



A Culture History of Precolonial Tuomo Society before the Advent of Western Institutions in Nigeria: A Signpost of Ijo Culture

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Abstract: *This study explores the precolonial cultural history of the Tuomo people, an Ijo-speaking community located in the Bolutoru Creek region of Delta State, Nigeria, before the influence of Western institutions. The study examines the influence of geography on the migratory history of the Tuomo people, and traces its roots to the ancient movements out of Gbaramatu and Arogbo via many places to their present location. The study highlights the distinctive sociocultural practices of the Tuomo people, characterized in their political, economic, traditional education, and religious beliefs tied to the Bulusubu Deity, regarded as God's representative living amongst men, and the epicenter of lived traditions of the people. This uncommon tradition in living memory that was handed down through generations in the form of rites of passage such as childbirth, circumcision, marriage, and death, as well as communal festivals and the symbolic roles of masquerades and sacred objects are the living libraries of their cultural heritages. The study adopted a descriptive historical model and depended on primary and secondary sources of data collection for analysis. Thus, the findings reveals a comprehensive history mirroring an essentially preliterate Ijo civilization, which underscores the dynamic yet enduring traditions of the people, offers insight into how these practices shaped the community's identity before colonialism.*

Keywords: Culture History, Tuomo, Ijo, Delta State, Nigeria, Western Institutions.

1. Introduction

The history of any people is deeply rooted in their culture, as lived experiences. Tuomo is an Ijo/Izon-speaking community located within the Bolutoru Creek in Delta State of Nigeria. Before the advent of Western institutions and cultural influences, the Tuomo people developed and sustained a rich cultural heritage marked by distinctive traditional practices, social structures, and belief systems. The environment defined by swamps, rainforests, and abundant natural resources played a central role in shaping their lifestyle. This is because the cultural history of Tuomo in precolonial times represents the heritage of its class and identity. The cultural history and traditions of the people have caught the interest of historians and social anthropologists, presenting a veritable insight into a people whose identity and history have been shaped by elements in the social environment. Tuomo is the headquarters of the Tuomo Clan, encompassing several surrounding settlements.

Preliterate culture history is shrouded with complexities. Because of its dependence primarily on oral traditions, with pockets of intelligence reports. The bulk of its cultural history as a distinctive identity has not been properly documented. Besides its internal development only sleeps in the collective memories² of a few individuals. The composition of the community is still being wrestled with by contemporary discourses that mock the viability of these precolonial achievements. There were occasions of inter-communal wars, a struggle for the priesthood, and the quest for a safe environment. Thus, like other Ijo communities shaped the dynamics of intergroup relations, maintained a distinctly African worldview expressed in their religion and sociopolitical systems. They

preserved their cultural traditions orally through sacred rituals, festivals, rites of passage, and a well-articulated indigenous educational system. These customs, norms, and values served not only as means of social control and cohesion but also as a framework for moral guidance, spiritual direction, and communal identity; demonstrably a moral community.

The centrality of its cultural edifice revolves around the indigenous educational, economic, and political systems. Although predominantly informal, rooted in oral tradition, apprenticeship, and cultural transmission through folk narratives, domestic imitation, and ritual practices, among others, knowledge production processes are known to the African world, especially science and technology, geometry, arithmetic and philosophy. Their lives were shaped by the region's rich riverine environment, splendidly suitable for a mixed economy such as fishing, farming, palm wine tapping, and canoe carving as central activities, often organized along gender lines. These significant cultural complex of the Tuomo history in its precolonial strands, spotlights a deep insight into the indigenous knowledge systems and heritage that have withstood the test of time, becomes a storehouse of history, offering insight into how these cultural structures laid the foundation for community life long before the arrival of European cultural traditions on the West Coast of Africa, is the focus of this paper. This paper is divided into three major sections to drive home the significant aspect of Ijo history and, by extension, Africa's precolonial pride.

Geographical and Historical Overview

The geographical setting is characterized by fresh water swamps, tropical rainforest vegetation, with abundant natural resources, which has significantly shaped the cultural and sociopolitical life of its people. The Ijo people refer to this location as "Bolutoru Creek, Ekeremor or Tuomo speakers, meaning from the same creek." Tuomo town is the headquarters of "Tuomo Clan" ("Tuomo Ibe" commonly referred to as the TT Clan) comprising "Teimigbe (Toru-outside and Bolou-inside) Torugbene town, Ogbogbagbebe and Tebegbe town" all in Burutu Local Government Area of Delta State. They are situated in the fresh water swamp area of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The vegetation is largely riverine with tropical rainforest, with lots of economic trees. The Tuomo territory is blessed with an abundance of natural resources such as wildlife, lakes, raffia palm trees, and it's currently home to oil exploratory activities. Thus, the environment of Tuomo shaped the socioeconomic activities of the people.

According to oral history, the progenitor of the Tuomo people is "Tuo" (the first son of Esuku/Osuku-owei), and the present settlement of the Tuomo Community was dotted with a series of migrations embarked by the early ancestors. The ancestors of the Tuomo people were part of same migration that left "Gbaramatu" and "Arogbo" in prehistoric time. They accompanied the Arogbo on their journey before settling at Ukpe. According to Gbelele, from Ukpe, some of the ancestors migrated up the Forcados River to "Patani territory" and founded a settlement, living close to the "Erowha" (Efe or Edo people). Afterwards, due to the slave raiding activities of Okumbiri, Mein, among others, they were forced to flee. Thus, a faction of the Erowha community migrated and settled at the present-day Efurun in Warri, which in recent times has become an Urhobo-speaking community. They moved again and settled in Aboh territory, but also due to incessant inter-communal wars, Esuku and his family abandoned the settlement and proceeded southwards via Ayotoro, settled in Ekantsgbene territory where the Ayakoromo community resides today. The tradition tells of Esuku had divinity at Ekantsgbene, and after his death, the children agreed to make Tuo king over them, and the custodian of his father's divinity. However, Tuo rejected the offer of kingship and the custodian of the divinity, he therefore escaped to Isamp in Tarakiri Ibe. During a fishing expedition, Tuo settled at the present location, which was called Toru-agboro (Agboro on the river). Thereafter, they were joined by Itali and Patani indigenes of "Kabo-wei Ibe" in their present site.

Figure 1: Showing Tuomo's Location on the map of Burutu LGA.



Culture History: A Conceptual Discourse

Culture is defined as the total way of life. It is hard to imagine any period in time when man lived without culture. A society's culture includes all of the socially borrowed, learned and transmitted patterns of behaviors, values, morals, traditions, ideas, attitudes, etc., which influence individuals and which they share together. It is also defined as "all those historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, and non-rational, which exist in any given time as potential guides for the behavior of men." According to Taylor, culture is that complex whole which includes: knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.⁴ Thus, to Piddington, culture is "the sum total of the material and intellectual equipment whereby they satisfy their biological and social needs."

Culture is divided into two broad categories such as material and non-material to depict its distinctiveness. Material culture refers to all the physical artefacts that shape the lives of members of a particular society, distinctive clothing, buildings, inventions, food, artworks, writings, music, and so on. Some of the most important aspects of material culture are technological achievements, which are the ways members of a society apply knowledge to adapt to the changing socioeconomic or environmental conditions. While non-material culture constitutes all the non-physical products of society that are created over time, and shared knowledge, beliefs, customs, values, morals and symbols. Non-material culture also includes common patterns of behaviors and forms of interactions appropriate in a particular society. The emphasis is that culture is both static and dynamic over time; culture is changed, retained, and reformed in line with prevailing circumstances. Culture, both in its static and dynamic form, is transmitted from one generation to another. This is how it turns out to be cultural heritage. Culture history records and interprets past events involving human beings through the social, cultural, and political milieu of or relating to the arts and manners that a group favors. As such, cultural history studies human actions, change and continuity as evidenced by the material and non-material culture which includes inventions, environmental diffusion and the extent of utility in human society.

Sociocultural Ventures

The Tuomo people are a unique set of people with a unique way of life. Before the penetration of Western culture and institutions in the area, the people exhibited a patterned behavior which was passed down to them from one generation to the next. This pattern of behaviors was expressed via their beliefs (religion), rites of passage, education system, economic activities and political lifestyle.

Religion and Festivity

Religion is a key element in a people's culture, and it plays a vital role in the lives of a people. His Highness Oshogbo Akeinkide observes religion as "one of the main factors that held the Tuomo Clan in unity as the celebration and veneration of a common deity brought the various communities within the clan closer together." The people of Tuomo were originally traditionalists, and their religion was not in any way different from the African Traditional Religion. Nevertheless, like all other religious practices in the world, the belief in a supreme being (God) has never been in doubt, but "a great difference exists in the idea of mediator between the supreme being (Temeowei). The reality is that Tuomo Traditional Religion does not ascribe the role of mediator to Jesus Christ or Mohammed as do the foreign religions (Christianity and Islam), but believes in the role of ancestors as well as Bolusubu, Guga Orumetera, Pauleowei and Akederou as Deities through which God is worshipped. There is also a sacred forest "Opuogbo Bou", and lake "Ebiribo Dunu" in Tuomo. Opuogbo Bou is accordingly the abode of the spirit beings."

The chief Deity worshipped is Bulusubu, whom was found by Tuo floating in the river while he was fishing (remember that Tuo once rejected the offer to accept Bulusubu as a deity and to be the head of his father's family), but this time Tuo took it home and began to worship Bulusubu. This was how Bulusubu came to be the national Deity of Tuomo. Veneration of Bulusubu was held in high esteem by the Tuomo people, who saw Bulusubu as an umbrella of coverage for protection and blessings. Sacrifices to the deity were a paramount prerequisite for survival. Bulusubu was responsible for maintaining law and order; crimes like stealing, murder, adultery, etc., were seriously frowned at, and anyone found guilty of such was severely punished by the deity. As a deity, Bulusubu is usually represented by the totemic figure of python (Sadia) and the monitor lizard (abedi). These were seen and believed to have a mystical relationship with Bulusubu and were thus revered. It was taboo to kill and eat any of these animals, which were seen as sacred among the people. The snail (osi) was also forbidden for consumption among the people.



Celebrations were usually held in honor of Bulusubu in the form of "Bulusubu Oge" (Bulusubu festival) once every year. One interviewee asserted that "before the festival commences, all the sons and daughters of Tuomo living in other places would come, and all other communities within the Tuomo Clan would come as well with their various skills and talents, all in honor of Bulusubu

Deity. Participants are engaged in various games and sporting activities, such as gun shooting competitions, wrestling, swimming, canoe racing competitions, etc. were performed during the celebration. Before the wrestling competition, two symbolic giant monitor lizards would wrestle for the fortune tellers to predict the outcome of the two wrestling communities; thus, the wrestling game was also the precursor to the festival.⁹ The Bulusubu Deity was publicly worshipped once a year on the Tuomo market day (akanbai). The festival lasts one market week (eight days). The deity is worshipped on the first Tuomo market day, and the second is four days after Bomadi market day, and it's followed by the worship of Guga and other deities. Libations were offered at the shrine of Bulusubu, after which masquerades (awu) are free to roam about and display their various styles.

The masquerades include Aforumou, Endiawu, Oguberi, etc. These masquerades were possessed by the Bulusubu spirit. As a result, there is no specific or separate masquerade festival in the community; they are all tied to the annual worship of Bulusubu Deity. The climax of the masquerades segment was the worship or appeasement of the water or marine goddesses. This was followed in quick succession by a war procession in which men were feat with their powers and the efficiency of their war charms and amulets, significantly showcasing the potency of "Egbesu" (Ijo war God) in practice. The spirits were believed to have come out to attend the festival, which was believed as communion between the two worlds (spiritual and physical realms). Thus, there were rituals they invoked to return them home through procession by the chief priest. This brings to an end the festival, which was an annual ritual in Tuomo.

Rites of Passage

Down through the ages, the Tuomo people have accorded some special rites of passage. Rite of passage is a ritual event that marks a person's progress from one status to another. Rites of passage, according to Udisi Lawrence, are ceremonies surrounding events and other milestones attained by people. It is also referred to as initiation ceremonies, such as baptism, etc. Rites of passage are usually connected with personal transitions between important stages that occur during one's lifetime, these transitions are generally emotional changes. Precolonial Tuomo people considered the important transitions of birth, circumcision, marriage, eldership, and death as very serious events.

Birth: In Tuomo, birth is regarded as one of the most critical and important situations in life. The period of pregnancy is regarded as the most dangerous, because "it is believed to be the period when attempts are made by evil forces to harm or destroy both mother-to-be and the unborn child".

Thus, as soon as pregnancy is confirmed, great care is taken to ensure safe delivery. Young girls normally stay with their mother or a close relative before delivery. According to Bread Odikeme "the first seven days after delivery is dangerous because some traditionalist in Tuomo were believed to have forbidden new born babies and their mothers, so if these set of people sees any new born babies and their mothers before the seven days are completed the new born baby will die."¹⁰ So the new born baby and mother are to stay indoor (Areware) for eight days before coming out". Childbirth is well celebrated (except twin babies, which were considered evil and killed), and male children are the most celebrated ones. The reason for the greater appreciation of the male child is that he would inherit the family estate and maintain the family name, while the girls would be married out. Immediately after a child is born, the child is washed and sprayed with a concentrated native gin, which is a cleansing agent and sterilizer and presented to the parents, the newly delivered mother and father. Naming ceremony during which the child is given a name reflects the world view of the child, or after the day on which the child was born or after one of the child's ancestors.

Circumcision (Benikoro)

Circumcision is an ancient practice of the Tuomo people, which has continued to date. Traditionally, both males and females are circumcised, but the time of circumcision of a child varies from family to family, as some families only allow their children to be circumcised when they reach the age of puberty. These families believed that infant circumcision had caused untimely death in their families. In Tuomo, there were not many ceremonies attached to male circumcision, however, the ceremony for female circumcision is more elaborate. Girls' circumcision involves cutting part of the clitoris (oregain). It was usually performed collectively by a group of four girls or more of marriageable age, which was accompanied by elaborate ceremonies. The girls involved were usually treated like queens and were not allowed to do any form of domestic tasks until they were finally

healed. Male circumcision on the other hand involves removing part of the foreskin of the penis, usually with a knife. It was carried out by men who were considered competent for the job. Usually, fresh plantain leaves were laid out on the floor outside the house of the parents.

Able-bodied men would hold the child very firmly to prevent him from moving any part of his body. When the surgeon ascertained that the grip was firm enough, he would then perform the surgery. After the operation, herbs were usually applied, and within a few days, all pains would have subsided. As a tradition, both male and female circumcised are called "ayoro". This accorded the newly circumcised a special dish called "polufiya". They usually tied rapper; the males tied rapper around their neck with their legs wide open when they walk about because they do not want the wound in their penis to touch any part of their body. Adults were also not allowed to have sex or marry without being circumcised, which was a common tradition amongst the Tuomo people of Delta State in Nigeria.

Marriage (Erenana)

Marriage in traditional Tuomo was held sacred. Polygamy was the norm everywhere; the practice of having more than one wife was widely practiced, and a man's wealth was determined by the number of wives and children he had. It's not that monogamy was forbidden; rather, marriage to more than one woman was not frowned upon. If a man had an interest in a girl, he would have to go do a formal introduction by visiting with his family members to meet with the parents of the girl and formally set the preliminary stage by asking for the girl's hand in marriage. When the parents' consent was given, a day was fixed for the payment of the bride wealth. Marriage ceremony in traditional Tuomo witnesses the payment of the bride wealth and the tying of the nuptial knot between a man and women who have decided to get married and whose parents have accepted her bride wealth.

Payment of bride wealth was important because it legalized the union. It was seen as a kind of documented signed between families, an agreement duly entered into for life, unifying and protecting the marriage. It entitled the husband to adultery fees in the event of unfaithfulness on the part of the wife, it thus gives the man exclusive rights over the wife. The return of the bride's wealth signifies the end of marriage since it was the very thing that legalized and legitimized the marriage. Thus, divorce was affected by the return of the bride's wealth. Traditionally, the marriage ceremony was usually done at the home of the bride. During the ceremony, the bride (ayoro) was usually kept in a well-furnished room where she was served by relations and friends alike, composed of ladies. Marriage was accompanied by singing, dancing and feasting. The payment of the bride wealth was usually done the same day as the marriage, which signifies the bringing of the groom and bride as man and wife.

Eldership (Okosuotu)

The rite of eldership was the fourth major initiation rite, and it was an important component of the initiation system because it was the elders who presented tradition and the wisdom of the past. Thus, Tuomo's precolonial era experienced a remarkable leadership balancing; there existed social groupings such as "Oru-Amabraowei" and "Osowei". The most powerful of all was the Osowei, a revered sacred cult group comprised mainly of the menfolk, who have distinguished themselves in the society. Its function was to offer protection and prestige to the community by those who had undergone the initiation rite successfully coupled with their ripe old age, as currency for the membership. This sacred society was seen in traditional eyes as an offshoot of Bulusubu's Shrine. However, unlike other sacred associations, Osowei's case was different; it was not wholly secret, as its members were generally known by the public.

Death and Afterlife

Death is the last rite of passage that a person has to go through on earth. Traditionally, the Tuomo people believed in "death as an act of God". God, the creator of death, sanctioned death for mankind. Death, therefore, becomes something inevitable, a kind of debt to be paid by all. Death and burial in Tuomo are marked by grief and mourning, weeping signals the demise of someone in a family in the case of a loved one and when the person dies prematurely, mixed mood of joyful mourning if the deceased had died at a ripe old age firing of three- or four-gun shots respectively signals the death of a male and female adult. There are also two types of burial ceremonies. These were the "Ogbodein" and "Tebesendein" (hair shaving ceremony). There are elaborate funeral rites associated with

drumming, singing, dancing, funs, drinking, and eating etc. The Tebesendein takes place after three or four days of the Ogbodein; members of the deceased family would shave their hair, including facial hair, symbolizing death and new life. In precolonial Tuomo, women (except very old) are not allowed to be buried in the town; they are only buried in cemeteries based on their age. This practice is still observed by the people today because all those that attempted to bury their mothers in Tuomo main land are disturbed by spirits, those who tried to violate the custom later dugouts their mother's dead bodies few days after the burial and bury them in the community cemetery by Tuomo customs, norms and traditions.

They believed that death was not the end of human existence on earth. Death was regarded as a transition from one stage of existence to another; they believed in reincarnation. They believed that dead people would be reborn into their families or other parts of the world. According to Monokeme "traditional Tuomo people also believed that a dead person spirit could come back to pack his/her properties spiritually during the Tebesendein before his/her properties are shared physically among his/her family members." Thus they gathered the dead person properties in one room for the deceased spirit to spiritually take what he/she wants to take before the sharing of the deceased properties. Accordingly, the signals of the coming of the deceased spirit are: dead body odor, putting off lights in the room and sounds of touching the properties. It was believed that he lived in the "Duweamabou" with these properties. Another interviewee subscribed that Duweamabou "was the home of the dead, and was believed to be the abode of all the dead." This was further dissected by Prof. Benjamin Okaba, president Ijo National Congress (INC), when he observed that "the Duweamabou in Ijo society is regimented into many spheres of influence such as communities, lineages and family units."

The belief was that "there is a certain compartment in Duweamabou, dwelled by the people and families that are possessed by evil spirits, they could come to the physical world through birth; they can be born into any family to make money and return through death; it's believed that every money spent on these types of babies went into their spiritual account. One of the interviewees asserted that she thinks "the people living in that part of Deweamabou are suffering from hunger, the hunger they face is worse than the one in the physical world, and that is the reason they come to the physical world to make money and gather food and return." This type of baby is referred to as "Owouwenawoama (plural) or Owouwenetubou (singular). They died to be reborn for a certain period (usually died at puberty) after they had made their parents spend a huge amount of money to repeat their life cycle, causing the family a whole lot of grief. Thus, if the parents of those types of children quickly notice that their child was Owouwenetubou, they had to quickly perform the necessary rituals to prevent the child from going back to his/her Duweamabou family.

In other cases, when parents understood that their child was Owouwenetubou after they died again, and to stop them from being reborn into the family, they usually mutilate the child's corpse or bury it with tattoo or incised marks over the body, thus preventing them from returning to cause havoc in the family. Those Owouwenawoama children sometimes returned to distant nibbling for vengeance against the family.

Indigenous Education

Education is the process of cultural transmission and renewal. The process whereby adult members of a society carefully guide the development of infants and young children, initiating them into the culture. Education in a precolonial sense could best be described as informal, because it does not necessarily follow a specified syllabus or scheme of work, as is the case with the Western educational system. Tuomo's traditional education takes the form of "informal transmission of societal or communal norms, values, customs and ethos from one generation to another, through the medium of folklore, folk music, folk tales, adages, riddles and jokes. The old members of society served as facilitators or teachers to children in their houses impacted the children through the above mediums with questions and answers, as well as hands-on experimental learning techniques.

Traditional education in preliterate Tuomo also offered the apprenticeship model of learning, which enabled young ones to acquire the requisite skills in various endeavors of life necessary for economic independence and survival in adulthood. Young boys learnt the act of tapping by following their fathers and other elderly people to "Koropeinbou"(raphia palm tapping bush). Similarly, girls are often expected to remain at home and learn domestic work by imitating how their mothers and other

female elders in the community carried out domestic chores, such as cooking, sweeping, weeding farmlands, weaving mats and baskets, etc. Young people also engaged in training activities like climbing, cooking (tei-tei fiye), wrestling, children's masquerades festival, carving of masquerades, drums, canoe for children play, and grass and mat house building, swimming practice, and fishing expeditions. Intellectual training consisted of sitting quietly beside their father at meetings and listening attentively to learn the skills and process associated with the arbitration of cases, oratory, wise sayings and the use of proverbs, as well as the philosophical world.

Thus, the Tuomo people had a dynamic sense of the supernatural world around them as well as the potency of the natural environment. One interviewee stated that some practiced witchcraft and passed it down from generation to generation. It's also the common practice of the use of medicine to harm or protect, to ensure health and fertility, and victory charms were common amongst the Tuomo people. While medical practitioners rely on herbal remedies, others are purely magical. Some were common knowledge, others the property of guides or individual specialists. The specialists were trained in the indigenous educational system. It's important to note that Tuomo's indigenous education has no written curriculum, but it served the community well as everyone had employment through various services rendered to humanity. These services were either paid in cash or in kind.

Economic Ventures

An economic system is the effective management of the resources of a society to meet the basic human needs, such as food and water, clothing and shelter, as well as the exchange of goods and services. Tuomo Town is blessed with an abundance of natural resources; the vegetation is largely riverine with tropical rainforest, with high-value economic trees such as the wild or African palm wine for distilling local gin. Fertile lands, lakes, and canals are also abound in Tuomo. Thus, the economy was greatly influenced by the environment. The economic activities of the Tuomo people include: fishing, farming, tapping, lumbering, and canoe carving. The indigenous fishing industry in Tuomo was a vast enterprise, as a result of the availability of rivers, lakes and canals situated in the town, fishing was a major occupation in the community as it provided a cheap source of protein as well as articles for trade. Fishing in Tuomo was the function of several indigenous techniques such as spears, traps, hooks, nets, poison, as well as the construction of ponds and fences etc. The town had two fishing festivals at "Ebiribou Lake" yearly; the first in February and the second in November. This Ebiribou Lake fishing festival usually attracted neighboring communities' participation as they came with different fishing gear to fish in the lake, which, in most cases, was borrowed by the people for future use. Libations and prayers were offered to the Lake before people ventured into their fishing activities.



Like in many traditional Ijo settings, the women were basically in control of the "processing, preserving and marketing of the harvested fishes whilst the men dominated fishing activities, since women were, in most cases, prevented from engaging in risky ventures. The exchange was traded by

barter before the use of cowries as a medium of exchange." Tuomo people supplemented the economy with a little subsistence farming; crops such as yam, cassava, plantain, cocoyam and sweet potato were planted in medium quantities. While palm wine tapping and local gin distillation were the major occupations of every adult male in precolonial Tuomo society. They also engaged in canoe carving. Canoes are "dugout boats, they are made by hollowing a tree-trunk." The skills involved in the hallowing process were commendable. The digger-hoe tool itself was a technological feat; even more baffling was the finishing technique, the technique involved a high level of technological development. The smoothing process and sharpening system were done by insertion at appropriate intervals.

Canoes served the Tuomo people as a means of transportation in the waterways as camels do to the Sahara Desert dwellers. As it was prevalent in many precolonial societies, the Tuomo people built houses with hard small trees with mud walls, and thatching roofs produced from a combination of leafs and the hard back of the long branches of the raffia hooker. The raffia palm leaves are arranged and joined together on split raffia palm bamboo poles to produce suitable roofing mats. The dressing culture of the people was also unique, men used white loincloths tied around the waist, a black hat with an eagle feather to crown it. The ladies equally used a white loincloth tied around the waist or chest region with a white head tie (agele). It is important to note that pre-colonial Tuomo society was guided by a high level of morality.

Political System

The mixed economic activities drive the political organization to favor a gerontocracy leadership system, where authority rested with the elderly known as Ama-Okosuowei (Village Elder). He was chairperson of the village assembly (Amangula), as well as the Village Head, supported by the Council of Elders and Chief Priest, who performed both civic and spiritual duties.² Dispute resolution, was embedded in spiritual practices through the Bulusubu Shrine Court. The society was well integrated and holistic in every sense, where education, economy, and governance were deeply interwoven with the cultural environment.

The political history of Tuomo started with one nuclear family, the head of the family was the father, and in his absence, the oldest male son acted in the place of the father; as time went on, this evolved into quarters, which in turn grew into Tuomo Town. General meetings were held to discuss matters concerning murder, stealing, slavery, and marriage, fishing rights, ownership of lakes, lands, and raffia palm bushes. The political organization of the early Ijo society was largely non-centralized. Prof Obaro Ikime corroborates that, "the Ijo political system is like that of a fragmented society in which the village is made up of people who claim common descent from given ancestors through the male line. The village is divided into quarters; each quarter is, in turn, made up of extended families, each of which normally lives within a definite compound. There was a man and his wives, as well as grown-up sons and their wives and children resided in the compound." Thus, Tuomo was divided into three major quarters, namely;

Foukunou: comprised the family units of Tobufiekeme ware, Enebufo, Koru, and Afo ware.

Akerebunu: comprised the family units of Obabein/Okoro, Asian, Oyabera, Zuo, and Ekpebimo ware.

Ekeremobiri: comprised the family units of Youprebofa, Panwuru, Pade, Pinapins, Tudiyeafa, and Tein ware, Diritenkumo ware, and Yeifeyei ware.

Prof. Alagoa, however, described the political structure of the western Ijo in which Tuomo is part of as "gerontocracy", government by elders. The oldest man is automatically the head of the village community. He was referred to as "Ama-okosuowei", town elder and chairman of the Amagula (Village Assembly). The executive duties of the Amagula were, however, performed by a younger leader called "Ogulasuowei" (spokesperson). Religious matters came under the eagle eyes of the Chief Priest "Orukareowei." The village administration was assisted by Okosuotu (Elders Council), which functioned as a decision-making organ and authority holders in conjunction with the Ama-okosuowei, due to their age.

There were no formal courts in precolonial Tuomo society. The Bulusubu Shrine served as the temple of justice, where the high priest (Orukareowei) played an important role in community affairs. He (priest), in conjunction with his lieutenants and community elders, decides who will participate in dispute resolution issues. He served as a judge in heinous cases such as murder, piracy and theft. He invoked the Bulusubu Deity to confirm and deliver the decision of the gods because of

the belief that he sees the spiritual realm. If the two parties involved in the dispute are not pleased with the verdict, the priest would make the two parties swear an oath in the name of Bulusubu Deity. It was also the duty of Orukarewei to announce the date of the Tuomo festival through the Town Crier.

1. Conclusion

The cultural history of the Tuomo people before the advent of Western institutions reflects a deeply rooted, richly layered society guided by traditional beliefs, values, and social systems as exemplified in the indigenous culture that regulated social conduct, spiritual life, and human relationships. Thus, it illustrated a culture that was both spiritually profound and socially cohesive. This precolonial cultural heritage not only shaped their identity but also fostered unity, discipline, and continuity among the people. The preservation of these cultural commons upon which the society was built before the influence of Western institutions, such as indigenous education, technology, economy, and political systems, was a deeply proud heritage rooted in communal values and environmental realities. Education was informal yet holistic, blending moral instruction, skill acquisition, cultural transmission that had thrived for many millennia, was the gift of the River Niger structured around kinship, spirituality, with leadership resting in the hands of elders who ensured social order and upheld communal values. The resilience of the cultural traditions in the lived experiences of the people was a clear case of a culturally rich heritage.

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