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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE AND MARKETING IN THE UPPER CROSS RIVER REGION OF NIGERIA BEFORE 1800

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### Abstract

The often quoted Kenneth Dike's analogy that the West African history, (Upper Cross River Region of Nigeria inclusive) was largely the history of five centuries of trade with European Nations has been criticised in certain quarters. Put succinctly, the scholar was emphasising more on the period of external contact with Europeans. It was an erroneous judgement devoid of an African initiative in economic development, ignoring the internal processes and infrastructural facilities in the region, which set the pace for the more embracing Atlantic commerce along the coast. The thrust of this paper is to debunk Dike's 'truism' and lay bare its inherent weaknesses. The paper examines the dynamics of economic development in the Upper Cross River Region of Nigeria showing that societies as existed in the region never lacked commercial initiative. Inhabitants of the region fully participated at various levels of exchange relationships within and without, long before the advent of European traders. The paper argues that there were infrastructural facilities such as markets, indigenous goods, trading activities and on the whole, neighbours to support the system in the Upper Cross River Region of Nigeria.

**Keywords:** African, Economic Development, Upper Cross River Region (UCRR)

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Upper Cross River Region of Nigeria is broad in scope. This characteristic of the area has led to a wide range of descriptions by scholars. Foremost in this category is Petters' analysis of the physical environment of the area as forming part of the Cross River Basin. He identifies the northern three quarters of the Cross River Basin, between latitudes 5° 30' and longitudes 8° 40' east as the Upper Cross River area (1990: i). Clearly, the area is very wide indeed and needs a careful approach to actually determine our area of focus. Jaja notes that in the early years of the twentieth century, the sub-region covered some parts of Iboland including Afikpo, Arochukwu and Abakaliki areas (1990: 85). The neglect in scholarly interest in the study of the culture history of inhabitants of this region is evident in the following assessment:

*...that the people of the Upper Cross River Region of Nigeria have a culture history worthy of any academic attention is a new development. Until modern times the area was one of the least known in Nigeria... earlier orthodox historiography indiscriminately labelled the inhabitants 'fragments of earlier world', 'splinter zone' and 'human clusters'... early explorers, visitors to the region may have been confused by what they saw... (Erim, 1990: ii).*

These and other factors made them to cast aspersions on the history of the region. Yet in these confusing circumstances, another scholar noted that though the area lacked large-scale political units, it had a dense population, vigorous internal and external trade, complex marketing structures, a combination of circumstances that may appear puzzling (Northrup, 1978). These enabled the region to function as an economic unit before the arrival of Europeans. This paper

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therefore is an attempt to explore the African initiative in economic development for ancestors of the people contributed significantly to development in the region long before the advent of Europeans (Ecoma, 2010: 77) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Our area of focus is bounded on the east by the Republic of Cameroon; west by Imo, Enugu and Ebonyi States; north by Benue State and south by Odukpani and Calabar in Cross River State. In this paper, the Upper Cross River Region (UCRR) of Nigeria however, shall cover the entire northern half of the present Cross River State comprising these ethnolinguistic groupings (Erim, 1987: 78): Obudu, Ogoja, Yala, Ikom, Obubra, Agbo, Bahumono, Yakurr, and Biase.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The spate of arguments and counter arguments on the origins of trade and marketing in pre-colonial African societies has made it necessary to distinguish between two emerging schools of thought, the 'substantivists' and the 'formalists'. Their views in relation to our subject of discussion will be examined.

The substantivists represent the school of thought which adopts a pre-1950 approach to pre-industrial economies (especially African economies). They refer to such economies as peasant, lacking in features like self-regulatory markets, supply-demand relations and farming mechanisms. Many among them go further to reject that there were such things as tools, land, in African economies to which we may assign the category of "capital goods" (Andah, 1980: 181). Thus they rely more on the theoretical views on distribution and exchange, crediting the involvement of African societies in external trade dealings through trade routes as stimulant to the development of local trade. They utilise geographical criterion in analysing the development of trade in pre-colonial African societies (Vansina, 1977: 237, 252). In view of this framework, the great concentration of traditional markets in West Africa was then attributed to the geographical position of the region to the Guinea coast in the South and the Trans-Saharan routes in the North (Konczaki and Konczaki, 1977: 260).

Accordingly, they maintain that for centuries, parts of the West coast of Africa were visited by European traders. Inland, important North-South caravan routes linked the trans-Saharan with the Guinea coastlands. It is their view that in West Africa where societies were not so favourably located in relation to the major caravan routes or suffered from difficult topographical barriers to trade, such societies commonly had no indigenous markets before the arrival of Europeans. This would naturally imply that our region of study, the UCRR, remote from the immediate influence of the trans-Saharan trade, had no markets. They argue that where there was lack of external trading contacts, there were no markets; that in such isolated subsistence economies though there may be elementary exchange, such internal exchange never gave rise to markets, but took the form of reciprocal gift-giving based on kinship and other social obligatory payments. Among the proponents of these viewpoints are: Karl Polanyi, Jan Vansina, B. W. Hodder, and Claude Meillassoux (Polanyi et al, 1957; Bohannan and Dalton, 1965: 297; Hodder, 1965: 255).

We shall contrast the formalists' perspective. The formalist school of thought presents a wholly orthodox view on the origins of markets in sub-Saharan Africa. A post-1950 approach, this school concerns itself particularly with the forms and structure of the processes of a society's material life and with its economic formations. They argue that indigenous trade and exchange arose from the individual's propensity to barter; involving the necessity for local exchange, consequent upon deficits in one area and surpluses in another. To them, these internally generated phenomena may stimulate conditions for the development of trade (Gray and Birmingham, 1970). Thus the formalists adopt an internal economic stance solely and wholly to the society in which the activity emanates. They criticise Vansina's categorisation of trade patterns in Africa, arguing that geographical scale and items of trade are indeed very unreliable indices in determining the development of trade.

Viewed either way, in spite of the cosmetics of the formalists approach, both still adopt an essentially Eurocentric stance on pre-colonial African economies. However, this paper will adopt a middle approach by focusing attention on the pre-existing forces within the region of our

study which paved the way for the development of trade and marketing activities well before 1800.

### III. PRECURSORS OF TRADE AND MARKETING ACTIVITIES

There is enough material evidence on the antecedents of trade and marketing activities in Nigeria. Scholars including Northrup and Ukwu, have observed among other things that trade developed in the area from internal factors. In ancient times when there were no facilities for refrigeration, late catches of fish and shrimps often necessitated disposal within the shortest possible time on account of their perishable nature, hence the development of markets at the heads of river navigation and contact zones. Within the Upper Cross River Region, studies on the Ejagham, Biase, and Bakor (Attoe, 1990; Majuk, 1995) have revealed that trade developed among these societies due largely to internal factors- the complimentary needs of people in close proximity to themselves. Thus, trade in the UCRR was independently induced by forces operative within the society, rather than the external. In effect, trade and markets here developed out of mutual reciprocity in the culture of the people.

No society is self-sufficient and in human history, the quest for self-sufficiency has always persisted including those of the UCRR. Ecological variations have always provided a natural patterning or mechanism thus necessitating occupational specialisations which enable individuals in the region to exchange goods they produced for those they lacked. For instance, while the Ogoja and Ikom areas favoured the production of big-sized yams, the Obubra people specialised in the production of plantain, water yam and fish. The Boje-Boki and Obudu people specialised in the production of dug-out canoes and dry meat because of their location in the thick forests (Erim, 1990: 45-46). While canoe-making is dominant in the Boki-Obudu areas, the clayey areas of Bateriko, Umon, and Ishibori in Nkum-Ogoja support the production of earthenware pots. Ejagham soils favour the growth of yams, cassava, maize and legumes. Centrally in this region, the loamy alluvial soils have always supported oil-palm, bananas and specie of vegetables (Onor, 1994: 122).

The Agbo, Bahumono, Yakurr and Biase areas have always supported the cultivation of certain crops and other forms of occupational specialisations peculiar to the area. Crops grown include plantain, yams, water yams, cassava and legumes. The brine lakes which dot the Yala areas of Okpoma, Ijegu-Rekor, Njua Bano, Nsanakang and Boki areas make salt production (Afigbo, 1990: 136; Akinjogbin and Osoba, 1980: 10; UCRHT 20: 77-78) a major preoccupation of the womenfolk in the area.

Given these ecological disparities and consequent localisation of certain products, exchange became inevitable between one unit and the other and even within themselves. There emerged that avid desire by each unit to exchange its local products for other needed items which were not immediately found within the vicinity. Trade therefore developed locally based on the complementary needs of communities in close proximity to each other, consequent upon deficits in one area and an effective demand on the other. Gradually, the venue for exchange within the respective units developed into village markets and later gained prominence as vital centres for exchange, distribution and redistribution of agricultural surpluses (Erim, 1992: 128; Ndoma-Egba, 1972).

The production of goods by peoples of the UCRR was a predominant factor in the nature of exchange relations between the different ethnic units in the region. The basic aim of some households here was to secure products for its well being. Usually, in planning, agricultural disasters like famine, soil infertility and pest destruction were lost sight of. Projections into the forthcoming harvest yields sometimes resulted in greater yields than anticipated. Naturally then, there arose the need to look for outlets to distribute the surpluses. This 'marketable surplus' is defined as theoretical surplus available for disposal with the producer after his genuine requirements of family consumption has been met (Basil, 1961: 26). This development is complementary and if trade is to develop between any two locations, there must be a marketable surplus in one area and an effective demand in the other (Ulman, 1957). These complementarities of wants within the respective ethnic units in the UCRR nurtured the initial exchange transactions which developed first with the family units, from whence it spread to the lineage level and consequently to the nodal centres as demands increased.

At both the individual and community levels, pre-colonial Africans interacted freely with one another. Gestures of goodwill based on the African philosophy of being one's brother's keeper, laid the basis for the development of trade in the region. History is replete with traditions of pre-colonial Africans in the Yoruba kingdom of Oduduwa and Benin interacting freely with each other as early as the thirteenth century socio-culturally, economically, and otherwise. Such intergroup relations (Ikime, 1980: 102; Hull, 1972; Alagoa, 1976) have always engendered greater commercial ties between groups which often led to the exchange of gifts in marriages, blood pact, worshipping of common deities and festivities. These gestures were indeed reciprocal gift-giving acts based on socially obligatory principles which at the same time were a determining factor in the nature of exchange relations between kingship groups, friends, relations and very close neighbours. It had to do with the feeling of warmth, cordiality, and suitability of the groups.

Within the UCRR, there was that innate desire on the part of communities in close proximity to themselves, to sustain relationships bordering on economic, socio-cultural and political ties. These features attracted gestures of goodwill based on reciprocity and redistribution. Out of this grew different levels of occupational specialisations and at the same time nurturing exchange relations. Hodder holds a contrary view that this was not a standard form of exchange transaction as it never utilised the existence of open market institutions (1977: 257). Be that as it may, this mode of transaction was peculiar to the African cultural milieu/background. It was neither based on the capitalist nor socialist economies as the received wisdom of Western economies would have us believe. It was apt for the need of its users.

Cosmological factors within the UCRR also nurtured the basis for the development of trade and marketing activities. Engrafted into the belief system was the concept of reckoning of time based on weather interpretations (Ecoma, 2009: 127-128). Such concepts were linked to market arrangements thereby ensuring the smooth patterning of market days to avoid undue clashes. These considerations then determined the size of gathering and attendance in a market and the periodicity, justifying the holding of such markets. An aggregate of these factors nurtured the evolution of market cycles in the region as in other parts of South-Eastern Nigeria.

#### **IV. TRADE AND MARKET PERIODICITY REGIMES**

Peoples of the UCRR participated in various levels of exchange relations between themselves and the neighbouring units in the era before contact with European cultures. Such relations will be categorised into two basic levels: Intra and Inter trade transactions.

Firstly, intra village trade or the localised form of exchange relations mainly involved and indeed was dominated by isolated acts of exchange. Here, local agricultural produce from farms within units in a village group were reciprocated. This served as a veritable measure of exchange in pre-colonial transactions. Although the acceptability of this form of exchange transaction as a standard measure has always been queried, (Andah, 1980) it is certain that though the gifts may not be similar in quantity or size, care was often taken to ensure that it was similar in value.

Secondly, inter village/community trade otherwise known in some quarters as regional trade involved trade conducted over greater distances than the local one. It occurred between neighbouring villages and involved the exchange of specialised products from local industries. This took place because some units possessed supplies of items not readily available to others example, pottery materials, salt, cam wood, mats, etc. It has been stated that this type of exchange relations operated among Nigerian groups long before the advent of colonial rule (Njoku, 2001).

The two levels of exchange- intra and inter village trade flourished alongside each other, its importance being underscored by the existence of periodic markets in every village group within the UCRR. Essentially, these periodic markets have been identified as "a pulsating spatio-economic phenomena with cycles as a form of adjustment to longer run changes in areal demand" (Eighuvy, 1972: 300-302). It attracted participants from within and without units in the region exchanging their wares for other items not readily available in their vicinity. In a typical market within the UCRR, for example in Biase, both levels of trade operated freely, as could be ratified in the hypothetical map (see Appendix I). The respective Biase units encircled provide a hypothetical example of the intra trade relations which existed among the Erei, Biakpan, Umon Island, Agwagwune, Okurike, Ikot Ana, and Ikot Okpora in pre-colonial era. Outside these units are the

several inter trading connections which Biase had with other groups as the Itu, Calabar, Arochukwu, Eniong, Bende, Ohafia, Afikpo, Ediba, Itigidi, Ikom, and Mamfe, to mention but a few of such places.

For clarity of purpose, the UCRR will be divided into zones notably- Obudu and Ogoja, Ikom, Obubra, Yakurr, Agbo, Bahumono and Biase zones respectively. Within the respective zones, the two levels of exchange relations just discussed will be discerned and areas of uniform and mixed periodicities identified accordingly (see Appendix II on the overview of trading zones in the region).

#### **V. AREAS OF UNIFORM PERIODICITY**

Under this category, the Obudu/Ogoja areas, Agbo, Bahumono and Biase areas present themselves as areas of uniform periodicities. Obudu/Ogoja zones exhibit a five day periodic market cycle while Agbo, Bahumono and Biase exhibit a four day market cycle. The entire people of Obudu-Ogoja zone participated in vigorous internal and external commerce long before the era of Europeans in the sixteenth century. They had developed existing infrastructural facilities for trade and marketing and a dense network of trade links which radiated in all directions of need around them. These facilities in the area and indeed in the entire region of our study, paved the way for external trade contacts with Europe in the sixteenth century. Clans within Obudu-Ogoja exhibited a five day periodic cycle (UCRHT 44 and 45) as already emphasised. However, a review of selected clans within the area will suffice in this discussion.

##### **i.) OBUDU**

Within Obudu, trade and marketing activities in Igwo clan provide an illustration on this view. Here, the native week is reckoned every five days notably: Katube, Ugidi, Azul, Lifembe and Udama. This calendrical week had its basis on the economy of the people and existed long before the advent of European contact in the area. On each of these days, regulated marketing transactions were carried on. On Katube day, marketing activities took place in Obudu urban. This market has been reckoned as the largest in that vicinity (Ibid). As was customary on such days, participants from within and outside the confines of Obudu attended the market to exchange locally produced goods for items they needed. Early before sunrise, traders depart with their trade good and arrived at the market-place to take their seats. Goods for exchange were displayed on mats spread on the ground. This basic pattern of exchange arrangement has been confirmed in almost all the units within the region. Later on, the pattern was modified to the use of tables in displaying goods. Participants in this market include those from Obudu, Bebnaobong, Kaokib, Atiekpe, Ohong, Utanga, and Kutiang. Outside Obudu, people came all the way, and trekking through footpaths, from Boki, Bekwarra, Utugwang and Tiv areas. These outside groups usually brought with them their local produce for exchange purposes.

Articles sold here generally included dawa-dawa, palm produce, pears, kola nuts, bush mango, livestock and poultry products- goats, chickens, etc. A variety of fruits and vegetables could be obtained in this market. Specialised products like salt, earthenware and native cloth and towels filtered into this market specially from Ogoja, Ikom, and Tiv areas. Market meetings for the display of trade goods rotated on set days among the respective groups in the area until each can relatively attract a sufficient number of people to justify holding a market (Smith, 1971: 325).

Apart from the internal exchange transactions in Obudu, there is ample evidence to substantiate the fact that Obudu traders travelled considerable distances to neighbouring units to trade. In the process, they sold their specialised wares in exchange for goods they could not produce locally. Such transactions took them to Ogoja, Bekwarra, and Tiv areas. They supplied the Mbube with beniseed, locust beans, potatoes, salt, Tiv-made towels and products of the smithing industry like hoes. There were in existence ancient mines located in this region from where iron ores were extracted locally for the manufacture of agricultural and war implements such as hoes, knives, axes, swords, spears and guns, etc. The smithing profession in this region (specifically parts near Afikpo and the old Ogoja area which incorporated the Obudu units) is credited to these mines which are dated to the ninth century A. D. (Afigbo, 1980: 13-14). It seems probable that the Igwo of Obudu including the Utugwangs, must have imbibed the skills of resident smiths in the area and in turn could exchange products of this industry for other items with neighbouring groups.

Traders from Obudu went northwards into the adjoining Tiv region for trade purposes. Here, they obtained locally produced Tiv-towels which they subsequently redistributed to other units within the UCRR. Such patterns of relationship between the Obudu and her neighbours in all directions of need continued to the eve of colonial conquest and characterised the very pattern of trade relations in the area in the nineteenth century.

## ii.) OGOJA

Within Ogoja, the various clans participated in vigorous internal and external commercial relations with her neighbours long before the nineteenth century. The Mbube, Nkim/Nkum, Ekajuk, Bakor and Yala clans to mention but a few provide illustrative examples of this relationship. Among the Mbube, the calendrical week is reckoned every five days namely: "Nguel", "Muanenkum", "Ayental", "Lekuan", and "Okuno" respectively. "Nguel", being the first day of the week was by tradition revered for the worship of the earth deity- "Bulem" (Obokon, 1985: 68; Hodder and Ukwu, 1969: 129). Essentially, this practice has been observed as a common feature of market days among units in the UCRR. Within Mbube, there existed markets for the exchange of locally produced commodities in the various centres. "Nguel" was the principal market day with markets at Egbe and Idum. On "Muanenkum", market was held at Ojerim; "Lekuan" at Ogberia and Odajie. Within this calendrical arrangement, market days rotated in a cycle among the various Mbube segments until each had its turn. Articles of exchange found in these internal markets include yams, palm produce, plantains, fowls, goats, sheep, ducks, and some specialised wares (Obokon, 1985: 71) like basketry, wooden spoons, mortars, pestles and pots to mention, but a few of them.

On the stipulated market days, people from the surrounding region of Boki, Bekwarra and Utugwang in Obudu, Tiv (Munshi) area, brought their livestock and poultry products in exchange for items they could not obtain in their vicinity. Hausa traders equally visited the internal markets in Mbube with the following items: trinkets; hooks for fishing; pieces of limestone (Etukwe/Akanwa); ginger; beads; English cloth; spirits; drinks and firearms. In all probability, these suggest trade relations from the seventeenth century onwards. Traders from these areas sold their wares to the Mbube in exchange for copper rods known locally as "Bishun Bituel". Other specialised craft manufactures got into "Mbe"- the traditional name for Mbube people and habitat- from Agberembede in Nkum, Yala and Nkim.

The Mbube established trade contacts with their neighbours in all directions- West, South, North and East. Often times, such contacts led them to attend Ezekwe market in Ogoja where they interacted with the Aro Middlemen. The Aros at the time were known for their frequent visits to Ezekwe market where they exchanged large quantities of firearms and gun powder for slaves. As the chief purveyors of slaves, they spread tentacles to areas as far as the Cameroons and uniquely established a most intriguing system of trade with the Ogoja people and environs. This they did by establishing settlements in these non-Aro villages thereby securing contacts with prominent and influential persons, who undertook, in return for European goods, to assist Aro traders in collecting slaves (Ekejiuba, 1972). Besides Ezekwe market, Mbube traders attended Bansara market and Nkum market at Ishibori. From time, Bansara had been strategically located as a creek town and therefore became the evacuation zone for all products from Obudu-Ogoja Southwards. During the era of legitimate trade, Bansara served as a major market for the export of agricultural produce downwards to the estuary at Calabar.

To the South, the Mbube traders attended the Boki markets at Njua Bano (Obokon, 1985), Ogurumidi and Aladim, Kakwagom (Wuda) and Ntamante respectively. These areas provided the Mbube with salt, dried meat, pepper, kola nuts and specialised products like cam wood. They also attended the largest market in Bekwarra district- Ogidi, where they obtained palm produce- oil and kernels. The Ogidi market coincides with Ojerim market in Mbube. Eastwards, the Mbe travelled mostly through bush tracks to markets in Utugwang area. The Bekwara and Utugwang markets served more or less as collecting centres, (Ibid) where produce from Mbube and Boki districts, found their way into the Northernmost part of Obudu and to areas as far as Wukari- the former Jukun capital. Through the same market, the Mbe obtained northern products like locally

made towels (Agbegbe Bechero), Kano cloths, tobacco and ginger. These markets provided sources of supply for locust beans (dawa-dawa), cowpeas (Mporo), groundnuts, millet, beniseed and salt.

The Mbube established trade contacts with their Hausa neighbours to the North where they often sold them rubber lumps. Essentially, a nineteenth century traveller had identified the sophisticated level of market organisation in Hausa land specifically in Kano (Akinjogbin and Osoba, 1980: 101). Besides, the Mbube attended the Yala market of Adah reputed for food and livestock and which holds same day with *Nguel* markets in Mbube. Thus, Mbube people established trading links with her neighbours and from there radiated a dense network of trade routes which crisscrossed the length and breadth of the clan, spreading out in all directions of need. As early as the sixteenth century, the Mbe were already prepared for the new commercial activities along the coast. From the seventeenth century onwards, Mbube people were drawn together with other Obudu/Ogoja units through the already established commercial infrastructures into trade with Europeans along the coast through middlemen groups.

The Nkim/Nkum clan of Ogoja area is bounded on the North by the Yala, South by Onwu river, East by the Yakoro/Bekwarra, and Westwards by the Ekajuk. They comprise: Ishibori, Nduk, Njua, Ibeel, Ogodo, Aladim, Ukpe, Nkpagada and Ekandang respectively. The area falls into the five day market zone similar to Smith's classification of the Tiv, Yala and Idoma groups (Hodder and Ukwu, 1969; Smith, 1971). The traditional week in the clan is reckoned as "Akpine", "Ugbada", "Itukpa", "Itunkim" and "Ayanto". A large market exists at Ishibori noted for the production of earthen pots to which all the surrounding groups like the Ekajuk, Boki, and the rest of Ogoja attended with their wares. There were smaller markets at Njua and Aburumbidi.

Goods sold within the internal markets include palm produce found mostly among the Njua village groups, beniseed, yams, guinea corn, coco yams, Egusi, water yams and groundnut. The concentration of beniseed and palm produce in large quantities in these areas provided supplies to European firms established at Bansara in the nineteenth century. Poultry and livestock were also found in these markets. Specialised products of pottery, cam wood and salt fell into the range of goods found within Nkim/Nkum markets.

The Ekajuk-speaking units, Bekwarra, Aferike, Mbube, Okpoma in Yala, Ukelle, the Okpodun of Obubra, and the Abakaliki all attended markets within the clan to exchange their locally produced goods for items they needed. The Igedde of the Benue area and the Idoma were also among the list of participating traders from outside Ogoja who attended markets in Nkim/Nkum, exchanging their specialised wares for other items they needed. In all probability, this commercial transaction dates back to the period shortly after the disintegration of the Jukun Empire, when pockets of Idoma groups started migrating towards Ogoja (Talbot, 1969: 227) and indeed, the Cross River area.

Confirming, Connell reports of the early trade links between the Nkim/Nkum and other Cross River groups before the nineteenth century (NAE File No. EP. 12682A). That trade within Nkim/Nkum depended on a middleman trade in cam wood brought from the upper reaches of the Cross River. These middlemen were specifically the Agwagwune who settled within the clan and in other parts of Ogoja for the purpose of trade. This occurred when Old Calabar supplanted the Rio del Rey as the main entrepôt of the Cross River Region after about 1665 (Afigbo, 1990: 130). At the time, all movement of population for business now became directed towards the region of the Cross River Valley. Consequently, communities hitherto stuck inland moved in to take advantage of the booming trade at the coast (Erim, 1990: 7). And out of these emerged contending economic and political centres along the Cross River, by the end of the seventeenth century. The Agwagwune regarded the upper parts of the Cross River as their exclusive preserve. They therefore entered into all types of social and political contacts with people far up the Cross and Aweyong River (Patridge, 1905: 72-73) in Ogoja for the purposes of trade. Such contacts brought them to settle among the Nkim/Nkum clan in Ogoja area.

The Nkim/Nkum people sold their yams to the Agwagwune who would subsequently take the produce by canoe via the Cross River to Calabar. There, customers probably consumed some and sold the rest to European ships waiting for shipment at the coast. The Agwagwune there also constituted themselves as a body of slave traders who obtained slaves from this region for onward sale to European merchants. It is intriguing to note that most slaves in this area came from

Benue rather than from Nkim/Nkum area. This was in accordance with the customs of the people which frowned at the sale of indigenes into slavery. This feature was peculiar among all the Upper Cross River units. The category of persons for sale were mainly stranger elements from outside. Here, the Jukun raids into Hausa land yielded rich harvest of slaves sold to Cross River customers in the Ogoja zone including the Nkim/Nkum. The Nkim/Nkum were now drawn optimally into the ongoing provisioning trade (Northrup, 1978) and the trade in human cargo along the coast from the seventeenth century onwards.

The Bakor, which comprise the Ekajuk-speaking unit of Old Ogoja Province, have five days in a market week reckoned traditionally as Ekpa, Nkim, Egbo, Ebe, and Ndack respectively. On "Ekpa", the Ekajuk communities of Nwang, Ebanembin and Mfom held their markets. On "Nkim", market was held at Agburumbede in Nkum, Alok in Nnam and Ofun-Nta in Nta. The market at Ofun-Nta has been identified as an important commercial centre which linked the Bakor and people of the Upper Cross River Region on one hand (Majuk, 1995: 131), and those of the Lower Cross River Region on the other hand, before the nineteenth century. On "Egbo" day, markets were held at Bansara in Ekajuk and Agboja in Nkim. The Bansara market was the largest and the most central market. On "Ebe", there was market at Edor in Abanyum and on "Ndack", at Emang Ndack (Aggrey, 1980) respectively. Thus within the traditional calendrical schedule, each Bakor community had specified days to carry out its exchange transactions. The schedule kept rotating until all the units had their turn.

Articles for sale in those markets include agricultural produce like yams- the staple of the area, maize, millet, beniseed and specialised goods like salt, cam wood, native cloth (Egudugudu), pottery materials and crafts- mat weaving, cane trays, beds, etc. On specified market days, people from Ekajuk and the surrounding areas of Yala and Ogoja, Boki, Obubra and Igedde in Benue, attended Bakor markets to dispose of their wares in exchange for items which they lacked (Aggrey, 1980: 30-31; Ewah, 1992: 27). The Boki area supplied Bakor communities and environs with salt, cam wood, and forest products like *Arokpa* (bush mango). Okpoma in Yala also supplied the area and the Ogoja areas with salt. The Igedde area of Benue provided a veritable supply for native towels, and later tobacco and slaves in the seventeenth century. The Nkim and Nkum pottery industry in Ishibori-Ogoja supplied earthenware products to the Bakor and others in the neighbourhood. Through these links, routes linked the Ekajuk area with other surrounding communities for the purposes of trade. Notably among such numerous routes were those from Esam, through Abanyum in Ikom, to Mbembe in Obubra; through Egbagi via Ekwaro to Mfom and Ezekwe; then to Igedde in Benue through Bansara-Ofunatam. This was the route later used by the Agwagwune, Aro, and Afikpo in the seventeenth century. Other innumerable tracks crisscrossed the area linking it with outside communities. Though these routes could not be possibly plotted in view of their myriad nature, they later fed the currents of trade contacts between the Bakor and European merchants from the seventeenth century onwards.

The Bakor attended markets outside their vicinity in pre-colonial times and such often took them to Okpoma in Yala, where they purchased salt in large quantities. Bakor women who were traders went there to buy salt for resale in the home market and for use. Large quantities of salt were later used as currencies in the area. Since salt was a status symbol among the Bakor, a woman's wealth was measured in the quantity of salt she left behind at death (Majuk, 1995: 132, 134). Salt was stored up especially in the dry season which was the peak period of production. Bakor traders attended markets in Kakwagom-Boki, where they obtained cam wood and other forest produce. They attended Ezekwe market North Ukelle, and at Mfuma- South Ukelle. The Ezekwe market in the seventeenth century was reputed for its supplies of European goods. Being a large market, the Aro middlemen often attended with their wares mostly firearms, gunpowder and spirits which they obtained from European merchants. The Aro presence in the area extended to other regions as far as the Cameroons. Besides Ezekwe market, the Bakor extended their trade links to the Nkim and Nkum where the pottery industry at Ishibori supplied them with earthenware for their local markets.

As early as the sixteenth century, the Bakor had been a part of the commercial intercourse with Europeans at the coast exchanging produce like ivory, cam wood and slaves for gins, gunpowder and other European goods (Majuk, 1995: 136). The Idoma area of Benue and the



Bamenda grass fields of Cameroon (Onor, 1994; Ewah, 1992) provided the Bakor and indeed other Upper Cross River traders like the Ejagham and the Agwagwune with large supplies of slaves for the external market with Europeans at the coast. By the seventeenth century, an aggregate of these commercial ties in the UCRR, had resulted in the development of trade routes: from Ibi in the Benue Valley (Afigbo, 1990: 136) through Wukari, Yala in Ogoja, Ezza, Afikpo and Uburu via the Cross River to Calabar; from Takum (Eastern Benue Valley) through Sankwala to Agboja, Bansara both on Aiya river to Ofun Nta and into Calabar; linking the Bamenda grass fields of Cameroon through Ikom and into Calabar. With these routes, the volume of slave supplies from the Upper Cross River increased. "A loose organisation of interests"- middlemen groups- emerged along the Cross River (Erim, 1986: 6-7; Afigbo, 1972: 26). These were mostly the Efiks (on the lower estuary), the Umon (on the middle) and the Agwagwune, whose exclusive preserve was the upper parts of the Cross River Region. The Ejagham traders were also offshoots of this relationship. These groups took advantage of the commercial opportunities offered by the trade with Europeans along the coast from the seventeenth century to carve out domains of commercial interests along the Cross River Region.

The Yala-speaking unit of Ogoja comprise the: Okpoma, Yahe, Utukpo, Wuleche Ebo, Ugaga, Okuku, Idigbo, Ipuole-Okuku, Abacho-Igbekuku, Ijegu, Onyi-Ijegu, Okpame, Yala-Ijegu, Echimoga, Ochimode, Echimovana, and Echiakpo (UCRHT 70: 246) to mention but a few. Within this unit, their traditional week is recorded every five days namely: Ikor, Ina, Ogbada, Ogidi, and Akpakpa. This tallies with Smith's classification of West African markets which identifies the Yala, Idoma and Tiv as areas in which the five-day market week is prevalent (Smith, 1971: 322). On the stipulated market days, market was held on the specified venues usually on open space or a playground with shady trees. In Yala, such places were referred to as "Ogra" which served as open space reserved by the community for marketing activities.

On "Ikor", the Yala market at Okpoma was held. This was the most central market in the clan and equally noted for the supplies of salt in commercial quantities. As already emphasised, the Okpoma area is dotted with brine ponds and springs including Ijegu, Aloda, Agoga, Igekuruku, Akurhia and Okpoma in what later became the Old Ogoja Division (Erim, 1992: 51; Afigbo, 1990: 136). On "Ina", the Yahe market held. On "Ogbada", the Okpoma/Ada market, reputed as the most popular major food and livestock market in the area, held. This market holds the same day with the Egbe market of Mbube on "Nguel" day. On "Ogidi", market was organised by the Alebo/Ebo unit in Yala and on "Okpakpa" was the market at Okuku. Okuku market in Yala clan is the largest market in which people within and outside the clan attended. Even those from the West African sub-region did participate in the marketing activities held at Okuku from pre-colonial times. Markets in Yala attracted neighbouring groups to come into the clan for trade purposes exchanging what they had for items they lacked. People from Okpoden in the Mbembe area of Obubra, the Yahe in Yala, Wanokom, Abakaliki in Ibo territory, Izekwe, Ntara, Izzi, Wanudu, Igedde in Benue, Tiv (Munshi), Utugwang in Obudu, Mbube, Bekwarra and Ishibori in Ogoja area, the Ukelle and Boki, and those from far away places like Kano, Kaduna, Sokoto and Chad Republic attended.

Various goods were displayed in these markets for exchange. They ranged from agricultural produce to specialised products. Millet was a vital crop of the area with species ranging from white, brown or red. The brown or red specie was notable for brewing of Burukutu- a popular malt drink locally known as Yeje/Ogenne (UCRHT 70: 247) by the Yala. Palm produce, up-wine (Ewor) and specialised wares like earthen pots known as "Ajija" were among the range of goods found in Yala markets. These earthen pots were made by the Itekpa people- partly Yala and partly Benue in origin. Yams, the staple of the entire Ogoja region could also be found in abundance in Yala markets. Species of yams ranging from Efa'la (reputed as the best), Ogoja, Yebo, Udari, Okumondo to Ehiage and Obua (cocoyam) were in abundance in these markets. Pepper, groundnuts and salt also provided the range of items prevalent in Yala markets. Salt, a highly profitable trade commodity served to link the Cross River people effectively with those in the Igbo and Benue regions in pre-colonial times up to the second decade of the nineteenth century. It is believed that this salt trade attracted the Jukun to the Cross River Region, who also exported large quantities of this salt to the Savannah lands further north. These developments occurred long

before the nineteenth century and Afigbo (1990: 136-137) estimates that the salt mines of the Ogoja-Uburu axis (which incorporates Yala lands) were exported northwards to the Benue valley and eastwards to the Cameroon region.

Being richly endowed with salt, Yala traders attended markets outside their vicinity to dispose off their wares in exchange for items they could not produce. Such trade contacts often led portions of the Yala merchants to migrate into the adjoining regions where they could derive opportunities from their business acumen. They attended Idoma markets in the Benue from where they obtained locally made towels which the Ekajuk refer to as "Egudugudu". Later, their trade transactions with the Benue merchants made them to secure slaves for the ongoing European commerce along the coast in the seventeenth century. Out of this relationship developed one of the major trade routes which ran from Ibi on the Benue Valley, via Wukari (the former Jukun capital) and through Yala territory itself before finally terminating in Calabar. This route linked the Yala with the slave lands in Benue. From there they obtained large supplies of slaves, ivory, cam wood and domestic animals which they sent southwards along the coast. Some of the slaves were retained to work their farms while some were sold out. Those who worked the yam farms provided Yala farmers with large yams with which they supported the provisioning trade along the coast in the seventeenth century (Northrup, 1978). In return, Yala traders obtained European goods through the middlemen traders of the Upper Cross River area (Afigbo, 1990: 136; Patridge, 1905: 72; Erim, 1986: 6).

These commercial contacts in the seventeenth century led pockets of the Yala to migrate towards the Cross River area to take advantage of the developing commerce along the river. Talbot observes that the Knumm on the Cross River are portions of the Yala traders who migrated there probably for the purpose of trade (1969: 227; Erim, 1990: 48). The Nkim and Nkum Okpambe settlements in Ikom and other Yala settlements in Obubra area are equally offshoots of that relationship. Erim confirms this in his impressions on the origins of the modern Yala groups who occupy portions of Ogoja, Ikom and Obubra areas within the Cross River Region. These infrastructural facilities within the respective units in our area of study prepared them for the European commerce along the coast from the seventeenth century onwards.

### iii.) AGBO

The Agbo-speaking unit within the Upper Cross River Region comprises Itigidi, Adadama, Igbo Ekureku and Igbo Imeabana in present day Abi Local Government Area of Cross River State. Among these units, the four-day market cycle predominates. The traditional week days are reckoned as follows: Ile/Orie, Nkwo, Evoge/Afor and Eke- similar to the Ibo market days. Before now, all Agbo-speaking units as well as the Bahumono-speaking units had a common market with the Igbo at a place called "Evei"- somewhere around the Afikpo-Agbo axis (UCRHT 41: 145). At this venue, the Agbo and environs interacted with adjoining Ibo communities and participated effectively in the prevailing salt trade in the Ohaozora area of North Eastern Ibo around Uburu. Afigbo identifies this as the salt trade of the Uburu-Ogoja axis (1990: 136), which almost fed the entire Upper Cross River village markets before the fifteenth century. Insecurity and rivalry along the trade routes necessitated the transfer of these structures to the Agbo communities. Despite this, the "Eke" market at Afikpo remains the largest marketing centre between Ibo and Agbo territories, with the smaller markets in the Agbo periphery.

An Imeabana informant states that out of the four market days, the Imeabana sell on "Nkwo" while the other days rotated in a cycle until all other Agbo units had their turn. In these units and on specified market days could be found people from Afikpo, Ikwo, Akpoha, Ishinkwor, Ukawu, Ezza, Ughelle, Okpuitomo, Abba Omege- all in Iboland. Within Cross River, people from Yakurr, Idomi and Bahumono communities attended the markets with their wares. Goods sold in these markets ranged from agricultural produce to specialised wares (Agwu, 1993).

Agbo traders established trade contacts with the adjoining Ibo and Cross River territories. Where local supplies of materials were inadequate, they travelled to neighbouring areas mainly through bush tracks. Often times they crossed rivers to obtain supplies of salt, cam wood and earthenware. The pre-colonial commercial links between the Agbo and adjoining Ibo communities could be captured in the following quotation:

*Apart from other inter-clan trade in Ohaozora, the people also traded with their immediate neighbours to the North, South, East and West... To the South, the people of Ugwulangwu, Abaomege, and Ukwu traded with neighbouring Ezikwo, Izzi, and the Cross River people of Ugep (Ugem), Itigidi and Yakurr. Goods such as hoes, knives, axes, spears and metal gongs were exchanged for salt, yams, coco yams and earthen pots from Ishiagu... (Agwu, 1993: 105).*

The Itigidi were the kith and kin of the Agbo who traded with their Ibo neighbours. Such transactions led to the emergence of routes linking Agbo to other surrounding communities. From this link, foreign produce came into Agboland. By the seventeenth century, the Agbo had already established connections with Agwagwune on the Cross River and became part of the commercial intercourse with Europeans along the coast.

#### **iv.) BAHUMONO**

Similarly, among the Bahumono-speaking units, the four-day market week is prevalent. The days are reckoned as: Eche/Eke, Rebom/Orie, Issa/Afor and Bikwo/Nkwor. These nomenclatures equally obtained in the Agbo calendrical week (with slight variations in pronunciation), are akin to the Ibo market week. This may not be unconnected with Ibo influence and proximity to the Bahumono-Agbo territories. In his study on market periodicity in West Africa, Hill identified the broad geographical unit covering Southern West Africa (1966: 301), extending from the Cross River Area adjoining Iboland, the Ibibio country to Eastern Nigeria and the Cameroons, as areas in which the four-day markets are found. In all probability, the Agbo-Bahumono-Biase areas fall within this category.

Within the specified market days, market was organised in: Ediba, Afafanyi, Usumutong and Ebom-Ebijakara respectively. The "Haffah Rebom" or market held on Rebom days at Afafanyi, was the largest and more central market to all the Bahumono groups (UCRHT 53: 188). The remaining market days after "Haffah Rebom" kept rotating in a cycle until the entire Bahumono units had their turn. Wherever markets were held participants from within and outside Bahumono attended. These included people from Ediba, Usumutong, Anong, Igonigoni, Yakurr, Agbo, Mbembe in Obubra, Biase and from Iboland. Traders from areas as far as Mamfe and Bamenda in the Cameroons, usually attended Bahumono markets long before colonial era.

Bahumono traders travelled to markets outside their vicinity to obtain trade goods for sale in the local markets. Often times, such goods ranged from agricultural produce like yams, groundnuts, beans, palm produce to specialised goods like craft manufacture, salt and cam wood. Bahumono traders also travelled to Iboland area where they participated in the salt trade of the Uburu-Ogoja axis before the fifteenth century. They attended markets in Afikpo- Iboland and those in Yakurr and Agbo areas in the Cross River Region. These commercial ties led to the emergence of numerous routes crisscrossing Bahumono territory and linking them with outside regions. Other products which were not readily available in Bahumono community gained access into the area. Through these processes, Bahumono traders were drawn into the ongoing commercial intercourse with Europeans along the coast through the role of middlemen groups.

#### **v.) BIASE**

The Biase-speaking units also fall into the area of four-day market week identified by Smith and Hill (Smith, 1971: 322; Hill, 1966: 301). They have four days in their calendrical week. The Ugbaghara and Erei reckon their market days as: "Ibum", "Irei", "Ikpo", and "Eke". The Agwagwune and Okurike reckon theirs as "Ibum", "Igbegbet", "Ikpo", and "Eke"; while the Umon refer to theirs as "Ribum", "Brifed", "Gbiqua" and "Raton", all indicating a four day periodic cycle. Within this arrangement, the Ugbaghara and Erei take "Eke" as their market day, the Okurike- "Igbegbet", the Agwagwune- "Ikpo", and the Umon- "Raton" respectively. Goods found in these markets within Biase ranged from agricultural produce like yams, plantain, beans, pepper, groundnuts, bush mango, to specialised wares like pottery materials, salt and cam wood and canoes. Livestock and poultry products added to the range of goods in these markets.

Participants from within and outside Biase community attended the internal markets. People from Ikun, Agwagwune, Abayongo and Okurike attended with locally produced goods for exchange. Later, they began to participate in inter trade relations with their neighbours. This facilitated the transaction of the economy from an "immediate exchange" to a "market-oriented

one" (Attoe, 1988: 111; Flint, 1976: 381). Participants from the Upper and Lower reaches of the Cross River and from the adjoining Ibo communities to the West, all attended the well regulated markets in Biase. The strategic location of Biase on the Cross River encouraged traders from all directions. From Iboland area (specifically Afikpo and Arochukwu) and up and down the river, traders came in. Patridge captured this mood as follows:

*...peoples from the opposite side of the river at Abayong (sic)... bring canoe-loads of clay pottery. These pots are of all sizes and shapes, plain and ornamental, some of quite elegant design, all fashioned by hand and baked in the sun and in the smoke of a slow fire. Others bring a cargo of yams and there a few down river traders...* (Patridge, 1905: 74; Attoe, 1990: 103).

A similar scene was observed in Umon where:

*...it is frequented by people from places both up and down the river, so that a stranger that is visiting Umon by water finds it engirdled with quite a fleet of canoes* (Patridge, 1905: 68-69; Attoe, 1988: 3).

These developments in Biase and other units in the UCRR antedate the nineteenth century and provided the framework within which the external trade with Europeans developed.

Articles of exchange in these markets included yams, plantain, and specialised wares like pottery materials, canoes, and cam wood. Livestock and poultry products, added to the range of items found in the internal markets. When European commerce along the coast began from the seventeenth century onwards, European goods like cloths, soap, powder, gin were exchanged for slaves obtained from further inland. The level of trade in this unit was well organised to the extent that tolls were exacted by the traders to curtail haphazard movement of foreign traders into their territory. In the nineteenth century, the British merchants considered these measures as great impediments to their trade along the Cross River.

The internal trade transactions apart, the Biase (Umon and Agwagwune) attended markets outside their vicinity. In all direction of need, (West, North, South and East), they established strong trading links with their numerous neighbours before the dawn of colonial era. Westwards,

*the Biase particularly the people of Ugbaghara and Erei clans were very much involved in trade transactions with the Ibo neighbours such as Ohafia, the Afikpo and Arochukwu. In ohafia, there were many political units some of which were: Ebem, Anophu, Amechi, Amuna, Ndibe, Esiafo, Ewere, Okon, Anorgwu, Ehi-Ohafia, Asaga, Akam, etc. ...markets in the different units of Ohafia were usually fixed for different days. Thus where each of the political units in Ohafia/Afikpo held markets, traders from Biase especially Ugbaghara and Erei clans usually attended* (Attoe, 1990: 103).

The Umon and Agwagwune visited markets outside Biase and the area as far as the Upper reaches of the Cross River, before the nineteenth century. Being interested in long distance trade, the Agwagwune established trading settlements along portions of the Upper Cross River, extending as far as the Cameroon region. From the seventeenth century onwards, pockets of "Agwagwune/Akunakuna" traders were found in Ekajuk, Nkim/Nkum- Aferike and Mbube areas of Ogoja Division (Erim, 1986: 6; Patridge, 1905: 72), where they settled for the purposes of trade. The business acumen they possessed enabled them to tap most of the trade of these hinterland areas to their optimum advantage. Remarkably, the Agwagwune from time regarded this domain as their exclusive preserve and vehemently resisted external incursions detrimental to their trade. These monopolistic tendencies by Cross River traders characterised the pattern of relations resulting in the development of contending economic and political centres along the Cross River at the end of the seventeenth century. Such interest groups comprised the Efik, Umon, Agwagwune and Ejagham all along the Cross River. The Agwagwune remained a vital force to be reckoned with and with which hinterland areas were linked to the ongoing commercial intercourse with Europeans along the coast.

## **VI. AREAS OF MIXED PERIODICITIES**

These included communities in the Ikom, Obubra, and Yakurr zones. Essentially, the diversity of the length of market weeks in these areas defy distinct classification and vary considerably (Smith, 1971: 321). While an informant may claim a six-day periodic market cycle in

one area, others within the same unit claim a seven-day or five or four-day market cycle as the case may be.

**i.) IKOM**

Within Ikom, the Ejagham-speaking and Boki areas manifest traits of mixed periodicity. Among the Ejagham, village markets existed mostly around riverine areas where it was readily accessible to canoes. Thus, markets existed at Akparabong, Ajassor, Bendeghe-Ayuk, Ikom, Nde, Yala, Orimekpang on the right bank of the Cross River. Such market gatherings occurred on days specified by tradition (Ndoma-Egba, 1972) in order to prevent undue clashes. On the surface, the distribution may represent a seven-day periodic cycle but the patterning was essentially a communal duty which specified the gathering of markets once in every traditional week. The largest marketing centres existed at Nde and Ikom.

In Nde, market was held at a place called "Nsak". The traditional week in Nde unit was reckoned every five days namely: Ase, Nkor, Ejun, Asayin and Ekpe. These market days rotated in a cycle among the respective Nde units until each had its turn. Wherever market was organised in this unit, participants from neighbouring areas attended to exchange their locally produced goods for those which they lacked. Participants usually came from the Ogoja area, Obubra, surrounding Ikom and the adjoining Cameroon region, to attend the market at Nde. Being strategically located, Nde had always remained a great emporium of trade in Ikom area. In view of its commercial importance, Okuni and Ikom traders exploited it to their optimal advantage by using Nde as a stopping over point, for rest and necessary preparation, after their long journey from the Cameroons. Even after the abolition of slave trade in the 1850s and as late as 1926 or thereabout, Ikom and Okuni slave dealers returning from the Cameroons maintained the tradition of breaking their journey at Nde before proceeding to Uburu fair to dispose their wares (Erim, 1992: 60). The choice for this point was made possible by the positioning of an overland route from Calabar to Okuni via Nde neighbourhood, before linking up with Arochukwu in Iboland, Mamfe and Bamenda in the Cameroons. Articles evacuated from this route were importantly slaves (Alagoa, 1980: 255) and other items like canoes, ivory, wild rubber and yams. Slaves were obtained mostly from the Cameroons. Traders plying this route often stopped over at Nde before terminating at Uburu where a large regional fair existed for the sale of goods. From Uburu, Aro traders operated a wide network of trade routes sending goods to Itu on the Cross River. Itu served as a major collecting point, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

Other items that could be found in Nde market include yams, plantain, groundnuts, livestock and poultry products, specialised wares, craft manufacture and pottery among others. From this market, locally produced goods and other exotic goods were injected into markets in the surrounding areas (Bohannon and Dalton, 1965: 23). The distribution of trade goods from one village market to the other in the region of our study was more or less done in relays. Goods bartered in one market were readily conveyed to the other market by local travellers through trade pacts and arrangements (Erim, 1992: 59). These preconditions facilitated the movement of trade goods from one location to the other until they reached their final destinations. Thus the period of European trade which began from the seventeenth century onwards, was only an aspect of the system of exchange which had its genesis in pre-colonial times.

On the right bank of the Cross River, Ikom existed as a great emporium of trade. Largely through the initiative of some influential traders there, Ikom, harboured one of the largest markets within Ejagham unit (Harris, 1972: 128). This market was highly reputed for the sale of a variety of goods: yams, coco yams, palm oil, ivory, wild rubber, canoes, cam wood, salt and later in the seventeenth century, slaves. In view of its commercial importance, traders from neighbouring areas and from far away places attended Ikom market. Such included people from Boki who came in with their rubber, cam wood, yams, and bush meat which they sold to the Ejagham middlemen in exchange for iron distributed to the local smiths (Ewah, 1992: 28). People from Mbembe in Obubra, Mbube, Bekwarra, Yala, Ishibori, Ekajuk, all in Ogoja zone, attended Ikom market. They came with their produce which they exchanged for other items not readily found in their vicinity. Traders from Idoma in the Benue region and from Mamfe in the Cameroons attended this market on the specified days. Such movement of foreign traders into Ikom territory for exchange purposes

in the 17<sup>th</sup> century led to the formation of Nkim and Nkum Okpambe settlements by portions of the Iyala of Idoma (Talbot, 1969: 227) who probably migrated there for the purpose of trade.

Strategically, Ikom lay on the slave route from Bamenda and the Cameroons (Alagoa, 1980: 255), and served as a centre for the trade between Cross River Valley and the Cameroons. Its traders established strong trading links and organised a network of connections within and outside the area. This enabled them to secure sources of slave supply and other required items for the ongoing commerce along the coast. Slaves were mostly acquired through recognised agents. Slaves from Bendi market in Obudu, passed through the hands of recognised agents who carried them along bush tracks to Ikom and Olulumo traders. Another bush track ran from Itumkol (Bendi) through Ubong, Ukposhi, Ibong (Bette), Ukpe and Alege, in the Iruan country (Erim, *ibid*: 55-56). Kakum in Bette-Obudu, was connected to the Bendi market by another route. Yams, palm oil and kernels were among the list of trading goods which passed through these routes.

Ikom middlemen traders established viable commercial networks which extended into the Obanliku area. This made them to frequent the Udeshi and Obanliku markets where they extensively benefitted from the flourishing trade in cam wood and other items. Such connections extended to areas as far as the Cameroons where they obtained slave supplies from Mamfe through recognised agents. To service this trade, an overland route ran from Southern Etung in Ikom through Boki, extending as far as the slaving chiefdoms of Mamfe and Bamenda in the Cameroons. On the tributaries of the Cross River, another route developed, terminating at present day Bansara and Ogoja and the vast "slave lands" of the Benue or Plateau area (Ejogha, 1984: 47; Onor, 1994: 133). Equally connecting this trading network to the estuary at Calabar is the overland route which ran from Calabar to Okuni near Ikom, whence it joined other routes from Arochukwu, and those that went into Mamfe and Bamenda areas of the Cameroons. Important articles evacuated through these routes were slaves (Erim, 1992: 59), cam wood, etc.

In pre-colonial times, Uburu, Yala (Ogoja), and Ikom areas provided sources of salt supply for most parts of South Eastern Nigeria. In Ikom, salt was both produced and traded in large quantities in Akparabong, Abijang and Nsofang. Southern Etung supplied the Ofutop while Ikom obtained their salt supply from Akparabong and sometimes from Southern Etung (Ejogha, 1984: 47). Where local sources proved inadequate, the salt springs of the Upper Cross districts in particular those near Nsanakang and Osidinge and the Akwana salt in the Bamenda grass fields of the Cameroons, provided edible salt for the entire Ikom zone and environs, long before the nineteenth century. Salt was traded in balls of about 1 kilogram or in small palm leaf bags. At the turn of the century, five small bags were valued at one "brass" (Chilver, 1977: 158; Northrup, 1978: 212). This trade was a long established one for in salt, people of the Upper Cross River Region had remained self sufficient until about 1800 when cheap imported salt got into Nigerian markets.

The network of trading connections so far discussed above also extended to the Ofutop. Ofutop women within Ikom zone were noted for their peculiar mat weaving skills. Ikom traders tapped the supplies of these mats into their market. The Nkum of Ogoja with their pottery products were also drawn into this commercial network with Ikom traders. The Yala of Ogoja often times supplied parts of the zone with some quantity of salt when local supplies proved inadequate. They also provided supplies of earthenware materials. The Bamenda grass fields of Cameroon were areas where Ejagham traders of Ikom could richly source for slave and salt supplies for the ongoing trade with Europeans along the estuary, at Calabar. The slave lands of Benue also supplied some quota for the trade. Livestock products added to the range of goods obtained from the Idoma of the Benue region.

Down the Cross River, Ikom traders extended their commercial expertise and traded extensively in canoe supplies, palm oil, ivory, wild rubber and yams which they obtained from parts of the Upper Cross River Region (Alagoa, 1980: 255). This brought them in contact with the Agwagwune who brought down the trade goods to the Umon who subsequently sold to the Enyong and later to the Efik. From Efik traders, the goods were finally disposed to European merchants at the coast (Nair, 1972: 235; Noah, 1978: 12; Alagoa, *ibid*: 255). This pattern of trade relations were in line with the existing monopoly of trade and politics along the Cross River by the end of the seventeenth century. Ayandele and Latham (Ayandele, 1966: 111; Latham, 1990: 75; Noah, 1978: 12-13) acknowledge this fact stating that the degree of this monopoly along the Cross

River was so intense that one tribe along the Cross River would not allow others to pass through its territory. This pattern characterised the trade and politics of the Cross River Region from the seventeenth century onwards and even up to the nineteenth century, when Europeans moved in to break the monopoly. From Itu on the Cross River, Efik traders obtained large supplies of slaves through the Aro middlemen who had established a large network of commercial relations in Iboland (Ekejiuba, 1972; Alagoa, 1980: 259). Through their trading connections, the Aro used Agwagwune middlemen as their trading agents to obtain large supplies of slaves which they sold at Calabar (Mcfarlan, 1957: 105). Slaves from farther up the Cross River passed through the Agwagwune middlemen to the Efik traders at Calabar. Given the connections from Ikom:

*...various routes ran to the North and East but the most important went eastwards overland to the Mamfe and Bamenda areas in the Cameroons. Until the imposition of colonial rule, the pattern of trade was in a sense relatively simple. No one from Ikom ventured southwards or downstream very far- all the traffic to the coast was handled by Efik or Agwagwune traders. Equally, moreover, all trade with the hinterland was controlled either from Ikom itself or from linked neighbouring towns of which Okuni was the most important (Harris, 1972: 126; Patridge, 1905).*

The importance of the trading connections which crisscrossed Ikom from pre-colonial times cannot be over-emphasised, but suffice it to say that it resulted in the establishment of Ikom and Okuni as important trading centres in the Upper Cross River Region. Using Ikom as an example of pre-colonial trade emporium along the Cross River, the period of European trade which commenced from the sixteenth century onwards could be regarded only as an aspect of the system of exchange which had its roots in pre-colonial times.

On the left bank of the Cross River zone, Abrugba, Ofutop, Okuni, Nsofang and Nkpot trade centres developed. The Abrugba operate a six-day market cycle reckoned as Asie Abrugba, Asie Okosora, Asie Okangha, Asie Osiaya, Asie Ekpokpa, Asie Oseabakan with "Asie" connoting market. Markets were named after venues. Such venues were usually open playgrounds known as "Efasie" in Abrugba. Yams, coco yams, palm produce, beans, groundnuts and water yams were sold here. Fish, meat and livestock products, and specialised products like salt and canoes constituted the range of items sold in these centres. From Abrugba, trading connections extended to the Ofutop and other Ikom areas, Ogoja area, and surroundings. Traders came from without to participate in the trade at Abrugba. Such characterised the pattern of trade in the unit until the end of the sixteenth century when they were drawn into the existing commercial relations along the Cross River.

The Ofutop exhibit a five-day periodic cycle namely: Asie Oseabakan, Asie Nkuma, Asie Okosora, Asie Okanga and Asie Ekpokpa (UCRHT 20: 77; UCRHT 31: 111). Yams, plantain, and maize and specialised crafts like mats were among items sold in Ofutop markets. Ofutop women were specifically noted for their mat weaving skills in the entire Ikom zone and the entire Ogoja areas from pre-colonial times. Such skills attracted traders from Ikom and suburbs to Ofutop where they could obtain this produce for sale to others. The Boki-speaking unit of Ikom zone, the Cameroons, all participated in the trade transactions with the Ofutop. Ofutop women usually travelled distances on foot to the Cameroon area to sell their mats in exchange for salt (Ndoma-Egba, 1972: 28; Chilver, 1977: 212; UCRHT 20: 77) long before the nineteenth century and even after. It is pertinent to note that Abrugba, Ofutop and other smaller marketing centres in Ikom zone supplied the larger Ikom market with variety of goods for sale. They constituted a substantial part of the network of trade relations which existed at Ikom from pre-colonial times to the later part of the nineteenth century.

The Boki-speaking unit in Ikom zone exhibit a six-day periodic cycle with the largest centres at Beteriko, Wula, Okundi, Bawop, Njua-Bano, and Kakwagom-Iruan. On Beteriko market day, products from the farms and cam wood were usually displayed for sale. Buyers came from Ikom, Bendi and Bette in Obudu and Mamfe in the Cameroons. On Njua-Bano market day, items like salt, yams, plantains, water yams, palm produce and ostrich feathers used for decorative and other purposes were displayed for sale. Njua-Bano village had been highly reputed for its salt-making skills in the entire Boki unit. The degree of reckoning had grown to the extent that the

village is said to derive its name from salt known locally as 'Bano' (Ewah, 1992: 26). Buyers came from the Ibo areas of Abakaliki, Mamfe in the Cameroons and from Tiv in Tsar District to attend the market in Njua-Bano. On Okundi market day, goods ranging from foodstuffs- yams, plantains, palm produce, and water yams constituted the range of items sold in the market. Buyers came from Bansara, Ekajuk and the Nkim area all in Ogoja to attend Okundi market in Boki. The Kakwagom-Iruan market was reputed for yams and decorative earthenware products. Livestock and poultry products added to the list of items sold in this market. Traders came from Mbube, Ogoja to exchange their locally produced goods for Iruan goods.

Boki traders established trading connections which took them outside their units. They attended Ikom market where they sold rubber, yams, and bush meat to Ejagham middlemen who in turn distributed hardware, clothes and other articles to them. Boki traders from Osokom and Kakwagom specifically, extended their trade relations to the Ekajuk in Ogoja. Here, they sold cam wood, yams, gunpowder and hardware which they obtained from Ibo traders from the seventeenth century onwards. The Boki attended far away Yahe market in Ogoja, close to Abakaliki in Iboland. From this market, they purchased raffia, clothes and other European goods for sale at home. The Boki-speaking unit of Bennie, Alankwu and Buentsebe attended Sankwala market of Obudu to purchase raffia mats, soya beans and locust beans (crops that thrive better on the semi-grassland areas of Obudu). In all directions of need, the Boki established trading connections. They fed a substantial part of the trade currents which flowed through the length and breadth of Ikom zone till the nineteenth century.

#### ii.) OBUBRA

Similar variation in market weeks has been observed among the Obubra people. While some infer a five or six or seven-day market cycle, in certain areas a four-day cycle operated. The Mbembe area of Obubra comprise Adun, Ofat, Ohanna, Iyamoyong and Apiapum to mention but a few. Among the Mbembe, the week is reckoned as Ephawutem, Ebotuwu, Ekophawu, Egbinyinwu, Ekoriku and Edanwu respectively. Ekong relates that there were specific market days in the area for the disposal of commodities; that this occurred every six or seven days (UCRHT 35: 124; UCRHT 48: 168). Okimba from Apiapum explains that markets there were held every six or seven days while Enyi from the same unit maintained a six-day market cycle was in operation (UCRHT 35: 124).

Affirming Enyi's viewpoint, Okum Clan which comprises Iyamoyong, Apiapum, Ohanna, Ogbongba, Iyamitet, Okurumuktet, Edondon, Okokore, Isaben, Odongkit, Ochon, Onyanokpon, Onyanoranga and Okpaguni, operate a six-day market cycle with the largest market at Apiapum (UCRHT 17: 60). On such days, people from surrounding villages attended the internal markets in Obubra. They came in with their wares in exchange for items greatly needed. Articles sold included yams, plantains, groundnuts, coco yams, okra and specialised goods like craft manufacture. Livestock and poultry products also added to the range of items sold in the markets. Describing the typical market in Obubra, Patridge noted that prior to the advent of Europeans, the people traded among themselves. The trade had grown up to the level of accommodating traders from outside. In this regard, he states:

*...the trade of the district is conducted by down-river people- Efiks, Akunakunas, Inokuns, and natives of Umon who came up in their big canoes bringing European goods from the Calabar factories retailing them... and purchasing the indigenous products of the district, which they take down for sale (1905: 245).*

People from the area attended markets outside their vicinity, participating in various levels of exchange transactions in adjoining Ibo territory, Ikom, Ogoja, and parts of Mamfe area in the Cameroons before the seventeenth century. The description by Patridge supports the level of development in pre-colonial times.

Within Obubra zone, a four-day periodicity regime is observed in Abirijang (Abafere) and in Isobo area. Isobo which comprise Isobo Otaka, Bikobiko (with Isobo Ezomezo and Njanegbe now under Isobo Ekpangudele in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State) is an area in which the four-day market cycle predominates (UCRHT 11: 43, 45). This occurrence may not be unconnected with Isobo's proximity to adjoining Iboland area in which the four-day market week is predominant. Elder Inyang Awonge notes:



*Isobo has four market days. Our movement up and down has changed a lot of things. Before the war, we were in Obubra zone. Being in the minority, we adopted Obubra six-day market cycle common among the Mbembes. When we were with the Abakaliki, we also adopted the four-day market cycle... there was no central market among the Isobo then because the Isobo never lived in one geographically contiguous area. But in the Ikwo area of Abakaliki, a more central market existed- the Igboji market... it rotated every four days... (UCRHT 11: 43, 45).*

The chequered political history of the Isobo continuously affected the operation of market cycles in the area. At one time, it would reflect a six-day cycle zone, at another, a four-day depending of course, on developments at particular points in time. For convenience sake, the area shall be classified under a mixed periodicity zone.

Isobo, (a sub-group of the Ibo) have markets which are similar to the Ibo market cycle and the nomenclature of Ibo market weeks are the same with the Isobos. They reckon their market weeks as: Nkwo, Eke, Orie, and Afor respectively. Each Isobo town had its own "Nkwo" day where they normally display locally produced goods for sale (UCRHT 11: 43, 45). Articles sold include yams, water yams, vegetables, melon, pepper, palm produce and bush mango. Specialised crafts like cam wood, sleeping mats and salt provide the range of items that are found in these markets. Participants came from the surrounding areas of Obubra, Iboland, Ikom and Yakurr areas. Abakaliki and Afikpo traders from Iboland are identified as the regular group of traders in Isobo markets. They brought locally produced goods from Iboland into Isobo and exchanged for other items not readily found within their vicinity.

Wherever markets were held outside Isobo, Isobo traders attended, establishing commercial ties in that neighbourhood. The Igboji market in Abakaliki was the most central market both to the Isobo and the Abakaliki. From this market, Isobo obtained a wide range of goods from locally produced ones to exotic items. They obtained European goods from Ibo traders from the seventeenth century onwards. In Apiapum market, pockets of Isobo were seen here and there covering distances on foot (UCRHT). This movement to and fro into Ibo territory and the Mbembe area resulted in a myriad of trade routes crisscrossing Isobo area into Iboland and the Mbembe areas right from pre-colonial times. In view of enduring commercial ties with Iboland, the Isobo participated in the salt trade of the Ububru-Okposi area of Iboland long before 1800.

### **iii.) YAKURR**

The Yakurr-speaking area of the Upper Cross River Region comprising: Ugep, Ekor, Idomi, Mkpani, Nko also present a mixed periodicity regime. The Yakurr generally (excepting Ekor and Idomi) operate a two-day market cycle reckoned as "Kokeh" and "Okponnobi". On Kokeh was the biggest and more central market day in Yakurr. Kokeh was usually held at Ugep while each village in Yakurr observed its individual markets after that. Goods displayed for sale ranged from yams, water yams, coco yams, corn and other foodstuffs to specialised goods like pottery and salt. Participants in these markets came from the surrounding region of Itigidi, Ediba, Usumutong, Abayong in Biase, Agoi, Mkpani, Nko, and Assiga, all within the Upper Cross River Region to attend Yakurr market. People from the adjoining Ibo territory- the Abiriba, Afikpo, Mkpuro, Item and Ohafia- all came to Yakurr to trade with their locally produced wares. In return they bought yams with copper rods, and other items for retail in their local markets. Within Yakurr, the Agoi area met the local supplies of native chalk and cam wood (UCRHT 32: 117). Afikpo women usually brought pottery products for sale in Yakurr markets in exchange for other items they needed. These links between Yakurr and her neighbours antedates the fifteenth century.

Yakurr traders travelled long distances to the adjoining Ibo territory wherever markets were held in the neighbourhood. Numerous routes developed from this relationship. From Yakurr, traders moved to Igonigoni, crossed the river to Oziza. From Oziza, they got to Uburu-Afikpo in Ohaozora, to obtain salt which was a lucrative item at the time. From Uburu, Yakurr traders also obtained gunpowder, antelope skins, native chalk and cam wood in the seventeenth century. These are indicative of the early trade links between peoples of the Upper Cross River Region and those of Ohaozora area (Agwu, 1993: 105). Afigbo rightly captured this when he stated:

*...from the Ibo town Uburu northwards into Ogoja there are brine lakes from which salt was made by evaporation. Most of Iboland got its salt popularly known as Nnu Okposi/Nnu Uburu... this salt trade was ancient indeed, at least predating the 15<sup>th</sup> century (1980: 10).*

Long before the advent of Europeans into the region, Ugep traders often attended the regulated markets in Ohaozora where Uburu/Okposi is situated.

Within Yakurr zone, the Ekori and Idomi manifest traits of a four-day market cycle which is predominant among the Ibo, the Agbo, Bahumono and the Isobo respectively. In Ekori and Idomi areas, the week is reckoned traditionally as Ebibi-pla, Koko, Eplabloke, and Kewiwoyi. On these days, markets are held in the village square. Goods were displayed for exchange and such goods ranged from farm produce to some specialised crafts like cam wood, salt, etc. People from Ugep, Adim and environs usually attended these markets to exchange their wares for locally produced items. Livestock and poultry products added to the range of items found in these markets. History is replete with traditions from the Ekori and Idomi areas of Yakurr, of the ingenuity of Ibo traders from Mkporo and Ohafia areas who attended the markets. This influenced the adoption of the four-day market cycle prevalent in the area. Smith's classification (1971: 322) of West African markets with regard to areas with four-day market cycle adequately covers this unit.

Traders from this area established trade links with surrounding groups. Similar to what obtained in other parts of Nigeria, they trekked long distances using footpaths. In the process, routes linked Ekori and Idomi areas with Iboland and surrounding units long before the fifteenth century.

Down the Cross River, they traded extensively from the sixteenth century onwards, participating in the ongoing trade along the coast. Here, canoes provided the basic means of transport where traders paddled slaves, cows, goats and sheep down the river for sale to traders who finally sold to the Agwagwune. Pereira made reference to the ongoing trade in this region when he commented:

*They came from a hundred leagues or more up the river bringing yams in large quantities; they also bring slaves, cows, goats and sheep. ...they sell all this to the natives of the village for salt... (1937).*

#### **CONCLUSION**

Issues so far raised in this paper with regard to the development of trade and marketing structures in the Upper Cross River Region before 1800 have proved that the region was involved in various levels of exchange relations among themselves and neighbouring regions before the advent of Europeans. Infrastructures like markets, trade routes and others that developed from these internal transactions, paved the way for external commerce with Europeans in the seventeenth century. Thus, the commercial economy of the region having been well developed made use of both general and special purpose currencies which are the indices of a viable economic system. It should therefore be clear that there was trade and economic development in the Upper Cross River Region before the nineteenth century and the later trade with Europeans in the nineteenth century, was built upon an earlier form of trade in the region.

This paper has demonstrated contrary to the grains of the older historiography, that trade and its related activities pre-dated the advent of European traders at the coastal areas of modern Nigeria. It is also clear that the roots of this trade are as old as the history of the region.

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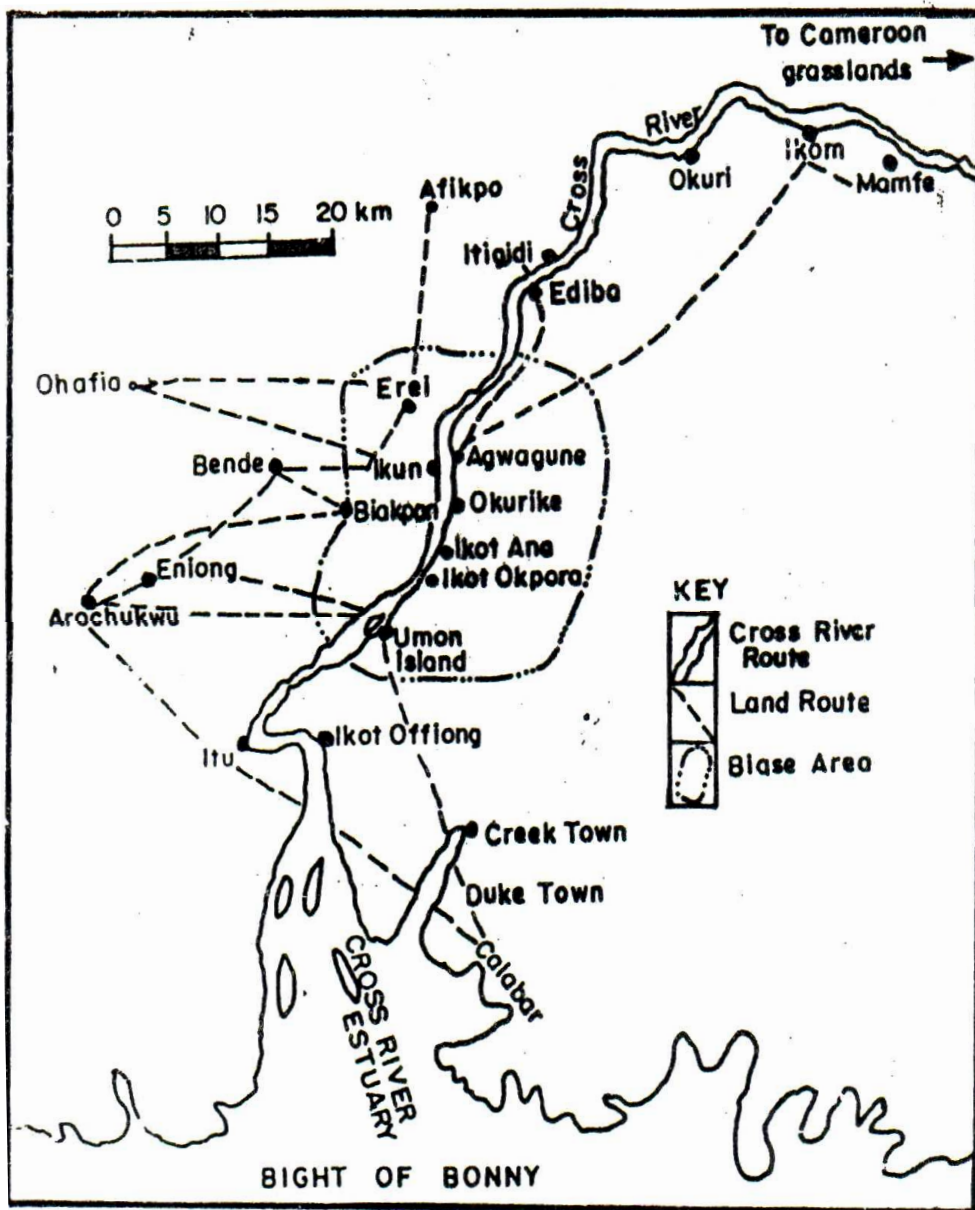
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APPENDIX I

HYPOTHETICAL MAP OF BIASE WITHIN THE UPPER CROSS RIVER REGION ILLUSTRATING INTRA/INTER TRADE CONNECTIONS BEFORE 1800



Adapted from: Attoe, S. D. (1990). *A Federation of the Biase People: Origin and Development of Biase Ethnicity 1750 – 1950*. Enugu: Harris Publishers Ltd, p. 120.

APPENDIX II

THE RESPECTIVE ETHNIC GROUPS WITHIN THE UPPER CROSS RIVER REGION CLASSIFIED INTO TRADING ZONES

