# ASPECTS OF INTERCOMMUNAL RELATIONS BETWEEN NKEREFI AND NARA UNATEZE 1900 – 1960

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**Abstract**
This work focused on the socio-political relations between Nkerefi and Nara Unateze in colonial Nigeria, both communities are found in present day Nkanu East Local Government of Nigeria. It discovered that inter-group relations that existed between Nkerefi and Nara took various forms and ranged from economic, social, political and cultural exchanges. The similarities in language, festivals, social and political forms of organization, among others lay bare the evidence of close-knit interaction that existed between Nkerefi and Nara Unateze; a detailed examination of these factors form, the crux of this research work. The study employed the historical methods which emphasize description, thematic presentation, interpretation and analysis of facts. Information for this study was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources came from oral interviews, with the persons knowledgeable on the research subject, as well as archival documents obtained from the National Archives, Enugu (NAE). Secondary sources like textbooks, journal articles, magazines, newspapers and so on were used. Related unpublished materials like personal diaries, academic theses were also used. The findings show that there were strong inter-group relations between Nkerefi and Nara Unateze mainly on economic and socio-cultural factors.
**Keywords:** Inter-group, Relation, Nigeria, Nkerefi, Nara Unateze

## Introduction

Understanding the varied relationships between communities, kingdoms and ethnic groups, otherwise called inter-group relations is perhaps the oldest approach to the study of Nigerian history.[1] The importance of inter-group relations in Nigerian history may not be overemphasised: this has been aptly documented by such historian as Obaro Ikime, Adiele Afigbo and O.D. Okpeh, among others. For example, A.E. Afigbo notes that,

> …the theme of inter-group relations in Nigerian history is not a new invention of recent Nigerian

> historiography, only the emphasis given to it and the care, sympathy and understanding with which it has been investigated have varied from epoch to epoch.[2]

Afigbo further shows that through varied accounts of origin and migrations most Nigerian ethnic group are keenly interested in preserving the perceptions of the inter-group relations between them and their neighbours.[3] Additionally, J.F.A. Ade Ajayi and E.J. Alagoa further underscored the importance of the inter-group approach to the study of Nigerian history when they held that,

> It is of course, necessary to begin with the histories of the individual groups, but we need to lay greater stress on inter-group relationships, to compare developments within the various groups, and to relate developments in each group to the emerging Nigeria-wide pattern.[4]

*In the Yoruba-Igbo Relations, 1925-1960*,[5] Jumoke Olaidi examines Igbo relations with the Ekiti of north-eastern Yoruba land during the colonial period. The study examines the Igbo contributions to social, cultural, political and economic development of Ekitiland. The author highlights the factors that conditioned the Igbo to migrate to Yoruba land and Ekiti particularly. According to the author, it was the missionary Roman Catholic priests that first brought the Igbo to Ekiti land in the twentieth century. When eventually the Igbo got themselves integrated into Yoruba land, they helped to bring their kins, mostly the Awka blacksmiths into Ekiti. Although, Jumoke's study does not concern itself with either the Nkerefi or the Nara Unataeze people, it nonetheless shows that the twentieth century was a period of change for most Nigerian communities. This fact is considered crucial in historicising the relations between Nkerefi and Nara Unateze.

In *Nnewi and Awka-Etiti Relations,*[6] M. C. Muoneke explicates the close contacts between Nnewi and Awka-Etiti over the years. Like the present work which delves into the aspects of the relationship between Nkerefi and Nara Unateze, Muoneke's work examines the aspects of relations of the two communities – Nnewi and Awka-Etiti. The author observes that these communities established relations through trade, inter-marriages, festivals and wars.[7] These relations between Nnewi and Awka Etiti, like that between Nkerefi and Nara Unateze led to cultural diffusion and the cultural similarity between both communities today.

In *The Dynamics of Inter-group Relations in Nigeria Since 1960: Essays in Honour of Obaro Ikime @ 70*,[8] the importance of the study of inter-group relations among Nigeria societies are explicated. The authors infer that the study of inter-group relations shows the contributions of history and historiography towards nation-building. In the book chapter, insight into the development of the trend of studying inter-group relation under political, social and economic variables is drawn. However, no detailed examination or appraisal of inter-group relations under these variables is attempted. This present study seeks to fill this gap by selecting Nkerefi and Nara Unateze for detailed appraisal.

In Nkanu sub-cultural zone of Igbo land, the Nkerefi Clan is prominent and through accounts of origin, political institutions, trade, festival, and titles, among others, were known to have related over the ages with her neighbours. The inter-group relations between Nkerefi and Nara Unateze provide a window into a better understanding of the history of the Nkanu people.

The inter-group relations that existed between Nkerefi and Nara Unateze took various forms and anged from economic, social, political and cultural exchanges. The similarities in language, festivals, social and political forms of organisation, among others lay bare the evidence of close-knit interaction that existed between Nkerefi and Nara Unateze. Therefore this study will examine the different forms of interaction between Nkerefi and Nara Unateze 1900 – 1960.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theory most relevant to this study is the theory of Mutual Aids. The proponent of this theory is John Locke. The theory of Mutual Aids was popularized by the: Russian philosopher, Peter Kropotkin.[9] Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) was a Russian prince, geographer, and self-proclaimed anarchist, who gave up wealth and a privileged lifestyle in exchange for one of scientific discovery and political activism. It was his desire to help emancipate his fellow Russians from economic and political exploitation, and did so by writing propagandistic pamphlets, books, and essays. If they could shed off their hopelessness, Kropotkin believed it would bring about a rejuvenation of the human spirit. He wrote that:

> Nine-tenths of the whole population of grain-exporting countries like Russia, one-half of it in countries like France which live on home grown food, work upon the land - most of them in the same way as the slaves of antiquity did, only to obtain a meagre crop from a soil, and with a machinery which they cannot improve, because taxation, rent and usury keep them always as near as possible to the margin of starvation.[10]

The Mutual Aids Theory contends that necessity rather than mere social association/interaction is the driving force of the co-operation and association human enter into with their fellow human in a given society. Thus, human beings become "interest"-driven as they relate with their fellow humans. In other words, where human interest is not at stake or threatened, they tend to quickly dissociate themselves. Locke's theory is predicated on his belief that, God made human beings, and naturally put them under strong obligation of necessity, convenience and inclination to make their choices. He drove them into the society and also endowed them with understanding and language to mutually continue to enjoy it.

The usefulness of the theory with regards to Nkerefi and Nara is borne out of the fact that the mutual needs of making life better has been the driving force in the relations between the Nkerefi people and their neighbours. Nevertheless, the Mutual Aids Theory is not a flawless theory, as in fact, no theory is flawless.

**A Brief History of Nkerefi and Nara**: **Geographical Location and Physical Features**

It would be unnecessary to discuss the geographical location and physical features of Nkerefi and Nara Unateze differently because both are of close proximity and share common physical features. There is only a slight difference in vegetation and topography. Nevertheless, Nkerefi covers more area than Nara Unateze and equally has more population.

**Nekerefi** is a clan[11] in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State in South-eastern Nigeria. It comprises four autonomous communities namely: Imeoha Nkerefi, Ohuani Amofu Nkerefi, Ishienu Amofu Nkerefi, and Enuogu Nkerefi.[12] It lies within latitude 6.8N and 7.65E.[13] It also lies wholly within the tropics and stretches far beyond the Ovu River in the north, the Aesu River in the south and the east and the Okobo River in the west. The town is flat open grassland with a thick forest belt in the immediate vicinity of each village. The soil is light, sandy, clay, and reasonably fertile, thus the people have a reputation as yam and rice farmers.[14]

**Nara Unataeze** has predominantly two major rivers which are the Esu River and the Ojorowo River. The two rivers have their confluence at Obeagu Umueze.[15] Another great feature of this town is the presence of its two major markets, namely Nkwo and Orie Nara whose market days are only four days apart from each other. On each market day, goods and commodities which Nara Unateze is known for are always displayed in high quantities as it

dubbed that the farm produce of garri and palm oil gotten in the town serves a quarter of the state's populace.

**Traditions of Origin**

While the origin of the Igbo people remains a subject of divergent views and hypotheses, archaeological discoveries and empirical researches as well as analyses have gone a long way to establish scientifically valid points to the possible origin of the people. The most romanticized hypothesis of the Igbo origin is that which traces the origin, migration and settlement of the Igbo to the Middle East. The Oriental hypothesis of the Igbo origin is basically hinged upon cultural similarities between the Igbo and the Jews on the one hand and the Igbo and the Egyptians on the other.[16] However, it has been noted by historians, among whom is A.E. Afigbo that it would be spurious to lay claim of the Igbo origin upon a hypothesis that cannot be empirically verified.[17] This draws our attention to the important archaeological discoveries by Thurstan Shaw at Igboukwu and other location. One of the major significance of the famous archaeological findings was that it shows that the Igbo stock had inhabited the present place of abode for many centuries. This may give credence to some of the hypotheses which either claim that the Igbo originated from where they are found today or that they migrated from locations not far away from where they are at present.

**Nkerefi**

The pre-colonial history of Nkerefi was essentially that of the migration and fusion of people and rise and full of kindred and villages.[18] Various claims point to the fact that Nkerefi people are the descendants of Ezeokeuna – a cattle rearer from Edemberri.[19] According to archival reports, "the people of Nkerefi, being descendants of Ezeokeuna of Ezza at one time used to make periodic sacrifice at their ancestor's shrine at Ezza, but however, this custom has ceased for many years".[20] Nkerefi traced her origin from Ezzakuna (Ezeoke-una) the founder of Ezza, whose father Una Okpoto Okumeze came from Afikpo group of the Igbo history.[21] These people have been organized into something like a vassal state by their possession of a common dialect (language) and culture, but in reality, there is no Nkerefi state or race. The word Nkerefi refers more to the dialect and occupation than people.[22] One particular legend and oral school of thought states that when 'Ezeoke Una' the father of Nkerefi saw that his son – Ezeoke UNA Junior (Ogbonnaa) has matured into manhood, he gave him few cows and some yams to start his own life and maintain his family. He received the paternal gifts and blessings from his father, and moved southwards in search of settlement and livelihood. He had acquired the art of cattle-rearing and farming from his parents. As he moved, his cattle (Efi) multiplied and he started selling some through barter (exchange of goods for goods), and people were happy with him for his clemency, industry and enterprise. Whenever a visitor said that he was going

to the home of Ezeoke Una, people were confused it was going to be the home of Ezeoke or his father, they called him Ezeoke Una – 'Nke-na-ere- efi' which means cattle seller or dealer. This was the genesis of the name Nkerefi.[23]

**Nara Unateze**

Nara Unateze is a town in the Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State Nigeria. The community contains eight villagies: Amofia, Amagu, Umuiba, Umuokparangene, Umueze, Umueja (Umunze) and Umuawalagu, Ishiogbo.[24] Nara Unateze and Nomeh Unateze migrated from Ogugu-Eze Community in the present day Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu State. Nara Unateze is a younger brother to Nomeh Unateze both of which are found in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State. They were hunters and migrated to Amagunze, from there to Numeh.[25] Nara moved further and his first settlement was at Umuiba which makes Umuiba the first compound in Nara Unateze and Umuawalagu the last born. Nara has five sons (descendants), Umuiba, Umuokparangene, Umueze, Umunze and Umuawalagu.[26] Because of impending wars, when they saw Amofia and Amagu passing they beckon on them to come and help them wage war against any external enemy. So they reached an agreement that Amofia should be the eldest son of Nara and Amofia and Amagu were adopted to make Nara seven villages and Amofia was the first person to rule Nara.[27] However, Ishiogbo were slaves during the slave trade era and at the abolition of the slave trade they were adopted also to make it the eight villages in Nara Unateze.[28]

**Nkerefi and Nara Unateze Relations during Colonial Rule 1900 – 1960**

There are different aspects of the relations between Nkerefi and Nara Unateze and the cordiality of this relationship has been a subject that elicits various degrees of emotions and interpretations. However, there seems to be a consensus among the indigenes of the two communities regarding the trends and nature of the relations. The position sometimes had been that the relations between both communities had been cordial. Thus, various aspects of the relations between both communities through the colonial times are examined in this sub-tittle.

**Political Relations**

Nkerefi and Nara Unateze in the pre-colonial times managed their own affairs with little or no outside interference. Before the arrival of the Europeans in the 19th century, the basic unit of their political life was the village group. In traditional Nkerefi and Nara Unateze land, enlargement of scale of her political institution made true democracy possible. Their political institutions were before the colonial administration designed to combine popular participation with weighing for experience, ability and achievements. This was the role of the family head. He was the oldest man of the surviving generation, in the family, or in the kindred, village or the community. He

could settle family disputes, and command respect and reverence, because he controlled the channel of communication with the ancestors.

The coming of Europeans to Nkerefi and Nara Unateze and its attendant administrative consequences changed their old political administrative system. With this, came the British system of government popularly known as 'Indirect Rule'. The Indirect Rule was a "system of local administration in which the essential features were the preservation of traditional institutions and their adaptation, under guardianship or protection and direction of the British administration to the requirements of modern units of local government". In simple terms, it may be regarded as a system of administration under which traditional rulers were allowed to rule their people under the supervision of the British or imperial officials. The introduction of Indirect Rule was troublesome as it was in Igbo land and other parts of Eastern Nigeria. One reason for this was that Indirect Rule upset the existing traditional system of government which the people had for long been used to. In native Nkerefi there was no chief but the *Ofo* and title-holders. Though the *Ofo* holders were accepted heads of social, political and judicial authority, their powers were limited like those of *Nze-na-Ozo* of old, for they could not act without the consent of the elders who relay to them wishes of their people. The British Government however tried to tackle the problems of the absence of traditional rulers by creating. "Warrant Chiefs" and gave them powers unknown before.

The situation changed under the Indirect Rule, and the British officials rather than the people became the ultimate source of chiefs' authority. Consequently, the chief began to develop arbitrary powers with the support of British officials and so traditional government began to break down as chiefs no longer enjoyed the support of the people. The class of chief priests regarded the introduction of Indirect Rule as an intervention on the old institutions. But the administration later succeeded because of the system of village democracy and egalitarian nature of the communities, there was an absence of traditional authorities able to command the obedience of their people. Though chief priest and oracles played vital roles. We might perhaps wish to ask about the working of Indirect Rule system in Nkerefi. It is a very simple system which created avenues for a little supervision under it, the clan heads were responsible to the village councillors, who were responsible to the warrant chiefs. The warrant chiefs were responsible to supervisor and the supervisor was responsible to Assistant District Officer was responsible to the District Commissioner and his subordinate chiefs of the county council were directly responsible to the communities.

Other important organs of the colonial administrator were the Native-Authority (NA), native court. To this end, there have been the establishment of native treasuries in all native administrations and there was provision for administration of justice. These factors were often referred as the pillar of Indirect Rule system. Colonial incursion seems to harmonize the age long relations between both communities. However, in an assessment of the state of development in parts of emerging Nigeria in 1900 , Frederick D. Lugard said of the Southern Provinces, particularly the Igbo areas that,

> By the time when Native courts were established in Eastern part of the Southern Provinces, the tribal system and authority had broken down and had been succeeded by anarchy under the disintegrating influences of successful middlemen traders and the Aros. The latter were professional slave traders, and ruled by the terror of their juju…[29]

As a way out, he prescribed that native courts be established and warrant chiefs be appointed. Thus, by 1914 warrant chiefs were appointed in some parts of Igbo land. This system, however, was to collapse in 1927.[30]
The above assertion by Lugard referring to an alleged breakdown of law and order may be an unfair assessment of the Igbo nation where there had been institutions of traditional administration and cohesion as exemplified in the village government and local dispute arbitration processes before the inauguration of British colonial rule in Nigeria[31] What the British did in this part of the country was to vilify the existing social structures to justify the introduction of a semblance system to be manned by their own appointed agents and officials like the warrant chiefs, court clerks, messengers and councilors . This line of thinking becomes justifiable in view of the fact that the issue adjudicated upon in the British-established native courts were not any different from what had obtained in the earlier court system.

In this section of the study, we consider how Nkerefi and Nara, under the British- supervised system, federated for judicial purposes. Three factors might have recommended the federation of the two towns in respect of a group court. They were:

1. Similarity of their customs and organization;
2. Proximity as the two towns adjoin each other; and
3. Availability of sufficient funds to run the group court

We may also add as a factor that recommended the federation, the issue of insufficient British personnel to man separate courts for each of the two towns. It is a known fact that throughout the colonial period in Nigeria, the

British resorted to the group courts system due to the dearth of English personnel. For instance, following the promulgation of the Native Court Ordinance of 1914 and the Native Authority Ordinance of 1916, Chief Onyema Onwusi of Eke was appointed the Native Authority of the Agbaja clan comprising the Eke, Udi and Oji River Native Court Areas.[32]

In the early years of colonial rule in Igboland, the whole of Nkanu area was under the Udi Division and by extension under the jurisdiction of the Udi Native court. However, following the proclamation of the Provincial Court Ordinance of 1916, a Native court was opened at Agbani. Meanwhile, as a result of the proclamation of the Native Authority Ordinance of 1916, the Nkanu Native Authority was created with Agbani as the headquarters and at the same time it retained the seat of the Native Administration Treasury. In 1934, there was a re-organization of the Court. Following the formation of the Ugbawka – Amuri Court from the 1st instance, and the withdrawer of Ugboawka from the Nara Court, only the following four towns were left in the Court. (1) Nara (2) Nkerefi (3) Mburubu (4) Numeh.[33] Only four men held warrants in this court. They are:

1. Edeani of Nara
2. Chukwuniene of Mburubu
3. Chukwu Njoku of Nkerefi
4. Mba of Numeh

**Socio-Cultural Relations**

One of the factors which solidified the relations between Nkerefi and Nara Unateze is the marriage institution. They both consider the marriage institution as sacred even from the pre-colonial times. That is, marriage institution is considered sacred and is seen as a contract between two kin groups which transcends ethnic and religious barriers. Both Nkerefi and Nara Unateze do not consider marriage as only the affair of the individuals involved but also the families and extended family groups concerned.[34] Marriage, therefore, became an avenue through which individuals share group life. Some of the features include betrothal from early age of a girl to a boy (Iha nwanyi), residence at interval by the girl with the family of her future husband, during which the girl's character and personality are observed (Inete Uma).[35] Among its features includes the offer of bride price by the family of the boy to that of the girl, and the various gifts from the girl's extended family to her on the day she goes finally to settle down in a new home with the husband.[36]

The rule of exogamy is rigidly applied to forbid marriage between any two members of the same lineage. If any kind of kinship relationship is established, marriage is forbidden to prevent and or removal of "aru" or

abomination/pollution.[37] Where the bride price is not paid a child born through the coming together of a man/woman belong to the woman's father's patrilineage. Even when a wife deserts her husband to live with another man in his home, unless the bride-price is completely refunded to the former husband, any child born by that woman belongs to the 'legitimate' former husband.[38] Divorce, therefore, is effected not only by the woman deserting her husband to live with another man, but in addition, by the second man refunding all the bride-price/expenses incurred by the first husband. When someone's wife dies, her corpse is buried in her husband's compound. This is against some practices in some other areas of Igbo land.[39]

**Economic Relations**

The nature and pattern of economic activities and relations in Nkerefi and Nara Unateze of pre 1900 largely continued at the dawn of the 20th century. However, colonialism brought with it some changes which intensified the economic activities and contacts. The primary motive of colonialism was for economic gain. This informed the British colonizing power to design the Nigerian colony as primary products center for the British industrial needs. The south-eastern zone was discovered to be a major source of palm products which were essentially needed to grease industrialization in Britain. This development led to the setting up of infrastructural facilities needed to exploit and transport the resources from the produce centers to the coasts where they were further shipped to Europe. Roads were constructed and markets expanded.

The primary occupations of Nkerefi and Nara Unateze before the advent of European were predominantly farming, wine tapping and trading in agricultural goods. The farming activities were done in a very small scale with hoes, cutlasses and axes as the major implements. With this type of labour, much was not produced during the harvests that some supposedly big farmers and their families ironically had to go to the community markets to purchase yams melon, cocoyam, etc.[40] It is on this note that both communities patronize each other on the goods they have comparative advantage.

**Conclusion**

The subject of inter-group relations, especially in the developing African society, is sometimes difficult to define. This is because commentators of the Western school often cast group relations in Africa in the mold of wars, crises and murders. To them, therefore, group relations refer to destruction. However, in our examination so far, we have been able to establish how groups, without any traces of biological ties, were able to conduct long political, social, economic and relations. The suitability of the theoretical

framework has been justified because, as seen in the course of this research, inter-group relations between Nkerefi and Nara Unateze anchored more or less on mutual aids and interdependence.

Despite the modest contributions of this study, a lot of research still needs to be done on Nkerefi. For example, detailed research is yet to be done on Nkerefi and her neighbour both immediate and extended neighbours.

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