

# Intergroup Relations in Igboland: A Study of Precolonial -1908 Opi and Nike Communities

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## **Abstract**

*Neighbouring communities would always interact with one another. These interactions are sometimes peaceful and occasionally violent. Many texts, have emphasized Opi-Nike warfare, to the near disregard of other socio-cultural ties. This paper has tried to show that Opi-Nike relations had not been characterized by wars alone. Being neighbours, they had intermarried, traded together and had beneficial cultural exchanges. For instance, Nike people obtained horses from Opi which were a major item in their title-taking and funeral ceremonies, while Opi people obtained some scarce commodities such as salt and much later clothing materials from Nike. This mutual interdependence continued even during occasional outbreak of hostilities. Nike's militaristic tendencies had its origin in its culture which made it mandatory for all male children born on Eke market day to be drafted into military service for the community. This standing army provoked uneasy relationship between once peaceful neighbours. However, Opi refused to be intimidated by the awesome military might of Nike even with Nike's deployment of guns during wars as against Opi's machetes and clubs. Although many observers tend to harp on Opi-Nike wars to the utter neglect of strong ties through marriages, festivals and cultural exchanges, this study is of the view that the peaceful contacts outweighed the recriminations in Opi-Nike relations. Thus, Herbert Spencer's theory of the survival of the fittest which derives from Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection may appear to be the prism upon which Opi-Nike relations could be best appreciated. This study covers the period from precolonial times to 1908. The terminal date of 1908 was chosen because it was about the time of the foundation of the city of Enugu and imposition of British colonial rule in Nsukka area.*

## **Introduction**

The paper examines the relations between two communities, namely, Opi and Nike both in Enugu State of Nigeria. Contacts between people and cultures are as ancient as human history. Their importance as a stimulus to human development are also widely recognized (Afigbo: 1953:11). Opi is located seven kilometres Southeast of Nsukka metropolis, while Nike, a confederation of 24 village-groups, is located in the east of Enugu metropolis. Both communities in the pre-colonial times were largely composed of agriculturalists and traders.

Opi consists of three quarters namely: Idi, Ibeku, and Ogbozara in order of seniority. In the remote past, Opi people were said to be tall, stoutly built, hairy and bore facial marks. Their Igbo dialect was different from the dialect of their neighbouring villages called "Igbo Ishii" (six tribes) (Onyeke, 1984: 3). The people responded aggressively to external threats and were feared by their neighbouring communities.

On her part, Nike is a confederation of 24 village-groups namely: Ibagwa Nike, Amakpo, Onyoho, Ama Owele, Eziam, Edem, Amorji, Nokpa, Alulu and Iji Nike. Others are Ogui Nike, Nneke Uno, Nneke Odenigbo, Ugwogo

Nike, Ogbeki, Agbogazi, Ako, Emene, Akpuoga, Ugwuomu, Nchetenche, Onu-Ogba, Nkwubor and Obinagu. Their actual origins and order of seniority are historically obscure. The absence of an integrated narrative of their social history has also posed a challenge to cohesion during periods of crises as each group laid claim to seniority. Typical of the Igbo, seniority also epitomizes leadership. Yet, a possible hypothesis advanced by scholars is that Nike is an amalgam of previously scattered autonomous, but neighboring, kin groups. These kin groups evolved into villages and village groups and ultimately clans. These amalgamations and coalitions, according to Adiele, E. Afigbo (1980: 80), occurred probably as a result of population expansion which forced hitherto widely disparate groups into conflicts with one another and created the need to regulate the use of farmlands to avoid mutually destructive conflicts. These units were able to work out an arrangement for cooperation, the necessity of such mutual advantage heightened a need for closer bonding and they came to look upon themselves as brothers. To consolidate this functional cooperation, these units probably, invented a common ancestor and hierarchical order of seniority for the members of the group (Afigbo, 1980:80). In the emerging historical sequence of events, Ibagwa Nike assumed the position of senior village-group.

The name "Nike" was said to have been given to the cooperating group by their neighbours whom they had conquered. Thus Nike means "Ndi Ike"- which literally means those who are forceful (Ugwueze, 1999:13). As powerful land takers and dispossessors in the pre-colonial times, what the Nike people did was to quarter their slaves to serve as buffer and defence wall against their enemies at the land boundaries. As R.K. Udo (1980: 9) has this to say about Nike:

At a period when local warfare was common, the people of Nike on whose territory Enugu is built, located their settlement quite close to the foot of the escarpment which served as a defence wall. Being themselves a warlike group, the Nike ravaged the districts east of the escarpment and acquired large territories which they had to defend. This they did by establishing picket villages settled by slaves at the periphery of Nike territory while the escarpment served as a natural defense wall in the west.

This pattern of settlement was not peculiar to Nike. In Opi, the slave settlements were also situated at the boundaries since they served as sacrificial lambs, acting as a buffer during inter-communal wars to protect the Amadi (freeborn). They also acted as a bulwark against any invading enemy (pers.com, 2010).

### **Aspects of Opi and Nike Inter-group Relations**

Over time, Igbo communities had interacted with one another in diverse forms for mutual and complementary benefits. The interactions between Opi and Nike manifested in trade and commerce, inter-group marriages, cultural contacts and occasionally in conflict situations.

## Trade and Commerce

Economically, Opi and Nike had traded in varying capacities. As subsistence farmers, Opi and Nike exchanged farm products, on the basis of comparative advantage. They both complemented each other in this sense. Trade goods like salt, slaves, horses, European cloths (when colonial rule was introduced), metal implements were distributed from one group to another. In Nike, the popular market, Eke Ilulo, was attended by Opi and other Nsukka people. Emma Ugwu (pers.com:2010) with the author mentioned precious stone like necklace (*àkà*), horses, cowries, waist beads (*onokpo \jigida*) as some of the items the traders bought from Nsukka area of which Opi was a part. James Nwachukwu (pers. com: 2010), confirmed this assertion when he observed that, his father who died in 1939 usually travelled to Ibagwa (Nsukka) and Edemani to sell and to buy goods. On the other hand, Opi traders travelled to as far as Nkanu (Nike) where they bought items such as melon seeds, *ekpoto* (all kinds of native clothes), *usheyi* -cam wood (Onyeke, 1987).

Horse was one of the items of trade relations between Opi and Nike. Horses were used for various ceremonies including title-taking and burial. These horses were brought to Nsukka from Igala now in central Nigeria in exchange for slaves and woven cloth. In Opi, as in Nike, the slaughter of horses marked the high point of the burial rites and ceremonies. The leading horse market in Nsukka was Nkwo Ibagwa as most of the horses which found their way into Nsukka were assembled there for sale (Afigbo: 1997:28). Perhaps, this is why Ibagwa Ani and Ibagwa Aka were reputed as centres for horse trade. Horses that were not used locally in Nsukka were normally taken to Agbaja, Nkalagu, Abakiliki, Ohaozarra down to the Cross River via Nike (Afigbo, 1997:280). The brave long distance traders travelled to Ejule in Igala to purchase horses and brought these down themselves. Other horse trade centres included Nkpologwu, Nimbo, Ugbene, Abbi, Nrobu, Uvuru, while the distribution of horses was dominated by the Aku. Other markets for horses in Nsukka were Orie-Orba, Aho-Ezi-Opi, Nkwo-Ike-Ozalla, Orie-Uwellu-Aku, Ehalumona and Eha -Amufu (Afigbo, 1997:33). Although horses were generally expensive, there was still a good market for them in Opi and Nike.

Another trade item was salt. Salt served dual purpose: it was generally used for seasoning food and as a legal tender. Processed local salt came from Uburu, where there are brine lakes. The salt came in two forms: either as a condensed brine or evaporated brine. Nike people it is said travelled to Uburu to buy salt which they traded and supplied to their neighbours. Salt came into Nsukka through Agbaja and Nike traders. When the Aro came into the picture, the people of Nsukka obtained salt either through Nike, Agbaja or Aro businessmen (Afigbo, 1997:32). Probably by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some Nsukka traders would travel to Nike and Uburu to buy the salt themselves.

The Nike people were among the leading traders who competed for the control of trade in Nsukka and the most important items of trade were slaves (Afigbo, 1997:33). Slaves were procured in a variety of ways. The major source of slave acquisition usually came from prisoners of war captured during inter- village wars and those sold by their own villages for crimes, breaches of taboos and debts. But a substantial fraction was made up of victims of violence who were either kidnapped or captured in civil wars. From several accounts, kidnapping was frequent but might not have supplied as many slaves as outright war (Afigbo, 1997: 42). In general, slave trade in pre-colonial Nsukka was done on a house- to- house basis. This could have been the reason why there was no slave market in Nsukka. According to Onyeke Patrick (1984:24):

There existed a kind of slave traders association by which slave dealers from far places: Obukpa, Ovoko, Enugu- ezike and Ibagwa trafficked slaves to the house of one Attama Ezugworie, a popular slave dealer, at Ehalumona about two kilometer west of Opi.

The reason for adopting this method instead of an open market was to avoid a possible location of victims by parents or relations. These slaves would be underguard at Ehalumona until very late in the night when they would be brought to Opi from where they were marched to Ugwogo Nike and later sold (Onyeke: 1984:24). There were normally three destinations for slaves which left Nsukka. The first, and probably the oldest, was Igala. The other two destinations were Nike and Uburu. For the present study, focus is on the second destination, which was through Nike. Nevertheless, it may be important to note, as Afigbo has observed, that it was only those slaves that did not get into Igala and Aro hands within Nsukka or who were required by local traders to serve as carriers before being sold that normally were taken to Nike and Uburu (Afigbo, 1997:42). He equally argued that "there was a fairly internal market for slaves in Nsukka as slaves were required for sacrifice to the gods and for burying prominent free-born "*ogaranya*". Those slaves who were not sold or used for burial were retained for domestic work in the house and farm (Afigbo, 1997:31). Opi informants attested to the fact that those who engaged in slave trade went to Uzo-egu to sell them. However, this mythical Uzo-egu was probably Ugwogo-Nike which borders Opi in the southeast. Ignatius Ozoeme (1981:30) observed that the captives were sold at distant markets and the slave route ran through Opi, Mbu, Ikem to Eha- Amufu where they were eventually sold to the Aro or to Ibagwa Nike slave traders.

Arising from the above slave trading routes, one can speculate that during the era of slave trade, the two communities had powerful slave traders who engaged in the trade which brought them mutual benefits. Initially, the slaves were procured from Opi. The mode of procurement only changed at the height of the slave trade when Aro commercial tentacles traversed the whole of Northern Igboland. One can also conclude that slaves,

agricultural products and salt constituted major items of trade that facilitated exchange of goods between Opi and Nike during the precolonial period.

### **Cultural Relations Between Opi and Nike**

Culture has been described as the totality of a people's life. Culture can be borrowed and diffused. Cultural contacts can result from arts, dance, music, customs, modes of dressing, religion, marriage. Among these, marriage and religion stand out in Opi and Nike relations. An Opi tradition of origin has it that the eponymous father, "Opi", married three wives: Okpuje (Ibeku), Ujoma Ozarra (*Ogbozara*) and Iji Nike (*Idi*). Idi Opi was said to be the offspring of a woman married by Opi from Nike.

Another account by Emma Ugwu (pers.com. 2010) states that a Nike man married an Opi daughter. The marriage however got sour and the woman left with her son named Udene for Opi, her father's home. Udene grew up a strong and fearless warrior but Opi rejected, insulted and maltreated him. It is said that Opi people threatened to kill the boy and attributed his birth to *ime okwa* (unwanted pregnancy). It is also speculated that the woman's father advised her to take the son back to Ibagwa Nike, his paternal home. At Ibagwa Nike, the source continued, the father welcomed him. However, Udene who was not happy with his maternal people for the treatment meted to him waged war against Opi. Here he founded Agu Udene and chased Opi people away. Over time, efforts by Opi to recover the land proved abortive as Udene led a contingent of Ibagwa warriors, killed and annihilated Opi people and subsequently settled their *Ndi-obia* (strangers) in Ugwogo Nike.

In his own account, Godwin Ugwu (pers.com, 2010) was particular about a certain Opi woman who had a son for an Ibagwa Nike man called Ngwu Nwa Nnamani. According to this tradition, Ngwu was said to have quarreled with his wife who took her son called Udene and fled to Opi. As Udene grew up, he was insulted by his maternal people; this led to his return to his paternal home to wage a war against Opi. What could be inferred from both traditions is that, there existed, inter-marriage relations between Opi and Nike. The idea that the Opi people insulted their grandchild, Udene, was because Opi people do not accept the son of a man from another place as theirs. Among the Igbo, according to customs, such a person is not given land for farming or for building a house. It could be that, the boy was meant to understand that he was only a refugee in his maternal home and the rights of a true son of the soil could not be extended to him.

The significance of marriage as a factor in promoting harmony and peace between groups is also found among other cultural groups outside the Igbo. Marriages have been used to strike alliances between the Igbo and the Bini, Idoma, Ibibio, *et cetera* (Afigbo, 1987:44). According to Nike's tradition, however, as mentioned above, such marriage alliances usually ended on a sad note. But this claim need not obscure the fact that marriage promoted relations and peaceful co-existence between Opi and Nike.

Another factor that promoted cultural contact between Opi and Nike was religious. In pre-colonial Igboland, Nri agents and diviners were known for their ritual and religious roles, while the Aro with their oracle *Ibini Ukpabi* became famous for trade as well as for the resolution of intractable disputes and spiritual quests. Other centres of spiritual importance in Igboland included Awka with the oracle, *Agbala* and Umunneoha with *Igwekala* that wielded great influences. These Igbo communities elevated their deities which attracted devotees from different places. Clients came from far and near, especially to Arochukwu in search of psychic help and relief from the oracle (Afigbo, 1987:43).

Nike people were not used to *arushi* (deities). It was the Ede-oballa priests that instituted some *arushi* in Nike (pers.com, 2010). The only prominent deity that held the Nike together was *Anike* deity in Onyoho village group. In Opi, there were medicine men that travelled to far-flung areas in Igboland such as districts in the present Abia and Ebonyi States to prepare medicines/charms for their clients. The river deity (*Api Opi*) became a culture carrier as clients from far and near visited it for spiritual and material help. An informant from Opi told the researcher that there were *Api* worshippers in Iji Nike (pers.com 2010). Although, one could not ascertain the veracity of this claim nevertheless the fact that the *Idi Opi* village-group is said to have sojourned in Iji Nike, may explain the link of *Api* worshippers to Iji Nike. Interviews conducted by Onyeke Patrick Ugwu (1984:76) revealed that people from different places such as Nike, Mbu and Nkanu came to consult *Opi* medicine men.

These medicine men are said to have been endowed with power for making different types of medicine for bounteous harvests, weather control such as rain making, *ogbanje*, protection against accidents and poison. It is even claimed that they could make charms that could enable a person disappear in the face of danger (Onyeke, 1984:77-78). Clients from far and near were said to have consulted them and those who were unable to pay for the charges at times pawned their sons and daughters to these *Opi* priests. There were those who made charms which were said to have enabled *Opi* to defeat her enemies. An informant in Nike said that in Nike's wars with the *Nsukka*, the Nike people used guns while *Nsukka* used charms (pers.com, 2010). Another informant asserted that one Ugwu Ogbuke was one of such priests from *Opi* that came to ward-off rain during festivals in Nike (pers.com, 2010).

*Opi* and Nike had peaceful relations before frictions developed. Inter-village visits during festivals and attendance at each other's market strengthened the cordial relationship. As E. J Alagoa (cited in I. Ozoeme, 1981:35) aptly described such a relation and its tendencies. According to him:

Wars featured prominently in oral traditions and although they could give the erroneous impression of a Hobbesian state of nature, the account of these wars also reveal the existence of peaceful relations.

In pre-colonial Igboland, village was linked to village, village-group to village-group by economic, matrimonial and other ties. The interactions and linkages between Opi and Nike strengthened their relations. An informant noted that, any Opi trader engaged in long distance trade must either be a brave man or had contact in Nike, otherwise it would be a difficult venture (pers. com 2010). Nike were great traders that linked Opi to more distance places like Uburu which developed into Igboland's great periodic fares, under the aegis of the Aro, and attracted merchants from a great distance (Isichei: 1976: 31). Apart from salt which was processed by an exclusive guild of women producers, horses were obtained for religious rituals. The relationship was such that the two communities had the capacity to make some inputs in their relationship. The trade relations between Nike and Opi were mutual or reciprocal.

### Conflicts

The factors responsible for disagreements between Opi and Nike included: land disputes and indiscriminate raiding for slaves during the era of the slave trade. The Opi /Nike war was said to be a war of survival of the fittest, a scenario in which if Opi was vanquished, her defeat would have led to spoilage and incessant raids from Nike. Hence, the military engagements between the two communities became primarily a fight for survival, particularly on the part of Opi. Generally, in traditional Igbo society, conflicts were resolved through third party mediation or surrender by the vanquished group.

Conflicts over farm lands between Opi and Nike resulted from two inter-related factors. First, there was the infertility of the land after long and intense cultivation. Second, was the need for additional land for rotational bush fallow (Emezue, 1983:50). As fertile land became limited, people began to explore and engage in alternative economic ventures to supplement their meagre farm products. Besides, the rotational bush fallowing which generated conflicts as groups resorted to use of force to acquire and keep as much of the arable land as possible (Emezue, 1983:51). The Nike people were said to have fought with their neighbours over farm lands so as to appropriate their conquered neighbours' fertile lands. Some factors might have accounted for Nike's military success both before the advent of trans-Atlantic slave trade and even more during the height of the trade. It is claimed that the secret of her prowess was the structure and organization of her army. For instance, it is said that all males who were born on Eke day (one of the Igbo market days) were castrated and dedicated to military service by the community. Members of this military cult normally spent most of their teenage and early adult life in the bush receiving military training (Emezue, 2009:134). They eventually formed a kind of standing army for the Nike. Apart from collecting tolls in all Nike markets, these warriors were always ready for deeds of valour. This earned them notoriety from the neighbouring communities which regarded them as *Nike*, or otherwise *Ndi*

*ike*- men of force and valour. With the advantage of a standing army, Nike gradually expanded at the expense of their immediate neighbours.

However, this quest in *Agu Udele Ugba* in Opi-Agu was vehemently resisted by the people. *Agu Udele ugba* is said to be a parcel of land owned by Opi. The name *Agu Udele ugba* was derived from the *ugba* (castor oil) trees that naturally abound in large quantities in the area. It is said that each time Opi women went to pick the castor oil fruits (generally used for food seasoning), the Nike people would drive them away. As is typical, all animal species including humans have a sense of territory, which in this sense literally means the defence of geo-political area against encroachment or "foreign" invasion. Usually, the primary motive for such defence mechanism is to secure resources, women and ultimately land (Otite, 1999:8). The same principle applies to nations, towns, villages and ethnic groups. Land conflict, for example, erupts when the claims of one party to land and territory conflict with the desire of others to satisfy their needs within the same physical territory (Otite, 1999:8). In pre-colonial Igboland, land dispute was usually a major source of conflicts and inter-community wars. Nike's claim over the *Agu Udele* land infuriated Opi people who after diplomatic negotiations had failed engaged them (Nike) in a warfare.

As already briefly pointed out, another version to the said *Agu Udele* land dispute attributes the cause to the collapse of a marital relationship between a Nike man and an Opi woman. The product of the marriage, *Udene*, returned to Opi with the mother. When *Udene* grew up, he was taunted by his peers in Opi due to his chequered background. The irritating insults, continued the source, forced *Udene* to return to his paternal home in Nike. On attainment of manhood, according to tradition, *Udene* organized several raids against his maternal home. Parts of Opi which he seized were named *Ugwogo Nike* (pers.com. 2010). Is it plausible one may ask, that one's matrikins could have made life so unbearable, as claimed that he would become an implacable foe? In most Igbo communities, off springs of inter-community marriages were used as ambassadors of peace during times of crisis. They could travel freely, unmolested in both communities. Indeed, this account should be taken circumspectly. However, according to tradition, Nike's aggression over *Agu Udele ugba* was said to have been successfully resisted by the Opi people. It is perhaps for this reason that Nike never appropriated Opi's land. Thus with the loss of the *Agu Udele* land by the Nike, the next alternative open to them was to embark on a southward expansion which enabled them to settle their stranger elements at a spot called *Ugwogo Nike*. This new settlement, claims a source, was to checkmate any possible encroachment into the territories (pers.com, 2010).

By the 17<sup>th</sup> century or perhaps earlier, a new economic opportunity had emerged in Africa. Slaves were exported to Britain, the Americas and the West Indies to work as domestic slaves or in plantations. The Aro with the instrumentality of their oracle, *Ibinukpabi*, rose to great power and wealth, especially at the height of the Atlantic slave trade. The Aro entered into pacts

with some strong or warlike local groups and established settlements wherever trade carried them. The Nike and Aro pact covered cooperation in commercial, military and cultural matters (Afigbo, 1981:108). With this pact, the Nike/Aro alliance became a force to be reckoned with in the life and politics of Nsukka communities. The Nike activities constituted, to some extent, a disruptive force in the social and political life of Nsukka. They tried to set villages against villages. This probably led to a number of local wars. It was not only that these villages often fought among themselves but that Nike- Aro-Abam at times had cause to conduct military raids into these areas. The reasons adduced for such triple *en-tête* were many and included for obvious reasons the fact that the Nsukka area was densely populated, and to that extent any raids there would yield a crop of slaves for sale. Second, the warriors hired from Abam, Edda and Ohafia fought in this area to have enough human heads as souvenir at home and also as a trophy to mark their departure from *ujo* (cowardice) to *ufiem* (fearless warrior) (Njoku, 2000:69). Thirdly, the open semi-savannah vegetation of the Nsukka area facilitated the movement of the Nike guerrilla warriors. Fourthly, the area was on the whole outside the zone of effective Aro influence. The warriors therefore assumed the liberty to raid this general area with the encouragement of or in collusion with the Aro (Njoku, 2000:84). Indeed the internecine wars in this area, resulting from population pressure and the attendant 'land hunger' bred inter-communal conflicts which the warriors took advantage of. By the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the sour relationship between Opi and Nike developed and spread to other villages in Nsukka. Different versions account for the cause of the wars that were intermittent throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Afigbo (1997:11), the quarrels centered on allegations of extortion and sharp practices by Opi against Nike. Intelligence report has it that:

The Idi quarter of Opi also suffered in more recent times at the hands of the Abams, hired fighters from Afikpo who were paid by Nike (Udi Division) to raid various towns with whom they had quarrels. In the case of Idi Opi the cause of the raid is said to have been a slave given by Ohodo to Nike, as tribute who ran away from Nike and took refuge with the Api juju at Opi. This raid took place shortly before the arrival of government.

The slave given to Nike by Ohodo knew the potency of the Api oracle and decided to be an Api slave than being sold into slavery. Again, nobody, even the *Attama* (the chief priest) of Api had control over Api oracle's property because they were sacred objects which could not be disposed of. The Opi people knew the swift reprisals for violating the codes of the oracle and therefore did not hesitate to challenge Nike people instead of facing the wrath of the goddess.

As people who had commercial links, Eze Nwa Mbeke, the then Nike ruler, must have thought that the slave given to them by Ohodo was intentionally confiscated by the Opi people. The dominant argument has

been that either that Opi was trying to shortchange them in the scheme of things in the Nsukka area or Nike thought that Opi was trying to compromise their (Nike) economic stake in Nsukka. Eze Nwa Mbeke was said to have seen such an act as an affront (pers. Com, 2010). However, Opi on its part applied diplomacy knowing that Nike, being a slave owning community, could attack Opi with their "invincible" hired warriors. Thus, Eze Nwa Mbeke was made to understand that a slave that had run to the Api oracle for safety had become Api's property and therefore, safe from harm by the Opi people (pers.com, 2010). After the breakdown of negotiation between Opi and Nike, the latter enlisted the help of her war allies.

Thus, began a "time of trouble" for Opi and its environs as their territories were constantly raided for slaves. The war so engulfed the whole of Nsukka that Ero ulo was sacked and until date, Ero is divided into three quarters: Ero ulo, Umualor and Ero -Agu (Njoku, 2010:80). It is further claimed that during their first attack on Opi, the Nike warriors invaded at nights and unleashed terror on some of the villages. And they succeeded in overrunning Umuamadim, Umuamushi and Umuaro all in Idi Opi. They also pillaged and depopulated these villages, the source disclosed. The thinking in some quarters is that the probable reason why these Opi villages have remained small in population is the result of the pillages of those days (pers.com, 2010)

Eze Nwa Mbeke in some Nsukka quarters like Ukehe was regarded as a Nike king while on the other hand Opi informants claimed that he was a warrior. Nike informants, however, said that he was a king and merchant who dealt in the slaves (pers.com, 2010). Eze Nwa Mbeke thus decided to use the slave issue as a pretext to avenge a perceived wrong and to forcefully acquire more slaves. This corroborates the observation of R.G. Gavin and W. Oyemakind (1980:485) that, slave trading was always a big business and those who traded in slaves were usually involved in politics. They further stated that, slave trading was inevitably connected with war and some states such as Borno, Benin or the Oyo Empire probably at times deliberately went on rampages for slaves.

Following the euphoria of their first victory, Nike and her allies raided Opi for the second time. They campaigned on the Onu Api oracle but were said to have been repulsed by honey bees which surged out and killed one of the warriors while the rest dispersed in different directions (pers.com, 2010). Emboldened by this development the Opi challenge the over lordship of Nike and her hired warriors and subsequently, killed another warrior (pers.com, 2010). To kill or repulse an Ohafia, Edda or Abam warrior was at that time regarded as a rare act of bravery all over Igboland (Njoku, 2000:80)

The Opi warriors it is further said awaited Nike's next raid, which eventually came but was swiftly resisted. The Opi warriors were said to have fought fiercely the Nike warriors who on this occasion suffered many casualties (pers.com, 2010) The hired warriors recorded this setback due to a number of reasons, which included the fact that they were interested in glory

and not in geography. They were taken to the war fronts by the Aro guides who were not quite familiar with the terrain. Not only that, they were believed to have been exhausted after trekking, the only available means of transportation. Ohafia is over 100 kilometers from Nike/Opi. This situation could have only agreed with Sun Tzu's (1988:xix) line of thought to the effect that:

The terrain is to be sized up in terms of distance, degree of difficulty of travel, dimensions and safety. The use of scouts and native guides is important here for "chasing a game without a guide leads to the bush".

Unarguably, the Nike warriors lacked the above factors- a fact that attests to their defeat not only in Opi but also in Ukehe and Okpatu.

### **The Challenge of Okanga Igbo Nike**

In Ukehe tradition, Agbowo was believed to be the son of Eze Nwa Mbeke, the merchant and great warrior. In Opi he was described as the Okanga Igbo Nike although Aniji Ugwueze (1999:39) has stated in his book, *A Short History of Nike*, that *Okanga* and *Ikpa* dance was meant for those warriors who had excelled in wars and brought human heads as trophies or those who had killed dangerous animals. Following the defeat of the hired warriors and the death of his father, Okanga Igbo Nike vowed that he would 'grind snuff' with a human skull at the central Opi market (pers.com, 2010). This means that he would be ruthless with Opi people. Okanga Igbo believed to be a giant and ordinary man to him were likened to dwarfs. He was like the mystified Onoja Oboni of Igala raids (Afigbo, 1981:90). His threat was not an empty boast. *Oha* Opi (an assembly of the Opi elders was said to have tasked the different age-grades to produce their warriors who had excelled in wars more than their peers.

As a result of this decision four warriors were chosen, namely, Eze Nwa Agbode, Eze Nwa Nshiegbe, Ugwu Nwa Asogwa and Agbo Nwegwu (pers.com. 2010). These generals assembled and strategized on how best to eliminate Okanga Igbo Nike. This was to ensure the total annihilation of Nike and her allies. It is poignant to note that the Opi people knew the consequences of a failed rebellion against Nike and her allies. The generals therefore devised a means of dealing a final blow on Nike (pers. Com. 2010).

The Opi warriors, it has been speculated by many have found out that Okanga Igbo had a woman lover at Nsukka. The said lover was probably persuaded by Opi warriors to betray him. The woman it is further speculated must have been so beautiful that Okanga a feared and revered warrior, had kept her for himself whenever he visited Nsukka (pers.com. 2010). On the other hand, it must have been a friendly relationship which made it easy for her to betray Okanga. The other side of the story has it that it was probable that, the warriors deceived her into believing that his death would bring respite, peace and tranquility in the Nsukka area. During one of such visits, the Opi warriors hid around the woman's house. As Okanga Igbo slept, the

source continued the warriors quietly went to the woman who allegedly gave them his gun. It is said that they removed the gun powder in the gun and refilled it with sand. When Okanga Igbo woke from sleep and set off on his journey back to Nike, he probably did not know that the gun powder had been removed. This was a period in human history when there was no other means of transportation except by trekking. Okanga Igbo reached Eluwe nwa nza Ibeku while other accounts said at Abakwuru Ede-oballa (pers.com, 2010), there he met his waterloo. He was intercepted by the warriors who laid ambush for him. At first, his awesome sight frightened the first three men from taking action against him. However, it was the fourth man, Eze Nwa Agbode, who mustered enough courage to hit him. At this point, Okanga brought out his gun but to his chagrin, it could not fire a shot (pers.com, 2010). Despite that, he was said to have used the butt of his gun to cause some injury on Eze Nwa Agbode, who it is said suffered from the injury till death (pers.com, 2010). Okanga, our source claimed was eventually overpowered and killed by his assailant warriors (pers.com, 2010). His head, the gun and the machete were subsequently used as souvenirs by Eze Nwa Agbode to mark his gallantry in the encounter. It was also alleged that the machete used to cut off his head was to become curative medicine for stomach ailment (Apa) (pers.com, 2010). The said weapons of war used by Okanga Igbo were as recently as 2001 disposed of by his grandchildren after they had allegedly suffered series of untimely deaths (pers.com, 2010). The demise of Okanga Igbo Nike marked the end of further raids on Opi by Nike.

## **Conclusion**

Opi-Nike relations, like all human relations, had their periods of peaceful co-existence as well as moments of frustration and bitterness. During the pre-colonial period when movements of goods and traders involved an element of risk, established traders from both communities travelled under the protection of influential indigenes without fear of coming to harm. However, when Nike's business class developed strong trading ties with the Aro, another aggressive and ubiquitous merchant class in Igboland, the mutual relationship and harmonious co-existence between Opi and Nike began to disintegrate, possibly by mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. Soon enough, the Nike people were lured into the lucrative slave trade by their new trading partners. Typical of the slave trade era, the consequence was constant slave raids on the neighbouring communities. Nike sought to subjugate neighbouring communities and turn them into vassal states on whom they levied tributes annually. Opi eventually became a vassal state of Nike and paid tributes annually in the form of slaves. The period understudy was an era of the survival of the fittest, to echo Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection. From then on, there was no love lost between the two neighbours as Opi and Nike constantly sought to dominate each other. Although, many observers tend to harp on the Opi-Nike wars to the utter neglect of strong ties consummated through marriages, festivals and cultural exchanges, this

study is of the view that the beneficial effects outweighed the recriminations in the Opi-Nike past strained relations. Indeed, a more peaceful relationship blossomed between Opi and Nike after this show of strength as both communities had respect for each other.

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**Interviews**

Bernard Asogwa, Retired police officer, C.68 years, interviewed at his residence, Elugwu-Ida Ibeku Opi, 24th April, 2006.

Ignatius Nwagbo, a Civil Servant, aged C.56, interview held at Elioli Amukpa Ogbozara Opi, 26<sup>th</sup> August 2010.

Emma Ugwu, Igwe Ibagwa Nike, C.40 years. Interview held at the Igwe's Palace, Ibagwa Nike, 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2010.

James Nwachkwu, Elder, C. 80 years, Interviewed at his residence Obinagu Iji Nike, 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2010.

John Udele, Onyishi Umunta Uwelu, c. 94 years, interviewed at his residence Umunta Uwelu Ogbozara Opi on 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2010.

Ogbonna Asogwa, An Asogwa titled man, C. 75years, interview held at Ibeku Opi, 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2006.

Ezugwu Tikiri Onyeke, Onyishi Umunna, Oboigede and a soothsayer, C. 70years, interviewed at his residence Umunta Ogbozara, 28<sup>th</sup> August, 2010.

Vincent Ugwanyi, Eze Opi, C.70years, interview held at Umunevu Idi Opi, 28<sup>th</sup> August, 2010.