The Aro Hegemony: Dissecting The Myth And Reality

Chidume, C. G. & Nmaju, U. U.
Department of History & Strategic Studies,
Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike,
Ikwo (AE-FUNAI),
Ebonyi State
Corresponding Author: Chidume, C. G. (chudidume@yahoo.com)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.33281/JTHS20129.2019.1.6

Abstract
There are several authoritative accounts of the history of Arochukwu people – a revered community in Igbo land. Historians wrote some of these accounts of Igbo extraction who share historical link or root with the Aro and those of European writers who were probably influenced by the unverified accounts of insiders and outsiders. These writers seem to agree that Arochukwu people have a high pedigree of social and economic mobility and are imbued with such craftiness that proved them as shrewd merchants and at the same time exhibited high intellectual acumen. They were famous for possessing one of the most powerful, respected and fearsome oracle in Igbo land called Long Juju by the British and Ibina-Ukpabi by the indigenes. It was widely believed that the oracle possessed awesome powers such that it could deliver instant judgement and kill the guilty party. For this widely held belief, it was consulted by people from far and wide. But covertly, the Long Juju was used by the Arochukwu people to facilitate the slave trade and that was one of the reasons why the British ordered a punitive expedition against them in 1902. The strategic location of Arochukwu in the Cross River basin positioned them securely to control the booming slave trade in Igbo land and beyond as middleman to European slave merchants. Strikingly, the slave trade was the major significant economic activity that the Arochukwu people were known to have engaged in which also, gave them fame and made them establish settlements outside their native Aro. Undoubtedly, the Arochukwu is a great people, whose imprints remain indelible in Igbo history but the extent to which their exploits are rendered in current narratives and writings as historical truths are contestable. This paper contends that most written accounts of the Arochukwu people do not represent factual truths but embodies embellishments, myths and conjectures.
Keywords: Arochukwu, British, Ibibio, Igbo, Slave trade

Introduction
The most famous account of the Arochukwu tradition of origin has it that the land of Arochukwu was initially inhabited by Ibibio people that arrived in the area at about 300 AD from the Benue valley and founded the early settlements of Obong Okon Ita and Ibom. Many years passed before the first Igbo group led by Agwu Inobia and who referred to themselves as Ezeagwu group came along and pressed into the Ibibio occupied territory and founded several other settlements. The Igbo settler group (Ezeagwu) and their Ibibio landlords became entangled in war over who would possess the land, but there was a stalemate. In reaction, the Eze-Agwu clan invited a priest named

© 2019: C.G. Chidume & U.U. Nmaju

Nnachi from Edda clan of northeastern Igbo land and another group from the east of Cross River came through Nnachi (Onwuejeogwu, 1981). These people were identified as Akpa people. Akpa forces led by Osim and Akuma Nnubi helped the Igbo group to capture the rest of the area. The capturing of the entire area led to the formation of an alliance of nineteen [i](19) new and old settlements in the area known as the Arochukwu kingdom around 1650-1700. The first king (Eze Aro) to rule a unified Arochukwu was a man called Akuma, but after his death, Nnachi's son called Oke Nnachi took over and his descendants have ruled the throne to this day. (Nwogu, 2009)

The account went further to reveal that by the mid-18th century, there was mass dispersion of several Aro business families from their homeland into the Igbo hinterland and adjacent areas. The dispersion or movement into the Northern hinterland up to parts of Southern Igbo areas were facilitated by their middlemen role in the slave trade and as agents of Ibina Ukpabi oracle. The mystery surrounding the Ibina-Ukpabi and the awesome powers attributed to it gave Arochukwu people prestige and protection, which made them enjoy unfettered movement across the length and breadth of Igbo land. In addition to this were the services of some of their neighbouring Igbo mercenary communities of Ohafia, Abam and Edda. Unarguably, these warrior groups helped Arochukwu people move around freely without molestation, which enabled them to carry out the middlemen trade and enjoyed a long period of relative economic prosperity.

Another authoritative account of the Aro origin has it that Arochukwu was settled first by Ibibio people before another wave of migration brought some Igbo group to settle amidst the Ibibio as tenants. Over time, the Igbo group revolted against their Ibibio landlord, a rebellion that ended with the near annihilation of the Igbo. Those who survived fled further into the hinterland or were captured and taken into captivity as Ibibio slaves. As they fled the Ibibio massacre, they encountered an iterant native doctor from Edda who promised to assist them by hiring Akpa warriors to chase out the Ibibio from the land. The native doctor undertook this assignment by striking a deal with the Eze-Agwu Igbo group that he would become one of them if he succeeds in bringing Akpa warriors to defend Arochukwu as well as fortify them supernaturally to wade off further Ibibio raids. With the deal sealed, the unnamed native doctor brought the Akpa warriors who came and chased away the Ibibio.

After the defeat of the Ibibio, one of the Akpa warriors decided to stay back while the others left. Also, as it happened, it was the descendants of the native doctor who later created the oracle that came to be known as Ibina Ukpabi or Long Juju. It was, therefore, the descendants of the Eze-Agwu Igbo group, the native doctor and those of the Akpa warrior and defeated the

Ibibio elements that formed what is today known as Arochukwu. Interestingly, the different narratives of the Arochukwu history do agree in very many respects and have given us a clue as to how Arochukwu was founded. At least, we know about the Eze-Agwu group, the native doctor from Edda and his lineage and the Akpa warrior's lineage and the remnants of the Ibibio as historical figures that have remained constant in the history Arochukwu. It is also not in doubt that the Ibibio first inhabited Arochukwu before they were defeated and routed out. The very fact that they share close cultural ties, linguistic affinity and common boundary buttresses the fact of the age-long relationship and contacts between the two groups.

Arochukwu is located on the outermost fringe of Abia State and has a common boundary with Cross River and Akwa Ibom States. It is accessible through the Umuahia and Arochukwu trunk A road. It is a border Igbo community and speaks Igbo language with varied dialects as a result of waves of migration from different locations across Igbo land. It is one of the communities that are classified as Cross River Igbo together with Abiriba, Ohafia, Ihichiowa and Abam. They are distinctly matrilineal. At the height of their economic prosperity and influence, Arochukwu people founded satellite settlements outside their native homeland (but not tributary States) scattered in different parts of Igbo land. Some of the better-known settlements include Arondizogu, Aro-Okigwe, Aro-Ezinachi, Aro-Amuro, Aro-Ihube, Aro-Obinikpa, Aro-Ubahu etc (Imo State); Aro-Okporoenyi (Umuahia), Aro-Ngwa, Aro-Isuochi (Abia State); Aro-Ajalli (Anambra); Aro-Abakaliki (Ebonyi); Aro-Ngwo (Enugu) and Aro-Ikwerre in River State. From these locations, Aro people sourced and traded on slaves, while raiding recalcitrant communities with the help of mercenaries from Abam and Ohafia.

Therefore, Arochukwu history represents a medley of culture and tradition; a community characterized by the influence of external cultural traits and a melting pot. However, one group whose history and tradition of warfare appear to have had an effect and bearing on Arochukwu is the Abiriba people. Oral accounts of both groups contain information about some events that may be beyond coincidence but point to certain historical closeness and relationship in the distant past. For example, both histories agree on the role of Akpa warriors in founding Arochukwu and on the 'final' battle for Aro settlement and consolidation in which Abiriba people claim to have played a significant part. It is from this standpoint that this paper attempts to interrogate some aspects of Aro history by taking a hard and closer look at some "historical facts" that may help us confirm or otherwise disregard certain claims. This is important because it will ultimately guide

us to appreciate Aro history, myth and reality better. To achieve this, a brief history of Abiriba will be helpful.

A Brief History Abiriba and The Aro Connection

Abiriba people believe that they had lived and migrated from Akpa an ancient settlement (uninhabited today) situated on the left bank of the upper Cross River area together with the people of Agbawan, and Ena (Urugbam Ejiedede) as a group of Ekoi Yakuur tribe in Cross River. An Abiriba person takes pride in calling his home town Usukpam Etete, a corruption of Urugbam Ejiedede - the praise name of Ena people. As a single group, the wandering horde of warriors left Akpa when the rivers dried up and the environment became too hostile for human habitation to Ena where they settled for a period before some leaders emerged to found new settlements. Thus, from Ena the first group left and settled at a place called Agbawan; the other group headed northwards journeying through inhabitable forests of Erei and Ohafia and finally settled at Abiriba. A remnant of the group stayed back at Ena and is today referred to as Urugbam Ejiedede people (Chief Ejim Akuma, 1996). A scion of the Akpa tribe, Abiriba people are renowned as great warriors and blacksmiths. Factually speaking, it was their bravery and knowledge of iron work that aided their migratory movement from their native Akpa land to their present location called Abiriba. The people live amidst other war-like and hostile Igbo communities such as Abam, Item, Ohafia, Edda, Igbere etc. Essentially, the history of Abirba recounts how the people fought several wars from Akpa along their migratory routes to their present settlement and how they fought for prestige, blood heroism and protection of their trade (Umon/Inyimoka Trade Guild, 1996).

It is a widely held belief among Abiriba people, that as part of Akpa, they were skilled in the art of warfare and bravery and with their skills in iron working, fought several wars one of which was the war against the Ibibio before the founding of Arochukwu. This, according to them, is the reason why an Abiriba person will refer to an Aro person and vice versa as “nwadim” meaning my cousin. Also in the course of history and to further cement the relationship between the two communities, Abiriba people point to yet another war that took place between Arochukwu and Ibibio when Aro people had firmly secured their present abode but came under frequent attacks from Ibibio people. The Ibibio had devised a means of spreading terror and fear by using masquerade (Ekpo) to raid, kill and plunder Aro villages at will – a war tactic in which the Aro could not contain. Consequently, they appealed to the Enachioken of Abiriba (King) who heeded and sent at the instance of Aro, seven (7) warriors to wade off

incessant Ibibio raids and killings using the masquerade (Elder Anya Eze, 1995). Retelling this story, some Abiriba elders stated that the people of Arochukwu came under attack by the belligerent Ibibio sometime in the late 17th century. This time the Ibibio people used masquerades (Ekpo Ibibio) to frighten and wage a guerrilla war against the Aro. Probably due to the age-long cordial relationship that had existed between Abiriba and Aro, they (Aro) asked for assistance from Abiriba to deal with the Ibibio menace and the request was granted. Abiriba sent seven warriors to fight the Ibibio masquerades called in Abiriba parlance "okiri-Ibibio". The seven warriors were Nkuma Agbaike (leader), Owom Upko, Gbagbali Ohunnunu, Alawara Adimaribonkwu, Okoronta Agwuocha and two others whose names we cannot immediately ascertain (Chief Ejim Akuma, 1996).

The seven warriors fought and defeated the Ibibio masquerades that had laid siege on Aro land. As the victorious Abiriba warriors were returning home, they were given a gift of a mirror by the Eze Aro. Four warriors lost their lives and only three made it home with the gift which was engraved in the wall of Umuechukwu village hall at Amogudu - Abiriba. This popular claim among Abiriba people is according to them a further proof to the fact that Abiriba had rendered more significant military assistance to Arochukwu than any other surrounding community, but yet they are least mentioned or recognised by historians. According to late Chief Ejim Akuma (a local historian), Abiriba warriors did not fight as mercenaries but fought for glory, blood heroism, to secure their homeland and protect their movement outside Abiriba and their business interest as long-distance travellers and traders. They also fought to liberate communities under siege, especially communities that share historical link or affinity with them or simply on request. Thus, they fought the "Agha Uturu; Agha Mgbom; Agha Ukpati" etc. and several others in different parts of Igbo land. In the case of Arochukwu, they fought because of some historical ties and conclusively brought the Ibibio menace and terror to an end (Chief Ejim Akuma, 1996).

Precolonial Economic Activities in Igbo Land

Pre-colonial economic activities in Igbo land comprised of several occupational groups cutting across farming, sculpturing, wood carving, salt production, traditional medicine men, oracle agents and smiths. According to the late Prof. Adiele Afigbo, Northern Igbo area had established a trading system linking the area with salt and lead producing areas of north eastern and western Igbo and through them to the Cross river waterway. He noted further that nothing much was known about the trading system of southern Igbo but that it is likely that they traded agricultural products for salt and fish (Afigbo, 1981, p.134). Afigbo stated that it is believed that the Southern

Igbo got iron tools and weaponry and some ritual objects from the Northern Igbo, the only part of Igbo land which was endowed with iron ore. According to him, by the 10th century, progressive land degradation and dwindling economic fortunes led to the diversification of economic activities from agricultural to non-agricultural products and this gave rise to professional group of traders that moved about to sell their wares. Among the famed long-distance trading groups are those from Aro, Awka, Nri, Nkwerre, Abiriba, Umunneoha and Aboh (Afigbo, 1981, p.134).

All the groups except Aboh backed the long distance with rendering some other services; Awka, Abiriba, Nkwerre were renowned smiths; Aro and Umunneoha were oracle agents; Nri were ritual and medicine men (Afigbo, 1981, p.135). Afigbo observed that Awka smiths organised themselves into a guild, one half of whose members were allowed to travel in any one year, while the other stayed behind to guard the home. He concluded somewhat erroneously that the Nkwerre and Abiriba there do appear to have such organization and arrangements (Afigbo, 1981, p.135). Abiriba blacksmiths had developed a well-organized trade guild known as the Amuzukwu society on whose shoulder rested the blacksmiths trading activities, secrets, control and movement. And with the passage of time the Amuzukwu trade guild metamorphosed into two trade guilds representing the dominant two lines of activities/trade – Umon trade guild for riverine trader with about five (5) trading houses and Inyimoka trade guild for hinterland traders also with about five (5) trading houses (Umon/Inyimoka Trade Guild, 1996).

The account of Afigbo while recognizing the role and contribution of other groups in the evolution of the long-distance trade and the economic activities of the period has however been consistent in giving credit to Arochukwu people for establishing the largest and most extensive flourishing trading networks and routes in the Northern Igbo hinterland. A network that extended to all parts of Igbo land and stretched to the Southern Igbo areas. Pointedly, the Aro middlemen commercial activities are not very transparent as it cannot be pinned down to any specific line of trade save the fact that they were undoubtedly agents of the famous long juju. Thus, the fame and economic prominence that Aro seemingly enjoyed throughout Igbo land and beyond derived essentially from the fame of the long juju and not on any account of economic dexterity in any line of trade. Aro people did not engage in agriculture on any meaningful scale, nor were they among the communities noted for their skills in wood carving, weaving, sculpture, and blacksmithing. They did not possess any special ability in trade. During this period, the organization of trade in Igbo land was done on the basis and strength of speciality. For instance, communities such as Awka and Nkwerre

were known for their skill in blacksmithing. According to late Chief Ume Ndukwo, Abiriba were noted not only for their skill in blacksmithing and firearms but were famous as wood and motifs carvers. In addition, they traded on ivory tusks, various blacksmith wares before progressively delving into the sale of European goods from their bases in parts of Ibibio and Cross river areas (Chief Ume Ndukwo, 1996). Clan of diviners and native doctors came from Edda, Nri and Item etc.

Some communities were proud owners of powerful oracles and among these groups are found the Arochukwu (Ibina Ukpabi), Awka (Agballa), Umunoha (Igwe-kala), Ozuzu (Amadioha) etc. Unarguably, the Ibina Ukpabi was the most famous oracle in Igbo and through it, the Aro custodians became universally famous and respected throughout Igbo land. It is perhaps in this sense that some historians have asserted that the Aro was the most famous commercial traders in the Igbo hinterland. Though the Aro lives at the coastal fringes of Cross River and Ibibio areas which gave them some advantage and facilitated trade links with the early Europeans yet the Aro did not utilise this natural head start but instead concentrated on the trade boom of the period – slave trade in which they enjoyed a virtual monopoly. Despite the boom associated with the slave trade and the random distribution of some European wares that aided in slave-raiding to accomplices, Arochukwu people did not rival in any other trade nor did they establish economic control or hegemony over Igbo land. It was therefore hardly surprising that it was during the slave trade that Aro influence reached its zenith. As Afigbo noted, "in eastern Igbo land, the Aro dominated directly in the distribution of foreign goods as well as in the assembling of slaves for sale to the coastal middlemen. He pointed out that; the wealth of the Aro oligarchy and its ascendency was based on the slave trade" (Afigbo, 1981, p.136).

This paper contends that different Igbo groups had natural and material endowments which dictated their line of specialisation in the overall economic spectrum and contributed modestly to the growth of Igbo economy in pre-colonial and colonial epochs. Even in post-colonial times, this specialisation has been more clearly defined and refined. Members of the Umon/Inyimoka chambers of commerce have argued consistently that no single Igbo group(s) should lay claim to establishing an economic hegemony, but that if any should boast Abiriba are the people to beat. They claimed to have played no less a significant role in the making of the pre-colonial and post-colonial economy of Igbo land. The people had established themselves as a community of skilled blacksmiths, carvers, sculptors, native doctors and itinerant traders who travelled far and near and settled in distant lands to practice their trade. As earlier noted, two lines of trade were established by

Abiriba smiths: the hinterland traders (Inyimoka group) and the riverine traders (Umon group). The hinterland traders (Inyimoka) covered areas such as Bende, Uzuakoli, Umuahia and Aba while the riverine traders (Umon) moved Northern southwards towards Arochukwu to cover parts of Ibibio and Cross river areas up to Itu, Okopedi Itu, Effiyong, Umon, Calabar before venturing into Equatorial Guinea and Cameroun (Umon/Inyimoka Trade Guild, 1996).

Commenting on Abiriba people, Elisabeth Isichie had noted that a French visitor to the Delta at the end of the Seventeenth century acquired several elaborate swords of Igbo manufacture made by Abiriba people. She further noted that in the 19th century, Dr. Baikie visiting the Delta and Niger saw swords, spear, and metallic ornaments which were very neatly finished and made in Igbo land. He thought them to be the work of the Aro, but it is generally agreed that they were the work of Abiriba smiths (Isichei, 1973). The first European visitor to Bende in the 1890's, gave an interesting description of bells, pipes, jewellery and brass-mounted staves made in Abiriba whose inhabitants consist of nothing but blacksmiths, who do all the work in brass and iron for a very great distance around (Reports of district officers, nd). The works of Ekejiuba in the 1960s revealed the existence of ritual brass objects used by the Aro and made by Abiriba smiths which have striking similarities both in style and content with the bronze of Igbokwu and Ezira. They include bells with decorated surfaces, swords, a bracelet decorated with motifs and large manilas used for rituals purposes and decorated with snakes, lizards and leopard skins.

In her book, "A history of Igbo people", Isichei remarked that Abiriba a wealthy community of smiths and long-distance traders worked raw iron from the mines of Okigwe – Arochukwu ridge (Isichei, 1973). Interestingly too, Hope Waddell also gave an account of an Igbo Smith [from Abiriba] at Umon in 1857… one of the tribes noted for iron work and who travel about and sojourn where they can get work (Isichei, 1973). Writing about Abiriba in 1903, Henker in a despatch to the High Commissioner, noted thus, "the next day, we moved to the cluster of towns in which the Abiriba people live finding a splendid road from Amankalo Igbere. The Abiriba town comprises of Ameke, Amogudu and Agboji. Here, we received a most enthusiastic welcome and Leut. Richard Morrisey held a very satisfactory meeting. We found the town full of all classes of traders and everyone seemed well off and wore good clothes, quite different from towns around them (Isichei, 1973).

In 1912 the Enachioken of Abiriba (King) commissioned three age grades to dredge the Igwu River from its mouth at Okopedi Itu where it joined the Enyong River down to Abiriba to allow for the passage of Abiriba merchants' dugout engine boats bringing goods from Equatorial Guinea and

Cameroun. The goods landed at Abiriba and distributors from all over Igbo land came to buy. Items of trade included herrings, drugs, enamelware, gin, spirits, cigarettes, textiles etc – a trade in which Abiriba merchants enjoyed a monopoly. In addition, a full house of the Umon/Inyimoka trade guild informed the writer that Abiriba people played a very important part in the establishment of the famous Agbagwu market at Uzuakoli (which later became an important slave trade market). They abandoned the market and left Uzuakoli when there was a scuffle between Abiriba traders and Uzuakoli people which made the traders move to Umuahia. The movement of Abiriba traders out of Uzuakoli marked the beginning of the decline of Agbawu market. At the establishment of the West African currency union, Abiriba traders engaged in dangerous overseas trading importing the various goods that they had hitherto smuggled and sometimes competing with European multinational companies like United African Company (UAC) (Umon/Inyimoka Trade Guild, 1994).

The Ibina Ukpabi (Long *Juju*)

One account of the Ibina Ukpabi says that the Edda native doctor who invited the Akpa warriors that fought for Eze-Agwu group created the oracle to give spiritual protection to the Aro people. The fear probably informed the need for such an oracle of a future Ibibio attack but most importantly to create a mystic aura and awesomeness over Arochukwu. The Ibina Ukpabi was indeed a god that protected Aro people and gave them a sense of superiority over other Igbo groups. Thus, it was initially intended as a channel or object of worship and invocation for safety and blessing but later became the principal organ that played both political and judicial functions. The custodians of the secret of the oracle used its influence and its rumoured awesome power to wield considerable political authority in Arochukwu and beyond as the oracle was famed for its impartial judgement in settlement of disputes. Its fame spread like wild fire as people from afar came to consult the oracle aided by a network of agents. In this way, the Aro middle men were able to establish new settlement outside Arochukwu. According to G.I Jones, the effectiveness and therefore the fame of the oracle lay in its apparent ability to kill by supernatural means those disobeying its verdict. He noted that old informants told early British District Officers that Ibina Ukpabi oracle priests at Arochukwu used to sacrifice an animal whose blood was then seen flowing out from the grove. The litigant was hidden for a few days and later sold into slavery (Stride & Ifeka, 1969, pp.352 -353).

Arochukwu and The Slave Trade

Arochukwu played a significant middlemen role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The Aro confederacy (Aro slave traders) scattered throughout the hinterlands of the Igbo nation, in coalition with several Igbo leaders, orchestrated the sale of over 4 million Igbo sons and daughters during the transatlantic slave trade. Many Igbo slaves, who were shipped from the slave outposts in Calabar and Bonny to Europe and the Americas, were first assembled in Arochukwu, and then transported to Calabar or Bonny via the Aro Blue River which pours into the Atlantic Ocean. Most Igbo slaves were shipped to North Carolina and Virginia, in the United States. Igbo slaves were also shipped to the Caribbean Islands of Jamaica, Haiti, and Cuba (Onwuejeogwu, 1981).

In 1807, the British abolished slave trade but the Aro using their extensive network of slave trading continued the lucrative trade on slaves in the interior and the hinterland particularly at the slave mart at Agbagwu in Uzuakoli. But between 1840 and 1860 the success recorded by the British in the abolition drive dealt the first blow to Aro interest by wiping away the main source of Aro wealth creation and hegemony. Afigbo had asserted that generations after generations the Aro had enjoyed virtually unchallenged economic supremacy, among the Igbo, Ibibio and some other neighbouring hinterland groups. But the success of the expedition was a deadly blow to the Aro hegemony (Afigbo, 1981, pp. 240 -241).

It was indeed the slave trade that allowed Aro to experience an economic boom, not serving as middlemen in the distribution of European goods. As has been stated, the European goods distributed were in furtherance of the slave trade and nothing more. Even in the distributive trade, Abiriba merchants had positioned themselves on the entry ports of European goods in the Ibibio and Cross river areas where they controlled a substantial portion of the trade. The goods obtained by these merchants were distributed throughout Igbo through chains of intermediaries who included the Aro and other Igbo groups (Elder Anya Eze, 1995).

It seems that the Aro growth and expansion was supported by the slave trade, no more no less. They dominated the slave markets at Bende, Uzuakoli and Uburu which served as the major distribution centres for slaves and who were transported by a variety of routes. According to Jones, G.I. slaves from northern Igbo country could be taken to Uzuakoli which linked Bende to the Southeast. At Bende purveyors would hand over slaves to Aro intermediaries who then sold them to traders from Old Calabar and Bonny. The slaves were of northern origin of the Igbo stock and were captured during slave raids. Others were sold into slavery to meet pressing needs or indebtedness (Stride & Ifeka, 1969, pp.353 -354).

Jones, G.I also observed that the Aro used their links effectively and penetrated the hinterland, New Calabar, Bonny and Kalabari States. The Ibibio elements in Aro helped traders to travel to Southern Ibibio, while the Akpa element provided contacts in Obubra and Cross River area as Enyong people linked them to Old Calabar. Armed with these vital contacts which provided safe trade routes, the Aro were able to offer slaves for sale to whichever State that offered the highest prices. And so during the 18th century, the Aro enjoyed a monopoly on supplying slaves. Indeed, the slave trade was an economic boom for the Aro who utilized its benefits including the founding of new settlements (Stride & Ifeka, 1969, p.354) fully.

Conclusion

This paper does not in any way suggest that the Aro did not make an imprint in the economic life of the Igbo nor does it play down on the significant contributions made by the group in the economic, political and religious life of pre-colonial Igbo society.

On the contrary, it argues that the accounts rendered by some historians as the authentic history of the Arochukwu nay other Igbo groups are not entirely factual narratives. For example, the Aro were not at anytime the wealthiest or a very wealthy community in Igbo land. It is also not a fact of history to suggest that Aro people did establish any form of political, economic or religious hegemony over Igbo land. The account that the Aro trading system (except about the slave trade) penetrated the hinterland and beyond cannot be sustained, just as what some historians have described as Aro commercial dominance is arguable. But it is not in doubt that the Aro made a modest contribution to the economic growth of Igbo land. As earlier noted, the Long Juju (Ibina Ukpabi) which symbolised their influence across Igbo land aided them to build an economy sustained by slavery. It is generally agreed that the Aro had an unmatched monopoly in the slave trade and used the opportunity it offered to spread their tentacles and influence around and beyond Igbo land. And it was through their dominance of the slave market that they made their most significant contribution to the economic and commercial activities of Igbo land of that era.

References

Afigbo, A.E (1981) *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*. University Press Ltd in association with Oxford University Press

Isichei, E. (1973) *A History of Igbo People:* London; Longman Press.

Nwogu, M. *(2009) Aro Kingdom re-brands after 700 years. The Sun Publishing Ltd. Retrieved: 2010/02/25*

Onwuejeogwu, M.A (1981) *Igbo Civilisation: Nri kingdom and hegemony; London Ethnographica. Retrieved: 2014/10/02*

Southern Provinces of Nigeria; Tribes, Custom and Superstition, compiled from the reports of district officers, part 1, chapter vii: Travel tribes with their language and intercourse. (1992) CSE/5/2/8

Stride, G.T and Ifeka, C. (1969) *The People and Empires of West Africa*. Longman Publishers, Ibadan

List of Informants

Chief Ejim Akuma, Amogudu Abiriba. Date: 6 April 1996. Age: 90years

Chief Ume Ndukwo, Umueso Abiriba. Date: 10 April 1996. Age: 86 years

Elder Anya Eze, Amogudu Abiriba. Date: 10 July1995. Age: 92 years

Umon/Inyimoka Trade Guild, Obu Nkwa Ihebu Abiriba. Date: 4 May 1996.

Umon/Inyimoka Trade Guild, Obu Nkwa Ihebu Abiriba. Date: 20 May 1996.