

AROCHUKWU IN THE NIGERIAN ECONOMIC EQUATION, 1900-1960

Ihuoma Elizabeth Obienusi
Department of History and International Studies,
NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

The Arochukwu community exhibits a high degree of social and economic mobility, which can be attributed to their innate business acumen, entrepreneurial ingenuity, and impressive cognitive abilities. These traits have enabled them to excel as merchants and traders while demonstrating exceptional intellectual prowess. The strategic location of Arochukwu in the Cross River basin positioned them securely to control the then booming slave trade in Igboland and beyond as middleman to European slave merchants. Strikingly, the slave trade was the major significant economic activity that Aro people were known to have engaged in which also gave them fame and made them establish settlements outside their native Aro. The community was distinguished by its association with the esteemed IbiniUkpabi oracle, a revered institution in Igboland that was also referred to as long Juju by the British colonial authorities. This oracle played a significant role in the cultural, spiritual and social fabric of the region. It was widely believed that the oracle possesses awesome powers such that it could deliver instant judgment and kill the guilty party. For this widely held belief, it was consulted by people from far and near. The study through a critical analysis of primary and secondary sources, explores the economic significance of Arochukwu in Nigeria's Economic Equation between 1900 to 1960, shedding light on the town's contribution to the country's economic growth and development. Finding revealed that Aro migration spirit to other towns and cities laid the foundation for Igbo entrepreneurial apprenticeship in Nigeria. The study recommends the integration of Igbo diaspora communities into south east economic development and Nigeria as a whole.

Keyword: Arochukwu, Migration, Igboland, Economic development, slave trade

Introduction

Arochukwu is the third largest city in Abia state after (Aba and Umuahia) in south-eastern Nigeria, and homeland of the Igbo subgroup, Aro people.¹ The population of Aro is approximately 60,000,² and it is composed of 19 villages with an overall leader called EzeAro. It has a common boundary with Cross River and Akwa-Ibom states. Arochukwu is accessible through the Umuahia and Arochukwu trunk A road.³ It is a border Igbo community and speaks Igbo language with varied dialects as a result of waves of migration from different locations across Igbo land. It is one of the communities that are classified as Cross River Igbo together with Abiriba, Ohafia, Ihichima and Abam.⁴ They are distinctly matrilineal.

The Aro, as other Igbo communities, migrated from the Middle East and won the land from the inhabitants, the Ibibios, after series of wars. These wars had a historic impact on the town.⁵ For instance, the leader of the Ibibio warriors who fought the war was captured and slain at Oro village and this is why Oro became the Chieftaincy village due to its strategic location, historical significance, cultural and spiritual importance, and administrative and political significance, all contributed to its status as the Chieftaincy village of the Arochukwu kingdom. AmikpeObinkita became the centre where these defected warriors were judged. ie “Amikpe” means “war” or battle in

the Arochukwu dialect “Obinkita” means “warriors” or “fighters”, so AmikpeObinkita was an important institution in Arochukwu, where defeated warriors were judged and held accountable for their actions, thereby promoting social order and accountability within the community.⁶ This also is why Aro villages assemble at Obinkita during the Ikeji festival. Any village that is not represented was fined by the entire Aro. Arochukwu is a principal historic town in Igboland and every Aro indigene is a proud person due to the fact that they are the cultural Chief. Arochukwu is believed to be the ancestral homeland of many Igbo communities with many communities tracing the origins back to Arochukwu. It plays a significant role in promoting, preserving Igbo culture and traditions i.e Arochukwu Afia-ori festival, Igbo new yam festival, traditional marriage ceremonies, Igbo cultural renaissance, Aro Oracle, Igbo-ukwuetc. Their culture is being exemplarily practiced in all Igboland and this is how the Aro-Okigbo came about. The slave era found most Aro people migrating to all parts of Nigeria spreading the religion of Aro heritage as result of their rich and unique religious heritage which could be seen in their practice of aminism, worshipping various deities and spirits associated with nature, ancestors, and cosmos; like kamalu, Ibini-ukpabi, ancestor worship, and divination/oracle. Hence, Igbo communities who are neighbors to Arochukwu shared similar religious practices like Ibibio communities, Efik communities, Ututu community, Aba community, Ohafia community etc. This was as a result of population pressure which caused Igbo migration from the North into Ibibio areas starting from the 15th century. Also availability of fertile land and the regions natural resources made it attractive destination for settlers. Besides the middles east has a long history of conflicts and war so Aro people might have been displaced by war or conflict, leading them to migrate to a more peaceful region. This heritage, became adopted by the host in all the cities and towns in Igboland where an Aro man lived.⁷

By the mid-18th century, there was dispersion of several Aro business families from their homeland into the Igbo hinterland and adjacent areas.⁸ The dispersion or movement into the Northern hinterland up to parts of southern Igbo areas were facilitated by their middlemen role in the slave trade and as agents of Ibini Ukpabi Oracle. The mystery surrounding the IbiniUkpabi and the awesome powers attributed to it gave Arochukwu people prestige and protection, which made them enjoy unfettered movement across the length and breadth of Igbo land. In addition to this were the services of some of their neighbouring Igbo mercenary communities of Ohafia, AbamandEdda.⁹ Unarguably, these warrior groups helped Arochukwu people move around freely without molestation, which enabled them to carry out the middlemen trade and enjoyed a long period of relative economic prosperity. At the height of their economic prosperity and influence, Aro people founded satellite settlement outside their native homeland (but not tributary states) scattered in different parts of Igbo land.¹⁰ Some of the better-known settlements include: Arondizogu, Aro-Okigwe, Aro-Ayama, Aro-Okporoenyi (Umuahia) Aro-Ngwa, Aro-Isuochi (Abia state), Aro-Ajalli (Anambra), Aro-Abakaliki (Ebonyi), Aro-Amuro, Aro-Ihuba, Aro-Obinikpa, Aro-Ubahuetc (Imo state)AroNgwa (Enugu), Aro- Ezinachi and Aro Ikwere in Rivers state. From these locations, Aro people sourced and traded on slaves, while raiding recalcitrant communities with the help of mercenaries from Abam and ohafia.¹¹

Arochukwu was also one of the cities in the southern protectorate conquered by the British colonial government.¹² several historic tourist sites exist in the city. The mystic IbiniUkpabi, the slave route and other relics of the slave trade era are frequently visited by tourists. It is also in the food belt of Abia state where most of the staple foods are produced.¹³ Therefore, Arochukwu history represents a medley of culture and tradition, a community characterized by the influence of external cultural traits and a melting pot. It is from this standpoint that this paper examines; the pre-colonial economy of Arochukwu (1900) when Nigeria came under British rule, impact of colonialism on Arochukwu's economic growth and development, Arochukwu's role in the Nigerian economic equation and ends

with conclusion. The terminal year of this study (1960), marked the period Nigeria regained her independence from the colonial master.

Theoretical Framework

Dependency theory by Andre Gunder Frank and that of Vicent Ferraro is being applied to Arochukwu in the Nigerian Economic Equation. Andre Gunder's theory focused on individual nations, their roles as suppliers of raw materials, cheap labour, and markets for expansive manufactured goods from industrialized countries.¹⁴ the unequal exchange relationship between developed and developing countries was viewed as contributing to poor economic growth. It goes further and indicates that rich countries cause dependence by destabilizing the weak countries and causing them to be in need. The rich exploit the raw materials of poor countries and lead these countries to debt for their benefit. Thus, dependency theory is a concept based on the global relation of economic domination and exploitation by the more economically powerful countries over the less economically powerful countries. As a result of the unequal distribution of power and resources, some countries have developed at a faster pace than others.¹⁵

Also, Vicent Ferraro defined dependency as an explanation of the economic development of a state in terms of the external influence: political, economic, and cultural, on national development policies. It is a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subject to. The dependency theory introduces an interpretation of relations in international economy characterized by dependency which makes economy of one country "conditioned by the development and expansion of another country to which the former is subjected to".¹⁷ This leads to the idea that underdevelopment in a country is a direct consequence of expansion or development in other country on which the former depends on.

Proponents of dependency theory see structures and processes of world economy as having inbuilt biases leading to relations of dependency which directly causes the underdevelopment in the third world. The inequality can be explained in terms of dependency relations in trade, finance and technology. "This system is a dependent one because it reproduces a productive system whose development is limited by those world relations which necessarily lead to development of only certain economic sector's to trade under unequal conditions with international capital under unequal condition to the imposition of super-exploitation of domestic labour force with a view to dividing economic surplus this generated between internal and external forces of domination".¹⁸ Using Arochukwu as a case study, it is the view of this paper that the inequalities in terms of trade, finance and technology was as a result of dependency relations.

Dependency is a historical condition which shapes a certain structure of the world economy such that it favours some countries to the detriment of others and limits the development possibilities of the subordinate economics; a situation in which the economy of a certain group of countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which their own is subjected. There are three common features to these definitions which most dependency theorists share. First, dependency characterizes the international system as comprised of two sets of states, variously described as dominant/dependent, centre/periphery or metropolitan/satellite.¹⁹ The dominant states are the advanced industrial nations in the organisation of Economic co-operation and development (OECD). The dependent states are Africa which have low per capita GNDPs and which rely heavily on the export of a single commodity for foreign exchange earnings.

Second, both definitions have in common the assumption that external forces are of singular importance to the economic activities within the dependent states. These external forces include multi-national corporations, international commodity markets, foreign assistance, communication and any other means by which the advanced industrialized countries can represent their economic interests abroad.

Third, the definitions of dependency all indicate that the relations between dominant and dependent states are dynamic because the interactions between the two sets of states tend to not only reinforce but also intensify the unequal patterns. Therefore, Arochukwu's position in Nigeria's economic equation is characterized by its role as satellite in the metropolis–satellite relationship. The town's export of primary commodities and import of manufactured goods perpetuate unequal exchange and underdevelopment. To break this circle, Arochukwu and Nigeria as a whole must prioritize economic diversification, industrialization, and regional development to reduce dependence on the centre and promote more equitable economic interactions.

Arochukwu's Pre-Colonial Economy; 1800-1900

The Aro, also known as Umuchukwu (children of the Supreme God and custodian of the great Chukwu of Arochukwu- IbiniUkpabi), are a people whose home base in the city of Arochukwu is the last Igbo settlement before the Cross river in the south-eastern region of the area now known as Nigeria. Long before the Portuguese and the British arrived at the coast of West Africa, the city-states of Arochukwu had developed into a highly organized and progressive power, supported by a hierarchy of priests and chiefs who were agents of the all-powerful (God), Ibini-Ukpabi, the AroGod.²⁰ Though the Aro may settle among other cultures away from the Aro homeland, they still maintained their customs and traditions.

The history of the Aro goes back to the Igbo migration and founding of the kingdom of Arochukwu. Before the Igbo started arriving in the 17th century; the Ibibio lived in many scattered communities between the Imo and Cross River where they arrived through the Benue and plateau area. Population pressure caused Igbo migrations from the north into the Ibibio areas starting in the 15th century. Tensions escalated especially when the last and heaviest phases of migrations occurred in the 17th century. The Aro-Ibibio wars and the migration of the Akpa from east of the Cross River formed the nation. This began during the turning point of the 17th century to the 18th century. The Igbo and Akpa alliance defeated the original inhabitant Ibibio after several long years of warfare.²¹ By this time the slave trade was popular in the hinterland. The mid-18th century saw the start of mass migrations of Aro businessmen and slave raiders. Priest of IbiniUkpabi, spread the religion and the Aro confederacy was in power. Aro culture and influence spread, until it went into a downfall during the last quarter of the 19th century. This was due to the abolition of slavery and the penetration of the Europeans mainly British colonists. This resulted in Aro dominance being drastically decreased enough for British to occupy eastern Nigeria. Not only did the Aro suffer a defeat, but a terrible loss of importance and influence throughout Igboland.

The Aro have a very rich tradition. One factor is the Ekpe society which is a sacred cult originally from east of the Cross River.²² The highly religious and judicial cult took a major part in Aro cultism. The use of the writing system, Nsibidi, was based on secret societies like Ekpe. Another is the IbiniUkpabi shrine, who was a mediating god among the Aro. They influenced neighbours and allies before the British invasion. The shrine was used for selling slaves during the slave trade. The Ekeleke masquerade activity was important in Aro settlements rather than Ekpe. Brought from the Aro in the western Niger Delta, it eventually spread to the Oguta area.

In the account of Afigbo while recognizing the role and contribution of other groups in the evolution of the long-distance trade and the economic activities of the period has however been consistent in giving credit to Arochukwu people for establishing the largest and most extensive flourishing trading networks and routes in the Northern Igbo hinterland.²³ A network that extended to all parts of Igbo land and stretched to the southern Igbo areas. Pointedly, the Aro middlemen commercial activities are not very transparent as it cannot be pinned down to any specific line of trade save the fact that they were agents of the famous long Juju. Hence, the shrine was corrupted, commercialized and used for selling slaves during slave trade. During this period, the organization of trade in Igbo land was done on the basis and strength of specialty. For instance, communities such as Awka and Nkwerre were known for their skill in blacksmithing. Abiriba were noted not only for their skill in blacksmithing and firearms but were famous as wood and motifs carvers.

But, Afigbo unarguably noted that Arochukwu's Ibini Ukpabi was the most famous and respected Oracle throughout Igbo land. It is perhaps in this sense that some historians have asserted that the Aro was the most famous commercial traders in the Igbo hinterland. Though the Aro lives at the coastal fringes of Cross River and Ibibio areas which gave them some advantage and facilitated trade links with the early Europeans yet the Aro did not utilize this natural head start but instead concentrated on the trade boom of the period (slave trade) in which they enjoyed a virtual monopoly. Despite the boom associated with the slave trade and the random distribution of some European wares that aided in slave-raiding to accomplices, Arochukwu people did not rival in any other trade nor did they establish economic control or hegemony over Igbo land. It was therefore hardly surprising that it was during the slave trade that Aro influence reached its zenith. As Afigbo noted "in eastern Igbo land, the Aro dominated directly in the distribution of foreign goods as well as in the assembling of slaves for sale to the coastal middlemen. He pointed out that; the wealth of the Aro Oligarchy and its ascendancy was based on the slave trade."²⁵

This work then summarizes that Arochukwu people have a high pedigree of social and economic mobility, and are imbued with such craftiness that proved them as shrewd merchants and at the same time exhibited high intellectual acumen. They were famous for possessing one of the most powerful, respected and fearsome oracle in Igbo land called long Juju by the British, and Ibini-Ukpabi by the indigenes.

Impact of Colonialism on Arochukwu Economy

British colonialism in the late 19th century turned Anglo-Aro relations sour. Aro leaders knew that Christianity, colonialism and end of their monopoly would destroy Aro economic rule.²⁶ Also the British felt that repeated Aro attacks rendered outright war inescapable. They made plans for war in 1899. The conflict had both religious and economic causes. Aro traders and the Royal Niger Company had their own issues. An Aro invasion of Obegu in 1901 started the Anlo-Aro war; in 1902, following a direct attack on Arochukwu and months of fighting, the British were victorious. The Aro confederacy's power was shattered making it easier for the British to take over the Eastern Nigeria region although resistance in the area was far from over. Although Aro dominance crumbled in March 1902, many Aro took part in later resistance against the British in the region such as Afikpo (1902-1903), Ezza (1905), and other areas where the Aro had a particularly significant presence.²⁷

British forces captured Arochukwu, destroyed the Ibini-Ukpabi shrine and implemented policies to weaken the confederacy's political structure. The war effectively marked the end of Aro autonomy; and the colonial administration introduced new political and economic systems that bypassed traditional Aro leadership. The fall of the Arochukwu confederacy marked a turning point in the

region. British colonial policies dismantled much of the indigenous social and political framework that the Aro had cultivated over centuries. Though British forces dismantled the Arochukwu confederacy, its legacy endures in the cultural and historical identity of south-eastern Nigeria. The confederacy's trade networks laid a foundation for the region's commerce development, influencing modern trade practices and routes. The Ibini-Ukpabi oracle, even in its absence, is remembered as a powerful religious and judicial institution that symbolises the fusion of spirituality, and governance.²⁸ This concept resonates in the cultural memory of the Igbo and neighbouring communities.

The stage of colonial rule saw a change in the Aro regional position of dominance, with the British proclamation of a protectorate over the whole of southern Nigeria in 1900. This political action automatically brought the Arochukwu district within the old Calabar Administrative province. The British understood clearly that to consolidate power in the conquered areas, they had to undermine the Aro influence. As the British colonial officer Colonel Moorhouse put it, "It was inevitable in my opinion, that in the extension of the British Administration, there should be a conflict between the government and the Aro in the conditions that existed at the time". He insisted that "It was in order to break down the trade monopoly of the Aro far more than any missionary influence" that the decision to open the country was made.²⁹ Although Western influence undermined Aro power in the region, the pre-conquest, Aro-inspired migrations and intermingling yielded various forms of inter-group relationships between the Aro and their neighbours in the Igbo and even non-Igbo areas. Although Aro migration and settlement had various long lasting effects, the most prominent result is the permanent geographical dispersal of the Aro in various parts of Igboland and beyond, encapsulated in what is popularly referred to as the "Aro."³⁰

Despite the many challenges that the Aro in the homeland and those "in Diaspora" had to face especially during the colonial era, quite a good number of them still distinguished themselves in different ways, often taking advantage of Western education to enhance their prestige.

The Aro legacy is preserved today through oral histories, cultural practices, and recognition of Arochukwu as an important historical site. Many contemporary Igbo communities still reflect on the Aro confederacy's impact on socio-political organisation and the resilience of the Aro people is celebrated as part of Nigeria's rich cultural heritage. The stories of some leaders still remind us of the sophisticated structures that pre-colonial African societies developed, challenging simplistic narratives of African history and demonstrating the complexities of indigenous governance and trade system.

Arochukwu's Economic Growth and Development

In 1954, the Lyttelton Constitution, adopted as part of British political reform in Nigeria, transferred aspects of economic planning to the regional government.³¹ By this time, agriculture was still contributing about 60 percent of national income and subsistence for over 70 percent of the population.³² In the Eastern region, agriculture was seen as the most important route to economic development and increased welfare for the population.³³ The palm produce trade still dominated the rural economy. Key policies focused around cash crop production on plantation models; incorporation of rural farmers into the government's agricultural programmes, and the expansion of food production as a corollary of the government's overall agricultural program.

For the Aro, this new stage presented, as Chima Korie points out, were such that "they were unable to monopolize the palm oil trade in the same way they had monopolized the slave trade. Unlike the slave trade, the production and marketing of palm oil were readily open to local competition since

the oil could be produced by anyone who had access to the trees”.³⁴ During this period of legitimate commerce, the Aro struggled to smoothly transition to agricultural production, thus threatening their control of the better part of the south-eastern region market. The difficulties in making this shift, coupled with the threat to their regional dominance, underscore the viewpoint that in the period before the legitimate trade, the Aro economy was indeed driven by the slave trade.

It also gives credence to the “Crisis of adaptation” view expressed by A.G. Hopkins and others in reference to the legitimate trade that opened a new market economy for the Aro.³⁵ even though the transition diminished Aro control of trade, it did not mean a total collapse of their trading system. On the contrary, Aro hegemony did not end as they became active to some extent in the new palm produce trade in parts of the region by using old trading contracts, organizational skills and capital accumulated during the slave trade. Also Aro traders owe their reputation, influence and dominance more to an accident of geographical location than to anything else. Arochukwu was strategically located around the Enyong Creek, which links it to the main artery of the Cross River system “the highway by which light and civilization would penetrate the remotest recesses of the terra incognita inhabited by the Igbo, the Ibibio and the Ogojapeople”.³⁶ Therefore, it had the advantage of commanding the gateway into the densely peopled Igbo hinterland, apart from being within easy reach of the main south-eastern Nigerian coastal parts. Thus, with a location that was favourable, the Aro naturally manipulated their geographical advantage to gain high economic status.

Aside from a favourable geographical location, the Aro had the advantageous influence of the authority of the widely famed IbiniUkpabi oracle. The oracle conferred on the Aro the appellation Umuchukwu (“Children of the high God”), making them almost untouchable as they traversed the length and breadth of the Igbo territory.³⁷ In addition, they relied on the Aro military alliance system to protect their interests. They made use of the services of war-like neighbouring Igbo clans who even on short notice, served to ensure the protection of Aro interests in the region. Any analysis of the factors and strategies behind Aro success and dominant influence in Igboland is incomplete without recognizing the remarkable Aro spirit of enterprise and adventure, and their flexible social system embodied in the trinity of the trader, the diplomat, and the oracular agent. With their array of exotic wares, wherever the itinerant Aro trader paused, prominent men literally fell over each other to host him and even tried to lure him to establish a resting place of sorts. Then, the readily available agent of the Aro oracle would act as a guide for consulting the oracle and also serve as a guarantee for security along hazardous routes. Finally, the presence of the Aro diplomat was necessary for ending those inter-community feuds, which were adjudged unprofitable to Aro interest because of the challenges of insecurity they posed to travelers. Additionally, the presence of the diplomat was a known deterrent to attack from potential invasion because of the fear of real or imaginary repercussion from the dreaded Aro oracle as well as the fear of the inevitable military reprisal that would certainly follow such action.³⁸

Also, the economic capabilities under which the Aro became the major purveyors of European trade goods, including the exotic/luxury ones, such as gun and gunpowder. With such goods, they endeared themselves to the elites in the bush community, and stimulated differences in wealth and social status in these communities. For instance, the possession of a gun by an individual and the firing of guns during ceremonies such as funerals soon became indication of a high level of social status.³⁹ Thus the Aro depended on the coast-bound export trade to generate luxury goods with which they increased their power and prestige with their neighbours. As a result of exposure to what was perceived by the standards of the time as “better things of life”, expectations rose creating “a new class of men anxious to acquire wealth and titles- a class with whom the Aro also allied to extract captives through kidnapping and occasional raids.”⁴⁰ therefore, Aro dominance was based on wealth accumulation through trade and military power.

Under the aspect of culture and cosmology, the Aro advertised their oracular power and propagated the Ekpe/Okonko society in many parts of Igboland,⁴¹ Using the cult members to further expand their commercial interests. Remarkably with time, the Aro greatly used their oracle to influence or change Igbo cosmology, impacting the Igbo world view, as Aro agents were often invited to different parts of Igboland to help to establish local shrines, or *ihuchukwu*, of the great *chukwu*, the high God of the Igbo Pantheon. For the Aro, the spirit-psychic field involving occultism and the use of charms was useful in the dangerous business of slaving. Though risky, under the effective protection of their dreaded oracle and distinguished as “Children of the high God”, the Aro confidently strutted from one community to the other, directing the procurement and movement of captive.

Physically, the Aro travelled and traded extensively, building a sequence of resting places stretched out A trade diaspora along the trade routes. The subsequent proliferation of Aro settlements in pre-colonial Igboland was a corollary of these resting places. According to David Northrup, the more important resting places gradually became trading centres and finally Arosettlement.⁴² From these trading centres, new settlements were in turn, founded due to Aro initiative or the initiative of a local man of authority. This was the genesis of “Aro imperialism,” which became the foundation of effective Aro hegemony. Once a settlement was formed, the Aro acquired landed property and took wives from among their host communities. Such affinities served both to ensure peaceful co-existence and to increase the size of Aro groups since, while freely marrying non-Aro women, the Aro men at the time never permitted their daughters to marry a non Aro.⁴³

Arochukwu's Role in the Nigerian Economic Equation

Aro people made a modest contribution to the economic growth of Igboland and Nigeria as a whole. The long *juju* (*IbiniUkpabi*) which symbolised their influence across Igbo land aided them to build an economy sustained by slavery. It is generally agreed that the Aro had an unmatched monopoly in the slave trade and used the opportunity it offered to spread their tentacles and influence around and beyond Igbo land. And it was through their dominance of the slave market that they made their most significant contribution to the economic and commercial activities of Igbo land of that era. According to Jones, G. I., the Aro used their links effectively and penetrated the hinterland, new Calabar, Bonny, and Kalabari status. The *Ibibio* elements in Aro helped traders to travel to southern *Ibibio*, while the *Akpa* element provided contacts in *Obubra* and *Cross River* area as *Enyong* people linked them to old calabar.⁴⁴

In the early colonial days and even much later, Aro people were providing some needed financial capital or pre-farming seed aid to some farmers on certain agreed terms, in order to enable the local farmers carry out their farm works in large scale that would yield handsome profits for both farmers and the Aro fund providers. Some Aro traders were also helping the farmers in finding lucrative markets outside the farmers' communities for greater profits for the both parties. Those farmers who had collaborated with the Aro early enough in the farming and farm products trading activities, became richer and more successful in their ventures than they would have ordinarily been.⁴⁵

Also Aro's migration spirit to other towns and cities laid the foundation for Igbo entrepreneurial apprenticeship in Nigeria. Aro were and are still known for their long distance traveling and trading activities. They go with the mentality of working hard to make it good and big in life. This has become part of their life and a legacy the Aro have left in the minds of the people wherever they go. They create impacts on the lives of the people of the communities where they reside. Aro were among the first to embrace Western education in south eastern Nigeria. They were also employed to work at various levels in government offices and other institutions in the south eastern and Nigeria

as a whole. As travelers and business people, Aro were quick in developing strong connections and friendly relationships with the people of the communities where they occupied.⁴⁶ Hence, they were respected by the locals and the early Europeans for their intelligence, sagacity and shrewdness in business and also dexterity in building relationships with the people they had contact with.

Aro people are not limited by tribe and distances away from home. They are driven by global civility and citizenship mentality. They possess the minds and attributes that encourage civilization. They have positive and broad attitudes towards life and they easily contribute to the civilization and developments of any place they live. They also help to mentor their host to learn and possess such attributes too. The Aro anywhere they go will help to develop the place and make it to be much better than when they (the Aro) first arrived the place. The Aro Oracle was established centuries before the white man came around. The shrine was not founded to facilitate slavery activities as some people had wrongly claimed. The Oracle had existed several centuries long before the Atlantic slave trading activities became popular. Nevertheless, the oracle was put into use for some roles during the slave era. Aro wisely engaged some local agents from their many trade routes and locations to evangelize the powers' of their oracle throughout the length and breadth of south eastern Nigeria. People became Aro agents for the Aro oracle pilgrimage activities. Those agents, because of their engagement with Aro, became rich and very influential among their own people. Some of the offspring of Aro agents and their subsequent generations also became powerful and successful in various other endeavours they later engaged themselves to do. Some of them now play active role in politics and possess great influence in their respective states as they help in the development of their communities and states. These are part of the contributions the Aro oracle made to its agents.

The oracle is very much of an "intelligence network" couched upon the natural wisdom of the Aro to deliver best judgment on various issues brought to it. Hence, many people from different communities in the south eastern Nigeria including those of Ebonyi state still visit Arochukwu to seek help from the Aro oracle. Aro diaspora communities outside their ancestral villages in Arochukwu have now integrated permanently with the host communities, working hard, doing good business, building houses and good homes, paying dues and taxes to the government of the communities. By so doing the Aro are surely contributing to the development of such host communities and their states.

Conclusion

This article has shown that Arochukwu people contributed to the economic equation of Nigeria, 1900-1960. It argues on the contrary, that the accounts rendered by some historians as the authentic history of the Arochukwu and other groups are not entirely factual narratives. For instance, the Aro were not at anytime the wealthiest in Igboland but they established Aro settlement in various parts of Igboland and beyond. With their trading system, they penetrated the hinterland and beyond. Arochukwu had an unmatched monopoly in the slave trade and used the opportunity it offered to spread their tentacles and influence around and beyond Igboland. And it was through their dominance of the slave market that they made their most significant contribution to the economic and commercial activities of Igbo land of that era. The long Juju (IbiniUkpabi) which symbolized their influence across Igboland aided them to build an economy sustained by slavery. The IbiniUkpabi oracle, even in its absence is remembered as a powerful religious and judicial institution that symbolizes the fusion of spirituality and governance. This concept resonates in the cultural memory of the Igbo and neighbouring communities. The long Juju (IbiniUkpabi) which symbolized their influence across Igboland aided them to build an economy sustained by slavery.

This work then recommends the integration of the Igbo diaspora communities into East economic

development and Nigeria as a whole. The people of South east comprising of the states of Abia, Anambra Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo state can be described as mobile race that can be found in all parts of the world. The Igbo diaspora communities can be found mainly in United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Germany, France, many parts of Asia and south Africa making crucial contributions to the economies of their resident countries. The south east region of Nigeria with rich reserves of crude oil, coal, natural gas, palm oil, rice, soyabeans, iron, kaolin, limestone, lead, zinc, cassava, yam, cashew nut, maize and so on. It also has a large population of skilled workforce with significant number of them in diaspora. The Igbo diaspora communities have made huge financial contributions in term remittance to support their families back home which can be leverage to improve the economy of Nigeria. According to Kapur and Mchale, Diaspora remittances have significant impact on economic growth and development.⁴⁷

Furthermore, Igbo apprenticeship system should be given legal recognition to make it more attractive among youths. This will promote a higher level of economic productivity, create decent work and ameliorate the problem of youth unemployment, poverty and inequality in the south east of Nigeria. In the eastern part of Nigeria, where artisans or dealers adopt young people for apprenticeships, the Oga-Boy synergy has been practiced for a very long time. These trainees conduct their research based on actual experience, and they are ultimately prepared to launch their own businesses with seed money provided by their mentor. According to Ikerionwu, "Igba -odibo", has served as a means of support and a place where budding entrepreneurs can grow and get funding for their ventures. Therefore, the Igbos are gradually moving away from trade towards industry and factories without any help from the government, this has resulted in the creation of products like vehicles, motor components, motorcycle gadgets, materials for plastics, metal plaster casts, steel goods, clothing, footwear, electricity wiring, construction supplies, transmission lines, chemicals, etc. significantly, it boosted the economy of Nigeria.⁴⁸

Besides, there is need to enhance communities lines and network platforms for diaspora engagement aimed at capturing the offshore skills of our diaspora continents for development purposes. Communication tools such as e-mail, zoom, WhatsApp, Facebook and other social media platforms and mainstream media could be used to attract investment from the Igbo communities in the diaspora into the south east. This consistent with the views of Iroegbu, that the establishment of effective communication channels can help to bridge the gap between the Igbo Diaspora communities and the South east region of Nigeria.⁴⁹

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