



Notes on Pre-Colonial Economy of Ora Land up to 1899

By

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Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the major production endeavors that developed among the seven Ora villages of present Edo State before the imposition of British colonial economy. These pre-colonial activities attracted other countries from far and near to Ora Land. Without doubt, during that period, the economy reached its peak of growth and development with all the superstructures of a developed society which the colonial administration built on for the eventual economic exploitation of Ora land. The paper conclude that had colonial rule not interfered with the Ora society much of the economic crises that bedeviled Ora land would not have occurred, and the society would have attained a steady but meaningful development far higher than that of Europe and America.

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Introduction

The ethnic group that is known as the Ora today comprised seven autonomous villages before the beginning of the nineteenth century. These communities has evolved distinctive pattern of economic system based on the nature of their respective environment on peculiar and socio-cultural circumstances.¹ However, it is possible to identify features which are common to all of them before 1800. These features unique as it were, formed the basis of the pre-colonial economy of Ora land.

If approached from a general frame-work, the mini-state, Ora land had gone further than the subsistence level of production before the beginning of the 19th century.² During that period, the Ora pre-colonial economy reached its peak, sustained with the superstructures of a developed economy³. For example, there was evidence of division of labour due to specialization in the different sphere of production and distribution. This led to a vibrant economic of inter-dependence among various Ora communities with her near and far neighbours produce and products it needed⁴. The need to facilitate this inter-dependence, according to Agbaeyer led to

the development of an exchange sector and consequently markets. Thus a link was established between Ora and the Benin-Esan, Nupe, Idah, Okene, Afenmai, Igbo, Yoruba and later Hausa merchant⁵. In this article, the major productive endeavours that developed among Ora people which attracted other nationalities to its borders will be given attention and the nature of trade relations highlighted. Before than there is need to appreciate who the Ora people are.

Location, Origin and Population

Ora is one of the eleven clans which make up Owan Local Government Area in the present Edo State, Nigeria. It lies to the South of Owan Local Government Area and is bounded on the north and east by Emai clan, on the south-east by Ozalla clan and on the west by Luleha clan. The land mass is approximately 112 sq.miles⁶.

Ora people like other ethnic groups in Nigeria have different conflicting accounts of their origin and settlement patterns, which should not bore us here. However, all Ora came directly and indirectly from Benin kingdom as could be seen from the uniformity of political, social and economic organization features, e.g. language, customs, etc, all akin to Benin⁷. Although four various of the traditions of origin of Ora people can be distinguished, some Ora interviewed in Uhiele and Ohia still claim that besides the waves of migrations from Benin, that their ancestors evolved from the ground/water⁸.

Generally Ora is sparsely populated with less than 257-260 people per square kilometer. The thick concentration of the people is still evident around Sabongida Ora, Afuze, Uzebba, Ozalla and Ihieva⁹. The principal incentive for this density according to oral evidence was probably for defense against external enemies and for its soil fertility which boosted several productive activities. The population of the area fluctuated between 1931 and 1963. 'The 1991 national head count and that of 2006 have been contested and not acceptable to the majority of the people due to open controversies and secret manipulations by the electoral body and the state government'¹⁰.

Before the advent of the British colonial imposition, the Ora territory consisted of loosely independent connected chiefdoms each group being built around the *Oleakpen* and *Ejerenokhua* title grades or junior and senior chiefs respectively with the *Odi'vhonmon*, the head of the village assembly and the *Odionwere* as the head of the village¹¹. Ora was generally governed by the principle of gerontocracy. The important chiefdoms up to 1900 were; Ohia, Ovbiokhuanvin, Evbiobe, Uhonmora, Oke, Uhiele and Oroekpen¹².

Main Features of Ora Economy

Land, Ownership and Utilization

Land, *Otor* was/is about the main stay of people's existence. How it is exploited and controlled depended on the socio-political *milieu* in which this is done as it forms the basis of any analysis of a class society¹³. *Otor* for Ora society, although not exclusively was and has remained the most basic means of production on which all other economic and social activities depend.

For Ehimogic, has attested that "every primary, secondary and tertiary economy activities such as agriculture, manufacturing and commercial series depend on land and not the sky" ¹⁴.

Thus land, *Otor* as the principal means of production, was free, strictly communal and held in trust by the *Odionwere* for his people. It could neither be sold nor bought. If there was a dispute over a piece of land in the village, the *Edion*, elders looked into it and effected settlement. The same also applied when the dispute involves two or more village¹⁵. In some cases, rare as it was then, the general assembly, *Eguare-Arhelu* wades into the matter and if one of the party is not satisfied with the judgment of the general assembly of all the clans then the *Ihein*, chief priests sets the sanctions or imposes settlement¹⁶ agreeable to both parties because *Otor* was of crucial and central importance to any kind of survival. And in most capitalist societies including that of Ora, land was communally owned and no single individual had the right to appropriate it, except what the entire society permitted the family members for good communal social relations.

Again, it was generally agreed in Ora that land was not a (private) property and to sell it, even if one contemplated it, would amount to selling a genealogical position in the village. "Land then was regarded as a natural property of a family group but not the property of a single individual and one was always ready to lay ones life on the line should ones genealogical portion of land was threatened or encroached¹⁷. Each family group considers its ancestral land as a natural endowment where except could be loaned through the *edion* of the family¹⁸. However, a system of understanding the application of land was always demonstrated to anybody in need of land especially to non-Ora people.

- i. **The Market Place:** This like the village hall belonged to the entire community once built. Even though built by an individual.

- ii. **Building Site:** This refers to the owned piece of land on which a member or strangers of the community had his/her house. This land with the cleared and uncleared area around it belonged to him and his children descendants. If he left it to go and build somewhere else within or outside the village, no one else has the right to build on the site which thus had become his *Itelewa* or *Ijiogbe*, everlasting sacred abode. And if the house had fallen down the place was still his sacred possession¹⁹.
- iii. **Farm land:** The basic law over farm land was that “he who first farmed a virgin forest, land hitherto unclaimed, owned “it”. That means in pre-colonial Ora custom, the first man to clear a forest and cut down the trees for the purpose of farming owned it over generations.
- iv. **Leasing of Land:** Another level to which ownership of land could be exercised was leasing land to visitors, strangers, refugees and immigrants through the adult members, *Edion* of a family. It could also be leased through quarter heads, village heads or clan heads in general.
- v. Reward for bravery, patriotism, spiritual prowess and as innovators. In Ora land in order to encourage people from other societies to settle in the community so as to motivate economic and social growths, strangers from ‘any’ parts of the world were rewarded with tracts of lands for any demonstration of bravery, patriotism, spiritual excellence and as bringers of new ideas²⁰.
- vi. Some village or clan lands were set aside for religious purposes such as building of shrines and grooves and ritual sites.

Agricultural Production

Ora before 1900 and up to the present period is an agricultural country. Everybody, man or woman being either simple farmers, hunters, fishermen, animal rearers, fruit and reptile gatherers among others engaged in the production of food and raw materials for human, industrial and animal consumption. The food crops produced included yams, corn, coco-yams, cassava, beans of various varieties, pepper, groundnut, melons, banana, plantains, tree crops such as cocoa, palm trees, rubber and kola-nuts²¹. Farming was the most important productive activity in Ora because it was so ordered that it defines all the various stages of the year which was divided into farming phases²². It was either burning time, bush clearing, planting, weeding, tiling, harvesting, threshing or storing time. Farm year ends about the second week of December and any time after

the New Year begins with the clearing of bush for the main farms and by March/April, yams are planted with corn immediately after the first rain, *amen Ikpe*. Cultivation, weeding, packing and harvesting was usually carried out with simple implements like hoes, knives, axes, cutlass, sickle, spade etc produced by the indigenous black and iron smiths²³. The two dominant seasons were *Okia* and *Oro* i.e. dry and wet season. Apart from food crop production palm trees, palm oil and kernel were produced by the women who buy the ripe nuts from the men for local use and export all over Ora. Oral evidence attests that only the palm oil, kernel business later cocoa beans production survived the colonial period. The palm trees were also tapped by palm wine tappers to obtain palm wine used for entertainment and herbal medicine and for libation or prayers to their ancestors and the gods. There was also the tanning of the palm kernel into black oil, *Uden* used for body cream, lubricants and preventive and curative medicine²⁴ when mixed with some herbs. The raffia palm was also knitted for roof top and brooms. With clay pots, produced by potters, palm oil was transported to far away markets for exchange of what the people could not produce²⁵.

Hunting: Was another timeless activity of Ora hunters who were specialists because the occupation was restricted to men who had the charms and power to overcome the physical and metaphysical danger of the evil-infested forest²⁶. Among the specialists were hunters of elephants called *Ogbeni*. The hunters, *Orhe* were highly regarded because of their diabolical power in hunting animals such as bush pigs, leopard, deer, bush dogs, antelope among others. Besides, they made use of dane-guns, charms, traps, knives, hunting dogs and cutlass as weapons. In some parts of Ora before colonial rule, hunters were highly celebrated because of their bravery and as captains of the village informal defense corps²⁷.

Animal Husbandry

Apart from the consumption of animals caught by hunters, for the improvement of food protein, there was also the evidence of animal husbandry of livestock such as fowls, ducks, goats, pigs, dogs, sheep, rabbits, etc reared by some Ora people. Some hunters and their wives reared a lot of animals caught from the forest²⁸. Others gained ownership of livestock through direct acquisition by gift or purchase and through what Ojomon has called the contract of agistment, or livestock tenancy²⁹. This operated in taking care of animals for the owner's and sharing the offspring's with him or her. The advantage always rested with the owner, for the sharing was always in the ratio of two for the owner and one for the caretaker³⁰.

Fishing

Another developed major economic occupation of the Ora living near the river banks was fishing because some of the villages are situated in the village of the Owan River, the river from which the name of the local government area is derived³¹. There people engaged in fresh water and open river fishing. It was majorly engaged in by men during the dry season when there were no serious works in the farm and with manageable water level of the river³². Fishes caught were consumed by family members which added to the people protein and other not immediately consumed were preserved either by smoking, drying or salting and sold to retail traders who in turn sold them to consumer. Oral evidence attest to several fish merchants from other countries as far as Hausa and the Nupe kingdom patronizing Ora markets for dry fishes³³. Fishing tools included, locally made hooks, traps made of weaved baskets, poison made from foliage seeds/barks of trees and roots of plants.

Food, Fruits and Reptile Gathering

In addition to animal rearing by some wives of the big hunters, food, fruits, snail, tortoise and gathering of rare eggs of birds and reptiles were also engaged in. Women and some with their children or wards sometimes go far into the forest with hunters in search of these items for home consumption and exchange in the weekly markets³⁴.

Indigenous Craft and Industries

Beside the agricultural sector which involved the direct and indirect production of food and raw materials for the people and the rearing of animals, indigenous craft and industries engaged in for the manufacturing of several products which were allied to the agricultural and other sectors also thrived and became developed before the beginning of the 19th century. These practice were in the areas of *black and Iron smithing*: This was practiced in some part of Ora with concentration of iron. Some amounts of iron are also imported from Uzea in Esan country and Benin kingdom³⁵. Ozalla, Ugbire *Iwaenamaton* in bronze and brass casting works. The industry was very important in the production and repairs of farm tools for the agricultural sector which was the leading sector of Ora pre-colonial economy³⁶. Oral evidence proved that some of blacksmiths were said to have migrated from Benin with the legendary Uguan to Oraland before the end of the 15th century³⁷. The smith manufactured items such as axes, knives, hoes, diggers, cutlass, needles, pins, arrow heads, chisels, long royal knives and short cutlass, bangles etc some of knives and other weapons used extensively for both defensive and offensive war-fares. It was

these local weapons the Ora warriors, *Otu Isinrin* used in resisting several Benin, Nupe, Esan and later British incursion at several times of their history³⁸.

Textile and Cloth Production

Ora was noted for her weaving and cloth industry³⁹. The abundant cotton grown to the north of the country provided the needed raw materials for cloth weaving. Unlike farming, which was largely dominated by men, the textile and cloth production was dominated by the women folks. The women spun and wave locally grown cotton into *Ukponra*, Ora cloth. Weaving was locally done on a simple upright looms with hand heddles which produced strips of cloth of varying width. *Ukponra* was either plain white or with a pattern of blue and white stripes⁴⁰. The pattern were made either into lion cloth, *Ugbulu Ora* and Oza which mothers used in holding babies on their backs while attending to domestic or occupational activities⁴¹. Children were introduced into the art of weaving at a very early age usually with the preparing stages of ginning and fluffing of the cotton wool. The cloth woven were used locally and also sold to traders/buyers from other countries. Such as Benin, Nupe, Yoruba, Esan, Igbo and Ijo etc⁴².

Soap Production

This was also a major concern of the women fold. The soap, *Egbakho'ora* was produced from the remnant of burnt shafts of palm and plantain bunches, palm oil, residue, potash mixed with water for fermentation⁴³. The need for soap production was informed by the necessity to bath and wash. *Egbakhor'ora* itself was medicinal as it was used for curing acne, measles, fever and all kinds of skin rashes⁴⁴. Surplus productions were exported to Nupeland, Benin, Warri, Eko in present day Lagos, Igbo land Ijo land⁴⁵.

Pots, Plants and Tray Making

Pottery was a craft in Ora economy which many affirmed is timeless. Oral evidence advanced that the earlier migrants from Benin and Esan, met the art of making pot among the indigenous people of Ora⁴⁶. Pots *Uwawa* plates and tray making like soap production was purely carried out by women and their children or apprentices who helped in fetching the clay, water and other allied items from the river side, streams and forest for its production. Items produced by the *Omakhe*, potters included pots for cooking food, water storage, vaults for herb preservation among other. Most of the potters had their factory near the markets or trade routes for easy delivery to the middle men and woman retailer from other countries⁴⁷.

Leather Works

Iweni Ohian or leather works was another skilled occupation that became developed among the Ora people before the start of the 19th century⁴⁸. It was narrated that the skill was copied probably from the Benin and Yoruba settlers and hunters who deskin and tan killed animals to produce hides used for drums, belts, ropes, hand fan, bags and sheath for long knives, cutlass, and decorative arts for homes and shrines⁴⁹.

Wood Carving

This was another prominent art among the Ora people also said to have been copied from the Benin or Yoruba carvers⁵⁰. Oral tradition explained that at one time in their history, the region had the reputation of being the supplies of carved works made by Ora wood carvers to the Obas of Benin before 1800⁵¹. Carves were also noted in some other parts but with less skills and ingenuity. The oral carvers produced wooden trays, mortars, pestles, decorated doors, gates, stools, drums, ladles, masks, toys, materials, for religious objects, chairs, weaving materials and several others were produced by Ora carvers⁵². Most of the products were said to have been for the Benin royalty and long distance traders who transport some to other countries⁵³.

Mats and Baskets weaving

These were also parts of the developed 19th century economic activities of Ora economy. Mat, *Aewah* was woven from some special weeds found in the wide forest⁵⁴. The need to relax and to be comfortably sitted when holding meetings and for sheep inspired mat production among the Ora. Mat also had spiritual use in covering of the dead before burial and for separating and shielding shrines, secret grooves or as door blinds in Uhonmora, Uzebba and Ozalla⁵⁵. Oral evidences affirm that mat was one of the common materials spread on the ground for open-display of waves and food products in market places⁵⁶. Basket weaving was made from canerope, *Utartan*, Ekan collected from the forest. Baskets of different patterns, sizes and designed were produced for carrying farm produce, keeping of food stuff, preservation of dried meat and fish, for fishing, and transporting of produce from one place to another⁵⁷. Baskets were also woven for preserving clothes that requires some amount of ventilation after use⁵⁰. The practice were engaged majorly by women and men on part-time basis during the dry season when there was less work in the farms.

Herbal and Spiritual Practitioners

These were the herbalist and native doctors who practiced most of their act with magic and enchantments known to themselves and the initiates. They were generally termed *oboh*⁵⁹, native doctors. With their supernatural powers, the *obohs* provided the people with herbs, charms, talisman and other medical attention for good health and also for protective and preventive medicine⁶⁰ after divination, or application of magic. The history of these medical/herbal and native doctors cannot be pin-pointed according to Dr Osagie Ehigwima, 'it dates back to when the first man settled in oraland'⁶¹.

Trading and Commercial Activities

The consolidation of the various productive activities in Ora during periods no doubt led to the development of an organized, specialized and sustained exchange and distributive system through the established local and international markets, *Ekin* which encouraged the various villages in Ora and the neighbouring clans to specialized in the production of certain crops and products. Thus while some are specialized in the production of cocoa, cassava, maize and yams which were mainly produced by the people of Uhonmora, Eme, Evbiobe, Sabongidda and Oke respectively, Emai specialized mainly in the production of palm oil; luleha in rice and groundnuts and Ozalla in beans. Secondly, the major, international markets in the various communities were held on different days⁶². This arrangement was mutually beneficial to Ora and her neighbours. There was also the factors of proximity and accessibility of one community from the other which made it relatively easy for people to attend one another's markets and the lack of good storage facilities of produced food items brought people to patronize these markets frequently⁶³.

Before the establishment of regular markets, open markets, *Ekin*, *Otor* were conducted on a small scale in the village square while long distance international trade was limited considerably⁶⁴. The crops already mentioned were the major items of trade between Ora and her far and near neighbours. Manufactured goods of different manufacturers were also exchanged. And the big international markets which attracted traders from within and outside Oraland were held every four days⁶⁵. In most cases each clan had one big market which was held at the centre of the headquarters of the clan.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the long distance trade was well organized. The traders in most cases knew themselves. They therefore often inquired from one another as to

those who would attend the next market especially outside Oraland. This was in order for them to go in-group due to the insecurity in trade routes as slave traders or thieves could ambush traders and have their article stolen⁶⁶. Market affairs were mainly the preserve of women, probably because the articles of trade were merely food stuffs. In Ora land, the origin seems to be more in accord with G.E.N De Ste Croix's of market Croix's argument that local markets could have arisen out of the need for food exchange⁶⁷. Trade was built upon the products of the local industries exchanged either internally or externally. At the level of individual market, exchange bargaining or more appropriately haggling was an in-built device to prevent cheating⁶⁸.

Barter a system of trade continued well into the 20th century. It was mainly concerted with the exchange of agricultural produce for food stuffs between Ora Benin and mostly Esan traders. Evidence seems to indicate that cowry was a major currency of trade and it was widely adopted, as from the 16th century, as medium of exchange⁶⁹. The cowry shell had the characteristics of modern currency. Welch has shown that during the pre-colonial era, periodic markets in Ora-Esan land were organized by the *Ohaiekin*, markets officials on behalf of the chiefs and the village of Clan helds. They collect small charges from the traders who required permanent pitches. It was their task to purify the market if any market man or women died within the market environments, settle disputes arising from the haggling and other activities between the sellers and prospective buyers⁷⁰.

Trader routes by land were the same as the roads within the region. They were footpaths occasionally cleared to link one village or clan to another⁷¹. For example the major markets which featured in the trade between Ora and most of her neighbours were Ekin-Oise of Evbiobe. (Sabongidda) and Ekin-Uhomora, both in Ora, Ekin-Ora of Afube in Emai clan; Ekin-Auma of Uzebba in Iuleha clan and Ekin-Ozalla in Oralla clan. Trade routes linked Ora with each of these markets, and from Ora footpaths, trade routes linked Uhomora through Eme to Ekin-Ora of Afuze-Emai and from Evbiobe through Oke, Ojavun, Okpokhumi and Ebiame to Ekin-Ora of Afube-Emai⁷². Trade routes also linked Ora from Evbiob, Sabongidda and Eme through Uhomora to Ekin-Ozalla. The trade routes which linked Ora with Ekin-Ora passed from Uhomora through Evbiobe and Avbiosi to Uzebba-Lulehe⁷³. The long distance traders who engaged in the transerved of these trade routes usually headed directly for these major markets. They could be stopped in the villages through which the routes passed⁷⁴. In such circumstances, the trade had to take place along the road before the traders could get to the major markets⁷⁵.

These villages had their own markets which were held as mentioned before at the village squares and what normally happened was that when they bought items from the long distance traders who passed through their villages to or from the major markets, they in turn sold them in their own markets⁷⁶.

Transportation essentially was based on human head portage in the region which was then expensive. To argument the cost, the traders employed their wives, children and relatives as porters for short distance journeys. While slaves did the strenuous long distance journeys. But as Adesina, has shown, the development of the pre-colonial modes of transport was a function of the economic impulses of the people conditioned by geographical factors⁷⁷. There was also evidence of water transport among the Ora living in the riverine areas. Water transport was said to have been the cheapest means of transporting commodities over long distance⁷⁸. However, the cost of transport was determined by the degree of the security of the routes, the length of the journey and the weight and value of goods in relation to the distance of the journey⁷⁹. Among the Ora, portage by wives, children, close relatives and apprentices was regarded as necessary obligation that was expected by and given to a man, the head, provider and protector of the family.

As we have examined although the pre-colonial Ora economy was primarily aimed at satisfying personal needs, yet the idea of absolute subsistence is no longer accepted as evidence abound to argue for substantial production for exchange as demonstrated in this work. Thus a further development took place in the Ora pre-colonial economy which made great impact on the people and the state before the British conquest and imposition of a colonial economy in 1900.

Land Tenure: Agriculture was the most important productive activity and was undertaken with seriousness. So land was generally accepted as a free gift of nature. Thus a cardinal principle of land tenure, was that no one should be without land for farming⁸⁰. The essence of the land tenure system was use-right as opposed to “landlordism”. There could be land transfer or sale of some sort, but there existed a series of controls such as taboos, sanctions, and reversionary rights which safeguard against undesirable alienation or speculation. Feudal relation was unknown in pre-colonial Ora land⁸¹.

The importance attached to agriculture reflected in the rituals that proceeded from work to solicit the blessing of the gods. The usual approach to farming was the slash and burn in which shifting cultivation was practiced because of the constraint to the relative infertility of the soil.

Thus, too forestall the risks of further improvement, the soil must be left fallow for a long period. Bradbury suggests that the fallows for a long five to six years appear to be the practice over a large part of the Ora country⁸².

Development of Paid Labour: The full application of paid labour was another feature of the developed Ora economy before 1899⁸³. Apart from family efforts available to the producers in the agricultural and other sectors of the economy, other forms of labour included the co-operative labour, pawnship, slave labour and paid labour in some part of Oraland. Osadolor made mentioned that before the colonial conquest there was evidence of owners of farms, traders, and those in the manufacturing/factories who engaged some amount of paid labourers. He suggested that, the idea must have been borrowed from the Yoruba or Arab traders who traded into Ora land during the advent and the use of cowry currency as medium of exchange. Which means the evidence of an exchange economy that involved the negotiation of wages between the suppliers of labour and the employers, especially the cocoa and palm oil farmers Adigwe argued⁸⁴.

Organization and Operation of Trade Associations: Due to the liberalization of all productive activities, professional associations or trade guilds were established. The associations were made of traders, producers and farmers. They were registered with the Oba of Benin through his representative in Oraland. The trade association agreed on prices, trade routes, security for members and granting of financial assistance to members who suffer any loss. Non members were always encouraged to join due to it numerous benefits⁸⁵.

Social Interactions: The productive and commercial enterprises in which Ora was involved exposed her to the outside world and influences. In many ways, trade and commerce provided a common unifying force between Ora and her neighbours near and far⁸⁶. For example markets provided a common forum or meeting place for different social groups. It was an avenue to exhibit new ideas, products, skills, dancing steps, hair styles, narration of foreign news disseminated by the long distance traders and visitors⁸⁷. One result of these contacts therefore was mutual borrowings of culture between Ora and her neighbours. As the relations increased, inter-marriages between Ora and her neighbours became a feature of the developed economy and among others too⁸⁸. Inter-marriages seem to have been encouraged by such factors as low bride-prices that still prevailed in the area, and the desire for peace. This further strengthened the bond of relationship and prevented any possible conflicts that existed before colonial conquest⁸⁹.

Moreover, with time, mutual culture borrowings were expressed in aspects such as the institution of chieftaincy, ceremonial mock-wrestling, traditional ceremonies and dances. For instances a form of traditional dance known as *lyoko* has remained a cultural feature, not only in Ora but also in some of the clans with which Ora interacted such as Otuo and Emai. *lyoko* is a traditional dance among hunters and is usually danced in honour of one who has killed rare animals including elephants, tiger, leopard and the warthog, bush pig. In Ora and in other places where this traditional dance exists, it is called by the same name, *lyoko*, even though these people do not speak exactly the same dialect⁹⁰. It is not clear who first began this *lyoko* dance, or who borrowed it from whom, but it seems plausible to assume that it came to be established in the various places as a result of mutual contacts between Ora and her neighbours in earliest times.

There was also relationship in the use of common shrines, grooves, witch-test centres and oracles outside Oraland especially in Benin, Esan, Etsakon and Otuo. In this way, intergroup relations were enhanced, not only between Ora and other places people whose shrines and other belief and worship places they visited but also between them and other peoples who also went there with diverse socio-political backgrounds⁹¹.

Moreover, the similarities in the socio-political and juridical systems of Ora and her neighbours may also be explained in terms of inter-group contacts dating back to earliest times. For instances, in Emai, Lulehland, Ozalla clans, the title system was/is divided into two grades, namely, the *Ejerenokhua*, senior title grade and *Olakpan* junior title grade as in Ora. This would appear to confirm the claim that the *Ejere* title system in these other clans was imported from Ora. Also in Emai, there existed the nine age grades, *Otu Isinrin* corresponding to, and with similar functions as the *Otu Isinrin* in Ora. There functions included communal labour and defense of the community in war in times⁹². It is not clear at what point in the relationship between Ora and her neighbours that these aspects of Ora life found their way into Emai. As with chieftaincy however, the features seem to be products of long term contacts between the people of Ora and their economic neighbours.

Development of Sustained Commercial/Auxiliary Activities: One other important aspect narrated by some informants about the pre-colonial Ora economy was the development of commercial activities. These activities indirectly or directly provided series of services to those engaged in agriculture, industrial production, and trading/exchange services. B.T. Adoga, in one of his study in “Benin-Ora Political Relations before 1900” espoused that “the volume of goods

brought to Ora from the 1850s and the noted frequency of Nupe, Yoruba, Hausa and Arab traders became so apparent both in the flow of finance, profits and volume of exchanged goods and services. As a result of these development, many commercial activities became profitable to many Ora people in the urban and rural centres and also they became so wealthy that they began to attain the states *Quo* like members of the Benin and Yoruba aristocracy”⁹³.

Example of these commercial activities included Banking operations; Warehouse/goods keeping services, private security personnel, hotel and Inn providers; experienced language interpreters; singers, dancers and other entertainers who operated majorly on market days; advertisers. There were also middle men i.e. wholesalers and retailers of different status; internirant medical workers and weather interpreters situated in the market environment and on the trade routes.⁹⁴

Conflict: Another features of precolonial Ora economy was issues of conflict and peace management, inspite of the degree of cardinal relationship that existed between Ora and her neighbours, which has already been examined, there were periods of tension. Sometimes, such tensions developed into war. One of such war was the Ora-Imereke war of 1813⁹⁵. The war was fought when Ora people were still at Odorere. Imereke is in the north-west of Auchi, along the present Auchi-Igarra road in Etsakon Local Government Area of present Edo State. It happened the persistent appropriation of article from Imereke traders by Ora people without payment was the cause of the war⁹⁶. Acting on the order of their *Oje*, king, the Imereke reacted to the situation by capturing one Ebarumen, the wife of Oyakhiromen who was the *Odion Urukpe* of Eguare-Arhehi, Ebarumen had gone to Imereke to trade. After several proposals from Ora, Ebarumen was later released by the Imereke. However, her *Odigba* bangles which connoted high social prestige, were with held by the people of Imereke. Having tried in vain to persuade the people of Imereke to return the bangles, Ora embarked on a full-scale war⁹⁷. According to Pa Oyakhire, the war lasted for more than six months with Ora coming out victorious⁹⁸. Stories exists of other wars fought by the Ora with their neighbours over control of trade routes, price fixing, product extraction, toll payment, donations and rendering of commercial labour for market construction among others⁹⁹. Meanwhile, Oyakhire commented that, most of the wars which Ora fought with their neighbours were not prolonged wars or wars of total exterminations or wars were food crops are burnt nor wells, streams blocked with stones or with deadly substance. Instead wars

were terminated as soon as one party threw in the towel and sued for peace especially when a third among the party elders, *edion* pleads for a cease-fire, truce¹⁰⁰.

Conclusion

It could therefore be said that on the economic side that of pre-colonial Ora, was extensive, elaborate and developed. It rested on the three basic superstructures-agriculture, trade and exchange and manufacturing with commercial activities as complementary. Agriculture was the main economic activity with other activities as subsidiaries. These economic activities resulted in the further development and positive socio-economic, political and cultural impact on the Ora economy before 1900. At the level of conflict and peace management, Ora fought wars with the Emai, Luleha, Ozalla and Imereke that strained relations to some extent but when peace was attained, the Ora never delayed in relating with all her near and far neighbours especially for economic reasons.

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