiefs and elders of each community oversee the wrestling process. Neighbouring communities are also invited and the youths of these neighbouring communities are also invited to participate in the wrestling context. The Egelege festival of Isiokpo is a culture. Its cardinal purpose is to present, preserve and promote the people's way of life; the cultural relevance of the festival is to ensure that the cultural heritage of the people is maintained. It is also a mark of identity for the people. However, such a festival serves for entertainment. It is important to note, a village can only not participate in the Otna (Wrestling) if a member of the Isiokpo and Obodo council of chief dies, then that particular community where the chief dies would not wrestle for that year.

Wrestling during the period of 1960-1970 was performed using diabolical means or charms and this makes wrestling more competitive. Also, once one is a champion, he tends to get more favor from people, he was allowed to marry freely because families offer them their children's hand in marriage with the believe they have a champion as a son-in-law. The champion and families are highly respected. Finally, wrestling was fixed on Ekeh days and every village is expected to attend but after the civil war, this practice was moved to Saturday in order to make it socially accommodating.

Ute (Wrestling) in Elele Okaneli

Wrestling in Elele Okaneli starts from the month of September. Each of the communities in Ikwerre land starts on their own, they continue to wrestle until Ikwerre communities starts celebrating their end of year which in Elele is called "Oriji-Ike/New Yam Festival". The new yam festival is a seasonal festival which happens once farming stops in Elele Okaneli. Once the new yam festival is announced, wrestling stops and the people starts engaging themselves in the new yam festival.

The wrestling arena serves as a venue for celebration, often providing plenty food and drink for attendees to enjoy. Also, all contestants in Elele Okaneli are the youth and all villages in Elele Okaneli are expected to participate in the Ute (Wrestling) unlike in Isiokpo where a community is exempted if a member of the Isiokpo or Obodo council dies.

Masquerade Display/ Ekpo

The Ekpo or the 'ghost masquerade' is an ancient Society that originated from the Ibibio ethnic nationality of Akwa Ibom state. Due to the Ikwerre relations (Isiokpo and Elele) with the Ibibio group, this society seeped into Ikwerre land. The Ekpo society is based on the belief in life after death, hence the masquerade is believed to be the ancestral fathers visiting the realm of the living and involving in the affairs of men.

The Ekpo display has been in practice since the early 60s and possibly earlier. In Nigeria, every tribe has its own kind of masquerade display. The Ekpo season is between July - December depending on the community.

The Ekpo begins with the boy stage known as the "Ekpo Ntokeyen" and proceeds to the "Ataat". This is the second stage and also the young adult stage. The third and last stage is called the "Ekpo Nynho". It is important to note, one must be fully initiated into the society before marriage after which they are promoted to the Ekpo Nynho stage.¹⁹

Ekpo in Isiokpo

Mr Friday Job in an oral interview explains that Ekpo in Isiokpo started from 1954 and the first village to play it in isiokpo was Azumini. Later, Omueke and other villages in Isiokpo joined. In Isiokpo, the Ekpo is celebrated on December 26 and 1st January of every year. Each and every villages in Isiokpo host the Ekpo festival once in two years. Sometimes, the festival is played on 28th December but the correct date is 26 December and 1st January.

It is important to note, during the period of 1954-1969s pregnant women were not allowed to see the masquerade in order to protect the unborn child from evil eye or negative energy but from the 70s women were allowed to see the masquerades after offering one egg to masquerade so that their child will not look at like it.

¹⁹ A. Kinka, "The Ekpo Masquerade of the Isiokpo tribe and NFT photo: journalism: with Aleruchi Kinka, *Random photo journal*, last updated on 13th April, 2022, available on <https://randomphotojournal.com/2022/04/13/the-ghost-masquerade-of-the-isiokpo-people-and-nft-photojournalism-with-aleruchi-kinika/#:~:text=They%20tend%20to%20display%20days,%E2%80%9CTatul%C3%A9%20%9D%20have%20heavier%20masks/> accessed on 20th November, 2023.

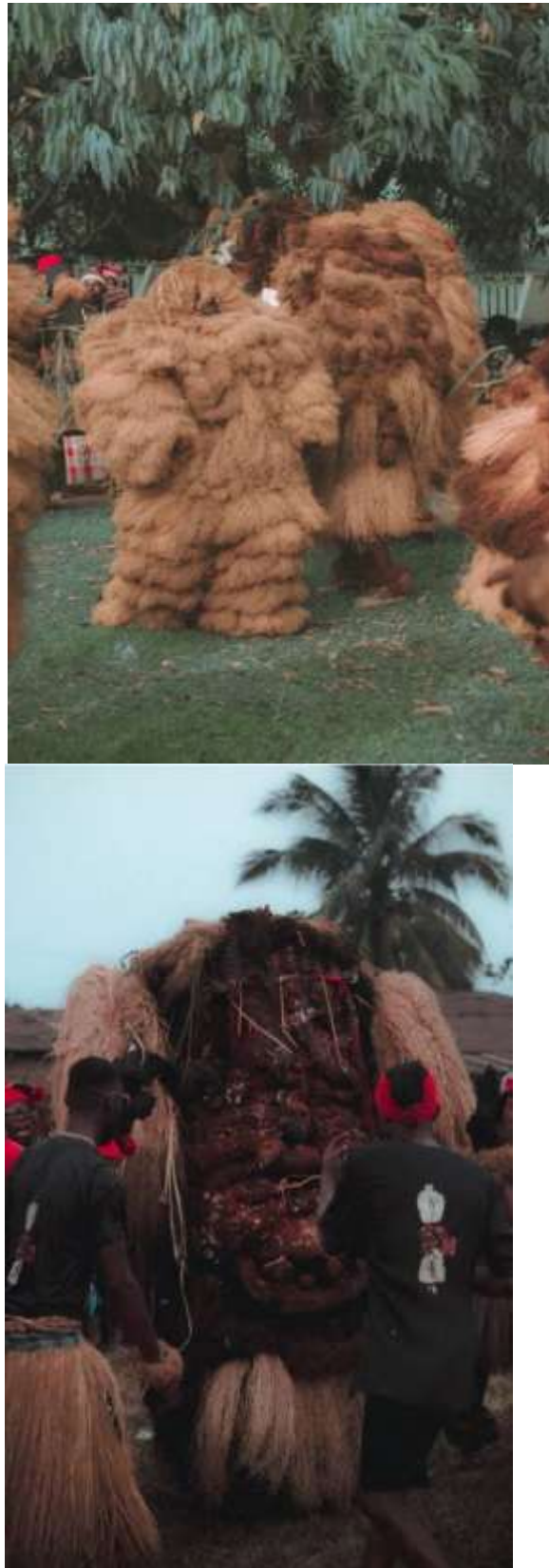


Fig 4.4: The Ekpo/Masquerade festival of Azumini, Isiokpo People: with Aleruchi Kinka, 13th April, 2023.

The masquerades captivated audiences with music and dance. Some performers executed meticulously coordinated movements that precisely aligned with prearranged sequences to earn the admiration of onlookers, who then rewarded them with monetary presents.

Ekpo in Elele Okaneli.

Sir Sam Eke in an oral interview explains the Masquerades features as replicate of carvings and dancers who played the role of the animals they wore as mask. Every large kindred in Elele Okaneli had one major masquerade. During the period of 1960-1970 masquerade in Elele Okaneli can come up at anytime; funeral of a great man or marriage ceremony of a great person.²⁰

Trade

Trade is a topic that has many aspects and implications, such as economic, social, political, and environmental. Trade can be defined as the voluntary exchange of goods or services between different economic actors, such as individuals, countries. Trade can have various benefits and costs for the parties involved, depending on the terms and conditions of the exchange. Trade can also have various effects and influences on the society and the world, depending on the scale and scope of the exchange. The Isiokpo and Elele people participated in trade relations.

Isiokpo Trade Relations

Isiokpo is a town in Rivers State, Nigeria, that belongs to the Ikwerre ethnic group. Trade relations in Isiokpo were mainly influenced by the Atlantic trade that involved the export of agricultural products such as palm oil, palm kernels, rubber, and cocoa to the industrialized western world. The Ikwerre people of Isiokpo were part of the hinterland communities that supplied these products to the coastal traders, especially the Kalabari and Okrika people, who had direct access to the European merchants. The trade was facilitated by the existence of a network of markets and roads that linked Isiokpo with other parts of the Niger Delta Trade relations. Isiokpo was mainly influenced by the Atlantic trade that involved the export of agricultural products such as palm oil, palm kernels, rubber, and cocoa to the industrialized western world.²¹

Elele Okaneli Trade Relations

Elele was also a transit point for the trade in palm oil, palm kernels, rubber, and ivory, which were exported to Europe through the Niger Delta ports. Elele also had trade relations with the neighboring ethnic groups, such as the Ogba, Ekpeye, Abua, Kalabari, and Okrika, Hausa etc.

Elele Okaneli benefited from the oil boom in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as it became a source of employment, income, and services for many people who migrated from rural areas to urban areas, such as Port Harcourt. Elele also became a hub of industries, infrastructure, and trade in the region, which further stimulated urbanization and economic growth. However, Elele also suffered from environmental degradation, such as oil spills, gas flaring, land degradation, and deforestation, which affected the health and livelihoods of the people and the ecosystem. Elele faced various challenges and difficulties in its trade relations with other parts of Nigeria and beyond, such as misunderstanding, prejudice, violence, and oppression. Elele was affected by the political and social turmoil that Nigeria experienced during 1960-1970, such as the independence from Britain in 1960, the first military coup in 1966, and the civil war between 1967 and 1970. Elele also had to deal with the issues of identity, belonging, and representation, as it tried to assert its rights and interests in a diverse and dynamic environment.²²

It is important to note, the trade relations between Elele and its neighbours were not always peaceful, as there were cases of conflicts and disputes over land, boundaries, markets, and resources. For instance, in 1967, there was a violent clash between Isiokpo and Elele over the ownership of Obiatubo market, which was a major trading centre for

²⁰ Sir Sam Charles Eke, 'interviewed on the Masquerade in Elele Okaneli', [interviewed by Aham Ijeoma Mirabel], Captain Elechi Amadi polythenic, SBS, 15th December, 2023.

²¹ J.Agumagu. 'Aro factor in Ikwerre history, 1700-1900', *University of Port Harcourt*:1988. Retrieved on 5th August,2023.

²² I. Eyindah, 'Land Disputes between the Hausa/Fulani-Elele and Elele Community 375 Land Disputes between the Hausa/Fulani-Elele and Elele Community, 1890-2006: Lessons in Intergroup Relations in Nigeria', Research gates, last updated on September, 2017, available on https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367056907_Land_Disputes_between_the_HausaFulani-Elele_and_Elele_Community_375_Land_Disputes_between_the_HausaFulani-Elele_and_Elele_Community_1890-2006_Lessons_in_Intergroup_Relations_in_Nigeria/ accessed on 15th November, 2023.

palm produce in the area. The conflict was resolved by the intervention of the military government that took over power in Nigeria after the 1966 coup d'etat.

Factors that enhanced Urbanization in the study Areas .

Urbanization can be defined as a multifaceted phenomenon that involves changes in land use, infrastructural development, economic activities, social dynamics and cultural patterns. It is the transformation process of rural areas to urban areas.

Cultural practices are the values, norms, beliefs, and behaviors that are shared by a group of people and passed down from generation to generation. Cultural practices are influenced by various factors, such as environment, history, religion, politics, and economy. Cultural practices can also change over time, as a result of internal or external forces, such as innovation, adaptation, diffusion, or conflict.²³

It is not in doubt that the Isiokpo and Elele Okaneli people were exposed to different cultures and influences from other ethnic groups, regions, and countries through trade, education, media, religion, and politics. Some of these influences were adopted or modified by them while others were resisted or rejected.²⁴

The factors include;

Religious factor

The Ikwerre are an ethnic group located in Rivers State, Nigeria, as stated in a Wikipedia page. The Ikwerre are very devout. Ikwerre traditional religion embodies a pantheistic perspective, acknowledging god in all aspects of existence, both seen and unseen. It is widely held that Chiokike (Supreme Being) is the architect of the cosmos and all its elements. Chiokike collaborates harmoniously with his several subordinate deities, including Ali, the soil deity and the principal divinity in the Ikwerre pantheon. The deities are said to guide individuals towards moral righteousness. Specific days of the week, seasons of the year, and times of day are considered holy in relation to the veneration of particular deities and in compliance with the commands of Ali. Today Ikwerre indigenous religion is being undermined through the effects of social change in the wake of urbanization and the influence of Christianity.²⁵

According to a blog post by SABC News Online, urbanization affects culture from an evolutionary perspective, as it creates new opportunities and challenges for cultural adaptation and innovation. The blog post suggests that urbanization can lead to both positive and negative outcomes for culture, such as creativity, diversity, tolerance, social cohesion, identity formation, conflict, violence, alienation, and loss of tradition.²⁶

Religion influenced urbanization of cultural practices in Isiokpo and Elele during 1960-1970 because religion was a source of identity and belonging for the Ikwerre people, who maintained and celebrated their cultural practices in the face of urbanization. Religion also provided them with a sense of continuity and connection with their ancestral roots and values.

Religion was also a factor of change and innovation for the Ikwerre people, who encountered and interacted with different religious groups and influences in urban areas. Religion also enabled them to adopt or modify their cultural practices according to their preferences and goals. It was a factor of conflict and cooperation for the Ikwerre people, who faced various challenges and opportunities in urban areas. Religion also shaped their political views and actions, as well as their relations with other ethnic and religious groups.

The spread and influence of Christianity and education in Nigeria also had a significant impact on the urbanization of cultural practices in Isiokpo and Elele. The

²³H. Heather, 'What is Cultural Norms', *Study.com*, available at <https://study.com/learn/lesson/cultural-norms-definition-examples.html>. (accessed on 15th November, 2023).

²⁴I. Johnson, 'Religion, Traditions and Education: Ikwerre perspective', *research gate*, 2022, available at <https://www.researchgates.net/publication/361400811-RELIGION-AND-TRADITIONAL-EDUCATION-IKWERRE-PERSPECTIVE>. Html. (accessed on 15th November, 2023).

²⁵A. Ben, 'Ikwerre People', *Wikipedia*, last updated on 14th November, 2023, available on https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ikwerre_people. (accessed on 15th November 2023).

²⁶SABC News Online, 'Culture and Urbanization', last updated on 7th November, 2023, available on <https://social.shorthand.com/SABCNewsOnline/n2bbr2uQCC/culture-and-urbanisation>. (accessed on 18th November, 2023).

Christian missionaries established churches, schools, hospitals, and other social services in the rural areas, which exposed the people to new ideas, values, and skills. The Christian religion also challenged some of the traditional beliefs and practices of the people, such as their ancestral worship, masquerade festivals, and secret societies.^{27,28}

It is important to note that Christianity arrived in Isiokpo by 1905, the first missionary Church under the umbrella of the Baptist Church was established in Obodo, Isiokpo. In 1907, Rev. James Boyle, an Anglican missionary arrived at Nkarahia to explore the possibility of establishing an outstation of Abonnema. He was well received by Chief Ishuku and this later led to the establishment of St Peter's Anglican Church in Nkarahia, Isiokpo.

While in the Northern communities of Elele, Omerelu, Elele- Alimini, Egbeda, Omodioga, Akpabu, Akpani, Christianity penetrated in the first decade of the 20th century. On March 19, 1911, St. Stephen's Anglican church, Omerelu was established. By 1912, Anglicanism was planted in Elele Okaneli.

It is important to note, even though Christianity arrived in Isiokpo in 1905, it did not really make much impact because the traditional worshippers were also the leaders in the church. They were said to go about their activities and later return to church on Sunday. But one significant impact of religion in Isiokpo is that it reduced the use of diabolical means when wrestling.

Political factor

The independence of Nigeria in 1960 also brought about political changes and conflicts, such as the creation of new states, the civil war, and the oil boom, which affected the urbanization process and the cultural practices of the people.

Creation of new states

As Isiokpo and Elele became part of newly created states, they likely witnessed increased infrastructural development, such as roads, schools, and healthcare facilities. This attracted people from rural areas to urban centers within these regions, leading to urbanization.

Civil war: The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) was a violent conflict between the federal government and the secessionist state of Biafra, which included most of the Igbo-speaking regions. The war caused widespread devastation, displacement, and death in the affected areas. Many Ikwerre people were involved in the war, either as combatants or civilians. Some fought for Biafra, while others supported the federal side. Some fled to safer places, while others stayed behind and suffered the consequences. The war also disrupted the traditional social structures and values of the Ikwerre people, who had to adapt to new realities and pressures²⁹. The civil war affected both Isiokpo and Elele Okaneli as schools stopped, cultural practices like the new yam festival were put on hold.

Cultural Factor

The urbanization process also fostered the emergence of new cultural forms and expressions among the people of Isiokpo and Elele. These new cultural forms reflected the changing values and aspirations of the urban populations, as well as their creativity and diversity. Some examples of these new cultural forms are popular music, fashion trends, urban art forms, literature, cinema, cuisine, and festivals. These new cultural forms also incorporated elements from other cultures, such as Igbo, Ekpeye, Abua cultures etc.

Economic Factor

This is the factor that relates to the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of goods and services in a society. Economic factor affects the urbanization of cultural practices by creating incentives and opportunities for people to migrate to urban areas, where they can access more markets, jobs, and incomes. This has led to

²⁷ C. O. Nwoso, *The Isiokpo people: A historical and cultural perspectives*, Ibadan University Press: Nigeria, vol.1, ch3, p56, 2012.

²⁸ Toyin , Falola, *The Nigerian cities* in Toyin Falola and Steven J. Salm(eds) in *Urbanization and African culture*, Durham California Press, Vol 2, pp. 142-144, 2005. Retrieved on 5th August, 2023.

²⁹ Toyin Falola, *Nigerian Civil War*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last updated on 13th October, 2023, available on <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nigerian-civil-war#:~:text=On%20May%2030%2C%201967%2C%20Ojukwu,a%20full%2Dscale%20civil%20war/> accessed on 17th November, 2023.

changes in their lifestyles, occupations, and consumption patterns, such as the use of modern technology, transportation, and communication.³⁰

Educational factor

This is the factor that relates to the acquisition, transmission, and application of knowledge and skills in a society. Educational factor affects the urbanization of cultural practices by creating demand and supply for education and literacy in urban areas, where people can access more schools, colleges, and universities. Educational factor also affects the urbanization of cultural practices by creating exposure and awareness of different cultures and perspectives in urban areas, where people can learn from various sources, such as books, media, and peers. Educational factor also affects the urbanization of cultural practices by creating innovation and creativity of cultural expressions and products in urban areas, where people can experiment with new forms, styles, and genres. A good example is the establishment of "St Peter's State's School" in Isiokpo. This school ranges from Primary 1-5 and so other neighbouring villages like Omagwa, Ozuwoha etc came to Isiokpo to complete their primary education.³¹

Judicial System

This factor pertains to the court in Ikwerre. In accordance with traditional history, Ikwerre is divided into seven groups known as "Ikwerre Essa": Elele, Isiokpo, Rumuji, Emohua, Choba, Aluu Igwuruta, and Obio. During the Colonial era, seven native courts were established in Ikwerre. These courts were situated at Elele (1931), Obio (1931), Isiokpo (1901), Rumuji (1932), Emohua (1933), Choba, Aluu Igwuruta, and Obio (1931).³²

Igwuruta (1947).³³

Isiokpo, like any other community in the Ikwerre Essa has its own local judicial system or legal mechanisms for handling disputes and administering justice. During the colonial administration, the first native court was established in Nkariahia, Isiokpo in 1901. This court was used in settling disputes until 1960 where the Customary court was established in Isiokpo. The Magistrate court and High court later came into existence. These two courts were in the same location as the Customary and Native court. It is important to note, the Customary court which was the successor of the Native court was built on a different location from the native court, the high court resides in the exact location of the Native.³⁴



³⁰Ojo, A. 'Nigeria's Urbanisation History, Trends, Drivers and Implications', Springer.Com, last updated on 23rd June, 2023, available on https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-19765-0_2/ accessed on 18th November, 2023.

³¹Chief Chadwick Mpi, 'interviewed on 'Religion in Isiokpo', [interviewed by Aham Mirabel], Mpi Nworah Compound, Isiokpo, Nkariahia, 23rd September, 2023.

³² Wika Ugwechi Gift, 'court in Elele Okaneli', [interviewed on phone by Aham Mirabel], 22nd November, 2023.

³³Dr. Mrs Joy Agumagu and Dr. Paul B. Badey, "Ikwerre Language Curriculum At The Primary School Levels: An Examination, PDF Free Download", docplayer.net, last updated on 10th September, 2021.

³⁴ Chief Matthew Aluru, 'interviewed on court in Isiokpo', [interviewed by Chief Chadwick Mpi], Mpi Nworah Compound, 23rd September, 2023.

Fig. 4.5: A picture of the customary court in Isiokpo, Nkaharia, photographed by author, 23rd September, 2023.



Fig.4.6: A picture of the high court which resides in the location of the native court in Isiokpo, Nkaharia, photographed by author, 23rd September, 2023.

Migration

Migration is the movement of people from one location to another. Migration may be voluntary or involuntary, temporary or permanent, and it may result in cultural changes when individuals from different cultures come into contact. This is done to escape poverty, famine, or environmental degradation, or to seek better living conditions or land etc.³⁵ Migration had various impacts on the diversity and unity of Isiokpo and Elele, such as the intermingling of languages, cultures, and genes, the formation of clans and associations, and the preservation of ethnic identity. Migration also continued after the colonial and post-colonial periods, as many Ikwerre people moved to other parts of Nigeria or abroad for various reasons.

Impact of Urbanization on the Cultural Practices of Isiokpo and Elele

During 1960-1970, Nigeria experienced a period of political and social turmoil, marked by the independence from Britain in 1960, the first military coup in 1966, the civil war between 1967 and 1970, and the oil boom in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These events had a significant impact on the urbanization and cultural change in Ikwerre land, as well as other parts of the country.

Experts assert that culture is as ancient as humanity itself, but it is ever evolving. In what manner do we connect with our ancestral heritage in a modern urban environment? What is our origin and how does it evolve in a contemporary context? Dr. Gerrit Dusseldorp, an archaeologist at the University of Johannesburg, asserts that culture is evolving more rapidly due to urbanization, since an increasing number of individuals generate innovative ideas, therefore providing others the option to accept or reject them. Cultural expert, Ndela Ntshangase says urbanisation affects and impact on people's culture because they are dominated by western culture.

“When people stay in the urban areas for a long time then they can be absorbed by urbanisation, even other cultures. When they go back to their homes, rural areas, they come with these ideas, and influence their areas.”³⁶

The transformation of traditional lifestyles and customs:

Urbanization has resulted in the emergence of new cultural practices, such as the use of popular music, fashion trends, and urban art forms, which reflect the changing values and aspirations of the urban population. As individuals migrate from rural areas to cities, they bring with them their cultural beliefs, practices, and traditions. Occasionally, these

³⁵ E. Victoria, 'Immigration, migration, and culture', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*, last updated on 28th March, 2018, available on <https://oxfordre.com/psychology/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.001.0001/acrefore-9780190236557-e-287> (accessed on 15th December, 2023).

³⁶ SABC News Online, 'Culture and Urbanization', *SABC NEWS*, last updated on 7th November, 2023, available on <https://social.shorthand.com/SABCNewsOnline/n2bbr2uQCC/culture-and-urbanisation/> (accessed on 18th November, 2023).

urban areas may experience changes in their traditional way of life as people adapt to the new, evolving cultural practices.³⁷ In Isiokpo, wrestling was formally fixed on Ekeh days only but after the civil war, the practice was moved to Saturday in order to make it socially accommodating. Isiokpo also modified their traditional marriage time in order to make it easier for strangers to marry off their daughters and still have time to go back to their respected homes. Some people may also modify their traditional forms of festivals, such as wrestling in Isiokpo etc.

Diversification and specialization of economic activities

Urbanization created new markets and demands for various goods and services in Isiokpo and Elele, which encouraged the diversification and specialization of economic activities among the people. For example, some people engaged in manufacturing activities such as palm oil processing, pottery making, carpentry, blacksmithing, and tailoring. Some people engaged in service activities such as trading, transportation, banking, education, health, and public administration. ³⁸Some people also engaged in informal sector activities such as petty trading, hawking, barbing, shoe shining, and scavenging.

The creation of employment opportunities:

This is one of the positive impacts of urbanization on cultural practices in Isiokpo and Elele. Employment opportunities are the availability and accessibility of jobs and incomes for people in urban areas. Employment opportunities can affect the cultural practices of people by changing their lifestyles, consumption patterns, and preferences, as well as by enhancing their creativity, innovation, and diversity.³⁹

The creation of employment opportunities enables people to migrate from rural areas to urban areas, where they can access more markets, jobs, and incomes⁴⁰. This also leads to the development of industries, infrastructure, and trade in urban areas, which further stimulate urbanization and economic growth. However, this also results in the exposure and interaction of people to different cultures and influences from other ethnic groups, regions, and countries, such as Christianity, Islam, Western education, democracy, and nationalism. Some of these influences are adopted or modified by the Ikwere people, while others are resisted or rejected.

The creation of employment opportunities enable them to change their preferences and values, as they develop new interests, goals, and aspirations that are influenced by their urban environment. For example, some people may value education, literacy, and skills more than tradition, kinship, and rituals. Some people may also aspire to achieve higher social status, wealth, and power, rather than maintaining harmony, solidarity, and respect. Some people may also prefer individualism, competition, and diversity, rather than collectivism, cooperation, and uniformity.

The creation of employment opportunities enables people to enhance their creativity, innovation, and diversity, as they experiment with new forms, styles, and genres of cultural expressions and products.

Quality educational and medical facilities

Quality educational facilities are the institutions and resources that provide access to learning and knowledge for people in urban areas. Quality educational facilities can affect the cultural practices of people by increasing their literacy, skills, and awareness of

³⁷Donovan's Note, *'The impact of urbanization on cultural practices and economic system'*, Studocu, Loyola university of Chicago, available on <https://www.studocu.com/en-us/document/loyola-university-chicago/economies-culture-and-development/the-impact-of-migration-on-cultural-change-and-economic-development/55696360?origin=course-suggestion-2/> accessed on 18th November 2023.

³⁸A. E. Afigbo, 'Some Aspects. Afigbo's respect for tradition carries beyond political and economic considerations. In "Religion in Nsukka: A Historical Prolegomena"' in Falola, Toyin, ed., *Igbo History and Society: the Collected Essays of Adiele Afigbo*, google Scholar. pp, 549–558, 2005.

³⁹G. Ursula. *'Urbanization and the employment opportunities of youth in developing countries'*, www.UNESCO.Org, last updated on 18th June, 2012, available on <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000217879/> accessed on 18th November, 2023.

⁴⁰J. Sanchez-Reaza. *'Looking at urbanization through a jobs lens'*, World Bank blogs, last updated on 13th June, 2016, available on <https://blogs.worldbank.org/jobs/looking-urbanization-through-jobs-lens/> accessed on 19th November, 2023.

different cultures and perspectives⁴¹. For example, in Isiokpo, the establishment of the Anglican church brought about the St Peter's State's School. This school ranges from Primary 1-6 and other neighbouring communities come to Isiokpo to complete their primary school. This may have influenced their values, interests, and goals, as well as their creativity, innovation, and diversity of cultural expressions and products. Quality medical facilities are the institutions and resources that provide access to health care and treatment for people in urban areas. Quality medical facilities can affect the cultural practices of people by improving their health, well-being, and longevity. For example, the Anglican Church "General hospital" in the late 1970s.

Change in the social structure

Urbanization often brings about changes in social structures and lifestyles. As urban areas offer more job opportunities and higher living standards, people might migrate from rural areas to cities like this influx of new residents can lead to the adoption of different cultural practices and traditions, as individuals bring their customs and rituals from their places of origin.⁴²

Trade often involves interaction between different communities, fostering cultural exchange. The trade relations between Isiokpo and its neighbours also had an impact on their culture, as they exchanged not only goods but also ideas, values, and practices. For example, Isiokpo adopted some aspects of Kalabari and Okrika culture, such as their dressing style, music, dance, and festivals. Isiokpo also had contacts with other hinterland communities such as Etche, Eleme, Ekpeye, Ogba Abua, and Igbo of Imo state, who shared some linguistic and cultural similarities with them.⁴³

Urbanization often leads to the growth of markets and commercial centers. This expansion might have provided opportunities for people from Isiokpo and Elele to engage in trade activities, facilitating the exchange of goods, produce, and crafts between the communities. This exchange have led to the marriage, sharing of cultural items, traditional crafts, and local specialties, contributing to a richer cultural exchange between the two areas. A good example is the Elele trade relations with Hausa. There are some negative impacts of urbanization on cultural practices in Isiokpo and Elele during 1960-1970 are:

The gradual erosion of traditional cultures was a result of the adoption of new cultural practices and modes of life by individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds as they relocated to urban areas. The sense of belonging and pride of the populace was also impacted by the loss of cultural diversity and identity, as they became more assimilated and alienated in the urban environment. This form of congestion in urban areas is a consistent occurrence due to overabundance, an aspect that is exacerbated by the daily influx of people and immigrants seeking a better life in cities and towns. The majority of individuals from rural or underdeveloped regions are compelled to relocate to urban areas, which typically results in a concentration of individuals in a limited space.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the complex and multifaceted impact of urbanization on the cultural practices of Isiokpo and Elele from 1960 to 1970. Urbanization played a dual role in shaping the cultural identity of these communities, acting both as a catalyst for change and a force of preservation. While certain traditions were transformed or diminished due to increased exposure to external influences, others were adapted and reinforced as a response to urban pressures.

One of the most significant cultural shifts observed was the alteration of traditional ceremonies and festivals. Events such as the New Yam Festival and wrestling contests, which once followed rigid ancestral customs, were modified to accommodate changing societal norms. For instance, in Isiokpo, wrestling was historically held on Ekeh days, but

⁴¹ J. Rinkesh, 'Causes, Effects, and Solutions to Urbanization Leading to Urban Growth', *Conserve energy future*, available on <https://www.conserve-energy-future.com/causes-effects-solutions-urbanization.php/> accessed on 19th November, 2023.

⁴² Y. Murayama, 'Urbanization: Concept, mechanism and global implications', Springer. Com, last updated on 22nd September, 2019, available on https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-32-9224-6_19. (accessed on 19th November, 2023).

⁴³ I. Chinda, 'Ikwerre intergroup relations and its impact on their culture', *African Research Review*, no 2, vol 2, pp. 83-98, 2017.

urban influences led to its rescheduling to Saturdays, ensuring broader participation in an era where time and work schedules became more structured. Similarly, the traditional marriage ceremonies of Isiokpo saw a shift in timing, moving away from nighttime rituals to facilitate intermarriages with outsiders.

Religious transformation also played a crucial role in reshaping cultural traditions. The growing influence of Christianity, which had established its presence in Isiokpo as early as 1905, led to a gradual decline in indigenous spiritual practices. However, this transition was not immediate. For a long time, traditional worshippers maintained their positions in church leadership, blending elements of their cultural beliefs with Christian practices. Over time, the introduction of Western religious ideals led to the decline of practices such as the use of charms in wrestling, which were once integral to traditional sports competitions.

Economic shifts were another defining factor in the urbanization process. The integration of Isiokpo and Elele into expanding trade networks, both regionally and nationally, facilitated exposure to new commodities, practices, and economic activities. This led to an increasing diversification of occupations beyond agriculture, such as palm oil processing, carpentry, and trade. In Elele, particularly, trade relations extended beyond the local community to include interactions with Hausa traders, fostering intercultural exchanges that influenced social behaviors and economic structures.

Furthermore, urbanization had profound effects on gender roles and family structures. The introduction of Western education and employment opportunities allowed for greater participation of women in social and economic activities. However, traditional family structures, such as arranged marriages and woman-to-woman marriage, persisted in some areas, albeit with modifications. The practice of widow inheritance, which ensured the continuation of lineage and property within families, gradually faced resistance as modern legal and religious frameworks provided alternative means of inheritance and economic security for women.

While urbanization brought about significant cultural shifts, it did not entirely erase indigenous practices. Instead, many traditions evolved to reflect contemporary realities. Masquerade performances, for example, remained a significant aspect of cultural identity, though their frequency and nature changed. The Ekpo masquerade, historically reserved for specific social and religious functions, gradually took on more entertainment-oriented roles, appealing to a broader audience and integrating elements of modern artistic expression.

Despite the undeniable transformations induced by urbanization, there was also a conscious effort to preserve cultural heritage. The people of Isiokpo and Elele found ways to retain their distinct identity by incorporating new influences into existing traditions rather than abandoning them entirely. This hybridization of culture illustrates the resilience and adaptability of these communities in the face of change.

Overall, the discussion underscores the notion that urbanization is not merely a process of cultural loss but also a dynamic force of cultural evolution. While certain traditional practices waned due to the pressures of modernization, others persisted and adapted, demonstrating the fluid and evolving nature of culture in urbanizing societies. The case of Isiokpo and Elele exemplifies how communities navigate the complexities of cultural transformation, balancing the need for modernization with the preservation of ancestral heritage.

5. Conclusion

The impact of urbanization on cultural practices in Isiokpo and Elele during 1960-1970 is complex, as it involves cultural continuity and transformation of the cultural practices in both communities. Urbanization was not a uniform or linear process, but a dynamic and dialectical one, that shaped and was shaped by the people and their culture. Urbanization was both a challenge and an opportunity for the people of Isiokpo and Elele, as they navigated the new realities of their time; Urbanization brought about both positive and negative impacts in Isiokpo and Elele during 1960-1970.

However, despite the impact of urbanization, it's important to note that traditional cultural practices did not completely disappear. Many inhabitants of Isiokpo and Elele Okaneli maintained their cultural heritage and continued to engage in traditional activities, ceremonies, and festivals. The cultural practices of Isiokpo and Elele Okaneli continued to evolve and adapt, creating a unique blend of old traditions and newly adopted practices.

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