Relations of Quasi Communities: A Case Study of Okoloba – Seibokoragha (Sabagreia)

By

Ugo, Yenimikikuro
Department of History and Diplomacy, Niger Delta University
Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State
Tel: 08033536370 Email: ugoyeni@gmail.com

Abstract

The study of Okoloba – Sebokoragha (Sabagreia) is a study on intergroup relations. Okoloba and seibokorogha are two ancient communities in the Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA of Bayelsa State. The communities are located adjacent to each other and share a common ancestral lineage. Due to their proximity, the communities came to be known as a common town called Sabagreia and existed as such until the 1990s. Over time, the relations of the two towns have also been characterized by socio- political and economic conflicts that have not been documented. The conflicts pertain to land boundary, struggle for paramount stool of the town and claim of the name Sabagreia. The study is necessitated by the fact that, the relations of the two communities has impacted greatly on the socio-political and economic development. The study adopts the historical methodology. For lack of substantial secondary sources on the communities, the study relies mostly on interviews for collection of data, analysed using historical tools of analysis. Owing to the nature of the study, it serves as a means of preservation of the history of Okoloba and Sebokorogha relations. Again, the study is useful because, it adopts the historical, descriptive and analytical tools.

Introduction

Okoloba and seibokoragha are quasi-communities situated along the River Nun in the Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Seibokorogha comprises of six (6) compounds namely; Foubiri, Tamu-burudani, Kalama, Asebiri/Ayamabiri, Daboubiri and Fanti/ Egbedani compounds. On the other hand, Okoloba comprises of five (5) compounds namely; Olodani, Isedani, Abadani, Burudani and Tamu-Isedani. The oral traditions of the people do not provide the dates that the settlements were established. However, (Alagoa, 1999) suggests that, the communities may have been founded before the 15th century. According to the oral traditions of the people, the Seibokoragha Town was founded by a man called Ikati, son of Okereke of Kalama compound, while, the Okoloba Town was founded by a man called Aba of Abadani compound. Kalama and Abadani, were later joined by other settlers from other places that now make up Seibokorogha and Okoloba towns. In any case, all compounds making up the two towns trace their ancestry to Izon, the eponymous founder of Izon Nation. Most of the compounds in the community have dani as the suffix ending their name. This use serves as a symbol of shared common lineage traced to Kala-Okun, one of the sons Izon. Danis that are found in Okoloba are; Burudani, Abadani, Isedani, Olodani. In Seibokorogha, there is Egbedani.

At the beginning, Seibokorogha and Okoloba existed as separate towns. But later, they came to be collectively known as Sabagreia. According to Alazigha (2010:4), the name Sabagreia was given to the two communities by British merchants whose missing crew was rescued by a man called Bere-ere, of Egbedani compound. However, the naming took place in Chief Izon Ibou's house in Okoloba Town. Following the introduction, Sabagreia became a common name for Seibokorogha and Okoloba collectively. In 1905, Captain Lord Esme Gordon Lennox, a soldier with the West African Frontier Force, also described the two communities as Sabagreia (Lennox, 1905:47).

Sabagreia became famous as a town hosting numerous government and non-governmental establishments and hub of social activities. Institutions that existed in the town in the colonial era were Native Court (1904), Post of Forestry Guard (1908), St. Peter's Anglican Church and School (1910), Roman Catholic Church and school (1940) Dispensary (1925), Leper Colony (1947), Maternity home (1955) Agricultural Station 1954 and Postal Agency. The fame of the town was further advanced by producing the famous White Eagles Dance Band of Sabagreia and Amb. (Prof) Lawrence B. Ekpebu, the First African Harvard Graduate. Due to the above factors, Sabagreia was described as "Sabagreia bi opu ama" meaning Sabagreia the big town and "Abadi Okoloba" meaning Okoloba the ocean town, by non-indigenes from far and near (Records of Sylvanus Berenangha).

Due to the different institutions and organization of social activities, Okoloba-Seibokorogha became a rallying point for people from near and far. In the colonial times, the town served as a trading post of the United African Company (UAC), which distributed the J.J. Peters brand of foreign gin that was consumed as luxury gin. Therefore, people came to the town to trade with the company. People also came to the town for sightseeing, conducting research in Lake Efi and for fishing during the fishing festivals. According to Timineri Aro, a retired Soldier, some dignitaries that visited Okoloba-Seibokorogha (Sabagreia), between 1960 and 1980 were; President Nnamdi Azikiwe, (August 19, 1961), Col. Odumegu Ojukwu, (September 1968) and Diette Spiff, the Military Administrator of Rivers State who performed the opening ceremony of Lake Efi Fishing Festival in 1975.

Before 1978, Sabagreia had no central political authorities and Okoloba and Seibokorogha had separate political authorities. The head of each of the towns was the oldest man, known as the *amananaowei*. The amananaowei of each of the communities exercised limited authorities, as the socio-religious and economic policies relating to the towns were taken jointly and applied across the two communities. By 1967, Sabagreia became a town in Rivers State and was subjected to the laws of the state. In 1978, the Chieftaincy Edict of River State was established, which led to the establishment of a Council of Traditional Rulers in the State. This necessitated the attempt to establish a central authority in Sabagreia by its indigenes. The efforts resulted in the election and installation of Chief, Koripamo David Ungbuku, a lawyer, as *Pere* 1 of Sabagreia. Chief K. D. Ungbuku, was not resident in the town, hence, his deputies were the ones that did the actual administration of the town. Chief Ungbuku's reign as *Pere* 1 of Sabagreia was characterised by conflicts between him and landlords of the town. The conflicts relate to control of land in the town. By 1980, the reign of Ungbuku, as the political head of Sabagreia was no longer visible, as the people no longer acknowledge him as the paramount ruler of the town. Electing another paramount ruler after him was also difficult, as both Kalama and Abadani compounds, wanted the ruler to come from their compounds. In fact, Ungbuku's reign, marked the beginning and end of a paramount ruler over Sabagreia town.

The end of Ungbuku's reign gave rise to increase in the political differences between the two communities. Disagreements over which side should produce the paramount ruler led to conflicts over ownership of the name Sabagreia. In 1987, the Seibokorogha community tried to install Chief L.D.O. Baraka, of Kalama compound as amananaowei of Sabagreia. The attempt was opposed by the Okoloba people. They claim Baraka can only be installed as amananowei of Seibokorogha and not Sabagreia because; the Sabagreia embraces the two community. Despite the opposition, Chief L.D.O. Baraka, was installed amidst preparation for war by the Okoloba community. Indigenes of Seibokorogha and Okoloba were also opposed to the installation of Chief L.D.O. Baraka, as Amananaowei of Sabagreia. Hence, on the 1990, Major N.T. Angaye of Okoloba and Major Bipelegha

of Seibokorogha led military officers from the two communities to nullify the installation. Efforts by indigenes and clan authorities to resolve the name related conflicts in the town did not yield any tangible result. Instead, conflicts relating to claim of the name Sabagreia continued. In 1996, His Highness, Macpherson McCarthy was elected paramount ruler of Okoloba Town. Thereafter, His Highness, Buokumo Orukari, of Kalama compound was coroneted as Amananowei of Sabagreia. The election of His Highness, Macpherson McCarthy as paramount ruler of Okoloba and coronation of His Highness, Buokumo Orukari, as paramount ruler of Sabagreia implies the final separation of the two communities as autonomous communities.

Notwithstanding, the political separation, people of Okoloba and Sabagreia, still observe traditional regulations relating to the use of forests, water ways and their resources used collectively. In addition, they also organize social activities under the management of committees that comprise of indigenes of the two communities.

The Environment

Seibokorogha and Okoloba Towns are located in the fresh water swamp region in the Niger Delta. The area is characterized by sand banks, creeks, swamps, seasonal River Niger flooding and forests. The communities are bounded to the south by the Tailor creek, to the east by the River Nun and to the west by Ayibabiri community. Opposite the towns are the Igbedi and Odobutoru, formerly Oruama-Toru which serve as link between the town and Igbedi town. The climate of the area is defined by the wet and dry seasons, seasonal flooding. The rainy season covers the months of April and November, while the dry season covers from December and March. Surrounding the towns is a vegetation made up of numerous trees namely; oil palm, raffia palm, mahogany, abura, white tafara, oak, cotton, wild mango (ogbono), (li, kuru, bolou, nyanya, aku, tala, buni, ogboin, uguruzi), etc. Notable creeks found around in the area are Igbedi Toru and Odobu Toru. Prominent lakes in the area are "Efi, koun, lokia, San dunou, puipagha and okpoti". These bodies of waters contain different species of fish such as Cray fish, Tilapia, cat fish, crocodile, iguana lizard manatee, prawn, lobster, crayfish, crab etc.

Traditions of Origin

The traditions of origin of the people of Okoloba/Seibokorogha states that, the compounds in the towns were established by people that came from different locations. The accounts refer to places around Agadagbabou and Oruama-Toru as places from which the initial settlers migrated from. However, the traditions do not contain dates when the migrations took place. But, it appears that the migrations took place before the 11th century. (Alagoa, 1972) states that the Igbani (Okolo-ama) town in the Eastern Delta, was founded between 1200 and1400, by Alagbariye, from Isedani Compound of Sabagreia.

Origin of Seibokorogha

Seibokorogha was founded by Kala, son of Kuraiba the only daughter of Kala-Okun and Asiawari of San-Ama. According to Uwougbeintei Obulu, the discovery of Lake Efi by Kala in the area necessitated the foundation of the Sebokorogha settlement. But the community was established by the children of Kala and his friend Keni-uku of Egbedani. It is claimed that, during the preparation of the land for settlement, the sons of kala and Keni-uku, encountered a mysterious gigantic tree called *Disin*. Attempt at felling the tree proved unsuccessful until incantations to the tree was made in the name of Keni-uku. Keni-uku was not pleased that his name was used to appease the tree. He

claimed that, the youths wished him evil for using his name for appeasement. Consequently, he named the place "Bolouseibokorogha ama", which means, a place were no evil minded person settles.

Due to later migrants to the town, Seibokorogha is now comprised of six (6) compounds. Out of the six (6) compounds, four (4) namely; Egbedani, Kalama, Tamu-Burudani and Foubiri trace their ancestry to Kala-okun and Agadagbabou, Igbedi Creek or Odobutoru creek as their earlier places of settlement. While the two other compounds of Ayamabiri and Daboubiri claim ancestry and migrations from other places. Two of the compounds namely; Egbedani and Tamu-burudani, have dani as the suffix ending the compound name. Seibikorogha is regarded as the spiritual headquarters of Kolokuma Egbesu in the clan. Hence, the community also serves as the deity's main shrine, where cleansing rituals activities of worshippers of Egbesu are done.

Origin of Okoloba Town

According to Okon (I984), Okoloba was founded by Aba, after killing Okolo, a mysterious being reputable for killing whoever encroached on that territory. After the settlement, Aba and his descendants decided to name their new settlement Okoloba, meaning kill Okolo. They did this to denote the circumstances that led to the establishment of the town (Okon, 1984, unpublished). Another account states that, Aba, the founder of Okoloba, migrated from a settlement around a stream called "Ikolo Uba" also called "Kolokuma Toru". The stream became navigable during the flood season and served as a bypass linking the Igbedi creek and Ikolo Town in the River Nun, via Agadagbabou on the Wilberforce Island. After settling, Aba chose to call the new settlement Okoloba in commemoration of Ikolo-uba, their earlier settlement. The Abadani people were later joined in the new settlement by their kinsmen namely; Buru, Ise and and Olou. To this extent, Okoloba is now made up of Abadani, Olodani, Isedani, Burudani, and Tamu-Isedani.

The origin of the name Sabagreia

Okoloba and Seibokorogha are two-quasi communities separated only by settlement claims. Owing to the proximity of the community, people described the two communities as either Seibokorogha or okoloba town. Sometimes, people of neighbouring communities described the settlements as seibokorogha. At other times, people described the settlements as "Abadi Okoloba". Over time, the two communities came to be jointly known as Sabagreia. According to (Alazigha, 2010), the name Sabagreia was given to the two communities by a set of sailor, who couldn't pronounce seibokorogha correctly. He captures events that gave birth to the name Sabagreia as follows;

> *One Bere-Ere, a palm wine tapper from Egbedani saved a drowning European. Bere- Ere took him to chief Izon Ibou of Burudani in Okoloba in the company of Fefugha a son of Keniuku who in reply to an enquiry on the name of the town told them it was Seibokorogha. The European could not say the name "Seibokorogha"; He called it Sabagriga and later spelt Sabagreia which was nearest to what the local people call sobokorogha* (Alazigha, 2010:4).

People of Seibokorogha and Okoloba towns saw themselves as people of one town and related as such. Accordingly, government establishments cited in the name of Sabgreia was located in either Seibokorogha or Okoloba axis. This accounts for the siting of the Native Court Sabagreia, Post of the Forestry Guard Sabagreia, Dispensary Sabagreia, Leper Colony Sabagreia, Maternity home Sabagreia in present Okoloba Town and Agricultural Post in present Sabagreia Town.

Political Relations

The traditional political organization of Seibokorogha and Okoloba towns was the "Village Democracy" which is a form of republican system of government. The type of government that thrived in the communities was gerontocracy, which is the rule of elders. Under this system, the head of each community was the oldest man called "amananaowei". Under this setting, decisions about the town, was taken collectively by all adult males of the town that constituted the *amagula* (village assembly). An amananaowei was assisted in the administration of the town by specialised officers such as "Ereowei" (spokesman), "Ekpekpegbele-owei" (town crier) and "orukariowei" (Priest) and compound and family heads called "birikosuotu" and "warikosuotu

Evolutionary trends in the Politics and Administration of Okoloba/Seibokorogha

In 1967, nineteen (19) states, including Rivers state were created in Nigeria by Gen. Gowon. By this creation, Okoloba/Seibokorogha which was in the Eastern Region became part of Rivers State. While under Rivers State, the policies that influenced political developments in Okoloba and Seibokorogha were the Divisional Administrative System of January (1967-1975), the 1976, Local Government Reforms and the Rivers State Chieftaincy Edict of 1978, which established the Rivers State Council of Traditional Rulers. The ways in which these policies impacted on the political developments in Sabagreia is captured by Mr. Chukwuma-Machukwu Ume as follows;

> *Towards the second half of the 1970s, the politics of Nigeria's second republic was gearing to a full start. Different persons and interest groups were using different networks and covers to push for their interests and agenda. These are realities. Obviously, Sabagreia was no exception. The people of Sabagreia thought of a way of furthering their interest in the second republic. First they formed strength in unity and for the first time the two villages, that is, Seibokorogha and Okoloba decided to have common traditional head* (Chukwuma-Machukwu, 2006; 41)

On 30th June, 1975, Zamani Lekwot, the then military administrator of Rivers State established the Rivers State Chieftaincy Classification. In order to have the chieftaincy stools in the communities classified, people of Okoloba and Seibokorogha presented two memoranda to the Tekena Tamuno and E.J. Alagoa led committee. The memorandum presented by the Kalama people recommended Kala 1 as the stool to be classified. The other submitted by Egule, led group suggested another name. Due to the differences in the two memoranda, Prof. T.N. Tamuno and Dr. E.J. Alagoa, who visited the community left without after interacting with the people. They claimed that they were not convinced that the two communities were one town to have their stool classified. The failure to recognise Okoloba-Seibokorogha (Sabagreia) as one community, by the Chieftaincy Classification Committee, prompted people of Sabagreia to write a constitution in the name of Sabagreia. Initially, the title that was to be adopted for the paramount stool and compound the ruler should come from posed threats to the project. But later, the both sides resolved that, there should be a central administration over the two communities in the name of Sabagreia. The paramount ruler could be elected from any of the compounds, but not with the title "Amananaowei" but "Pere" as done by other Izon communities in Western Izon. Also, two others chiefs, one for Seibokorogha and the other for okoloba, who will be deputy chiefs to the Pere be elected. It was also agreed that, matters concerning the development of the whole town be under the jurisdiction of the Pere. While matters pertain to Okoloba or Seibokorogha be handled by the deputy chief of that community.

Following the adoption of the resolutions, a committee comprising of people of the two communities was constituted. The committee was given the responsibility to draft a chieftaincy instrument that was to guide the conduct of the elections in the community. According to C.S.D.

Opuowai, the Committee swung into actions almost immediately and sat several times. By the end, it was able to present to the community a document which was titled "Sabagreia Chieftaincy Instrument" that guided the election of Chief K. D. Ungbuku emerged as the paramount ruler. Also elected were Chief J. E. Ugo, Deputy Chief of Seibokorogha and Chief Shedrack Ongore, Deputy Chief of Okoloba. Not long after the election of Chief Ungbuku and his deputies, disagreements between him and the landlord compounds surfaced. The developments almost truncated the coronation of Chief K.D. Ungbuku and constitution of his cabinet. According to F.R. Ugo, it was the presence of police officers that made the coronation of Chief K.D. Ungbuku and his deputies on the 17th April, 1976 possible. The coronation of Ungbuku as *Pere* 1 of Sabagreia, denotes the reign of a paramount ruler over Sabagreia.

Major controversies that surrounded Chief K.D. Ungbuku reign as Pere 1 of Sabagreia were the capacity and the powers he had over control of land in the town. Chief Ungbuku and some others from non-landlord compounds claim that, he ruled as amanaowei. Therefore, the right to allocate land in the community lies with him. On the other hand, the Kalama and Abadan people claim that Chief K.D. Ugbuku ruled as amadaowei and not *amanaowei*. Hence, they reserve the right to manage land in the community and not him. Owing to this feud, the landlord compounds, failed to recognise his reign. These controversies, made the reign of Chief K.D. Ungbku, as Pere one ineffective and eventual collapse in 1983. Chief Ungbuku's reign marks the beginning and end of the reign of a paramount ruler in Sabagreia, as there was none before him and none after him in the town.

Economic relations

There have been economic relations between people of Okoloba and Seibokorogha communities since the pre-colonial times. The economic relations take the form of fishing in the same river, streams, lakes and other body's water existing in their surroundings. They have also been farming together in the same farmlands. They also had coming market square, where they traded in different trade articles. Owing to the usage of common water ways, farm lands and common market square, people of the two communities observed common economic laws.

Use of common Forests and Aquatic Bodies

Lakes, swamps, creeks and farmlands in Okoloba and Seibokorogha were owned by families or compounds. In any case, all persons in the both communities use them together freely. In the same way, people of the towns also had free access to the cutting of palm fruits; gathering of wild mango (ogbono) or any other wild fruits or crops in any of the bushes freely. However, compounds sometimes lease their lands to individuals for a period of three (3) years for plantain farming and two (2) years for other crops. When leasing of land was to be done, the compound head, engages a town crier to proclaim the message across the length and breadth of the two communities. This provided opportunity for all interested persons in the communities to lease the land. Land for lease was given to as many that presented themselves without discrimination. Provided and individual could make the desired payments, he or she was given as much land as was demanded. But, in some cases, indigenes of the compound giving land for lease land were given some concession of a lower amount and number of years.

Compounds leased lands to raise funds and to establish the ownership of the land. Even on leased lands, the use of wild resources such as trees, herbs, etc was free for all. Any person in any of the two towns could fetch firewood, cut sticks for staking of yams, tap palm wine, gather wild fruits,

etc. Similarly, anybody from the communities could also engage in hunting or gathering of wild fruits or herbs for any purpose. In the same way, people of both communities also embarked on fishing freely in any of the bodies of water mentioned above.

Fishing and farming associations were formed by people of the both communities. The groups comprised of members of the both communities with similar experience. During the farming season, individual members of a particular group assist each other in preparation of land and other farming activities on each others' farms.During harvesting seasons; they also assist each other by harvesting the farm produce collectively from each other's farms. Cooporation of the people was done through sharing of farming or fishing implements and canoes with each other. All that was required was a proper request by the person, who needs it from the owner. However, sometimes the beneficiary shares the proceeds of the produce with the owner of the implement. Often times, this is done as an appreciation to show gratitude and not on demand.

Trade

Trade remains a major occupation of Okoloba and Seibokorogha people. They have a common day for market and market square used collectively them. By virtue of the common usage, women from both communities were apportioned spaces at the market square and waterside, which they cleared before the market day. The women do so to make trading activities easy and convenient for all. Offenders were jointly sanctioned by the women leaders as deterrent action. While the women cleared the waterside, the youths from the two communities combined to clear the market surroundings too. The market square served as a central play ground for both communities as well. It was used collectively by the youths for wrestling competitions, usually after the trading activities on the market days.

Use of Common rules/Laws

Rules that applied to the use of the land and bodies of water were binding on all and obeyed by people of the both communities. Laws commonly observed include prohibition from farming when a corpse is in the town, farming on market days, adult women bathing in the water side naked, etc. The people believe that engaging in any of these acts, offend the gods and incurred their wrath. For instance, they claim that when farming is done on market day or when there is a corpse in the town, spirits of the land send wild animals of the forest to devastate or eat up crops in that forest. Therefore, everyone was prohibited from doing so. Were a person in any of the communities committed any of the offenses listed above, such was made to perform cleansing rituals associated with the offense.

Religious relations

Religious relations of Okoloba/Seibokorogha people took the form of worshiping in the same shrines or church, consulting same priests, combined participation in funeral activities, as well as communities' purification rituals. Deities worship has been a major religious practice of Okoloba/Seibokorogha people. Every ccompound has a deity it worshipped. Some of the compound deities are Ede, Welelebia, Ikpe-oru, Kombia, Odumu, etc. A deity is symbolized by an animate object. For instance, the Ede was symbolized by crocodile, while the Kombia was symbolized by a Z shaped stick. The communities worship a deity for particular services it is believed to render to them. For instance, Konbiyai was worshipped as a deity that controls the sun and rain, while Ede was worshipped as a deity for buoyancy and fertility. Also worshipped by compounds are clan gods.

Notable ones are Egbesu and Okpotu. The two gods have their headquarter shrines in Seibokorogha, where ceremonies pertaining to them are finalized.

Okoloba and Seibokorogha also have many churches established by different missionaries. The St. Peter's Anglican Church was established in 1910, by the Christian Missionary Church. By 1940, the Roman Catholic Church was established by the Roman Catholic Mission. In 2019, the two communities host over twenty churches. The Churches comprise of people from both communities. For instance, St. Peter's Anglican Church and School Sabagreia and the Roman Catholic Mission are attended by indigenes of both communities.

Burial ceremonies are observed jointly by Okoloba and Seibokorogha people. When an adult idol worshipper died, a supper called "ungwogwo" in the local parlance is organized for the dead, before the corpse was buried. The meal made with roasted chicken, palm oil and other spices is prepared in a mortar. The paste is then eaten with roasted plantain by mail adults present at the venue. Part of the prepared paste is also smeared on an opening on the casket of the dead, before it was eventually taken for burial.

In both communities, there were witch doctors and priests that rendered cleansing and healing services. People in the communities consulted witch doctors for their ability and specialization and not based on the community he hails from. Witch doctors in Okoloba were consulted by people of seibokorogha and those in Seibokorogha were also consulted by people of Okoloba.

There is also the annual town cleansing procession carried out by women after an annual flood. Women of both communities embark on the procession with navy blue wrapper tied around their loins and smouldering fire wood in their hands. The procession begins by midnight at the northern end of Okoloba and ends the southern end of Seibokorogha. All the participants throw the firewood into the River Nun, before retiring to their homes. People of the communities believe that, the procession embarked by the women cleanses the town of harmful diseases and drives evil spirits that came with the flood away.

Social Relations

Mr. Opuowai Dudu, a former agent/church teacher of St. Peter's Anglican Church Sabagreia, a retired primary school teacher, a onetime political and youth activist and a local historian states that, there was remarkable cooperation between people of Okoloba and Seibokorogha before the late 1970s. At that time, all indigenes of Okoloba/Seibokorogha (Sabagreia) saw themselves as one and related as such. They engaged in several social activities such as weekly wrestling festivities, playing football together, joint *Omu aru* (war canoe) displays, etc. The two communities also jointly engage neighbouring communities in wrestling, and football festivities. Owing to the unity that thrived amongst the people, neighbouring towns always respected them.

Mr. Francis Robinso Ugo, also corroborates C.S.D. by stating that Youths of Okoloba and Seibokorogha always related socially. According to him, wrestling matches were organized on every market day at the market square. Male youths from the two communities gathered to organize wrestling festivities which served as entertainment for all and sundry. Sometimes, these matches were on challenge grounds between the two towns. Other times, it was the combined youths of the two towns against other neighbouring communities. In such matches, drummers played different kinds of drums to entertain the people. The drummers also arouse the spirit of the wrestlers by also using the beats of the drums to make remarks about them. When a wrestling match was on, women, who tied wrappers around their waists and chests helped fetch water from the river that was used

to wet the wrestlers. In addition, they also sang and clap their hands to arouse the spirit of the wrestlers.

Mrs Vesta Yeribo, a renowned woman in the two towns also narrated that; cultural dance groups comprised of the two towns united the people of Sabagreia. According to her, many girls and women came together to form dancing group. In some cases, the name of dance group was determined by the circumstance that led to the establishment of the particular dance. Dance groups displayed to entertain visitors and indigenes during chieftaincy coronations, burials, and Yuletide seasons.

According to Dagbo Aro, a notable wrestler in Okoloba, traditional dance and masquerade displays united people of Okoloba and Seibokorogha in the past. Local dances were mainly practiced by girls and women and masquerade displays were exclusively organized by male youths. Masquerade dancers wear multiple colour costumes and carried on their heads carved symbols depicting a particular fish, crocodile, etc. In addition, the dancers also carry wooden machetes and sometimes real cutlasses. The masquerade displays are accompanied by beating of drums and singing of songs. While dancing masquerades, the dancers also believed to be under the influence of the spirits of the creatures. Hence, the dancers are not liable for any actions of theirs. Therefore, those who witnessed such displays did so with ultimate caution to avoid being injured by the masquerades, Okoloba and Seibokorogha relations also involve inter marriages. The Inter marriages took the forms of small dowry and big dowry payments. Inter marriages unified not only the immediate families of the husbands and wives, but also the extended families and the towns as a whole. According to Okobatin Aro Ogidi, children whose parents were from the both communities helped to mediated some of the conflicts that involve the two communities. Such conflicts include Kalama-Abadani boundary conflict. In this case, the mediators, those whose parents were from the both sides, help resolve the case by setting pillars at the boundary set by a court judgment.

Conclusion

Okoloba- Seibokoragha are quasi-communities that have had relations with each other. In the 15th century, the two communities were christened Sabagreia by European voyagers, and came to be regarded as a single town. While the both communities existed as a single community (Sabagreia), people of the towns did things in common. That made the town famous and a place of convergence of people from far and near. Due to the fame, men from other clans in Izon land scrambled to marry daughters of the town. Those who were privileged to marry from the town also prided themselves by challenging their kinsmen if they could also marry a girl from Sabagreia.

By 1980s, rift over claim of ownership of the name developed, affecting the unity of the people and development of the town. The rift affected the cordial political, economic, religious, and social relations characterised the people of the two communities. Attempts to curb trends that are responsible for the rifts yielded no favourable results.

Drift towards political separation widened until Bayelsa State was created on 1st October, 1996 by Gen. San Abacha. Creation of the State paved way for the eventual separation of the two communities. Consequently, late Chief Macpherson McCarthy was elected as paramount ruler of Okoloba town late 1996. However, he was yet to be coroneted before his Death. The election of Chief Macpherson McCarthy marks the officially political separation of the two communities. In 1999, Chief D.S.P Alamieyeseigha, Governor of Bayelsa State, set up a committee for reclassification of chieftaincy stools in Bayelsa State. Consequently, stools of the two communities were classified third class status. The recognition of the stools further concretised the separation of the communities. In

2017, His Highness Bokumor Orukari, was coroneted as a paramount ruler of Sabagreia as *Kala the 10th*. In 2022, Dr. Woyengibara Emmanuel Jack Alazigha Dagbo, has been elected paramount ruler of Okoloba, but is yet to be installed.

Though Okoloba and Sabagreia now exist as autonomous towns. The customs and tradition that govern the use of the land and water bodies jointly used by the people are still commonly observed. Indigenes of the towns still jointly engage in social, cultural and religious activities. For these reasons, indigenes and non-indigenes alike still sometimes refer to the two communities as Sabagreia.

References

Ajoko B.S. Oral interview, Tamu-Burudani, 14th October, 2018.

Alagoa E, J, (1999), *The Land and People of Bayelsa State Central Niger Delta,* Port Harcourt Onyoma research publications.

Alagoa E.J. (1972). *A History of the Niger Delta: an historical interpretation of Ijo oral tradition*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

Alazigha, W. (2010), *Izon Traditions and culture part one* Port-Harcourt: Bodivic Publications.

Aro OKobatin. Oral Interview, Abadani-Okoloba , 30th May, 2022.

Aro T. oral interview, Yenagoa , 12, May, 2022.

Aro Dagbo, oral interview, Abadani-Okoloba, May 24, 20.

Ayaebi U. Oral interview, Kaiama-Sabagreia, 6th July, 2022. community development project.

Dauebi Amakoromo, (1991), "Chieftaincy (Ibenanaowei) Institution in Gbarain" a project submitted to the Department of History, Rivers State College of Education, Port Harcourt.

Larry, S.I. (2010) "the evolution of Chieftaincy Institution in Kolokuma Clan, Bayelsa State, 1800-2010", M.A. Dissertation submitted to Department of History University of Ibadan

Lennox, G, (1905) *With the West African Frontier Force in Southern Nigeria* https://books.gogle.com.ng>books retrieved 07/01/2022 4:38pm

Obulu, W. Oral interview, Egbedani-Sabagreia, 8th July, 2021

Okon, I. (1984) "The Origins of Okoloba and Seibokorogha Towns in Sabagreia" Community Development Project submitted to NYSC.

Opuowai C.S.D. Oral Interview, "5th May, 2018.

Personal Documents of late Sylvanus Berenangha Aguirism, retrieved 8/7/2014

Tamuno, T.T. (2002) "Indigenous Knowledge in Geography: A Case Study of Okoloba, Bayelsa State" Dept of Geography & Env'tal Management Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State.

The White Eagles International I Discography IDiscogs, https://www.discogs.com.artist.18377... Retrieved 20/2/2019 09:23 am.

Ugo F.R Oral Interview Daboubiri,–Sabagreia 10th February, 2016.

Ugo J.M. Oral interview, Daboubiri- Sabagreia, 6 June 2018.

Ugo Y. 1997. "Land Ownership and Chieftaincy Installation in Sabagreia 1970-1997", B. Ed Project, submitted to the Dept of History, Rivers State College of Education Port- Harcourt.

Ume Chukwuma-Machukwu (2006), *K.D.Ungbuku: The Sentinel of Justice (Personality, Views and Cases),* Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.

Yeribo, V. Oral Interview, Okoloba, 12 June, 2021.