A HISTORICAL DISCOURSE ON TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES OF THE KALAOKO PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT
This study explores the history of traditional institutions and cultural practices in Kala Oko, a community in the Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The Study adopted historical and descriptive research methods and obtained data from primary and secondary sources. As a qualitative research, analysis was done thematically. Data collection involved interviews and field visits, capturing firsthand accounts from community members. The study findings reveal the resilience of Kala Oko's traditional institutions and their significant role in fostering cultural heritage and social cohesion. Despite challenges such as limited funding, high transportation costs, and time constraints, the research highlights strategies for preserving and revitalizing these institutions in the face of modern pressures. This work contributes to academic scholarship and community efforts to maintain Kala Oko's unique cultural identity.

Introduction

The traditional institution of Kala Oko, located in the Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria, represents a cornerstone of the community's cultural and historical identity. This village, like many others in southeastern Nigeria, is deeply rooted in customs and traditions that have been passed down through generations. The traditional institutions in KalaOko encompass various social structures, including chieftaincy titles, age-grade systems, and cultural festivals, all of which play crucial roles in maintaining social cohesion and order.

Traditional institutions in Kala Oko have their origins in pre-colonial times when they were the primary systems of governance and social organization. Chiefs and elders, often selected based on lineage, wisdom, and merit, played vital roles in leadership and conflict resolution. These leaders were entrusted with maintaining law and order, managing communal lands, and

overseeing rituals and ceremonies that reinforced community bonds.[1]

The British implemented an indirect rule policy, which aimed to govern through existing traditional structures. This policy led to the formalization and alteration of chieftaincy titles and the introduction of Western administrative systems. The traditional leaders were incorporated into the colonial administration, often causing a shift in their roles and authority. This period also saw conflicts between indigenous practices and colonial laws, leading to a dynamic interplay of adaptation and resistance.[2]

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, there was a resurgence of interest in traditional institutions as symbols of cultural identity and continuity. In Niger Delta, traditional festivals such as the New Yam Festival and various masquerade ceremonies regained prominence. These events are not only celebrations of cultural heritage but also serve as mechanisms for passing down historical knowledge and values to younger generations[3]

The traditional institution of Kala Oko has continued to evolve in response to modern challenges. Migration, and the influence of global culture have all posed threats to the survival of these institutions. However, the community has demonstrated resilience through various strategies, including the documentation of oral histories, the revitalization of traditional practices, and the active engagement of youth in cultural activities. These efforts are crucial in preserving the community's unique heritage and ensuring its continuity.

In recent times, the traditional institutions in Kala Oko continue to play a significant role in the community. They are integral to the social structure, providing a sense of identity and belonging. The chieftaincy titles and age-grade systems still function as mechanisms for governance and social organization, while cultural festivals reinforce community bonds and cultural pride.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive historical account of the traditional institution in Kala Oko, exploring its origins, transformations, and contemporary relevance. By examining historical records, oral traditions, and current practices, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how traditional institutions have shaped and continue to influence the socio-cultural landscape of KalaOko. The study will also highlight the challenges faced by these institutions and propose strategies for their preservation in the modern era.

Understanding the history and evolution of traditional institutions in Kala Oko is essential for appreciating their role in the community's past, present, and future. This research will not only document these institutions but also offer insights into their resilience and adaptability in the face of changing social and political landscapes.[4]

The traditional institutions of Kala Oko, a village in the Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria, have long been central to the community's social, political, and cultural life. These institutions, encompassing chieftaincy titles, age-grade systems, and cultural festivals, have historically provided a framework for governance, social organization, and cultural continuity. However, over the past several decades, these institutions have faced numerous challenges that threaten their survival and relevance.

With the advent of colonial rule, traditional institutions in KalaOko experienced significant transformations. The British indirect rule policy disrupted indigenous governance systems, leading to the redefinition of chieftaincy roles and the imposition of Western administrative structures. Despite these disruptions, traditional institutions adapted and continued to play a vital role in the community. However, post-independence developments and modern challenges have further complicated their position.

[1]Abi Alabo Derefaka, 'Cultural Heritage in the Niger Delta', *Journal of African Studies,* vol. **12,** no. 4, 2018,pp. 45-60

[2] Lord Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1922), 25-30.

[3] A. E. Afigbo, *The Igbo and Their Neighbors* (Ibadan: University Press, 1981), 134-140.

[4] A. E. Afigbo, *The Igbo and Their Neighbors* (Ibadan: University Press, 1981), 212-218.

In recent years, unlike other communities in Nigeria, Kala Oko's urbanization, migration, and the pervasive influence of global culture have increasingly marginalized traditional institutions. Younger generations are often disconnected from their cultural heritage, leading to a decline in the participation in and transmission of traditional practices. Additionally, the legal and political frameworks in contemporary Nigeria sometimes conflict with traditional governance systems, further eroding their authority and functionality.

The preservation and revitalization of traditional institutions in Kala Oko are crucial for maintaining the community's cultural heritage and social cohesion. Yet, there is a lack of comprehensive historical documentation and analysis of these institutions' evolution and current status. This gap in knowledge hinders efforts to address the challenges they face and to develop strategies for their sustainable preservation.

Therefore, this research aims to investigate the history of traditional institutions in Kala Oko, uncovering their origins, transformations, and contemporary relevance. The study will explore how these institutions have adapted to external influences and modern challenges, and assess their current role in the community. By providing a detailed historical account and analysis, the research seeks to contribute to the understanding and preservation of Kala Oko's traditional institutions, ensuring their continued relevance in the modern era and it fills a gap in existing literature. The aim of the study is to document the role of traditional institutions in kala oko.

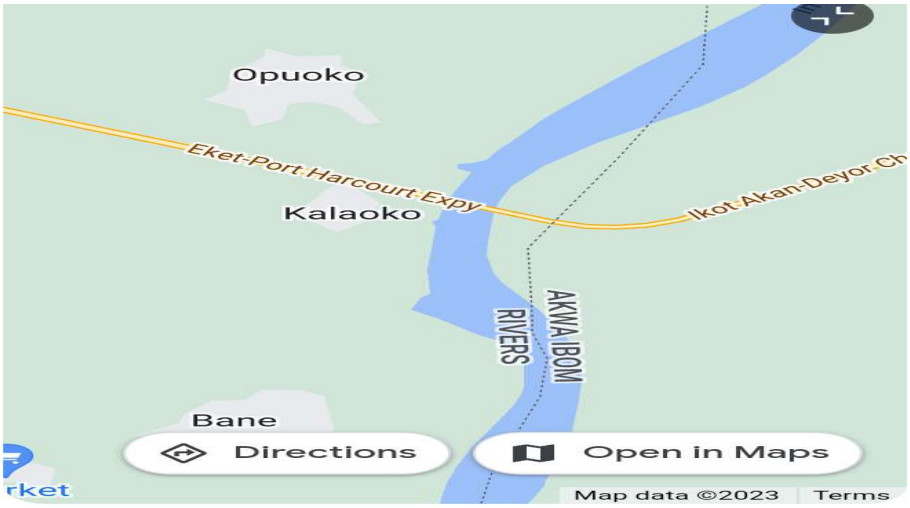

Fig 1. Map showing Kalaoko & Opuoko

Source: map.google.com (google map)

The founder of kalaoko was from Tai and his name was Wiileba it was recorded that he ran away from his original home land and came to his present place of settlement called Kalaoko. Although the reason for is migration is not known, but Kalaoko tradition observed that, he left his original community to settle in this place called Kalaoko as a result of an un known event when he came to the place he saw that the place was good and fertile. Although the event that made him to run from his original community was not really stated but it was believed that something actually happened. Then he started looking for a place to settle down, and when he got to a place where he saw a river he settled there the place was called Maa`ke`tur he settled there and build a temporary shelter over his head where he could reside for the meantime. Then he sent a message to his brother that he has found a place very fertile and full of water, when his brother heard about this he embarked on a journey to this fertile land and he settled

there. Wiileba and his brother started clearing some bushes into the dry land, one said to another indeed the land is fertile. They decided to split up and one of them later left the place and went to clear another Bush. One went to Opuoko while the other choose to settle in Kalaoko. Gbeneobia who was the brother of Wiileba settled in Opuoko and had children he settled there and saw that the land was also fertile and told his brother that he has found another place that is as fertile as the first one and they spent some years too and had families and the community came to become a large community. when one of the brothers had a son called Itekar and the son became the first ruler of the community and history continued but the particular year that the community came to settlement was not really mentioned, when the community was now a little bit big they now started dividing the community into clans and then each of the clans was ruled by someone, in the process of the rulership and then one of the ruler got married to an Igbo woman from there the igbos started coming in. when Itekar died a man called Deekia became the ruler but the year he died was not mentioned when the rulership was handed over to Deekia they gave him the part that he was to rule and then a man called Fo`o`r also lead some parts, during the time of Fo`o`r, the people saw that it was awful and his brother that was now ruling them which were the igbos and since the igbos want to become domineering, the people resisted that they will not accept instead they will choose someone to rule them and then in the process of choosing they chose the man called Benson to rule them. Benson was not actually at home when they chose him, they sent a message to him where he was that they chose him to rule over them, so he should come back to the community to take his position that they have given to him but when the message got to Benson he refused and said no that he will not rule and at a process he gave them a condition that if he should rule, they will abide by the conditions and the people accepted and he came back to rule them on the process of rulership the war between Nigeria and biafra started and when the people could no longer stay in the community again he ran away being the igbos. The igbos that was in Kalaoko community then run to their place when some of the igbos that was ruling in Kalaoko communities refused to go because of the leadership, again they decided to cause confusion between the people and the new leader Benson, the knowledge and education on his head in order for the people to remove the leadership from his hand they had to lay an allegation on him, the allegation that the Igbo man laid on Benson was that he told them to hit a town crier that no woman of the Kalaoko should take the Igbo men that they were infected with a deadly disease when he laid the allegation and it was found that it was a hate speech and false allegation, they arrested him and beat him to stupor and Fo`o`r, died in 1964 and it was in 1964 that Benson became the ruler.

It was believed that Kalaoko and Opuoko have some ditties one of them is yor`mui and why they named it that way was because it was from the river, they said the deity is was not really a being but like a Stone, (Angie Stone) according to history it later moved to the center of the community when the ruler saw it like that, he was afraid and said no that the deity can take the position from him, that it should be moved to the river where it belongs, or moved to the back of the community so that the community will be in the front, and that the deity sometimes possesses people and speaks to the community, and the rulership continued for one person to the other. There's something called yaa traditionally and it is a situation where a male in a particular family will go into a shrine and stay for 14 days without seeing his people and then after the 14 days he comes out, and people celebrates him. a stick is being given to him for the period of that 14 days when the 14 days is over, a bell is being tied at his waist and he runs around the whole community with others following clapping and singing with him this is a tradition that goes on annually and the yaa depends on the family you belong to and also determines what you will buy. Also for the female we have what we called Co`o`, a female will stay in doors for some period of time and when she finally comes out a huge box of wrapper will be bought for her and in the period while she is in doors, there is a special food prepared for her, and palm kernel oil is used rubbed all over her body, when the day comes for her to come out she goes from family to family to fetch water, fetch firewood go on errands and then anything the family member has to give to her as gift will be given to her. And also a woman that gives birth to the first child, it is a tradition that she won't be seen outside or doing any domestic work but will be eating some traditional dishes and for the period of three months she will stay indoors and also a side of her teeth would be broken by the family member on her first pregnancy and there is something called doo is being rubbed all over her body in the period of pregnancy also she is being

promised gift during this. Like plantain money rapper and some other things[5]

It is believed that in the pre-colonial era the Ibani (present day Bonny & Opobo) took their name from Kala-Beni (Ibeni) corrupted to Ibani. The founding ancestors of the original name) came from the central delta Ebe of Koloku ma, specifically the Isedani lineage of Kolokuma.

The traditions say that they left Kolokuma because of civil conflict. Although the exact time of the conflict is unknown, they came out of Kolokuma between 12th and 15th century (AD.

The leaders of the migration were Opuamakuba, his brother Kala-Beni (Alagbariye or Alagba-ari-gha) and Asikunuma alias Other families northwards, they first settled in the now Ndoki territory where they encamped for some time (prince Edimini thopuamakuba was born here). They moved from the Ndoki area, but left behind some of their people, these inter-married gave birth to the Ndoki people founding among others villages such as Okolomakiri, Ayama, Osobie and Oruama or Azuogusettled in the now Ogoni area and encamped at a site where Opuoko town now stands (thus the name Opu-Oko from that Kala Oko was founded).

Kala-Beni being a hunter went hunting one day and came across the site of Bonny Town where he saw many birds. He returned to Opuamakuba that there was good land to settle on further south. Opuamakuba then made the decision to leave the main l(Orupiri) where Opuamakuba died[6].

Both primary and secondary were essential sources of materials for this research, each offering unique benefits. Primary sources provide original insights, while secondary sources provide context, analysis, and a broader understanding of the topic. Recognizing the limitations of single-source reliance, the researcher employs a multi-source approach, crucial for navigating the strengths and weaknesses inherent in historical sources.[7]

Given the scarcity of written records, particularly regarding the pre-colonial history of Kala Oko, this study emphasizes the use of oral history. Oral history involves firsthand accounts and personal recollections from informants who experienced or witnessed historical events, offering insights into culture, social organization, and political relations. These oral traditions complement archival materials and written documents, enriching the historical narrative.

Historical Analysis on traditional institutions in Kala Oko

Social Institutions

Social institutions are established patterns of behavior, norms, and organized structures that shape human interactions and relationships within a society. These institutions provide a foundation for social organization, cohesion, and continuity, helping to maintain order and stability across generations. By setting expectations and guidelines for behavior, social institutions ensure that individuals can relate to one another and contribute to the larger social fabric. They are fundamental to the functioning of any society, as they support a shared way of life, common values, and community identity.

In this discussion, I will focus on two key social institutions: family and marriage. Both are central to human relationships, influencing individuals' roles and responsibilities, shaping identity, and fostering social support networks within communities. Family and marriage play unique roles in preserving cultural values and promoting social cohesion.

Family:

In the traditional culture of Kala Oko, polygamy was an accepted practice, allowing a man to marry multiple wives, including marrying a mother and her daughter. This custom was not only socially accepted but was also seen as a status symbol among men. Additionally, having concubines was permitted, though with certain cultural guidelines. One specific tradition allowed a man to take on a concubine if she was the first daughter of a family. This arrangement often took place if the first daughter, who traditionally would not marry outside her family, found favor with a married man. In such cases,

[5] Oral interview with Chief Robert Nwibe, Kala Oko, 1 August 2024.

[6] bonnyhistoricalsociety.com/about-bonny-kingdom/

[7] https://www.econtentpro.com

the relationship could be maintained, but she would remain a concubine rather than a full wife.

Within the family structure, the first son held a significant role, serving as the assistant head of the family. As such, he inherited his father's property and managed it, taking charge of assets that were deemed indivisible. If there were other sons, the remaining properties were divided among them, with the first son retaining primary control over the major assets.

The first daughter also held a unique role. She symbolized her mother in the family hierarchy, remaining at home even when other daughters married out. Upon her mother's death, the first daughter inherited her mother's belongings, maintaining continuity of the maternal lineage within the household. However, in families with no daughters, these maternal assets would pass to the youngest son. In cases where a man had two wives, the firstborn son from the first wife would traditionally hold precedence. However, if the son of the second wife completed certain cultural rites before the son of the first wife, he could claim the position of first son, becoming culturally recognized as such.

This historical account illustrates the deep-rooted customs of marriage and inheritance in Kala Oko, emphasizing the unique roles and responsibilities designated to family members within the traditional structur**e.**

Marriage:

In Kala Oko, polygamy is an accepted and respected tradition, allowing men to have multiple wives. This practice aligns with the community's values and economic structure, as larger families were historically seen as beneficial, especially in a society reliant on farming and fishing for survival. Having multiple wives and children provided a broader workforce to help with labor-intensive tasks, which was essential for supporting the family's needs and achieving prosperity.

Additionally, it is common in Kala Oko for parents to play an active role in choosing a wife for their son. Marriages are often arranged by the family, sometimes even before the son expresses personal interest in marriage. Parents may choose a wife for their son for several reasons: because he has shown interest in the girl, to strengthen bonds with her family, or even to honor a family that has done them a favor in the past. When a wife is chosen for a son by his parents, she is recognized as his first wife, regardless of whether he later marries another woman whom he personally loves. In such cases, the woman chosen by his family holds the status of first wife, while any subsequent wife is considered second in the hierarchy.

However, there are strict taboos in Kala Oko as well, one of the most significant being the community's view on twins. Twins are considered an abomination, a belief that has been deeply embedded in the cultural and spiritual fabric of the community. The birth of twins is seen as bringing misfortune or disrupting harmony within the family and society at large. This belief in Kala Oko has historically influenced practices and norms, reflecting the community's understanding of purity, order, and the cultural values that have been passed down through generations.

In my community, marriage as a traditional institution carries unique beliefs and customs, particularly surrounding the role of the first daughter in a family. It is believed that the first daughter, known as Bià-be, should not marry because she is expected to assume the role of the mother figure if the actual mother of the home is deceased. This tradition holds that the Bià-be becomes responsible for all the traditional duties of a mother, upholding the family's legacy and ensuring continuity. Regardless of whether a family has only daughters or a mix of sons and daughters, the first daughter is expected to remain unmarried to maintain the cultural legacy associated with the mother's role. However, the Bià-be has the right to bear children, often through relationships with a concubine, but it is considered a taboo for her to marry legally. She may also marry another woman to serve as a representative if she chooses not to bear children herself, ensuring that the family has continuity within the household.

Additionally, our community's customs allow for polygamy, where men may marry multiple wives and maintain peaceful households. Daughters are generally given in marriage between the ages of 19 and 25, often resulting in early marriages in traditional times. Marriages in this community were not always initiated by the couple themselves; families could arrange marriages for their sons, whether because the son liked the girl, the family wished to connect with her family, or as a gesture of goodwill toward her family due to past favors. When a family marries a girl on behalf of their son, she

becomes his first wife, even if he later marries another woman he loves, who would then be considered his second wife.

Since the people of Kala Oko were predominantly farmers and fishermen, having multiple wives and children was also seen as a means of survival and prosperity. Large families provided a strong workforce to support agricultural and fishing activities, contributing to the family's livelihood. Early marriage and childbirth ensured that women typically completed childbearing by age 40, as children were highly valued in traditional society. Not having children was viewed as a misfortune, often leading to the belief that a family was under some form of curse.

The traditional family and marriage systems in Kala Oko began to evolve significantly with the advent of Western civilization and Christianity, introduced primarily through British colonial influence. This change marked a shift in both economic practices and social values.

Historically, the people of Kala Oko depended on agrarian and fishing practices for survival, with cultural skills like farming, fishing, and craftwork defining their way of life. However, colonial influence brought with it the introduction of Western-style education and white-collar employment, leading people to shift away from traditional subsistence activities. As Western ideals became more prominent, men and women in Kala Oko began to seek employment outside the community, which introduced new family structures and influenced how marriage was approached.

Christianity also played a role in altering the cultural norms surrounding marriage and family. The practice of polygamy, once an esteemed tradition, was increasingly challenged by Christian doctrines that favored monogamy. Many in the community, especially converts to Christianity, began to adopt the idea of single-spouse families, reducing the prevalence of polygamy. This shift created a new social dynamic in Kala Oko, where traditional values sometimes clashed with emerging Christian ideals.

Furthermore, Western influence affected the institution of marriage by encouraging personal choice in marriage rather than family-arranged unions. As individuals gained more autonomy, arranged marriages became less common, and romantic love started to play a larger role in marriage decisions. This shift marked a departure from the tradition of marrying primarily for social or economic alliances between families.

The introduction of Christianity also impacted beliefs surrounding childbirth and family structure. The cultural taboo against twins, which had long been seen as a misfortune in Kala Oko, began to diminish as Western and Christian perspectives encouraged a more accepting view. Families that previously adhered strictly to the community's views on "purity" and order began to re-evaluate these beliefs.[8]

Today, family and marriage in Kala Oko reflect a blend of traditional and Western influences. While some families still honor the roles of the first son, the Bià-be, and polygamous unions, the cultural landscape is increasingly diverse. Families are now smaller, with many opting for single-spouse marriages and fewer children, aligning more closely with modern economic realities and personal aspirations.

The historical evolution of marriage and family institutions in Kala Oko demonstrates the resilience of traditional values alongside the adaptability to new cultural ideas. As Kala Oko continues to develop, its social institutions reflect an ongoing fusion of the old and the new, preserving unique elements of its heritage while embracing the practical changes brought by Westernization and modernity.

Historical Discourse on Cultural Practices in Kala-oko

According to history, the people of Kala Oko revere a deity called Yór-moè, believed to be the guardian spirit that keeps the community united in peace and protects them from neighboring threats. Yór-moè is regarded as the god of the land, and the people regularly offer libations and sacrifices to honor this deity.

Tradition holds that Yór-moè has been a powerful source of protection for the community, especially given its proximity to a river that flows from the Atlantic Ocean. Despite the dangers posed by the sea, people from Kala

[8] Oral interview with Mrs. Nwiyee NwiiBari, Kala Oko, 10 November 2024.

Oko are rarely lost to the waters. Historical accounts, including stories passed down from my grandfather, reveal that when there is trouble on the sea, a large fish, believed to be sent by Yó-moè, always comes to their aid.

One memorable story from my grandfather's experience recounts a time when he and his fellow fishermen were caught in a storm. Their boat began to leak, and they struggled to stay afloat as the vast river stretched endlessly around them. While desperately trying to save themselves, they suddenly felt the boat settle on a surface, as if it had grounded on sand. They disembarked onto this mysterious platform, which provided them the stability needed to patch the boat. As they prepared to leave, a paddle accidentally slipped from their grip and fell into the river. To their astonishment, they discovered that the surface they had been standing on was actually a giant fish. This fish, they believed, had been sent by Yó-moè to protect them, allowing them to safely repair the boat and return home.

In Kala Oko, no traditional practices or games are conducted without first paying homage to Yó-moè. The community believes that honoring this deity is essential to ensure peace, protection, and continuity of their way of life. These institutions are as follows;

1. New Yam Festival (Zia Aàbe)

The Zia Aabe, or New Yam Festival, is a cultural celebration marking the beginning of the yam harvest season. Observed annually between August and October, it involves several traditional activities that express gratitude to the gods and ancestors for a bountiful harvest. Key activities include:

- Blessing and Tasting of the New Yam: The festival begins with a ceremony where the oldest person or the chief priest blesses the new yams. This act shows respect for the gods and ancestors. The leader or elder tastes the yam first, signifying the community's acceptance of the harvest.

- Offerings and Sacrifices: Deities and ancestors are honored with offerings such as yams, kola nuts, or livestock in gratitude for protection and favorable conditions.

- Masquerade Dances: Masked performers representing ancestral spirits entertain the community through elaborate costumes, drumming, and dances.

- Traditional Music and Dance: Cultural music fills the air, and community members engage in traditional dances wearing colorful attire.

- Wrestling Competitions: Young men participate in traditional wrestling matches to showcase strength and foster unity.

- Feasting: Various yam dishes, including pounded yam and yam porridge, are shared among families and friends to celebrate abundance.

- Prayers and Thanksgiving: Community leaders lead prayers and rituals, seeking continued blessings and prosperity for the future.

The festival underscores the community's connection to land, tradition, and spirituality.

2. Masquerades (Nwi Nu Waaro)

The Nwi Nu Waaro masquerade festival is held biannually, typically close to festive periods. Before the event, libations and consultations are made to the gods. On the day of the celebration:

- The masquerades parade the community, chasing women and children indoors.

- Only pregnant women and nursing mothers are spared from being flogged.

- Men and young boys are free to move about, but women's activities outside are expected to cease by evening, reflecting traditional roles.

Community Gatherings (Aa' Tor Zia)

Kala Oko and neighboring communities, such as Opu Oko, hold communal gatherings to cook, pray, and celebrate with yams as the central dish. Sub-activities include wrestling matches, cultural dances, and other communal events that strengthen ties between communities.

Night Cult (Zim E' Dee)

The Zim E' Dee operates in secrecy, coming out only at night. It is believed that seeing them would result in death. Membership is by invitation only, as members are chosen and enticed by the cult. Their activities are shrouded in mystery, with the only evidence of their presence being the sound of a bullroarer.

Masquerade Dance/Patrol (Nwiyor-maa-bana)

This specific masquerade practice is believed to have aquatic origins and is associated with family protection. Membership is restricted and believed to be divinely chosen by the gods. Unlike other masquerades, this group does not flog people; they perform dances and patrols, showcasing their unique practices.

Rites of Passage

Rites of passage in Kala Oko are divided into two categories: male (Yáá) and female (Kòò).

Male Rite of Passage (Yáá)

- Reserved for the first male child, the rite involves a three-month isolation period during which initiates abstain from any contact with the opposite sex.
- Rituals and incantations are performed, and initiates carry a native chicken tied with palm fronds while patrolling the community.
- Upon completion, they are recognized as adults, eligible to represent their families and partake in cultural and spiritual practices.

Female Rite of Passage (Kòò):

- This rite is specific to first daughters, who undergo a similar three-month isolation in a specially prepared location.
- Covered in camwood and subjected to rituals, they emerge as female adults capable of defending their family and assuming traditional responsibilities.

Other Practices

Some other traditional practices, such as **Bumgo**, **Kukuma**, and **I-cu-ni**, are less understood due to the secrecy surrounding their activities. Known publicly for drumming and enchantments, these practices have largely faded with the advent of Christianity, as many practitioners have passed away, leaving little documentation of their customs.

These practices highlight the rich cultural heritage and spiritual traditions of Kala Oko, emphasizing communal unity, reverence for ancestors, and the preservation of cultural identity.

Traditional Governance

The history of traditional institutions in Kalaoko is a fascinating exploration of the dynamics of cultural governance, spiritual leadership, and the shifts in power structures influenced by historical events. This narrative, deeply rooted in the customs and beliefs of the people, underscores the centrality of tradition in maintaining social cohesion and the disruptions caused by external influences.

Kalaoko's traditional institutions trace their origins to the co-founding tribes, the Nwi-laba and the Gah-buu. Each played a distinct yet interconnected role in the governance and spiritual life of the community. The Nwi-laba family, recognized as the kingmakers and spiritual heads, wielded significant influence through their position as the intermediary between the people and the deity of the land, Yor moè. This role often led to their being mistaken as the sole founders of the community. However, the Gah buu tribe was the original ruling authority, with their leadership believed to be divinely backed by Yor moè.

The governance of Kalaoko was intricately tied to its spiritual framework. Leadership legitimacy required strict adherence to traditional protocols, many of which were underpinned by rituals and sacred rites. The Nwi-laba family, as the mouthpiece of the gods, played a crucial role in ensuring that rulers acted in accordance with divine will. This symbiotic relationship between the Nwi-laba and the Gah buu families reinforced a system of checks and balances rooted in tradition.

The process of selecting a king in Kalaoko was highly ceremonial and steeped in secrecy. First, the family designated to produce the king had to undergo extensive traditional preparations, which included participating in rituals and fulfilling spiritual obligations. These preparations ensured their readiness to shoulder the responsibilities of leadership. Next came libations, inquiries, and sacrifices to secure the deity's favor. A week-long display of cultural heritage followed, during which the community celebrated the incoming king. Central to this process was the communication of divine approval through the Nwi-laba family, whose role was pivotal in legitimizing the new ruler.

Despite the strength of this system, internal and external pressures began to challenge its stability. Intermarriages with individuals outside the traditional lineages introduced complexities, leading to disputes over succession. Meanwhile, the prelude to the Nigerian Civil War saw increased tension with the Igbo, who sought to assert influence in the region. These external pressures began to erode Kalaoko's traditional governance structures, setting the stage for significant changes.

A major turning point came in 1962 with the coronation of Benson Nwiyor. Unlike his predecessors, he did not follow the traditional process. Instead, his wealth and urban connections in Bori made him a pragmatic choice for leadership. His coronation marked the beginning of a departure from spiritual legitimacy to a more politically motivated approach. While his selection brought temporary hope of stability, his reign was fraught with challenges, especially during the Nigerian Civil War, which disrupted the entire region.

The war, which reached Kalaoko between 1968 and 1969, profoundly impacted the community's governance. The Nwi-laba family's role diminished, and traditional rites were sidelined in favor of immediate survival needs. Benson Nwiyor, who had been weakened by both the war and the opposition from traditionalists, eventually adopted a succession plan that deviated further from tradition. Rather than allowing the traditional processes to determine the next ruler, he handpicked his son as his successor, solidifying a shift in power dynamics.

This act set a precedent that altered the course of Kalaoko's traditional institutions. Leadership transitioned from the spiritually sanctioned framework to a more pragmatic system, driven by considerations of power, strength, and external influence. Today, the current ruler's position reflects this evolution. While the ruler no longer adheres strictly to the spiritual and traditional practices of old, the legacy of Kalaoko's traditional governance remains a vital part of its identity.

The history of traditional institutions in Kalaoko reveals a rich tapestry of cultural resilience and adaptability. It highlights how deeply rooted customs and beliefs shaped the community's governance, even as external influences and internal challenges necessitated change. The story of Kalaoko stands as a testament to the enduring significance of traditional systems, offering valuable insights into the interplay between culture, spirituality, and governance.

Traditional Kingship Practices

According to history, the community of Kalaoko was founded by two distinct tribes: the Nwi-laba family and the Gah buu. While the Nwi-laba family has often been regarded as the community's founders due to their role as kingmakers and spiritual heads, they were not the sole founders. The Gah buu tribe originally held the position of traditional rulers, deriving their authority from the land's deity, Yor moè.

The governance system in Kalaoko was intrinsically tied to spirituality. The Nwi-laba family served as the mouthpiece of the gods, mediating between the deity and the rulers. This dual governance structure ensured that the rulers' authority was both spiritually sanctioned and communally accepted.

The collaboration between the Nwi-laba and Gah-buu tribes was fundamental to maintaining order and stability in the community. The Nwi-laba family, by virtue of their spiritual role, held the power to interpret divine messages and guide the actions of the rulers. Their position as the link to Yor-moè imbued them with immense influence, enabling them to shape the policies and decisions of the Gah-buu rulers.

This partnership reflected a profound balance between spiritual authority and political power. While the Gah-buu tribe was responsible for implementing leadership and governance, their

actions were legitimized by the spiritual endorsement provided by the Nwi-laba family. This interplay ensured that decisions were aligned with both divine will and communal welfare.

However, this harmony was not without its complexities. The reliance on divine intervention and the intermediary role of the Nwi-laba family created a system where the legitimacy of rulers could be questioned if the gods' approval was not evident. This dependence on spirituality as the foundation of governance also meant that any disruption to the spiritual order could destabilize the entire system.

Over time, this dual governance structure became a defining characteristic of Kalaoko's identity. It underscored the community's deep connection to its traditions and its recognition of the importance of spiritual guidance in leadership. Despite challenges and external influences, the foundational roles of the Nwi-laba and Gah-buu tribes in establishing this system remain a vital part of Kalaoko's historical narrative.

The process of selecting a ruler in Kalaoko was deeply ritualistic and spiritual. Key elements of this traditional system included:

1. Preparation of the Royal Family: The family designated to produce the king had to be traditionally prepared. This involved adhering to all traditional practices, ensuring their readiness to take on leadership.

2. Rituals and Sacrifices: Series of libations, inquiries, and sacrifices were performed. These rituals served to invoke the guidance and approval of *Your moè*.

3. Traditional Displays: A week-long period of cultural displays was integral to the coronation process, showcasing the richness of Kalaoko's heritage.

4. Secret Practices: Certain rites, known only to specific families, were performed in secrecy to maintain the sanctity of the process.

Only after completing these steps would the deity communicate through the *Nwi-laba* family, granting approval for the coronation.

Challenges and Disruptions

The traditional system began facing challenges due to intermarriages outside the royal lineage, leading to succession disputes. Additionally, the arrival of external influences, particularly the Igbo, before the Nigerian Civil War disrupted Kalaoko's governance structure.

In 1962, a significant deviation occurred when Benson Nwiyor was crowned king without undergoing the traditional process. His selection was based on his perceived ability to protect the community, given his wealth and influence in Bori, a then-thriving city. However, his rule faced challenges, including opposition from traditionalists and disruptions during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970).

Impact of the Nigerian Civil War

The Nigerian Civil War significantly affected Kalaoko. The Igbo military's activities intensified the community's struggles, with the conflict reaching Kalaoko between 1968 and 1969. During this period, the traditional governance system further eroded. Benson Nwiyor's authority was undermined, and his reign marked a shift from traditional practices to a more pragmatic approach to leadership.

The Impacts of Traditional Institutions on Kalaoko

Impact of Social Institutions

Social institutions in Kala Oko—including marriage, cultural practices, chieftaincy, and governance—have significantly shaped the community's structure, identity, and development. These institutions, deeply rooted in Afrocentric values, emphasize communal well-being, interconnectedness, and respect for traditional norms. Below are the key impacts:

Strengthening Social Cohesion

- **Marriage Institutions:** Traditional marriage in Kala Oko has been central to fostering alliances between families, clans, and communities. It solidifies social bonds, ensuring the continuity of kinship networks and the transfer of values across generations.

- **Cultural Practices:** Rituals, festivals, and communal ceremonies unite the people, creating a shared sense of purpose and identity. For instance, initiation rites often mark transitions in life stages, reinforcing communal solidarity.

Preservation of Cultural Identity

Kala Oko's cultural institutions have ensured the survival of indigenous knowledge, language, and heritage. Practices such as storytelling, folklore, and oral traditions serve as vehicles for transmitting history and values.

The Afrocentric focus highlights how these traditions resist external cultural impositions, preserving the uniqueness of Kala Oko's worldview.

Conflict Resolution

Chieftaincy Institution: The traditional leadership system provides governance structures that are accessible, participatory, and adaptive to local needs. Chiefs and elders act as custodians of custom and mediators in disputes, ensuring justice aligns with cultural norms.

- Impact: This traditional governance reduces reliance on external judicial systems, creating a self-sufficient and harmonious community.

Conclusion

This study reveals the evolving nature of Kala Oko's traditional and cultural institutions, shaped by a complex interplay of change and continuity. Modern influences such as Christianity, formal education, urbanization, and globalization have significantly altered practices like polygamy, arranged marriages, rites of passage, and traditional deity worship. Despite these transformations, many foundational elements, such as the communal value system, respect for elders, cultural festivals, and the extended family structure, remain resilient.

These enduring aspects continue to serve as pillars of social cohesion and cultural identity within the community. By analyzing these changes and continuities, the research underscores the importance of preserving and revitalizing Kala Oko's heritage. This effort not only ensures the survival of the community's unique cultural legacy but also provides a framework for balancing tradition with modernity in a rapidly changing world.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Efforts should be made to document and preserve Kala Oko's oral traditions, cultural practices, and rituals through written records, digital archives, and recordings to ensure their longevity.

Community leaders and stakeholders should organize workshops and seminars to educate younger generations on the importance of cultural heritage, fostering appreciation and active participation.

A balance between modernity and tradition should be achieved by integrating contemporary elements into cultural festivals and rituals to attract younger participants while maintaining authenticity. The roles of elders and traditional leaders as custodians of culture should be reinforced through formal recognition and collaboration with local government and non-governmental organizations. Local government authorities should develop policies to protect and promote cultural heritage, such as designating cultural sites as protected areas or providing financial support for festivals and events. Traditional practices and festivals should be leveraged as opportunities for economic development, including cultural tourism and the production and sale of traditional crafts and artifacts. Programs should be developed to address the adverse effects of modernization by reviving near-extinct traditions and encouraging inter-generational storytelling through cultural clubs or societies. Further research should be conducted to explore Kala Oko's traditional institutions, encouraging collaboration between local researchers and academic institutions for deeper insights and effective preservation strategies. Implementing these recommendations will help Kala Oko preserve its rich cultural heritage, adapt to modern challenges, and ensure the continued relevance of its traditions.

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S/N	Name	M	Age	Place of Interview	Occupation	Date
1	Mr. Nwiyee Gordon	M	53	68 Hospital Road, Bori	Clergy	1/8/2024
2	Chief Robert Nwibe	M	63	Kala Oko	Chief	2/8/2024
3	Chief M.W. Gbaranee	M	70	Opunko	Chief	30/12/2023
4	Mrs. Baribe Joshua	F	40	Atali	Entrepreneur	
5	Mrs. Nwiyee Nwiibari	F	45	68 Hospital Road, Bori	Entrepreneur	30/12/2023

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