

THE IJAW IN THE 21ST CENTURY: EXPERIENCES FROM THE HISTORIC PAST AND IMPERATIVES FOR BAYELSA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The Ijaw people are the aboriginal to the Niger Delta, having lived and grown with the Delta for between eight to ten thousand years. In the course of their existence from ancient to modern times, they have evolved sophisticated economic, socio-cultural and political institutions by which they have existed and prospered in the often-inclement geographical conditions of their homeland in the Niger Delta. The sophistication of the Ijaw civilization and the lessons that its most homogeneous modern state yet, being the State of Bayelsa in Nigeria, could derive, is the thrust of this treatise.

KEYWORDS: *Ijaw, 21st Century, Bayelsa State.*

INTRODUCTION

Located in the Niger Delta in south-southern Nigeria, the existence of the Ijaw as a people goes back in time to antiquity and their collective origin seems shrouded in mystery, leading to the postulation of various theories that would appear to have different levels of credibility. But what is very certain nevertheless, is that the Ijaw have had a historic past of significant experiences and strides in various endeavours, from which they and indeed their neighbours and the foreign world, might derive several lessons that constitute imperatives for action by them in the twenty-first century. This treatise is therefore poised to unravel the Ijaw as an ethnic nationality, by attempting an exposition of the Ijaw identity, origins and experiences from ancient times to the 21st century. It attempts to unveil the historic experiences that have defined the Ijaw challenges, resilience and achievements throughout their existence, from which the modern geopolitical entity of Bayelsa State, Nigeria, for instance, was created and from which inspiration for profitable action at present and in the foreseeable future may be drawn.

Ijaw Origin, Environment, Culture, Politics and Economy

The Ijaw do not have a recollection of any place of origin outside their collective abode – the Niger Delta, but theories of Benin, Ife, Guinea Highlands, Jewish, autochthonous or extra-terrestrial origins have been hypothesised by historians, anthropologists, linguists and others (Okorobia, 2009). The Emeritus Professor of History – E.J. Alagoa, opines, that the Ijaw migration into the Niger Delta and consequent separation from their mainland neighbours, the Igbo, Edo and Yoruba, might have taken place as long as five thousand years ago. The Delta

itself, he notes, is geologically, about ten thousand years old, having been formed by sediments brought down by the River Niger as it flows from its source in the Guinea Highlands, into Atlantic Ocean (Alagoa, 1972).

Leveraging on the submissions of historical linguistics, the English Anthropologist – Professor Robin Horton – who became naturalised as a Kalabari (Ijaw) indigene, attempts two narratives of the possible origin of the Ijaw. First, he states that Proto-Ijoid-speakers (various Ijaw people), travelled down the River Niger and entered the Niger Delta through its highest point in the Central Delta. And second, he postulated that Proto-Ijoid-speakers entered the Delta through the far eastern creeks (Derefaka and Orugbani, 2009).

The foregoing submissions taken into cognizance, other scholars have through the years, as we had noted above, propounded theories about the antiquity of the Ijaw. While some scholars have propounded a theory of Judo-Christian origin likening the name Ijaw to the ancient Palestinian city of Ijon cited in I Kings 15:20; 2 Kings 15:29; 2 Chronicles 16:4, others have speculated that the Ijaw came from habitations in northern Nigeria, and yet others, that the Ijaw migrated from Ife, Benin or from the hinterland of the Delta. Virtually all these theories have been criticized for lack of cogent evidences (Okorobia, 2009). Generally, however, what virtually all the Ijaw can remember in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, are migrations within the Niger Delta itself and across its various zones. This does not however obliterate the submission that the Ijaw entered the Niger Delta, as stated earlier, through the River Niger about five millennia ago.

About internal migrations within the Niger Delta, and specifically in the Eastern Niger Delta (that is the area of contemporary Rivers State), the Ibani (Bonny) are known to have migrated from the town of Okoloba, not far from the town of Seibokorogha (which has been anglicised as Sabagreia), in the Central Niger Delta (in the modern Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria). This accounts for why the Kingdom of Grand Bonny is identified as Okoloba by its people and their neighbours. That is just as the Kalabari in the Eastern Niger Delta (contemporary Rivers State), tell of their migration from Elem Kalabari on the Rio Real (Royal River or River Bonny), to found the three cities of Bakana in 1880, Abonema in 1882 and Buguma in 1884. Also, the Okochiri people in Okrika trace their origins to Amassoma in the Central Delta (in contemporary Bayelsa State), where several forests Agadababou, Isomoboue.t.c., in the area known as the Wilberforce Island, are evident ancient centers of dispersion of the Ijaw from the Central to the Eastern and Western Delta respectively. Likewise, the towns of Bomoundi in the Central Delta (in the modern Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State), is the established place of origin of Bomadi in the Western Delta (in contemporary Delta State). In a similar antecedent, the town of Tombia in the Eastern Delta (Rivers State), was founded by indigenous migrants from Tombia town in the Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria (Alagoa, 1972).

From the foregoing narrative, it is manifest that the Ijaw are clearly aborigines of the Niger Delta which however is also home to other groups of non-Ijaw origins, that speak languages and dialects very distinct from Ijaw. A number of such groups speak languages that have been severally classified by Professor Kay Williamson (the English Ijaw-naturalised lady) as Central Delta or Ogbia, Edoid, Delta-cross and Igboid groups of languages (Ndimele and Williamson, 1999).

The Ijoid language group is divided into two principal divisions which are the Ijo and the Defaka branches. The Ijo branch comprises the East and West Ijo clusters of dialects, while the Defaka,

also identified as Afakani is spoken by a small village in Nkoro and IwomaNkoro in the Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area of Rivers State. The East Ijo dialect cluster consist of Nembe and Akaha (Akassa) in Bayelsa State; and Wakirike (Okrika), Kalabari, Ibani (Bonny), Bille, and Nkoro in Rivers State. The West Ijo dialect cluster consist of the Izon, and the Inland Ijaw comprising Biseni, Akita (Okordia) and Oruma people. Of these, the Izon is the largest, not only of its group, but of the entire Ijo language speakers. Professor Williamson identified twenty-four dialects of Izon, spoken across four states where the Ijaw people are aborigines. From Bayelsa State in the Central Niger Delta, through Delta, Edo and Ondo States in the Western Niger Delta, Izon is spoken by the Bumo, Eastern Tarakiri, Aguobiri, Oporoma, Oiyakiri, Ikibiri (southern Ijaw cluster), Korokosei, Bassan, Ondewari, Ikibiri (north-western Ijaw cluster), Ogboin, Kabou, Western Tarakiri, Kumbo, Mein, Tuomo, Operemo, Ekpetiama, Kolokuma, Gbanrain, Iduwini, Oporoza, Ogulagha and Arogbo clans and towns (Ozo-mekuri and Williamson, 1999).

Expectedly, through the ages, the Ijaw have had contact and robust intergroup relations with themselves and with their neighbours across the Niger Delta and at its fringes. Examples are at the Eastern fringe, the Igboid-speaking Ikwerre, Etche, Ogba, the Ndoki (now being believed to be of ancient Ijaw origin), the Igbo people, and other groups such as the Ogoni, Ibibio and the Ibeno peoples (the latter being also of Ijo ancestry). At the Western Niger Delta fringes are the Yoruboid group being the Itsekiri, Ilaje and Yoruba people. There are also the Edoid or Benin speakers comprising the Urhobo, Esan, Owan and other Edoid people. And finally, there are the western Igbo people of Ukwani and Anioma sub-ethnic nationalities (Ozo-mekuri and Williamson, 1999).

Traditional Sociocultural, Political and Economic Systems

The traditional social and cultural system of the Ijaw has reached levels of global sophistication and recognition from ancient to modern times. A typical Ijaw society is structured around the nuclear family made up of a man, his wife and children. Several nuclear families constitute the extended family, which is classified into Houses (wari). Several Houses in turn constitute the compound (polo), several of which constitute the town or kingdom.

Ijaw cosmology according to scholars, opines that there is a supreme being, the creator of the universe who is perceived from the idea of the conceptional and procreational abilities of the womenfolk and is thus viewed as a mother rather than a father. The supreme being – God – then is designated severally as Ayeba (she who could procreate and could kill), Woyingi (our mother), Tamarau (she who creates). (Okaba and Appah, 1999). The Ijaw belief system also holds that there are two main orders of existence being the Tominiamakiri or TomikiriorKiri-akpo– the physical and material world that could be seen, heard and felt by the senses, and Temeanga, Teme-Akpo or Temekirthe spiritual world which embraces the supernatural aspects of existence made up of the spirits of the sky – Suoteme, the water – Beniotuor Oru, and the bush – Bouotu. And there is the Egbesu and other deities, with the Egbesu believed to be the deity of war effective in protecting its adherents from knife cuts and bullets (Alagoaet al., 2009).

Ijaw sociological beliefs speak of the rites of passage of human beings from birth through puberty, to adulthood, old age and death. And each of these stages have their respective but varying ceremonies of initiation across Ijawland. Regarding the Ijaw worldview, they take a serious outlook to life, and extol the virtues of industry, honesty, and unity. The Ijaw are generally happy and face the challenges of life with ardent determination, diligence and

resilience, accounting as many would agree, for their ability to survive the inclement weather and difficult terrain of the Niger Delta for many millennia.

In course of their long existence, the Ijaw crafted an array of drums, percussive and other musical instruments, invented the theaters of play, poetry, music, dance and drama, typified by masquerade display and other aquatic or terrestrial theatrical performances on land and on water. The Ijaw also created a rich array of carved, sculpted, printed or decorative art forms that typify their peculiar deltaic environment, historical experiences and worldview (Anderson, 1999). In modern times, a record number of very talented authors, artists and artistes have emerged from the Ijaw ethnic nationality. Through the years from old times, the Ijaw have invented cuisines and textiles that are unique to the ethnic identity (Derefaka, 1999).

From ancient times, long before the advent of foreigners from Europe and other parts of the world, the Ijaw, as is well recorded, had evolved sophisticated traditional administrative systems by which they governed themselves and organised society (Alagoa, 1971). The original Ijaw administrative structure was gerontocratic, wherein the ruler of any town or village was the oldest man. That model of leadership would however give way to leadership by descent, and later, by social and economic status. The fundamental administrative unit was the Ibe or clan, with its structure basically the same with only minimal differences from the western to the central and eastern parts of the Niger Delta. Within each clan (Ibe), the singular institution of central control was the cult of a national god (Ibe-nana oru), whose high priest was the Pere. The Pere then was the only one wielding authority over the clan. It was his prerogative to determine the date of the annual festival of the national god (Ibe-nana oruolali), which he presides over. The Pere was therefore a priest-king, albeit without administrative or political authority. His authority was basically religious, although in the twentieth century, the seat of the Pere has been changed into a political leadership in which the Pere is king over the entire clan.

Albeit, exceptions existed with the Mein clan which had the Mein Okosowei (Mein elder), being the eldest son of their founding ancestor, the Apoi clan that had the kalashuweand the Arogbo clan – the Agadagba, all of whom had significant administrative authority over their respective clans. Besides, these leading functionaries were other important officials in the traditional organisational system. They were the deputy-president, messenger, town-crier, hangman and others.

Generally, because the authority of the Pere was non-political, each village of the respective clans was autonomous administratively. As such, an elaborate political and administrative organisation at the village level evolved and engendered a kind of democracy peculiar to the Niger Delta Ijaw civilisation. At the village level, the main administrative authority was the Amagula which was the village or town assembly. It was presided over by the oldest man in the village called the Amaokosowei (town elder), but executive leadership was vested in a younger man, Ogulasowei (the spokesman), chosen by the village assembly. And there was the priest of the village's deity, the Orukariowei, who was the village equivalent of the Pere and carried out the religious duties of the village just as the Pere does at the clan level.

On the eastern flank of the Delta, are states identified and designated city-states, each of which are approximately as large as the clan (Ibe) of the central and western Delta. Thus, the Bonny, Kalabari, Nembe and Okrika city-states are each known as Ibeor clan. Accordingly, as in the western and central delta, the people of each clan feel that they belong together but, in this instance, not only by a common descent, which is either very weak or absent in these states, but

by a common language that they speak or by common institutions to which they belong. But even the criteria of a common language and culture tended to fade with time. This became the situation as state institutions developed and their territorial influence increased, and they began to include people of different languages and cultures. What then bound them together in the face of the challenges and changes impeding their cohesiveness? It was severally, the cult of a national god and the spiritual kinship of the village god to the national deity, whose shrine is sited at the metropolitan city, being the capital of the city-state; its totem imprinted on what became the state's flag; and its drum-praise poem which became the anthem of the city-state. They also evolved the idea of the Amakiri (God of the settled earth) and the Amatemesuo (the spirit of the city), as a historical and unifying being.

Prior to their development of the state institutions mentioned above, the eastern Ijaw clans had the same basic village structure as the western and central Ijaw clans. People of the same descent were constituted into the Wari (House), which in turn made up the Polo (Compound or Ward). But the difference in the administrative structure of the eastern delta village administrative system from the system of the western and central delta village administration was the rejection of age as the criteria for who becomes the head or president of the Village Assembly. The president of the Village Assembly becomes, no longer the oldest man (the Amaokosowei), but the Amayanabo (owner of the town). The Amayanabo is chosen based on his descent from the ancestor of his particular Wari or Polo that is believed to have discovered and first settled the village location which would gradually assume the status of a town. The Amayanabo then was an elementary form of monarchy even though he was more of a ritual head like the Pere of the western and central Ijaw clans. This was the state of the administration until the advent of the Atlantic trade which led to increased wealth and power of the early Amayanabo.

The Amayanabo represented the people in their trade transactions with the Europeans (Beke), who paid him comey and other duties so that their persons and trade interests could be protected. The authority of the Amayanabowas also enhanced by the fact that the other leaders in the community, being the heads of the new type of House (Wari), looked up to him to introduce them to the European traders who could give them goods on credit through him. The result of all these was rapid economic growth that led to the founding of more villages and towns that enhanced the emergence of the city-states of Bonny, Nembe, Kalabari, Okrika and Opobo, whose metropolises or capitals became centers of people, wealth and power. The Amayanabo and Chiefs of the Eastern Delta also devised the means of enculturating new entrants into their respective Chieftaincy Houses (Wari) that constituted the kingdom. They did so through such elite societies as sekiapu in Nembe, ekine in Kalabari and Okrika and Ogbokoroma in Bonny.

The position of the Pere of the western delta and the Amayanabo of the eastern delta, have found expressions in other parts of the Niger Delta where some clans have become part of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality by longstanding association. Thus, there are the Ibenanaowei of the central delta clans; the Amayanabo of Akassa Clan, the Obhanoban of Ogbia Kingdom, and the Ibenibe and Obenibe of the Epie and Atissa kingdoms respectively. From ancient times, the kings and chiefs have been assisted in the discharge of their duties by elders, youths and women, where and however necessary, with each category of people playing specific traditional roles.

The Traditional economy of the Ijaw typifies the three mercantile features of production, distribution and the provision of services. The productive economy of the people features farming of various agricultural produce such as cocoyam, yams, plantain, cassava, banana and

coconuts, etc. It also features fishing, hunting, lumbering, palm oil making, and the manufacturing of several amenities such as canoes, paddles, nets, traps, baskets, etc., that are utilised for sustenance and for exchange (Orugbani, 2009).

The distributive economy features trading in the various products and items that are produced or manufactured within and outside the community. Trading takes the form of intra-community trade within individual towns and villages; inter-community trade which takes place between two or more short-distanced neighboring towns or villages at a chosen market location; and internal long-distance trade between places such as Yenagoa, Brass, Sagbama, etc, in the central Ijawland for instance, and far away towns or cities like Lagos, Calabar, Onitsha, Aboh, Lokoja etc.; as well as overseas trade, which was carried on between the Ijaw people and the Europeans that came to the shores of the coastal parts of Ijawland such as Bonny, Brass, Escravos, and other places.

The service-based economy is characterized by people who make a living by providing services. Such services include traditional birth attendance, tailoring, hair plaiting, body and bone massaging, building, carpentry, among others, that have complemented the main occupations of the people for many centuries.

In the mid-20th century, crude oil, which would eventually become the major revenue earner of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was discovered in Ijawland in 1956. Since then, the exploration and exploitation that followed, have had serious consequences. Although, the crude oil-driven economy has led to the growth of towns and cities, and to the prosperity of Nigeria and its citizens especially in the boom years of the 1970s, several scholars have opined that the crude oil-driven economy has had adverse effects on the original occupations of the Ijaw people through the years. Such traditional occupations which had been mentioned earlier, have for the most part, been unable to keep up with the crude-oil induced high standards of living. This antecedent has led to a widespread change in the choice of economic engagements with most people in virtually every part of Ijawland transiting from traditional occupations to more modern economic enterprises in privately owned firms and in government establishments so as to sustain themselves more effectively (Orugbani, 2009).

Besides the foregoing impact, the effect of crude oil exploration on the Ijaw people as on other peoples of oil producing areas is phenomenal. The crude oil economy has been riddled with incidences of environmental degradation, agitations and conflicts, which various succeeding governments have made frantic efforts to address without much success (Orugbani, 2009).

Ijaw Aptitudes in the Ancient Era

It is evident that the earliest period of Ijaw existence, which we shall herein classify as the ancient era or the earliest period thousands of years before the colonial era and after, dating back to between five to ten thousand years ago, marked the primordial phase of the Ijaw civilization. Thus, it goes without saying that even in that era of their earliest existence, the Ijaw were ingenious and creative, and achieved appreciable strides from which we might learn some lessons of value. First, they mastered the Niger Delta environment, that had become their home by nature's endowment, and also became very acquainted with its astronomy as an aspect of its geography. Second, they evolved sophisticated arts and crafts which they bequeathed continuously to their descendants through education by observation over several millennia, and

third, they invented ingenious means of production and distribution of produce and services by which they sustained themselves from the earliest period of their evolution.

Accordingly, Ijaw history and anthropology reveal that the highest point of Ijaw achievement in the era of their ancient evolution in the Niger Delta, was their aptitude at adapting to the largely inclement geographical conditions of the Delta especially in those primitive days, and their ability to evolve villages and subsequently towns which they called Ama (Alagoa, 1971). A consequence of their adaptability to the environment, was their abilities at astronomy which was manifested in their aptitude at reading the moon and the stars, by which they knew the movement of the river in relation to the solar system, and depicted the seasons especially as it related to the times and tides suitable or unsuitable for certain kinds of fishes, fishing and other economic and social activities (Sikoki and Otobotekere, 1999).

The nature of the houses that the early Ijaw built, and the vehicles, vessels and other implements that they crafted and employed for daily utility and sustenance from their earliest past, down through the ages, were also fit for purpose and adequate for their survival. The ingenious crafting of the houses with thatch roof and mud walls in the creeks, and thatch roof and thatch walls in coastal areas, made them suitable to shield the Ijaw from the weather conditions of the deltaic environment (Alagoa, 1995). These and more to be highlighted, mark a significant step towards the Ijaw advancement from the wandering hunter-gatherer stage of their existence to the sedentary fishing and farming village era of their evolution.

Necessitated by the need to commute from one location to the other in search of better fishing, hunting and farming grounds, the Ijaw became more advanced and developed interactive relations with their immediate and short-distance neighbours. That advancement meant that they mastered the art of carving canoes (the vehicle of the delta), from large trees such as the mahogany, abura, black afara, etc, and places like Egwema, Liama and Beletiemma on the Cape Formosa in the Eastern Delta became known for their expertise as centers for canoe carving (Alagoa, 1995). The Ijaw also perfected the art of carving different sizes of paddles to propel the canoes. The carving and usage of the canoe has several examples, but one of the earliest recorded usage dates back to the priest-king – Onyo, one of the earliest rulers of the original moieties of the Nembe people of the wider Ijaw hegemony, who lived and reigned in the 14th century AD. He owned and used a small canoe to navigate the creeks swiftly in conducting his daily routines (Alagoa, 1978). Another recording of the early usage of the canoe was of TuburuEiye, the great 19th century warrior of Agbere extraction in the Western Delta, who possessed a canoe that he used for his various solo expeditions of conquest and trade. Some of his weapons and tools, but not his canoe, survive till the twenty-first century (Olali, 2022).

Indeed, the various types and sizes of canoes produced by the Ijaw clearly buttresses the fact of the antiquity of the vehicle and how skillful they have been in crafting and utilizing it. Canoe carving evolved from the crudest form to the highest level of sophistication. From earliest times, the survival instincts of the Ijaw led to their crafting of the fishing canoe which would later serve their transportation needs. Further advancement led to the carving of larger canoes, that sometimes had a roof extending to half or its entire length, in order to contain and protect wares from the elements of the weather. Later, the canoe became adapted for festival purposes, used in conveying participants to various festivals such as wrestling or the annual convergence in veneration of respective national or local deities. The ritual canoe which is usually a miniature vessel laden or stuffed with assorted items as offerings to a particular deity or deities, placed

either on land or on the stream or river was crafted. And as interactions with neighboring peoples increased and skirmishes ensued, the war-canoes were constructed as large boats meant to carry between thirty to fifty or more persons to battle. The war-canoes of King Koko of Nembe which he used for his war against the British, survives till date and is preserved ashore at the Opupogu (an ancient waterfront in Ogbolomabiri, Nembe) (Charles, 2012). Since the twentieth century however, the war-canoes have been converted into vessels for festivals such as boat regatta displays. Other more modern uses of the canoes are for sports such as sailing, paddling and rowing for competition or cheer leisure.

Indeed, the Ijaw were so proficient at crafting the canoes that an entire clan in the Western Delta which became a center for canoe carving became known as Arogbo (derived from aruogbo—canoe forest). The oral traditions of the Arogbo explain their name as having been derived from the early canoe-building industry located there, certainly due to the availability of large trees from each of which a canoe was carved (Alagoa, 2012).

Besides canoes, the early Ijaw civilization boasts a record number of inventions in vessels, such as baskets and various fishing methods and gears. Of basketry, they made the Ogbani, originally adapted from the Igbo. It is the basket with a wooden base, used in carrying wares over long distances, and the basis of the Nembe-Ijaw proverb “Ogbanipurabotibidedere,” a wise saying that implies the English saying – “Uneasy lies the head that bears the crown.” (Olali, 2008). There is also the Opoli which is an ingenious indigenous refrigerator of sort, that is used submerged beneath the water surface in preserving fishes and crustaceans during fishing activities; the Ekelu utilised in measuring foodstuff for consumption and exchange; and the Ikpu used for storing cloths, clothing and other small wardrobe items (Olali, 2008). Regarding fishing gears, the Ijaw of this early eras invented the wounding gears such as spears and machetes, and various types of traps by which they fished for subsistence and primary exchange.

Closest to basketry is the invention of Ijaw threads and textiles. They derived their threads from plants and wore loin and shoulder cloths made of the raffia palm and similar products derived from the delta (Olali, 2012). Certain Ijaw towns like Ogu in the Okrika kingdom of the Eastern Delta were also inventive of pottery of which perhaps the most important product was the Ebe—the refrigerated waterpot which also serves as a musical instrument (Derefaka and Okoroafor, 2009). Made from mud, its roundish slightly spherical structure enabled the circulation of air within the pot that generates a very cooling effect (without iciness), on the water stored in it for drinking even in the heat of the dry season which is usually hot and humid.

In effect, the primeval Ijaw people of the original era possessed aptitudes of excellence even in those early days. No wonder, they invented the canoe and paddle by which they commuted between places, and other tools and implements by which they eked a living from their environment.

Ijaw Activities in the Era of Foreign Adventures

The mid-15th century (1450 onwards), marked the period in which foreigners – from western Europe – first set foot on Ijawland through the Atlantic Ocean on whose shores and hinterland the Ijaw have lived from ancient times. The objective of the Portuguese was to trade and to spread Christianity. The contact that the Ijaw had with the Portuguese became their first contact with foreign peoples across the ocean (Alagoa, 1977). By the time of the Portuguese contact however, the Ijaw had already attained some level of sophistication from being subsistence

fishing and farming villages especially in the central delta, to evolving trading centers in the eastern and western delta where communities were involved in the internal short and long-distance trade with their immediate and distant neighbours respectively, and had become primary centers of commerce and wealth.

The Portuguese explorer, captain and cartographer Duarte Pacheco Pereira who visited the Ijaw kingdom of Bonny in 1506, when the Atlantic trade between the European adventurers and the Ijaw was still at its primary stages, noted the activity of the Ijaw on the Bonny River designated the Rio Real by the Portuguese. Pareira who called the coastal Ijaw people of Bonny and others who dwell between the Escravos River and the Rio Real or River Bonny the name – Jos (Ijaw), noted that the people were manufacturers of salt which they traded in exchange with their hinterland neighbours, which was certainly the Igbos. In Pareira's words about the trading expedition of the Bonny, "travelling a hundred leagues or more up river, bringing yams in large quantities, which, in this district, was very good and nourishing; they also bring many slaves, cows, goats and sheep." (Alagoa, 1977). Consequently, the Bonny traders sold the produce they brought down the coast from the hinterland to the Portuguese in exchange for copper bracelets, which were more valuable than brass. The Portuguese then were fascinated at the extent of trade between the Bonny and their hinterland neighbours, as well as the largeness of the trading canoes some of which could hold up to eighty men according to Pereira, and were the largest in the Ethiopian Guinea.

At the Brass River, which the Portuguese called the Rio Bento, the Nembe traded in different sizes of canoes with their hinterland neighbours and later, at the arrival of European adventurers, with the Portuguese in the 15th Century, the Dutch in the 16th and 17th centuries and the British and the French in the 18th and 19th centuries. The same applies to the Kalabari, Okrika and Opobo (Ijaw) people. Of course, Jean Barbot, the French commercial agent on French slave-trading voyages to West Africa from 1678 to 1679 and from 1681 to 1682, described in his writing, the trading canoes that he saw in use by the Elem Kalabari in the 17th century. He noted that the traders armed themselves with javelins and shields for self-defence, and their canoes had twenty paddlers and were capable of conveying seventy to eighty warriors. The canoe then was primarily for trading, but also came to serve as a vehicle for defence and aggression.

With the progress of time, the facilitation of trade by the canoe amongst other factors, led to the phenomenal growth of the Nembe, Kalabari, Okrika, Bonny and later Opobo town, into centers of increased commerce, wealth and industry that became designated as city-states by the foremost Nigerian historian Kenneth Dike. The main produce of trade during this era at the Brass coast and all over the Niger Delta Ijaw territory and beyond was palm oil and kernel. The palm oil was needed to grease the machines of England and western Europe following the Industrial Revolution of 1750 onwards in which machines became the dominant instrument in the production process. The intensity of the trade transactions at the Brass Coast indeed became the basis for the name 'Brass' itself, which was actually derived from Brasin, "leave it"; implying the word the Brass traders told their European counterparts when they couldn't reach a compromise in pricing (Alagoa, 1964).

The Brass traders just as their Bonny, Kalabari and Okrika brothers of the Eastern Ijaw stock, traded their wares of fish, prawns and salt with their hinterland neighbours, mainly the Ijaw of the central and western Niger Delta for agricultural produce of which palm oil and kernel were the most valued and exchanged for European goods at the Brass coast. The trade partnerships

and markets up the Orashi River and other rivers in the Eastern Delta, up the River Nun and its smaller tributaries and creeks such as the Ekole, Epie, Tailor and Kolo Creeks in the Central Delta, and the Forcados, Escravos and Warri Rivers in the Western Delta, were plied by the merchant states and princes of all parts of Ijawland.

Accordingly, the trade between the various Ijaw states with their hinterland neighbours and their European partners increased the wealth, power and influence of the kings and princes of the Ijaw states of Nembe, Bonny, Kalabari, Okrika and Opobo. The overseas trade with the European trading partners also led to the evolution of centers of commerce in the hinterland rivers such as, but not limited to Ekpetiama, Yenagoa, Amassomaetc in the Central Delta, Twon-Brass, Akassa, Degema, Ahoada, in the Eastern Delta, Bomoundi, Burutu, Ughelli, Warri, etc. in the Western Delta.

At the time, the merchant princes of Ijawland wielded so much influence and authority in conducting the trade. When the supercargoes (the European trading ships) arrived either the Bonny or Brass coast, they anchored and must not commence trading until the king arrives on board the ship to declare the trade open. The Ijaw kings were so powerful in the trade that they charged duties called comey from the European merchants or supercargoes. They also collected and gave goods on trust from, and to the European merchants, for themselves and their trading chiefs and princes who served as their agents. Amongst such kings and merchant princes were King William DappaPepple of Bonny; King Josiah Constantine Ockiya of Ogbolomabiri, Nembe; King Koko of Ogbolomabiri, Nembe; King Duguruyai of Bassambiri, Nembe; Chief Christopher Iwowari of Bassambiri, Nembe; King Abbi Amachree of Kalabari (1863 - 1900); King Ibanichuka of Okrika (1876 - 1896); King Young Inikeiroari Briggs of Abonema (died 1905); King Willie Braide of Bakana; King Jaja of Opobo (Ijaw by acculturation; reigned 1821 - 1891); King AmanraOdo of Kaiama (1826-1900), King Kpadigha of Tarakiri (1839 - 1919), Chief EiyeTuburu of Agbere (circa 1850), Chief BekederemoOgein of Kiagbodo (18th and 19th centuries), etc. The life and activities of some of these merchant princes requires some elaboration.

The epitaph of King Josiah Constantine Ockiya of Nembesummarises his life and the activities, which were of course significant, that he embarked on as a merchant and king of his people. It reads: "Sacred to the Memory of His Highness Josiah Constantine Ockiya, King of the Brass Peoples. He invited the gospel into the (Brass) Country in 1868. The country prospered and trade flourished during his reign from 1863 until his death on Dec. 13th 1879. Requiescat in Pace (Bayelsa State Government, 2013).

King Koko of Ogbolomabiri, Nembe and his fellow kings and chiefs of Nembe and the entire Ijawland traded with the inland neighbours of his kingdom and with the British and became wealthy. In 1895, he and his trading partners and sympathisers declared war on the British monarch and trade interests by attacking the Royal Niger Company depot at Akassa. The war was declared due to the attempt of the company to usurp the trade in the Niger Delta hinterland, over which he was the major merchant and main middleman. All the overtures of King Koko and his neighbouring chiefs and people for a peaceful settlement of the observed highhanded trade strategies and practices of the company were rebuffed by the Royal Niger Company, thus the raid of its depot was for him the last resort. King Koko's expedition led to the abrogation of the charter of the Royal Niger Company by the British government, the establishment of the Southern Nigeria Protectorate in 1900, which was amalgamated with the Colony and

Protectorate of Lagos in 1906, that was in turn amalgamated with the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria in 1914 to give rise to the nation of Nigeria. It was therefore the quest for a solution to the protestation of King Koko in the era of the Atlantic trade that gave rise to Nigeria, successful as it has been, with many attendant challenges as is the situation with many nations across the world.

King Jaja of Opobo (reigned 1870 - 1891), was a foremost merchant Prince of Ijawland in the Eastern Niger Delta. Originally a slave boy who became fully acculturated into the Bonny Kingdom of his masters, he, by dint of enterprise, became head of the Opubo Annie Pepple Chieftaincy House of Bonny. King Jaja would after a civil war between his House and the Fubara Manilla Pepple Chieftaincy House, depart Bonny to eventually found the town and city-state of Opobo in 1870. The epitaph on the monument erected to his memory at the main entry point at the waterfront in Opobo town aptly describes the pedigree of King Jaja as a true Ijaw statesman and nationalist. It reads “Erected in the memory of King Jaja of Opobo: Born 1821; Died 1891: He was head of the Opubo House when the civil war broke out in Bonny in 1869. And in order to terminate once and for all, the continued family jealousies which he felt were detrimental to the people, he and his chiefs, friends and connections of the Opubo House left Bonny and founded the town of Opobo on 25th December, 1870. From that time till his death, the history of Opobo was his. His wise rule was evidenced in the opening up of markets to trade and commerce, and to him was due the important position taken up by Opobo in the group of Oil Rivers. This statue was erected by his European friends, his relations, chiefs and connections.” (Jaja, 1821 – 1891).

King AmanraOdo (d. 1926) of Kaiama in the Northern Ijawland, Central Niger Delta, was a great merchant King who was very instrumental to the promotion of peace, prosperity and progress of Northern Ijawland. In his book *The History Ijo (Ijaw) and Her Neighbouring Tribes...* Simon KoromoweriOwonaro highlights some significant events on the River Nun in the nineteenth century. He narrated that King AmaranOdo rescued the British explorer John Lander who was captured by some men namely Kile, Lokote, Teinkorogha, Perewari, Indoni and Bolou from Odi, by paying some ransom to the men. For doing so, the British rewarded King Amaran with an annual allowance of twenty cases of gin, which was later changed to twelve dollars annually, and was paid by Mr. Snuggy, one of the British pioneer workers on the Niger. In another instance, a native warrior of Igbedi, Bebekala captured two women from Aboh and sold them to MessrsJikie and Odon of Sampou. King OsainEneta, the then king of Sampou reported the incident to the British officials Messrs Gunny and Welson. The British officials reported to King Amaran who secured the release of one of the women. But when the other person refused to release the woman he had purchased, the British attacked and destroyed Sampou (Owonaro, 1948 and 2006).

In the Western Delta, Chief BekederemoOgein was a wealthy Ijaw merchant-prince, a direct sixth generation descendant of Mein, founder of the Mein clan. He owned a steam ship and built what has been described as an expensive palace. In his day, he was reckoned to have been an advocate of fair trading in defence of small-time traders on the River Forcados and records hold that he fought many battles in his advocacy for equity and justice especially in favour of the poor in society. He was a promoter of both traditional home-grown and Western European education as evidenced in the large number of his children that he sent to school. His eldest son Chief FuluduBekederemo became very industrious and famous in trade and politics and was in attendance at the 1941 Western Nigeria Chiefs Conference. Chief BekederemoOgein was the

great grandfather of Chief Edwin Kiagbodo Clark, Professor John Pepper Clark and their other illustrious siblings.

Certainly, the period of the European adventure in Ijawland, as in virtually all parts of Africa, which lasted for about four hundred and fifty years, was an era of enormous challenges just as it was an era of tremendous aptitudes and strides of achievements by the Ijaw. From the arrival of the first Europeans – the Portuguese – in about 1450, to the coming of the British in the 18th century, to the establishment of colonial rule at the beginning of the 20th century, the Ijaw thrived in resilience and determination. Although entire towns were destroyed and peoples displaced during the slave trade, the trade, especially in the era of the succeeding agricultural produce trade dubbed the “legitimate trade,” also led to increased population and wealth in different parts of Ijawland and occasioned the migrations of entire towns and states from the more exposed coastal areas, to more hidden and certainly, more secured inland locations.

For instance, King Willie Braide of the Kalabari state of Bakana led his people from Elem Kalabari (old Kalabari) on the Rio Real (the River Bonny), to found the new town of Bakana in 1880. King EkineBobmanuel, Chief Young Briggs, Chief AkpanaGeorgewill, and Chief Kaladokubo Standfast Jack, left the same location with their people and founded Abonema in 1882, and King Abbi Amakiri did likewise and established Buguma in 1884. Similarly, King Jaja (as he afterwards became), left the Kingdom of Bonny on the Rio Real and went inland to establish the Kingdom of Opobo in 1870 ((Jaja, 1821 – 1891).

Thus, the formation of viable and evidently civilized and complex states and state institutions and the sustenance of the resultant states was certainly the most significant activity of the Ijaw in the early, middle and late era of European adventure in Ijawland. However, also very indispensably significant is the fact that it was during this era that the first five university graduates in Ijawland graduated. They were Herbert Jumbo from Bonny who graduated as an external candidate from Liverpool College, University of London, England in 1856; John Jumbo, also from Bonny. He graduated from Durham University, England in 1878; and Robert Abrakassa-Igbeta from Nembe, who got his degree from the Isle of Man, England, in 1888; Josiah DikiboAkidiyeBatubo from Buguma, Kalabari, graduated from Colwyn Bay, Wales, in 1909, and Isaac Williams Osika from Okrika graduated as an external candidate from Durham University in 1923 (Fioforiet al., 2009).

Ijaw Activisms in the Era of British Dominance

Although the Ijaw had evolved state institutions that attained appreciable levels of sophistication before the British advent in the 18th and 19th centuries, it is a known fact of history that by 1900 they, as other peoples of contemporary Nigeria and West Africa, had been subjugated. And that was through crafty persuasion or conquest, in what the historian Professor J.U.J. Asiegbu has summarized clearly in his seminal book entitled *Nigeria and Her British Invaders* (Asiegbu, 1984). From the Nineteenth century, the British made carefully orchestrated efforts to change the pattern of commercial engagement. By the exploratory activity of Richard and John Lander, the British had come to the realization that the River Niger flows east through the length of Nigeria into the Atlantic Ocean through the Niger Delta, the home of the Ijaw. To gain access to the resources and trade in the interior and to eventually control it therefore, the British systematically gave up the slave trade, an initiative that was enhanced by the conditions enabled by the Industrial Revolution. Upon that, they began to persuade the trading states of Ijawland to sign treaties of protection from other European powers and neighboring interlopers and attackers who

preyed on the trade. But such treaties were actually intended to subvert the sovereignty of the traditional Ijaw states (Alagoa, 1999).

Subsequently, from the 1880s, they started changing the terms of trade by establishing Courts of Equity with laws promulgated by themselves in displacement of local law enforcement. These new strategies led to several wars of resistance consequent upon which several Ijaw kings were deported by the British to foreign lands. The British subterfuge also led to the destruction of various communities and subsequently, to the establishment of colonial government between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

But even in this era of British incursions, the Ijaw people were not mere onlookers or docile weaklings willing to be subdued. Having been active on the international scene of trade and politics, and having played host to various Europeans dating back to hundreds of years, the Ijaw were quite civilised and well aware of the motives of the British. But they were actually constrained by the existing conditions and dynamics of the trade with which they had become so intertwined with, and were actually no match with the British in capital, men, technology, arms and ammunitions. Notwithstanding however, the Ijaw states and towns still put-up fierce resistance to the British attempt to stop the slave trade (which had become one of the fulcrums upon which the economy of the Niger Delta rested at the time), as well as the attempt to usurp the trade through the Royal Niger Company, and to undermine the Ijaw economic and political independence. Accordingly, when the Niger company's conditions of trade and administration became too stringent and strangulating, the various Ijaw kings resisted it at different times.

King William DappaPepple of Bonny opposed the British by continuing the trade in slaves and was deported to England, but later released and restored to his throne after he converted to Christianity and vouched to cooperate with the British in the course of the abolition. King Jaja of Opobo founded the Kingdom of Opobo in response to the rivalry and disputes arising from the dynamics of the trade local and international trade within the Bonny Kingdom and beyond. Several years after ascending the throne of Opobo, he was deported and died in exile. Similarly, King Ibanichuka of Okrika was taken into custody by the British and died in the process (Ogan, 1999).

In 1860 and again in 1867, the people of the vicinity of the Rivers Nun/Forcados confluence town of Agbere (in Bayelsa State) revolted against the British government and its Royal Niger Company for sending steamers up the River Nun, which was their traditional trading territory. The Agbere boldly challenged the British to a duel in what has only recently been tagged by this writer as "the Agbere/British War. Consequently, Agbere was bombarded twice, but it remains a fact of history as scholars would agree, that they had made a statement that they could not be taken for weaklings. In 1895, King Koko of Nembe and his trading partners stood-up to the British by attacking and rendering the deport of the Royal Niger Company at Akassa inoperable. That attack eventually led to the abrogation of the charter of the Royal Niger Company, the abolition of the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1899 and the establishment of the Southern Nigeria Protectorate in 1900 (Alagoa, 1995). The Southern Nigeria Protectorate would, in 1906, be amalgamated with the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos (which had been created in 1861), to become the contemporary Southern Nigeria. Then, in January, 1914, the Southern and Northern Nigeria Protectorates were amalgamated to constitute the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Thus, from the foregoing narrative, it is glaring that the Ijaw people and Bayelsa State to be specific, were significant to the decision that led to the creation of Nigeria.

Beyond this significance, many Ijaw sons and daughters of the colonial era were involved in educational pursuits, indigenous business entrepreneurships and other areas of human endeavor. And it is noticeable from the submissions of scholars that it was in this era that the Ijaw began to produce their pioneer medical doctors, legal practitioners and other professionals.

Ijaw Actualization in the Era Towards Nigeria's Independence

Available oral and written literature reveal that the Ijaw began to constitute themselves into modern organizations geared towards the establishment of a common identity a generation before, and in the immediate years leading to Nigeria's independence from Britain. The move towards forging a common Ijaw identity was organized for five or perhaps more reasons. First, was the actualization of a unified front of all the Ijaw peoples across Nigeria and the world, second, to utilize that united front to ensure full Ijaw representation and participation in the emerging political process in Nigeria, third, to ensure the advancement of Ijawland in human and environmental capital development towards a prosperous future, fourth, to agitate for an all-Ijaw state or states within the greater Nigerian geopolitical sphere, and as a consequence of the latter, to ensure greater powers in the control, utilization and distribution of the resources found in Ijawland.

The original attempts of the forging of associations that brought Ijaw people together in the emerging Nigerian urban and semi-urban centers especially in the modern era of the twentieth century, a few decades before Nigeria's independence, was primarily to organize themselves culturally for kinship purposes and to render assistance to one another in times of need. This was actually vital since the Ijaw constituted a minority ethnic group in most of the emerging townships generally far away from the homeland. Ijaw groups constituted themselves to town unions and subsequently to regional and later into all-Ijaw unions in the developing cities of Lagos, Ibadan, Warri, Burutu, Port Harcourt, Aba, Enugu, Kano, Kaduna, and in the Diaspora – on the West Coast and other parts of Africa, in London, the United States of America, etc.

The first recorded significant All-Ijaw conference towards Ijaw self-actualization and move towards greater recognition and identity through state creation in pre-independence modern Nigeria was in 1942 at Bomadi. The objective was to demand the separation of the Ijaw from the Owerri Province, and to create a separate province for all the Ijaw people in the geographical areas that constituted the erstwhile Niger Coast Protectorate. Next was the All-Ijaw Conference at Onitsha in 1944. It demanded the creation of Rivers State and commissioned a delegation to meet with the colonial governor of Nigeria, Sir John Macpherson, to discuss the Ijaw question. These meetings were certainly the immediate factors that led to the creation of the Rivers Province from Owerri Province in 1947. Then in 1949, the Ijaw Union was formed and its convocation led to the presentation of a memorandum towards the creation of a separate homogenous region composed of the Ijaw geographical areas of Nigeria. The Ijaw Union met again in 1952 and demanded an Ijaw state that would unify the Ijaw living to the east and west of the River Niger.

By 1953, the Rivers State Congress had been formed and met the Premier of the Eastern Region and demanded the creation of Rivers State. That stride was repeated in 1956 with the formation and meeting of the Rivers Chiefs and Peoples Conference which sent a delegation to London to meet the Secretary of State for the colonies to demand for the creation of Rivers State. Between 1957/58, the Rivers Chiefs and Peoples Conference presented a memorandum for the creation of Rivers State at the pre-independence Constitutional Conference at the Lancaster House

Conference, London, and at the Willink's Commission hearings on Minority Rights on the Niger Delta and other peoples. Subsequently in 1964, following to Nigeria's independence in 1960 and her becoming a Republic in 1963, the Ijaw State Union carried on its quest for an Ijaw state by visiting President Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Belewa, for a constitutional review geared towards the creation of Rivers State.

All the above efforts at a definitive Ijaw national identity and self-actualisation during the two decades leading to Nigeria's independence were carried out by an evidently outstanding corp of Ijaw sons in their twenties and thirties. Amongst them were, in no particular order, Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye (from Bonny, Eastern Ijaw), Chief E.P. Okoya (Ekpetiama, Northern Ijaw), HRM King Francis OsamadeAlagoa (Ogbolomabiri, Eastern Ijaw), HRM King Benjamin Wari (Bassambiri, Eastern Ijaw), Barr. S.N. Dikibo (Okrika, Eastern Ijaw), Chief (AIG Retd.) P.H.E. Brisibe (Ojobo, Western Ijaw), Chief MelfordObieneOkilo (Ogbia/Nembe, Eastern Ijaw), Chief NinetryIzonbodo (Agbere, Western Ijaw), Chief Lawrence ReigbuduNabena (Aduku, Western Ijaw), Chief P.A. George Weikezi (Western Ijaw), Chief Wenike Briggs (Kalabari, Eastern Ijaw), Chief Nicholas Abo Frank-Opigo (Angiama, Southern Ijaw), Dr. I.J.M. Fiberesima (Okrika, Eastern Ijaw), Barr. R.P.G. Okara (Ekpetiama, Northern Ijaw), Chief G.B.C. Otoko (Andoni, Eastern Ijaw), etc.

Sequel to all the foregoing strides towards Ijaw emancipation, cohesion, self-actualization and greater powers in the control, utilization and distribution of the resources found in their land, the struggles and meetings of the Ijaw through the personalities listed above and others not mentioned, paid off in the actualization of Nigeria's independence and more so in the post-independence era as shall be highlighted below.

Ijaw Achievements in the Post-Independence Era

The post-independence era in Nigeria was one of tremendous achievements for the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality. Perhaps the most significant and historic of the achievements of this era is the incident that has been severally dubbed "The Twelve-Day Revolution," or "Creek Revolution" by scholars. On the 23rd February, 1966, Isaac Jasper AdakaBoro and his companions – Samuel Owonaru and Nottingham Dick embarked on an epic mission in defiance of the Nigerian state typified by two governments viz: The Government of the Eastern Region and the Federal Government of Nigeria. The agitation was primarily motivated by the need for the development of the Niger Delta, the home of the Ijaw, and to give its people greater inclusion in the affairs of the region. The Ijaw and their neighbours, it was obvious, were clearly oppressed by the dominant tribe, the Igbo, who had more population and occupied the top political offices in the Eastern Region of Nigeria at the time. Isaac Boro thus declared the Niger Delta Republic. For him, there was no reason why the Niger Delta where crude oil has been discovered in commercial quantity in 1956 and has begun yielding revenue for the government, should be underdeveloped and deprived of the most basic social amenities such as hospitals, schools and other facilities and its people wallowing in abject poverty (Boro, 1982).

Besides the Isaac Boro epic revolution, the post-independent era in Nigeria was quite eventful. The era saw the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War, the strength and resilience of the Ijaw in that war in which majority of Ijaw people supported the one-Nigeria mantra, and welcomed the creation of Rivers State on the 29th of May, 1967. Rivers State was a fitting reward for all Ijaw people, but a great commendation to the personalities listed earlier, Chief Dappa-Biriye and others, that had led the struggle for the creation of its precursor, the Rivers Province in 1947. It

was also a dream realized for Isaac Boro himself, who had led the armed revolution, though he had fought for a larger Niger Delta-wide republic.

Although, the Ijaw had to share Rivers State with its non-Ijaw mostly upland neighbors, and were still distant from their kith and kin in the Western Delta, the creation of Rivers State represented a major stride in the Ijaw efforts towards self-actualization and greater inclusion within the Nigerian geopolitical space.

In all, while it is true that Ijaw people have had several social organizations and meetings at home in Nigeria and in the diaspora through the ages, it is a glaring fact of history, that there was no world-wide Ijaw organization that unified all Ijaw people globally with a universal acceptance from all the subgroups before the founding of the Ijaw National Congress (INC) in 1991 (A Brief History of the Ijaw National Congress, 2006). Prior to the founding of the INC, there had been several Ijaw organizations. Among the early Ijaw organizations some of which we had mentioned earlier were, the Ijaw Rivers Peoples League (1942), All Ijaw Conference (1944), Ijaw Union (1949), Rivers State Congress (1953), Rivers Chiefs and Peoples Conference (1956), Ijaw State Union (1964), the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (1966), and in the diaspora (all still in existence) – the Ijaw Peoples Association, founded in London in 1948 by Lawrence Okorodudu and others; and several community-based Ijaw associations in the United Kingdom; the Ijaw National Congress of Germany, and the Ijaw National Alliance of the Americas (INAA) founded in 1995. The INAA works in close cooperation with the Ijaw Foundation and the apex pan-Ijaw association being the Ijaw National Congress.

The founding of the Ijaw National Congress (INC) in 1991 therefore remains one of the greatest achievements of the Ijaw in the post-independence Nigeria. This is so because not only has the INC been pivotal in unifying the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality, it is only evident that it was very strategic in the creation of the first homogenous Ijaw state in Nigeria – Bayelsa State. Although there exist the acknowledged linguistic and historical differences that sometimes tend to influence certain persons to dispute the homogeneity of Bayelsa State, it remains a proven fact that the INC has been a unifier above all dissension. But there is what shall be herein described as a 21st century Achilles hill, the partisan divide in Nigerian politics lingers. What the Ijaw experience had been around this and other challenges that abound, and what solutions could be proffered as imperatives for Bayelsa State, is what the next segment of this discourse is geared to address.

The Ijaw Experience and Imperatives for Bayelsa State in the 21st Century

As is profound in this treatise, the Ijaw experience of historic challenges and strides has been an ancient one, going back thousands of years from antiquity to the 21st century AD. The thesis of the narrative is the evidence that the Ijaw evolved a civilization in the Niger Delta, despite the difficulties and vicissitudes of their daily existence that has lasted for an admirable six thousand years and more. That culture which has long attained a high altitude of sophistication has imbedded in it, timeless values based on the agelong experience of the people which bequeaths definite imperatives for the Ijaw of the 21st century, and specifically for its only ethnically homogenous state of Bayelsa.

What then are the imperatives that the Ijaw experience bequeaths and demands? First, the Ijaw experience bequeaths a wealthy environment in one of the greatest deltas in the world – the Niger Delta. Home to the Ijaw ethnic nationality for six or more millennia, the Delta is rich in

minerals, flora and fauna, and has been the subject and center for innumerable studies on the environment. The book – The Future of the Niger Delta, holds the articles presented at the History concourse of 2007. Also, the book The Niger Delta Environment as Resource and Reserve, published in 2011, was the outcome of a two-day concourse on the subject of the environment (Alagoa, 2011). Second, the Ijaw experience bequeaths an extensive, virtually endless economic resource base that dates back in time from the very origin of the ethnic nationality, following their entry into the Niger Delta, to the present. The resources held by their land have long been utilized, certainly inexhaustibly, for research, industrial, agricultural and tourism investment or leisure purposes. Third, the Ijaw sojourn in the Niger Delta bequeaths a robust traditional educational system based on the provenly rich history, folktales, proverbs, praise-poems, dance, drama, costumes and cuisines of the Ijaw that have attained international acclaim from the era of the Atlantic trade to the present.

Based on the foregoing therefore, the imperatives for the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality and its only ethnically homogenous Bayelsa State in the 21st Century are as follows:

1. Environment: There is the need to harness the opportunities presented by the Ijaw homestead – the Niger Delta environment and its resources, in minerals, geographical, flora and fauna resources for industrial purposes profitable for investors and indigenes alike. Minerals available in abundance are the well-known crude oil and gas with its entire value chain in exploration, drilling, haulage, waste management, equipment leasing, materials and labor supplies, byproducts manufacturing etc. At present, siting a petroleum waste management facility anywhere in the Delta, but especially in Bayelsa State, would be profitable for investors and the state.

The fact that Brine (seawater or salt-water) was used by the Ijaw in manufacturing salt in ancient times in the Niger Delta has been established earlier in this discourse. That industry still holds enormous prospects today. Bayelsa State has abundant saltwater suitable for the manufacture of sea-salt, known around the world for its richness and health benefits. The earth crust is also rich in silica sand, used in manufacturing glass. Regarding geographical resources, wind and hydro energy sources abound in the Niger Delta coastline and in its waterways. Bayelsa State for instance, has the longest continuous coastline in Nigeria. Wind energy can be harnessed to provide electricity for industrial development.

Of floral resources, the oil palm tree, we had already indicated, has from antiquity, offered and still presents enormous opportunities for local and foreign consumption, transcending domestic and industrial uses. And its cousin the Raffia palm is wealthy source for various important products ranging from wines, to raffia and to grubs beetles suitable for food. Similarly, the Nipa palm which is of course very disturbingly invasive on the mangrove forest, has been utilized in the production of wine, paper and pulp. The Coconut tree has also been of economic significance, due to its having virtually all the properties of a palm tree. The mangrove tree has long been a source of livelihood for the Ijaw of the Eastern Delta saltwater zone. Its excellent timber has long been utilized for building houses privately by individuals, but has recently seen an upsurge in its usage at an industrial scale. Nevertheless, it is still plenteous for harvesting by interested investors, who should also be willing to invest in a replanting programme for every tree fell, so as to avoid depletion made worse by the invasive nipa palm. Other plants that have been cultivated from olden to present times that have commercial value are rice, rubber, cocoa, plantain, bananas, cassava and various spices of which the Grain-of-paradise or Alligator Pepper,

was an international product of trade exported by the Ijaw of the Niger Delta to Britain, Europe and other parts of the world.

Concerning fauna, the imperative is to leverage on the rich animal resources in fishes, shell fishes, crustaceans, mammals, reptiles, birds and insects that are in abundance in the Ijaw homeland, for increased local consumption and export. Bayelsa State has been reckoned as the last sanctuary of the Niger Delta Red colobus monkey Edumanom forest. The present government in Bayelsa State, as is well known, has made very significant strides in attracting investors to invest in the agricultural sector of the state. Nevertheless, it indeed bids the imagination, when in course of their history the Ijaw lost their taste for the vast more delicious meat varieties derived via hunting the animals in their rich forests, for cow meat which has been adjudged much less tasteful and unhealthy. Same situation applies to a lesser extent with fish, arising from the obvious depletion of fish resources in the rivers due to several known factors, and the massive importation of what has been tagged “iced-fish” into Nigeria from the 1980s, and the small to largescale breeding of fishes by individuals and corporate organizations.

2. Economy: Scholars and researchers of various descriptions are generally agreed that one of the major imperatives for progress and peace in the Niger Delta and the states therein is the industrialization of the region. Given the enormous resources we had highlighted above and more, it goes without saying that Ijawland has more than the requisite material resources for its own industrial revolution. And that revolution has to start with each village and town owning its own business or businesses, without having to depend on the government for everything. As it was in Ijawland in ancient times and in the 19th and 20th century, the Ijaw industrial revolution should as a matter of necessity, involve enterprising individuals as entrepreneurs who establish business ventures in agriculture, trading or manufacturing, that would employ their kith and kins and other non-relatives as workers who earn their wages by working the business. Apart from the manufacturing industries, trading opportunities and profits from products, goods and services abound in the traditional markets, and more recently, in established and emerging online platforms. This is why the recent programme launched by the Bayelsa State Government to increase the bandwidth of internet services in the state, and the training and graduation of youths on various computer/internet-related skillsets has been deemed as germane steps towards a prosperous future for youths.

3. Education: A major imperative for the Ijaw in the 21st century is the need to develop its youths towards surpassing the achievements of the Ijaw heroes and heroines in education and intellectual advancement in all relevant fields of endeavor. It is a well-documented fact of ancient and recent history that although the Ijaw have made great strides in all spheres of existence, by producing pioneers in many academic and other fields, several uncanny conditions such as lack of jobs, drug addiction, cultism and violence still exist in Ijawland and its neighboring ethnic nationalities. And the only solution to the vices is massive investment in the education of the youths. But the advocacy on education itself now speaks of education that is pragmatic, purposeful and relevant to the daily realities of life. There are thus huge investment opportunities in technical and vocational education especially as it relates cyber technology; business education transcending three major interests being oil and gas, agriculture and tourism. This model of education should traverse all aspects of the productive and distributive economy in the identified sectors. The Ijaw should also be at the vanguard of promoting political education in order to develop widespread awareness and a healthy political culture in Ijawland. That is for the purpose of getting fully and effectively involved in the political process as contestants or voters.

And to know how to de-emphasize political affiliations and differences for the unfettered development of the ethnic nationality, and for its advancement when its survival is at stake, especially in relation to external forces and factors.

CONCLUSION

This essay has been a treatise reminiscent of the experiences and strides of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality from its ancient roots to contemporary times. The central thesis of the essay is that the Ijaw has had a historic past that was both productive and prosperous, despite the challenges posed by the homeland environment in the Niger Delta and the dynamics of the ancient to modern economic and political engagements. The author advocates three imperatives for the Ijaw, and specifically for Bayelsa State in the 21st Century. His advocacy speaks of the need to harness the endowments of the environment by exploring the evidently rich natural resources for progress. The author expresses the indispensability of initiating an entrepreneurship, community and local government council areas-based Ijaw Industrial Revolution programme if the ethnic nationality must make progress economically. This he says shall reduce the overdependence and pressure on governments at all levels. He also highlights the third imperative as the promotion of technical, business and political education for wealth generation, awareness and general progress.

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