

# Trade and Commerce along the Niger: The Igala and the Development of Egga (River Bank) Trade/ Commerce in Southwestern Bank of the River Niger

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## Abstract

Trade and Commerce remains an important aspect of human civilization. Over centuries it has led to the free flow and exchange of goods, technology, cultural exchange and idea. In some other cases, the emergence of human society has been associated with activities associated with trade and Commerce. This is because in the cause and course of exchange, people associate free with one another, during which ideas and values are transferred and absorbed. This is the role the trade at the bank of the river Niger played in the history of the settlements which presently occupy and traded along the along bank specially among Edo, Igala and Igbo people and their neighbours from time immemorial in the Nigerian territory. This paper using historical methodology attempt to examine the contribution of the river Niger in the development of trade at the bank of the Niger and how this has led to the spread and development of societies and Civilization in the area(with specific reference to the Kwa linguistic group/ people and their neighbours.

**Keywords:** Trade, Commerce, Egga, River Niger

## Introduction

For us to meaningfully discuss the role of Igala<sup>1</sup>, in the development of Trade and commerce along the River Niger, there is the need to have a thorough understanding of the geographical setting (natural environment) of the area .This is of tremendous importance in any historical discourse especially in relation to the development of any economy and the ability of the people to understand, manipulate and influence it to their advantage<sup>2</sup>. In the case of the focus of this paper, the knowledge of the geography will help us to understand factors that influenced and aided the establishment of viable trade network, how they have been able to manage and manipulate it to their advantage, leading to the establishment of symbiotic communities within and around the Igala nation.

## The Geographical Location

Ane Igala is about 1350 square meters (13,150 square kilometers), and extends from about 7<sup>0</sup>3<sup>0</sup>'N to 8<sup>0</sup>N and 6<sup>0</sup>15' E to 8<sup>0</sup>N . The bulk of the territory lies within the lower Niger. It is bounded by the river Niger in the west, and the river Benue in the north. Along the Niger, Igalaland begins at Adamugu north of onitsha, and continues up to the confluence from where it protrudes lineally northeast wards along the Benue terminating at Amagede in the Igala - Agatu boundary. Its eastern boundary is demarcated by the Idoma polities of Onyagede and Otukpa and northern Nsukka area of Eteh, Enugu-Ezike, Itchi, Edem, Uvuru, Adani, and Ogurugu on the Anambra river<sup>3</sup>. river<sup>3</sup>.

Apart from what has been referred to as the core Igala area or High land Igala, there exist those at the Southwestern bank of the Niger often referred to as Ibaji Igala. Geographical analysis indicates that the area referred to in this paper as Ane Ibaji<sup>4</sup> is part Ane Igala in general and that part of the former Ibaji district in Idah Division whose northern boundary begins from a point some forty kilometers (40km) south of Idah and extends southwards until it forms the boundary between Anambra Division and Idah Division. The area is about 40 kilometers long and sixteen kilometer wide (i.e. 64sq.km) in the west it is bounded by the river Niger, while in the east it is bounded by five bodies of water-lyachu, Ata'kpa, Ikpako, Achikwu and Uko<sup>5</sup>. These are

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<sup>1</sup> Ane Igala is the same thing as Igala Land. Ane in Igala means Land, thus Ane Igala and Igala land will be used in this paper interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Kazlov,G.A.(ed); Political Economy:Capitalism. Progress publishers, Moscow, 1977; 12-26, Maurice C; Dialectical Materialism, Materialism and Dialectical Method, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1957;108-114

<sup>3</sup> Shelton, J.A; Igbo – Igala borderland: Religion and Social control in indigenous African colonialism, State University of New York,Albany, 1971, see also Okwoli, I; A short history of Igala, Matanmi Printing works, Ilorin, 1973; Buchanan, K.M and Pugh, J.C; Land and People in Nigeria, Oxford University press, London, 1962; Boston, J.S; The Igala Kingdom, Oxford University, Press, Ibadan, 1968; Lokoprof. 67/1960 Assessment Report on Ibaji District

<sup>4</sup> Ibaji means riverine people or people living near streams,lakes or water.

<sup>5</sup> The names of some of these rivers with time came to connote names of settlements in the area.

distributaries of river Anambra and during the annual flood season (August - October) when the Niger overflows its banks they are joined by the two parent rivers - the Niger and Anambra<sup>1</sup>. It is important to note that the natural providence of river network in the area has been of tremendous importance in the establishment of trade links with adjoining communities.

It is important that we take note from the onset, the geographical differences between the high land Igala and the riverain Igala area. In the case of the high land Igala, a large chunk of the area is on dry land and is accessible throughout the year, with occasional flooding of the area by the overflowing river Niger. In the case of the Ane Ibaja area, the reverse is the case. This is based on the fact that the area is largely an island. Due to the nature of the terrain, during the dry season it is possible to crisscross the area of foot. However, this is almost nearly impossible during the rainy (flood) season when the Niger overflows its banks<sup>2</sup>. This makes the canoes/engine boat and other means of water transportation the most common means of movement around the area. This is not in any way suggesting that the people and area is completely cut off from the rest of the region as there existed a constant affair between peoples because one of the most important market (for the people of this area) was at Oria later moved to the right bank of the Niger (Egga Illushi). Since the market (and other surrounding major markets) held (and still hold) every four days the Ibaji people and those from the interior Igala area constantly use of the Niger by means of canoes. Today this market is referred to as Egga (River bank) market, while the canoe/boat terminus is referred to as Egga Ejini (Engine)<sup>3</sup>.

The above factor especially the riverain environment of the people aided the easy movement of people, their goods and other services, facilitating what can be referred to as the earliest form of international trade. While self-sufficient with the resources that accrued to them from the fertile land, plenty of wild - life and fish, the big streams offered good defense against hostile neighbors<sup>4</sup>. This natural defensive providence facilitated the rapid peopling of the area especially after the Idah-Benin war and the Nupe raid or Kukuruku war<sup>5</sup>.

#### **Role of Natural Environment in the Development of Trade and Commerce.**

The land of the people referred to as *Agbacha Iwogun*<sup>6</sup> and their Ibaji counterparts which is situated along the river Niger is very low compared to the territory north of it. Geological analysis indicates that the area is devoid of stones and laterite, however sand is in abundance along the shores of the River Niger especially during the dry season. Most often the earth becomes very muddy after heavy rain. The Niger flood brings in a great amount of alluvial soil annually and this keeps the land very fertile for agricultural activities, aiding rich harvest. The fertility of the soil in this area was a factor that aided the early settlers to settle as well as take control of the trade network along the Niger. With the rich deposit of alluvial soil, the people cultivated agricultural crops like yams, rice, maize, okra, potatoes, cassava, tomatoes, and beans<sup>7</sup>.

The pre-colonial economy of the Igala experienced major historical changes which range from agriculture to manufactures and trade. Production and commerce were well organized while innovations occurred in the production processes. Particular technologies were used at different times while production was developed according to changing conditions such as demand, natural disaster, social and labour organizations as well as threats and challenges. Production and distribution were determined partly by the state, classes, clans, associations and through religious values. Labour organization included the family, household, age-groups and co-operative societies. Economic activities were organized either on group/clan or on individual basis.<sup>8</sup>

The nature of the environment encourage the cultivation of crops like maize which were usually harvested early mid-season (from July) where as long term crops like cassava and yam, were harvested at the end of the rains. The time differential between yam (a long duration crop) and maize (maize – a short duration crop) was very significant because the maize was both and good insurance as well as a good food while waiting for harvesting of yam which has greater popularity as food stuff. The soil type which is a mixture of laterite and sandy light brown, made up of clays, fine grained sands, lignite and carbonaceous shaley clays<sup>9</sup> encouraged

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid

<sup>2</sup> Uptill date the area is cut off from the modern luxury of cars and other means of transportation as the area is not accessible to vehicle; thus the major means of transportation remains canoe and flying boats.

<sup>3</sup> The Ibaji and interior Igala people refer to engine driven boat as engine as the use of the term Egga Ejini(engine) to refer to the terminus.

<sup>4</sup> Brooke, N.J, Assessment Report, 1920

<sup>5</sup> For details see Bradbury, R.E....opcit, Okojie, G.C, Ishan; Native law and Custom, among others.

<sup>6</sup> Agbacha Iwogun is used here to describe foreign elements who settled among the Igala especially the Esan people

<sup>7</sup> Okogie, G.C; Esan Native laws and customs. Yaba, 1960; Bradbury, R.E; The Benin Kingdom and the Edo speaking people of southwestern Nigeria. I.A.I, London 1957; 62-3

<sup>8</sup> Okogie, G.C., *Ishan, Native Law and Custom*: Yaba 1960 p.21. See also Bradbury R.E., *The Benin Kingdom and The Edo Speaking People of South-Western Nigeria*. London, 1957, P.62-3.

<sup>9</sup> Akinbode, A., *The Geography of Ekpoma*, Nigeria 1983:5.

planting of crops especially yam, which was harvested bountifully during the period under study.<sup>1</sup> This situation is argued to have led to the early domestication of variety of yams *uchu* and other related crops in the area. According to colonial assessment report by Brooke, N.J. (1920) Igala yam trade alone for 1920 amounted to about £66,666. out of an estimated total of £81,046.<sup>2</sup>

### **Trade and Commerce in Ane Igala from the Pre Colonial Period**

Internal and regional trading networks were an important part of the economy. It should be stated that there was no dichotomy between the two systems. There was actually a continuum between them especially when discussing a rather small economy like those of their neighbors like Aboh and Edo. It is important to note that the trade and commerce during this period may not be as organized and sophisticated as it is today, it however represent an attempt by the people to convert natural resource, using it to develop economic network system that keep them in constant touch with their immediate environment. This later led to the positioning of Ane Igala in the map of economic giant along the Niger.

The location of the Ane Igala (with specific reference to the Ibaji) between the high rain forest and the Savannah woodland provided favorable conditions for a variety of game to flourish. These included elephants, buffaloes, bush cows, leopards, antelopes and wild pigs among many others. There were professional hunters who acquired their skills through rituals,<sup>3</sup> techniques, and by hunting in different environments under different conditions, as well as specializing in a particular variety of game. These games were exchanged at the markets, which in turn boost the economy of the people. It also placed the Igala at high esteem as some of the forest products formed part of the regalia of the ruling houses. For example, the tusk of the elephant, which forms the Ivory, was of high value, the bile and venom of some animals were medicinal, while the leopard skin adorns the dresses of the royalty.

In hunting these games, the different weapons used were basically simple equipment signifying the people's interaction with nature and the developments in mechanical and chemical techniques. The result of this became visible in the form of bow, poisonous arrows and poisonous swords developed by the people to conquer nature. These were locally made and supplied to other farmers and hunters during trade. They also produced and supplied locally manufactured guns. The importation of arms, ammunition and European guns meant that hunting activities became more intensified and advanced. This further increased the number and varieties of games for both consumption and exchange at the bank market.

Commercial activities (with specific reference to trade and marketing) have been a long standing aspect of the life of Igala people. The differences in the nature of agricultural produce in the various regions of Igala land served as a major stimulus to trade. Trade was further enhanced by the hierarchical state structure, the river Niger and its connections with other peoples in the Nigerian region and even outsiders like the Arabs and the Europeans. Even before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Igala were one of the most important commercial groups in and around the zone. With extensive networks and the River Niger i.e. the Egga port and the immediate hinterland, the strategic location of the Igala land<sup>4</sup> enabled them to trade directly and indirectly with the Ebirra, Afenmai, Esan, Nupe, Igbo, Benin, Yoruba, and many others. Indeed, this was an area of considerable agricultural surpluses and was noted for its high quality palm oil, rice, yam, dyes, medicinal herbs and fish. They exploited these complex political, economic and religious ties with the Esan/Benin, Aboh and Onitsha Igbo and Nupe communities<sup>5</sup> to their advantage.

The articles involved in these networks were numerous and also peculiar to the area. Internally producers exchanged products for those they did not produce themselves. Prominent among the regional items of trade were slaves, salt, fish/other sea resources, carved objects for religious purposes which are largely featured in the re-export trade of the Igala. Apart from the exchange of food product and other household then, slaves also featured prominently in the pre colonial trade. Northrup argued that the Igala warriors had supplied the area with slaves.. Some were obtained through raids and tribute and others in regional markets such as Panda, Ikiri, Gbobe, Asaba and Aboh. Slaves also came from Nupe and Kakanda. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was reported that about 11,400 slaves were sold annually at Ikiri market, most of whom came from Nupe and Kakanda.<sup>6</sup>

In pre-colonial Igala, both men and women actively participated in trade. Men were more concerned

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<sup>1</sup> Okojie, C.F....op.cit., 25.

<sup>2</sup> Lokopof 67/1920, "Assessment report on Ibaji District", N.J., A.D.O. 1920:18.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> It is strategically located bounded on the North by Etsako, on the West by Benin Kingdom, on the South by Western Igbo and the East by the River Niger and the Igala people. See Bradbury R.E. Op.cit.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Northrup, David, *Trade without rulers: Precolonial economic development in southeastern Nigeria*. Oxford university Press London 1978:47, see also Henderson, R.N., *The King in Everyman*; New Haven and London Yale University Press 1972:78.

with large scale trading, the capturing and marketing of slaves and the trading and marketing of horses, dogs and other livestock. They also participated in wholesale and brokerage, regional trading, providing security, organizing and financing trade on a large scale as well as exporting produce. Igala men excelled in carving skills, and which was made possible by the abundance of trees in the Igala forests. Thus apart from canoe making, they also carved mortar and pestle for pounding of *oje*, objects of religious worship *ebo*, both for internal consumption and exchange. In his analysis, Baikie argued that the carving industry was a very lucrative one as far as the Igala were concern. Baikie noted, in 1850, that a canoe of twenty feet length and eight feet width was selling for fifty cowries, enough to purchase a good looking female slave.<sup>1</sup> Canoes had a somewhat restricted market and there was an element of state monopoly, guaranteeing high profits as a result of the restrictions enforced by the guild. This was because Highland canoes were in great demand by fishermen, and traders, who carried their farm produce up to Edo, Aboh and other neighboring trading territories. The high demand led to the emergence of specialized canoe builders,<sup>2</sup> contributing to a fair degree of improvement in the industry.

Apart from canoes built by the Igala for the ferrying their goods to and fro the market as well as for interconnectivity, they also (by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) provided other fishing communities (on the Edo side of the river and beyond) with other fishing tools like net and fishing hooks. This was developed by the people and regulated by the leaders as a way of maximizing profit.<sup>3</sup> Also, the regulation of the net was essential to prevent a situation whereby the young fish would be caught leading to a boom in one year and no fish at all in the following.

This development led to a more sophisticated and healthy way of fishing as against the practice of fish poisoning which was widely practiced. This involved the use of some poisonous leaves (especially *parkia filicoidea* – *ugba*) which were pounded into paste and scattered over pools or poured into streams. The fish were stupefied and then collected. However, the introduction of nets changed the method of fishing in 1841 as described by Trotter, who wrote thus

*They used nets of twisted fibres of a plantain leaf and either staked off certain parts of shallow water or employed large circular nets which they suspended over the banks, and let down and draw up every few minutes, throwing in a bait to entice the fish to approach and sometimes a vegetable poison which soon kills the fish.*<sup>4</sup>

The above monopoly thus gave the Igala community a total grip on the fish trade as well as trade in other materials needed for fishing activities. This directly or indirectly gave them control over the resources accruing from such trade.

Ane-Igala contained societies which had periodic markets. The Igala traditional week was calculated based on the market days, thus a week is normally four days.<sup>5</sup> In each of these days, commercial activities held in each local market. The trading activities were held in such a way that it does not clash with that of other areas. However the most important of these was Niger bank market located at Illushi, with its trading activities at the Egga-Oria or the Niger Bank.<sup>6</sup> Due to its location at the bank of river Niger, traders from the neighboring areas brought their produce to the market, and purchased Igala goods. It was also from this market that some European products infiltrated into the interior of communities around the river Niger. This is true of the cowrie currency which was introduced to from the west into the Ane Igala through the river Niger bank market.<sup>7</sup>

The bank market at Illushi was (and is still) at the border between Edo and Igala land, it serves as a melting pot for traders from Aboh, Igbo land, Esan, Onitsha and Itsekiri, Usobo and Benin, as well as Nupe traders from the North<sup>8</sup>. The availability of periodic markets gave time for the arrival of traders from distant places, encouraged the assemblage of a variety of trade items, reduced the time required for marketing and allowed people to visit almost every market in a particular area in turn. The meeting of each market at specific intervals reduced the costs of collection and distribution.

The Igala area, with specific reference to the Egga market gave a boost in trading activities in the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W.B. Baikie, *Narration of an Exploration Voyage*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. These Canoes were used for transportation across the Niger. Remnants of these canoes are found today at the river bank even at Idah market in Kogi state and the Egga market in Edo state.

<sup>3</sup> This is evident in the existence till date of specialized groups in the area, who today are the rich families in the area. They also own the means of transportation across the Niger, thus forming a sort of Trade Union.

<sup>4</sup> H.D. Trotter, et.al. *A Narrative of an Expedition...* p.324.

<sup>5</sup> This is synonymous with the Igbo week days of Eke, Ukwo, Afo and Ore.

<sup>6</sup> This trade attracted patrons from as far as Benin, Itsekiri land, Igbo land down to Akure in Yoruba land as well as Nupe traders from the north in the pre colonial period.

<sup>7</sup> N.J. Brooke Assessment report 1920.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

century especially from 1860 to 1900 (i.e. the last forty years before the increased market for cash crops). Trade with foreign companies brought a new factor into the economic network of the people. The shift of Oria market from the hinterland to the Niger Bank at Illushi on the Niger where traders and farmers from the neighbouring Ibo, Itsekiri, Benin as well as Esan neighbours of the Igala district could easily cross by means of canoe also facilitated this development.<sup>1</sup> Apart from foodstuff, other traded commodities, were looking glasses, cotton cloth, soap, pottery, rum, salt, and new food stuffs such as cassava.<sup>2</sup> From this market, foodstuffs were also taken to Ogurugu, Onitsha, Adoru and upto the Benin markets. The strategic position of this market made Igala a part-taker in all the carrying trade between Onitsha and Idah, and between the area and the riverine northern Ibo towns and villages as well as the Itsekiri and Usobo.<sup>3</sup> This was attested to by early European scholars who commented on the commercial prowess of the Igala nation. For instance, both Porter, Northrup and Alagoa argued thus<sup>4</sup>

*“Along the Niger River above the Delta was another area of Interaction and the Ijo, Edo, Igala, and Igbo people. The roots of the contact must go back for a considerable time before 1500 since among the Igbo west of the river those elements of Edo culture which antedate the rise of the Benin Empire (c.1300) are more wide spread than those that can be detected from Benin.”*<sup>5</sup>

This trade from the Igala area to the Niger bank market was always at the peak during flood season, and was conducted in canoes manned by the Igala canoe men. The market pulled a large population because in the 1830's some 300 canoes were seen going up to the market, while in 1841, 60 canoes holding from 2 to 70 men were observed returning from it<sup>6</sup>. This attest to the fact that the Igala traders must have transverse the length and breadth of the area, taking along with them their culture and tradition.

It is important to note that it was as a result of these trade activities that the Igala culture and language spread beyond the original frontal of Igala land into some other areas especially among the Igbo people and the Edo people. In the case of the Edo are, it has been discovered that Igala settlements dots various villages of the Esan (Edo) people. This can be found in villages like Emaudo (Ekpoma), Ahia and Udakpa (Present Day Esan Southwest Local Govt Area), some parts of Ugboha and Irrua. Infact oral tradition of the Edo people holds that Irrua (an Edo community) was established by an Igala man, while Emaudo in Ekpoma was established by warriors from Igala<sup>7</sup>. Analyzing the end result of the above, Brooks, N.J, argued thus

*The result of this trade relationship is the formation of an indivisible community of Ishan, Ibo, Kukuruku (Afenmai) and Igala, who formed most of the early settlements of the area.*<sup>8</sup>

In his analysis Ukwedeh wrote that this argument is given more credibility based on the existence up to the present moment of pockets of Igala speaking settlements of Ebu, Olohi, Ugboha and Ifeku at the bank of the Niger.<sup>9</sup> These scholars are of the view that a good example of such indivisible community is found among those those that are today Ibaji Igala and the Agbacha Iwogun. In an attempt to give a graphic and analytical picture of this situation, Bradbury argued thus,

*The community is largely Igala, recognizing the supremacy of the Attah, but exhibits an admixture of culture...the social organization exhibits Ibo characteristics but most of their cults are clearly of Edo origin. In urho chieftdom Ishan and Igala communities live side by side, each retaining its own culture and social organization; most of the people speak a dialect of Igala with and admixture of Edo vocabulary . Igala is spoken as a second language in Urowa and Ugboha chieftdoms<sup>10</sup>. This explains the existence at the bank of the river Niger of heterogeneous settlements Edo and Igala*

<sup>1</sup> Ibid

<sup>2</sup> Henson, R.N.; *The King in everyman Evolutionary Trend in Onitsha, Ibo Society and Culture*. Yale Press, New Haven and London 1971, p.70, See also Appendices.

<sup>3</sup> This is attested to by the fact that uptill date in the market each group occupy a specific area where they display their articles of trade.

<sup>4</sup> All these are presently located in the Esan South East Local Government area, (formally Agbazil).

<sup>5</sup> J.C. Porter, Intelligence Report on the Okrika claim of Degema Division 1933:8-11, NAI, CSO 26/3/29004 Intelligence Report Ndoki, pp.8-11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See Bradbury..Op.cit.

<sup>8</sup> N.J. Brooks op.cit.

<sup>9</sup> Ukwedeh, N.J., 1976, p.18.

<sup>10</sup> Bradbury....opcit



*admixture, these includes Akamalu, Anegbette, Ebu, Olohi, Okpatawo, Ekperi, Okwohimili, Ukpodo, Ifeku and Ineme<sup>1</sup>.*

This view has been expressed by both Obayemi, Ukpono and Asenime. In the case of Obayemi and Ukpono, they both argued thus

*It is noted that, the boundaries of Ane-Igala (Igaland) have not remained static throughout history. For example the Western boundary was further inland into the Etsako and Ishan in the past. This accounts for the existance at the bank of the Niger the Igala settlements of Aja-Okuta, Ifeku, Ilori, Ikpatawo, Ekpen, Ebu, Ukwochili etc. The geography of the Igala language observed an author, indicates that as one moves into the interior, variety of Igala languages is heard<sup>2</sup>. This situation tends to agree with the preposition that the homeland of the Ebu/Igala proto language should be located in the area where the language e share common frontiers. It is also possible that the present Igala population might represent the off-springs of the proto-linguistic group of the region. The southwards migration along the Niger of the people away from Ane-Igala (Igaland) started as a result of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Idah-Benin war and later contributed to the origin of communities in this area like Ibaji, Olohi, Ebu, Illah, Osomari, Okpaiye Omuolu, Okekpe, Oko etc. whose settlements are found along the river Niger south of Onisha<sup>3</sup>.*

In support of the above view, Asenime wrote thus

*The effectiveness of the politico-cultural influence of the Igalamela (Igala) on the areas West in the South-east and north where expansion and consolidation of the Igala influence continued until the closing decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century .....The present Ebu people are the Igala origin. They were Igala soldiers deployed to the war between the Igalaland and Benin and were defeated. A lot of them founded the Igala towns around Anambra and Edo states. The Ibaji people were also part of the military troop. They intermarried with some other language groups like the Ibos along the way to their present settlements. This process of intermarried polluted the original Igala language spoken here (Idah). Their claim according to you (the writer) that they originated from Benin is an abstract way reasoning. They were Igala defeated soldiers that couldn't come back for the shame of losing a war... The Benin people wanted to check the commercial and territorial expansion of the Igala, so it resulted to war."<sup>4</sup>.*

An analysis of the above indicates both the human might and economic prowess of the Igala, which others have admired from time and would want to copy or learn from. Thus the area understudy has from time been described as one which represents a perfect blend of people and cultures due to its location at the bank of the river Niger. It is as a result of this that early scholars, Europeans and researchers have described the southeast Ebu, Inyelen and the settlements of Ibaji as Edo communities<sup>5</sup>. Also, field interviewed carried out in the course of this research indicates that this trade has been attributed to the spread of Igala influence in the sack masquerade of the Nupe and some of the Edo communities<sup>6</sup>.

With this above relationship established, there existed a solid communication network and the existence of unhindered social cultural exchange in the area, which did not only facilitate trade and commerce with the Igala immediate neighbours, but also encouraged a wider economic unit and system. This was because the Igala made and supplied various articles of trade, fishing equipments and canoes through the Niger Bank market trade to communities as far as the Niger Delta area.

It was indeed in the light of the above, that the author argues that this relationship did not end at the trade point, but went further to provide the various peoples with a communal sense with which they fought any perceived enemy. This was specifically displayed in their common stand against colonial domination of the Nigerian territory. When the territory was threatened by the presence of the invading forces of the colonial rulers, they came together to provide military, arsenals and passage for the troops. For example during the Ekumeku

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank Report: Appraisal of Agricultural Development Project 1369a U.N.I., 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Obayemi, A., "Culture and group identity: The Case of North east of Okun Yoruba", Centre for Nigerian Cultural Studies, A.B.U. Zaria, 1976:9

<sup>3</sup> Ukpono, L.N., *A Short History of Eze-Chima*, Midwest Newspapers Corporation, 1977:30

<sup>4</sup> Asenime, J, *The Emergence of an Igala Group in Delta State: A Case study of the Ebu People c.1500-1900*

<sup>5</sup> Bradbury, 1960...Op.cit

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Dr. Idris Jimada, Dept of History, A.B.U, Zaria.

uprising which was against the colonial invasion, the market route right from Edo through the Igala territory down to Igbo land provided the needed passage for the local troops from Edo, Ebu, Illah, Ubulu-Uku, and Ibusa. Through this route which was not known to the invading force they were able to launch a sort of guerrilla warfare against the invading army. The organization of the has been described by earlier authors thus,

*During the Ekumeku struggle/uprising, troops recruited from Edo were mobilized through the Niger bank market-Otu-Illah route... At Otu-Illa, the recruits from Illa and Ebu were further organized, It was thus from this union and through this route which was not well known to the whites that the people attacked the British, pulling down churches and burning down houses belong to the administration...The bush was full of indigenous soldiers, who travelled by night and day for their guerrilla attacks and secret discussions....it was from these troops, the Missionaries and Company officials fled the area...except Asabe itself, a nearby small town Onicha-Ugbo and Isselle-Uku where the company had a garrison<sup>1</sup>.*

### **Conclusion**

From our analysis so far, we cannot deny the fact that the people of the Nigerian area from time immemorial had devised mechanism for integration and nation building; one of which was trade and commerce. In this way the various peoples were able to meaningfully interact and spread of their civilizations, as well as incorporate those of the adjoining territories into theirs .it was this excellent network that the colonialists met on ground and established on; thus coming out with what today constitute the Nigerian territory. The point being emphasized is that the activities of these pre colonial societies demystify the erroneous believe that the people (before advent) were only involved in the gyration of barbarous tribes before the advent of colonial rule; and that it was the advent of colonial rule that disrupted her civilization as well as the symbiotic relationship she was building for the country.

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<sup>1</sup> N.A.E 520/24 Copland-Crawford, Report of Rising of the Ekumeku society, 25, April 1904, Dennis E, The Rising of the Ekumeku Niger and Yoruba Notes, 1964; Ogoegbunam C, "A History of the Ekumeku Uprising in Aniocha area 1898-1911" M.A, Thesis, A.B.U, Zaria, 1991, Asenime J.U, Social and Economic History of Ebu People c. 1800- 1960 A.D, Unpublished M.A, Thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 2000.

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