

IMPACT OF OBOLO ON THE IBANI FROM SETTLEMENT TO 2015

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Abstract

The thrust of this paper is to assess the historical and significant impact of Obolo on the Ibani from settlement to 2015. Bonny settlement history in the Eastern Niger Delta is characterised by their waves of migrations from their home land in the Ijaw country of the Central Niger Delta to the Ndoki area through Opuoko in Ogoni territory, and finally arrived at their present place of settlement which was relinquished to them by the Obolo inhabitants of the territory. The Ibani migration and settlement at Ndoki further exposed them to the Obolo who traded with the Ndoki people along the Imo River where they exchanged their marine resources with agricultural produce of the Ndoki respectively. The Ibani contact and interactions with the Obolo was a precursor to the Obolo hospitable gesture to the Ibani forebear migrants. This work adopted the primary and secondary sources to reconstruct this past. The paper found out that Bonny was not self-made but owed their development to the enormous significant contributions of the Obolo. The paper therefore concludes that the Obolo had impacted extensively on the Ibani in several critical areas of their existence which enhanced their attainment of historical achievements and global prominence.

Key Words: Impact, Obolo, Ibani, Settlement.

Introduction

The name Obolo and Andoni refers to the same geographical location and people. It will be used interchangeably in this paper. Obolo is the venerated name of their founding ancestor as well as their linguistic identity while Andoni was evolved by the early European traders in Obolo. The name was derived from “Doni” Town. It gained popularity in European records and since then, Andoni became the adopted name for the Obolo people. The name Andoni remained a legacy of European trading relations with the Obolo.

The Obolo (Andoni) are the earliest settler in the Eastern Niger Delta before other ethnic groups arrived and settled there. Anene in his account states that these groups encountered the Andoni who were already in occupation of the coast.¹ Bonny tradition recorded by Ejituwu asserts that Andoni is a very old place and the people were one of the

¹J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition, 1885-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 7.

oldest stocks in the Eastern Niger Delta.² Being the earliest occupant of the sub-region, the Obolo people accommodated some ethnic groups such as the Ibani of Bonny and Opobo; and Nkoro. Subsequently, Obolo became the secondary dispersal centre to Ogu, Bolo, Okuru all in Okrika, Bille, Kala Ido, Tombia in Kalabari.³ In this regard Obolo was the ancient centre of inter-group relations in the Eastern Niger Delta.⁴ This paper structured into three sections: The Ibani People, the Ibani in Obolo territory, impact of the Obolo on the Ibani and conclusion.

The Ibani People

However, the Ibani clan comprises Bonny and Opobo, located at the Bonny and Imo Rivers estuaries. Bonny on the Bonny River emerged from three waves of immigration. The earliest was the foundation laid by the Andoni fishermen who settled on the grounds of what metamorphosed into Grand Bonny.⁵ Accordingly, the Ibani experienced three waves of migration before their final settlement on the Eastern Niger Delta. The first was from the Central Ijaw to the Ndoki area. Second was from Ndoki through the Imo River to Opuoko in Ogoni territory and third, from Opuoko to the Obolo (Andoni) territory.

Their final migration was facilitated by the Obolo and Ndoki trade contact on the Imo River. Both ethnic groups (Obolo and Ndoki) exchanged their marine resources and farm produce respectively, during the era of trade by barter. As participants in the trade, the Ibani were motivated to explore the territory beyond the Imo River; where they traded at Yankpo that is the Obolo territory for a permanent place of settlement. To solve the problem of Ibani's accommodation challenge, the Obolo in their natural hospitality provided a place of settlement for the Ibani which is the present location of Bonny.

Documented account and oral traditions of Obolo and the Ibani affirms that the present settlement of Bonny, Ayama (Peterside), Opobo, Queen's Town and other suburbs were originally occupied by the Obolo who used these areas as fishing settlements and residence respectively. These places were relinquished to the Ibani for settlement

²N. C. Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni) in the Niger Delta*, (Oron: Manson Publishing Company, 1991), 70.

³J. H Enemugwem, *Obolo and the Peopling of the Niger Delta*, (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2006), 8-18

⁴Romokere Mgbowji Benson "Obolo and Her Neighbours in the Eastern Niger Delta, Nigeria, 1800-2000," (Unpublished PhD History Thesis, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, 2017), 227, 335, 339.

⁵Enemugwem, *Obolo and the Peopling*, 9

especially, the location of St. Stephen's Cathedral Church, Bonny. Before the occupation of the Ibani and the construction of the church, Obolo people were living there to do their fishing activities likewise the present Opobo was the fishing settlement of the Obolo called *Otunkon*.⁶

The Obolo did not only provide places of settlement for the Ibani but also gave them some ancient social facilities such as bier (akprangba) which they used as their temporary sleeping material and roof for their hut. This was intended to meet their immediate need. With the Ibani settlement within Obolo territory, they became one of the closest neighbours to the Obolo. Their relationship was further strengthened through marriage contracted by the Bonny and Opobo kings, Chiefs and nobles with Andoni women. The resultant effect was that, the offspring of the marriage became kings, chiefs in Bonny and Opobo respectively.⁷ The king and chiefs of Obolo lineage in Ibani became agent of culture contact and diffusion. Through this royal contact, Obolo culture was subsequently adopted in Bonny such as the Ikuba from Obolo became the national deity and war god of the Bonny till date. The House of Skulls in Bonny was also adopted from Andoni; a symbol of inter-ethnic cultural development.

It is significant to note that, like the Negro of the New World, North America and Latin America, who contributed to the increased population of those areas, and inventions in science and technology, the Obolo also contributed immensely to the peopling of Bonny and Opobo. The Ibani of Bonny absorbed the Obolo settlements in Bonny but retains the indigenous names of Obolo communities which they corrupted thus; Egwede as Ogwede, Agana as Aganya, Anyamboko as Anyamkpo. All these settlements are since occupied by the Jumbo House which is one of the largest Houses in Bonny.⁸

⁶Ejituwu, *A History of (Obolo Andoni)*, 138, S.J.S. Cookey, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times 1821-1891*, (New York: Nok Publishers, 1974), 15, Enemugwem, *Obolo and the Peopling*, 9-12. Interviews with N. Lot A. Iraron, 63 years, in Elekahia, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. 19/2/2014, Clinton Z. Utong, 65 years, Rumualogu, Obio/Akpor L. G. A., Rivers State, Nigeria, 2/7/2011.

⁷Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni)*, 131, N. A. I. Waribere, *A Short History of the Jumbo (Main and Branches) of Grand Bonny*, (Port Harcourt: Divine Printers & Publishers Nigeria, 2007), 1, 14, E. J. Alagoa, *A History of the Niger Delta*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972), 157, E. J. Alagoa and A. Fombo, *A Chronicle of Grand Bonny*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972), 75. Romokere Mgbowaji Benson, "Andoni-Ibani Economic Relations in the Eastern Niger Delta, 1800-2000," *Lagos Historical Review: A Journal of the Department of History and Strategic Studies, University Lagos*, Volume 23, 2023, 72.

⁸Interview with Eric Gentle John, 69 years, in Bonny, Bonny L. G. A., Rivers State, 10/1/2014. See also Enemugwem, *Obolo and the Peopling*, 9.

In another dimension, the Ibani Civil War of 1869 compelled Jaja and fourteen chieftaincy Houses to desert Bonny; and in search of a permanent settlement. Jaja and his escapee group took refuge in Obolo and Nkoro. In this circumstance, the Obolo responded promptly to the social and economic challenges of the Ibani and provided a place of settlement for Jaja and his group on request; that is the present Opobo and Queen's Town for Uranta. By this gesture, the Obolo had established two viable and prosperous city states and satellite communities for the Ibani.⁹ These strategic locations the Obolo relinquished to Bonny and Opobo enhanced their economic prosperity and as well projected them as centres of international trade and commerce since the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, legitimate trade and currently petroleum and gas economy.

From the political perspective, the Obolo demonstrated their unflinching support to the Bonny people during the Okrika agitation for the relocation of the Local Government Area Headquarters from Bonny to a central place. In that controversy, the Obolo were the "political saviour" of the Bonny, else Okrika with some Opobo councillors would have moved the council headquarters from Bonny. In essence, the Obolo unwavering support sustained the political existence of Bonny as a single indigenous political entity.¹⁰ These contributions by the Obolo are eloquent testimonies that the Obolo ethnic nationality single handedly established the Ibani in the Eastern Niger Delta which gave them a distinct identity they could not have got in central Ijaw and Ndoki.

The Ibani in Obolo Territory

The history of origin of the Ibani in the Eastern Niger Delta is traced to Ijaw in the Central Niger Delta where they had settled.¹¹ The Ibani ethnic group experienced three waves of migration from Central Delta to Ndoki, from Ndoki to Opuoko and finally from Opuoko to the Obolo (Andoni) territory in the Eastern Niger Delta.¹² Their final wave of migration and settlement in the Obolo territory was through the Imo River and Andoni

⁹Romokere Mgbowaji Benson, "The Ibani (Bonny) Civil War of 1869 and the Obolo Response," *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research* Volume 16, No. 3, September, 2019, 6, 8.

¹⁰Interview with T. D. Jamaica, 57 years, at No. 22 Club Road, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, 5/2/2014.

¹¹Alagoa, *A History of the Niger Delta*, 151, Alagoa and Fombo, *A Chronicle of Grand Bonny*, 3-5.

¹²R. Horton, "Some Fresh Thoughts on Eastern Ijo Origins, Expansions and Migrations," in N. C. Ejituwu (ed.), *The Multi-Disciplinary Approach to African History: Essays in Honour of Ebiegeberi Joe Alagoa*, (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1998), 217.

River respectively. The Ibani had their initial contact with the Obolo while they were temporarily resident in the Ndoki area, since the Ndoki and the Obolo were interdependent traders.¹³ The Obolo as the earliest settler in the Eastern Niger Delta, was confronted with the challenge of the source of food supply being traditional fishermen and women. Their search for the source of food supply and other farm products through the Imo River, they encountered the Ndoki coastal dwellers who were also farmers. Through this inter-ethnic contact, Ndoki became the additional source of food supply to the Obolo and trading relationship was established. Both ethnic groups were then engaged in long distant trade and trade by barter. The Obolo exchanged fish, salt and other marine resources for food, other farm produce, livestock and slaves from the Ndoki area which the Obolo sold to the Portuguese.¹⁴

However, the Ibani who were resident among the Ndoki and participated in the trade, exploited the opportunity to explore the territory beyond the Imo River for a permanent place of settlement. The ancestral migrants of the Ibani from Ndoki followed two river routes; Imo River and the Andoni River to arrive at their present location where the Obolo relinquished to them.¹⁵ Their accommodation by the Obolo was necessitated by three main factors; Obolo contact with the Ibani in Ndoki, Obolo hospitality and their desire to have a close ethnic neighbour in the Eastern Niger Delta.

It should be noted that the ancient location of Bonny was the Obolo territory where they used as their fishing settlement and for economic activities. The Obolo in their hospitality relinquished their place of settlement and fishing territory to the Ibani who were in search of a permanent home in the Eastern Niger Delta.¹⁶ One of such places allocated to the Ibani forebear migrants is the present location of the St. Stephen Cathedral. Ibani Documented evidence indicates that the population of the Obolo occupants there was three hundred.¹⁷

To buttress this fact, Anene, in his account recorded that the Andoni (Obolo) were the earliest occupant of the coast (Eastern Niger Delta)¹⁸. Foreign and other indigenous authors such as De Cardi, C., Irving, James, Webber, Ejituwu, Cookey, have documented

¹³Horton, "Some Fresh Thoughts on Eastern Ijo, 22

¹⁴Enemugwem, *Obolo and the Peopling*, 10.

¹⁵Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni)*, 68-69, Enemugwem, *Obolo and the Peopling*, 10-11, Iraron, 63 years, 19/2/2014.

¹⁶Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni)*, 71.

¹⁷Cookey, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta*, 15.

¹⁸Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, 7.

that the territories today occupied by the Ibani of Bonny and Opobo were originally owned and ruled by the Andoni. Further, the authors recorded that Bonny and Opobo were allocated their respective areas of settlement by the Obolo (Andoni) to solve the accommodation challenge.¹⁹

The primacy of the Obolo in the Eastern Niger Delta and the account of the Obolo allocating their territories to the Ibani of Bonny and Opobo are summed under foreign accounts, non-indigenous and indigenous accounts:

Foreign sources (European) C. De Cardi (1899) cited in Eneyo (1991: IX), states that, a European trader in the Niger Delta and the chief architect and negotiator of Jaja's relocation to Andoni in 1869, recorded that the entire area, today known as Bonny territory was originally owned by the Andoni.²⁰

Non-Indigenous Sources (Nigeria) Weber, states in his landmark and decisive judgment that "there can be no doubt that at the time of Bonny war, the Andonis regarded all of the portion of land with the Okrikas and Ogoni as boundaries and between Andoni and Opobo River as their own. They exercise ownership by giving to the Okrikas the land known as Nkoro; and I am satisfied on the evidence that when King Jaja came, in the same generosity spirit, they gave him whatever he wanted."²¹

Anene, indicates that local traditions are in agreement about the early foundations of settlements and petty Kingdoms in the Niger Delta. As regards these Kingdoms, the names of the founders are remembered but whether these are mythical or real is a matter of conjecture. Two calamities led to the eastward dispersion of the Ijaw groups. These groups encountered the Andoni who were already in occupation of the coast.²²

Akpan records that, after administering the oath of fidelity, Jaja made a new request for a permanent settlement. He specifically requested that he should be given an island at the mouth of Otunkon (the Imo River) to facilitate his direct contact with the European traders. Leaders of Obolo (Andoni) granted Jaja's request.²³

¹⁹De Cardi C. "Andoni River and its Inhabitants," in M. Kingsley (ed.), *West African Studies*, (London: Macmillan, 1899). British Foreign Office Report, Ref. FO 084/1630, London: May 31, 1882, A. F. C. Webber, *Nigeria Law Report (NLR)*, Vol. 6, 24-33, Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni)*, 37-38, Cookey, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta*, 70-74.

²⁰ De Cardi, "Andoni River and its Inhabitants,"

²¹ Webber, *Nigeria Law Report*, 23-33.

²² Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, 7

²³ U. J. Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period* (Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2018), 416.

Indigenous sources (Obolo-Andoni) Ejituwu, states that, the tradition of the primacy of the Obolo in the Eastern Niger Delta is noted not only by the Obolo, but also by the Okrika, Bonny and Ijaw. It was Andoni, according to these traditions that controlled Idontoro (Big River) long before the arrival of the Okrika, Kalabari and Bonny on the scene²⁴ Eneyo also asserts that, the founding of Bonny town is said to derive from the stimulus of the trans-Atlantic trade. The involvement of the Andoni towns of old Asarama, Ilotombi and Unyeada in the trans-Atlantic trade therefore antedates the founding of Bonny in the Eastern Delta.²⁵

Enemugwem, in his account documents that, “the Ibani clan comprises Bonny and Opobo, located at the Bonny and Imo rivers estuaries. Bonny in the Bonny river emerged from three waves of immigration. The earliest was the foundation laid by Andoni fishermen who settled on the grounds of what metamorphosed in Grand Bonny. Their settlements of Ogwede (Egwede), Ayambo (Anyamboko), Aganya (Agana) and Iwoma with a population of 300 people was sited near what is now Saint Stephen’s Anglican Cathedral Mission. However, Ibani traditions seem to settle this argument. The first by a European trader Charles N. de Cardi, who posited that although Bonny people claim to have descended from the Ibo tribe, the land now claimed by Bonny as forming the Bonny Kingdom belonged to the Andoni.

Another was by Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther, who claimed the early Andoni villages near the mission that pioneered Bonny into prominence had a population of 300 people. Nevertheless, Jaja established the settlement of Opobo in the Andoni territory. The circumstances forcing his migration from Bonny and the subsequent founding of Opobo on a land first settled by Andoni fishermen made him to take an oath of loyalty to the Obolo (Andoni).²⁶

Ibani sources

Jaja’s claim and the European response: Jaja’s actions and war against the Ibeno and Andoni community and subsequent occupation of the Ibeno area; and purported claim of the King of Andoni through a fake treaty of surrender. He coerced some representatives to sign that Ibeno and Eastern Obolo have surrendered to him, and that they have placed themselves under his authority. On this note, consul Hewett queried Jaja for his

²⁴ Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni)*, 37-38

²⁵ Silas Eneyo, *The Andoni Monarchy* (Port Harcourt: Riverside Communication, 1991), ix

²⁶ Enemugwem, *Obolo and the Peopling*, 9, 11-12

aggressiveness and coercive actions against Andoni in the Qua Iboe River and contravening articles of the free Trade Act. In his response to the query, he stated: “I beg respectfully to inform you that the people inhabiting the Qua Iboe are Andoni men subject of the Opobo. The markets at which they could trade are mine, secured to me by treaty with the British Government. I am therefore astonished to hear from you that the above people are to be considered under British protection.

In the light of the above, many British traders on the Imo, Cross and Qua Iboe Rivers openly questioned Jaja’s claim to be the King of Andoni. One James Irving who was the spokesman for all the British companies wrote to the foreign office which the Reference Catalogue in London is F. O.84/1630, London, May 31, 1882. The letter reads: “Andoni is a distinct country and people from Bonny people and the King of Andoni held all the right over Opobo river...Under cover of a truce obtained from him by Charles de Cardi and Arthur Mc Eachen, Jaja and his slaves and household fled to the place now known as Opobo in Andoni country having obtained permission from King Engoga of Andoni to establish themselves... The letter concluded that the British Government under Consul Livingstone acknowledged Jaja in 1873 as the King of Opobo with sovereign rights over Opobo only and not Eastern Andoni from Ibeno in the Qua Ibo River through the estuary of Imo River to Western Andoni with a common boundary with Bonny.”²⁷

Cookey asserts that, “Having formalised their relationship, Jaja and the chiefs next approached the people of Andoni for aid. The Andoni at the time acknowledged the supremacy of a deity called Iyobolo (Yok-Obolo) (whose shrine was situated at the village of Alabie), and the chief priest of this deity was recognized as the head of all the Andoni. Having received Jaja’s appeal, the chief priest summoned the representatives of all Andoni villages to Alabie where they met Jaja and his men. Jaja assured his host of his pacific intentions. Bonny, he told them, probably with his tongue in his cheek, was not spacious enough to accommodate its growing population and this has led to constant strife. He had decided to leave in the interest of peace and wished to settle among the Andoni. He would swear with his people any oath the Andoni might produce to reassure them of his pacific intentions and he wished the Andoni to also reciprocate by swearing an oath not to betray him and his people. Finally, Jaja promised to promote the welfare of his people as well as those of the Andoni. This site was allocated to Jaja following the oath-taking ceremony.”²⁸ Epelle cited in Enemugwem, an Ibani traditional historian. According to him, “Bonny was

²⁷ British Foreign Office Report, Ref. FO084/1630

²⁸ Cookey, *King Jaja of the Niger*, 69-70.

first a temporary settlement of fishermen from the Andony Country, hence it was originally called Andony” and later changed to Bonny.²⁹

Impact of the Obolo on the Ibani

On settlement in Obolo territory, the Obolo related with the Ibani as their new and immediate neighbour in the Eastern Niger Delta. Their relationship was initially cordial but later became hostile due to the imperialistic and expansionist tendency of the Ibani. Subsequently, the Ibani engaged the Asarama (Obolo) people who founded the place called Ayama now known as Peterside in a series of war.³⁰ Ayama is located opposite Bonny. In the late 17th century King Amakiri of Bonny led his military fleet and attacked the Asarama people at Ayama.³¹ Consequently, he sacked the Asarama people from their found settlement. The settlement had since been occupied by Bonny natives who re-named it Peterside. Through Ibani incessant attacks on Ayama and the Asarama people being the only remnant Obolo community living with the Ibani, decided to abandon their settlement for the Ibani to occupy permanently. The Obolo therefore, through military conquest surrendered their settlement to the Ibani to further increase their place of habitation to settle their growing population.

The defeated Asarama migrated inward into Obolo areas and settled at a new location called Asarama Toru which incidentally became a trade route during the trans-Atlantic slave trade and palm oil trade. The Ibani again attacked the Asarama who after victories and stiff resistance were finally conquered.³² The Asarama deserted the area which the Ibani acquired as part of their territory. This defeat compelled the Asarama to migrate to the contiguous Obolo area (their present settlement) to avoid external attack and invasion.

The defeat of the Asarama and occupation of their settlements notwithstanding, the Ibani remained hostile to the Obolo, their landlord in pursuit of their expansionist interest and the political economy of the trans-Atlantic trade. In the 19th century, the Obolo and the Ibani fought intense wars. The 1826 war between Bonny and old Ukwakpu

²⁹ E. M. T. Epelle, *The Church in the Niger Delta*, (Aba: Assemblies of God Press, 1955), 9. See also E. M. T. Epelle, *Bishops in the Niger Delta*, (Aba: Assemblies of God Press, 1964), 39

³⁰ Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni)*, 70-71.

³¹ Alagoa and Fombo, *A Chronicle of Grand Bonny*, 74-75.

³² Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni)*, 113-114, 116, Alagoa and Fombo, *A Chronicle of Grand Bonny*, 75. Benson, “Andoni-Ibani Economic Relations,” 70, 74.

Unyeada (Obolo) which Bonny was defeated at the initial with the explosion of the cannon at the waterfront by a woman called Asakala. The Bonny reinforcement and alliance with the Ogoni led to the defeat and desertion of old Unyeada (Ukwuakpu). Another Obolo-Bonny war which lasted for seven years (1839-1846) was disastrous for Bonny. The Obolo roundly defeated them and that was the last war fought between the two ethnic neighbours.³³

This war was significant in Bonny political historiography. The heavy casualty on Bonny compelled the opinion leaders to search for a wealthy and more competent leader that can prosecute the war with his resources. Then King Awusa of Bonny became bankrupt and weak. This situation resulted in a dynastic change and Perekule emerged as their saviour.³⁴ The circumstance enthroned Perekule as the new king of Bonny and the reigning dynasty till date. The emphasis is that the Obolo-Bonny war reinvigorated the political leadership of Bonny from collapsing. Probably with King Awusa Bonny would have been defeated by incessant ethnic wars with the Kalabari especially.

In another dimension, the Bonny Civil War of 1869 led to the defeat of Jaja and the Annie Pepple House. Consequently, Jaja and other fourteen Chieftaincy Houses deserted Bonny their ancient settlement in search of a permanent place of habitation. In this circumstance of displacement and frustration, Jaja exploited his trading relationship with Obolo palm oil traders and friends and his earlier visit to Obolo in 1867 to secure accommodation first in some Obolo communities and second to demand for a permanent place of settlement in Obolo territory.³⁵

The oral and documented account of Utong and Akpan, records that with the flight of Jaja and his group, Bonny armed war men were poised and resolute to bring Jaja to total subjection and submission to their authority (Manilla Pepple House). Thus, they set out their fleet of war canoes with armed men to chase after Jaja and his group as to attack and probably compel them to return to Grand Bonny. They came through the Andoni River and had almost overtaken them, but some armed canoe of the Andoni warriors averted it. They adopted the strategy of blocking the creeks by felling trees across the creeks to

³³ Cookey, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta*, 70-74, Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni)*, 135-138.

³⁴ Alagoa and Fombo, *A Chronicle of Grand Bonny*, 75.

³⁵ Cookey, *King Jaja of the Niger*, 70-74, Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni)*, 135-138.

prevent Bonny from attacking the fleeing Jaja and his group. The Bonny war men were chased back by the Andoni warriors who inflicted heavy casualty on the Bonny.³⁶

The Obolo (Andoni) defence of Jaja and his group was in tandem with their tradition of protecting and securing strangers and refugees in their territory. Such people are considered “*ene Isotop*” (one who runs into the house or community to escape the attack or punishment of the aggrieved party). Again, it was regarded as an insult, embarrassment and a threat to the territorial integrity of the Obolo.³⁷ The timely defense of Jaja by the Obolo people is an indication that, if they (Obolo) did not respond promptly, Jaja and his group would have either been exterminated or forced back to Bonny and in that circumstance Opobo would not have existed.

Again, the Obolo demonstrated their magnanimity towards Jaja and his group despite their hostile experience with Bonny and allocated their strategic fishing settlement called *Otunkon* to Jaja. The Obolo and Jaja entered into a traditional pact of allegiance and protection. Jaja swore to an oath to uphold it and to *Yok-Obolo* (Obolo national deity) to which he swore. The Obolo response to Jaja’s accommodation challenge led to the establishment of Opobo Town on 25th December, 1870.³⁸ Uranta who had a face-off with Jaja because of his religious disposition (Christianity), approached the Obolo leadership, particularly Ikwut the founder of Ikuru Town for a place of settlement, was also given a place which was named Queen’s Town (after the Britannic Majesty-Queen of England) to guarantee her protection against Jaja’s possible attack on Uranta.³⁹

On the contrary, Bonny suffered severe economic hardship as a result of the civil war. By the 1873 Bonny-Opobo Treaty, Opobo was recognised by the British as an independent city state in the Eastern Niger Delta and the Ibibio markets were ceded to them. The treaty awarded Bonny rights to trade in six markets in the Imo River (Akmete, Obunku and four Urata markets). With this development, the Opobo had control over those Ibibio markets and blockaded Bonny from accessing them.⁴⁰ It is important to note

³⁶ Utong, 65 years, 2/7/2011. See also Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours*, 415.

³⁷ Utong, 2/7/2011.

³⁸ Cookey, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta*, 70-74, Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni)*, 135-138, Alagoa, *A History of the Niger Delta*, 159, 170.

³⁹ Benson, “The Ibani (Bonny) Civil War,” 8.

⁴⁰ Alagoa and Fombo, *A Chronicle of Grand Bonny*, 115, Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni)*, 142.

that Bonny was also fighting with the Kalabari in 1871 and so were blocked from accessing the Iwofe and Iga markets.⁴¹

The economic ‘melt down’ in Bonny compelled them to diversify their economy. Thus, they invested their resources in plantation farming. On this note, Obolo was their last resort since they had scarce land for crop plantation. Some of their prosperous trading chiefs came to Ataba and other Obolo communities demanding for temporary places to establish their plantations. These chiefs were Waribo Manilla Pepple, Squiz Atobobara Banigo, Omoni Brown, Hart Allison. King Ijork Oruk XI of Ataba in-council granted the request of his personal friend, Chief Waribo Manilla Pepple and others in about 1871. They established their plantations in Ataba satellite villages such as Uyonoba, Okuka, Emenokwan, Orongokobon, Otute, Otuafa and Okpojo respectively.⁴²

Obolo cultural heritage in Bonny was fundamental to the growth of Bonny since the ancient times. Obolo and Bonny oral and documented account recorded that, *Ikuba*, the national god of Bonny was introduced from Ayangala (Uyengala) village of Andoni. The monitor lizard (Iguana) was the symbol of the *Ikuba*. The deity was also adopted as the war god of Bonny.⁴³ *Ikuba* had since become the source of Bonny cultural identity and symbol of unity. In Bonny religio-cultural history, *Ikuba* is highly revered by Ibani people since it promoted and strengthened traditional political institution and social activities in Bonny. It became a source of bond for peaceful co-existence among the Bonny people.⁴³

From the religious perspective, the Obolo contributed significantly to the making of the Ibani as the Obolo relinquished their place of settlement to the church in Bonny where the St. Stephen Cathedral is located till date. As earlier indicated, St. Stephen Church location was the Obolo land occupied by the Obolo indigenes up to 1882. In 1864 when Christianity was strongly established in Bonny, St. Stephen Church, Bonny served as the seat of the Diocese of the Niger Territory. With the growth and expansion of Christianity in the Niger Delta, there was need for a Cathedral. Thus, St. Stephen Church, Bonny metamorphosed into a Cathedral which was dedicated in 1889. The transitional history of the Anglican Communion in Bonny indicated that, St. Stephen Church, Bonny

⁴¹ Alagoa and Fombo, *A Chronicle of Grand Bonny*, 78, Interview with E. E. Igbifa, 62 years, in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, 11/4/2012.

⁴² Igbifa, 62 years, 11/4/2012, E. E. Igbifa, *A History of the Ataba Kingdom, 1225-2009*, (Port Harcourt, Mind-Quest, 2015), 366-378, Benson, “The Ibani (Bonny) Civil War,” 8-9.

⁴³ Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni)*, 131, 144.

served as the Cathedral to the Diocese of the Niger Territory, Niger Delta Pastorate and currently Niger Delta Diocese.⁴⁴

It should be emphasized that, the Obolo land given to the church became a precursor to the development of Christianity in Bonny in particular and the Niger Delta in general. In Christendom, St. Stephen Cathedral has projected Bonny as the centre of Christianity in the Niger Delta. Christianity planted on the Obolo land by Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther made Bonny more prominent in England in addition to their economic prominence in the international arena. Accordingly, it could be rightly asserted that Bonny would not have been so prominent without the Obolo allocating their land for the construction of the St. Stephen Church, Bonny which later metamorphosed into a Cathedral.

Conclusion

By accommodating the Ibani of Bonny and Opobo kingdoms, the Obolo created two distinct city states for the Ibani. Their strategic locations earned them prominence as centres of international trade and commerce (slave and palm oil depot; and petroleum and gas) respectively. Without the Obolo gesture the Ibani would not have a distinct political and socio-economic identity in the Eastern Niger Delta, Rivers State, Nigeria and the world at large. They would have been eclipsed by other ethnic groups or by the Obolo themselves if they have imperialistic disposition. The Obolo conscious of maintaining their unique and pure blood identity, did not absorbed or integrate the Ibani into becoming Obolo people unlike the French policy of assimilation and the Kalabari which assimilated other ethnic groups into Kalabari Kingdom. From the above account, it is abundantly clear that the Obolo have impacted significantly on the Ibani of Bonny and Opobo respectively. The existence of the Ibani is the making of the Obolo. It is appropriate to conclude that without the Obolo there would not have been the Ibani perhaps in the Eastern Niger Delta.

⁴⁴ J. H. Enemugwem, "A History of the Niger Delta Diocese," *Journal of the Historical Society Nigeria*, Vol. 25, 2016, 124-125.

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