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URHOBOTRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP: A REVIEW OF ITS SUCCESES, FAILURES AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE¹

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Introduction

Urhobo as a Nation-State

A nation-state is a human organization that is supposedly designed to serve and promote the welfare of its citizens. To be worthy of its salt, a nation-state has to be organized and run on principles that guarantee its citizens, among other things, their lives, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. When the instruments of governance are in harmony with the cultural and social needs of the people, not many will bother to probe the purpose or the meaning of a nation-state. When, on the other hand, the political arrangement for running the affairs of the people becomes destructive of the ideals that had helped to sustain their lives, cultural and social needs, the tendency for people to ask questions about the true meaning of a nation-state will ultimately arise.

The crisis in Urhobo traditional leadership offers an example of how the stress and turbulence of the prevailing times can undermine the welfare of a people. Never in their history have Urhobo people been so concerned, as they do now, about their future and about the purpose of the political and social arrangement that govern their lives. The concerns about the future have in turn raised questions about the nature of the Nigeria's political framework that affects their cultural and social needs as a people. Urhobo, a major ethnic nationality in Nigeria is of prehistoric existence and has survived through ancient times,

¹ A shorter version of this essay titled *Selfless and Effective Leadership: Vehicle for the Unity and Progress of Urhobo*, was presented as the keynote speech at the 22nd Annual Convention of Urhobo Progress Union America held at the San Francisco Airport Marriot Waterfront, 1800 Bayshore Highway, Burlingame, California 94010-1203, on September 5, 2015

colonial rule and military occupation to arrive at the present state of affairs. In the intervening period, Urhobo country was annexed effective in 1891 into a corporate entity that became known as Nigeria in 1914. Politically, Urhobo people continue to be subjugated in the system to other ethnic nationalities into a minority status where they are marginalized when it comes to the distribution of political and economic resources. The denial of equal rights of citizenship in a corporate Nigeria has been made worse by the lack of cooperation among the people, and the poor representation of Urhobo interests at the national level. A major reason for this lack of proper representation has been attributed to the on-going subversion of the rights of Urhobo people to choose their leaders in free and fair elections. With the discovery of crude oil and gas in the 1960s, oil exploration and production have also systematically degraded Urhobo lands and waterways, rendering them so infertile and polluted that they are no longer able to sustain life.

The consequences of the events involved in the transformation of Urhoboland have been severe for the people, especially in recent times. While Nigeria continues to derive a major portion of its operating revenue from the production of oil in Niger Delta, including Urhoboland, the area itself remains deprived and underdeveloped. Urhobo is under economic stress. Political instability and insecurity, decline of agriculture, the mainstay of Urhobo economy and means of livelihood for the people, unemployment, youth restiveness, and the rise of crimes to a level that had hitherto been unknown in Urhobo history, have become the lot of the people.

Addressing the issues involved in the myriad of problems affecting Urhobo people can be done through one major perspective: an understanding of Urhobo problems as a result of ineffective leadership in recent times. Urhobo has a history of good leadership in times past that had worked hard to move Urhobo from obscurity into prominence. In spite of the current level of ineffective leadership, many Urhobo individuals continue to excel in many areas of human endeavor. In essence, Urhobo are intelligent and hardworking people who, with good leadership, are capable of restoring political stability and peace to their land,

and ushering in a new era of development and progress for the people. Given this perceived solvency of Urhobo people, this essay will begin with a brief history, as far back as possible, of Urhobo struggle for survival and the development of their lands in Nigeria's western Niger Delta. The historical account will be followed by one of a citation of some of the accomplishments of the people. Many of these achievements occurred from the 1920s through the 1950s during which Urhobo was pushed into prominence in response to a New World Order.² The essay will then move on to trace the origins of the unfortunate decline of Urhobo fortunes that came with the rise of multi-party politics and the series of military interventions in Nigeria. The essay will conclude its work with a call for the way forward to include strategies for reversing the decline of Urhobo fortunes, and ushering in an environment that is conducive for peace and development of Urhobo land.

Brief History of Urhobo Struggle for Survival and the Development of their lands

Kay Williamson (1979) had used a linguistic time scale based on a glottochronological methodology, to estimate that the progenitors of Urhobo and Isoko people had occupied parts of the Niger Delta for at least 2,000 years. But how did they get there? The answer to this question is important for this essay as it provides some insight into the kind of Urhobo leadership that existed in these early times. However, many of the prevailing accounts of the origin of Urhobo people appear to be rather speculative and are not based on credible evidence. In absence of archeological studies, many stories of Urhobo migrations, say, for example, from Ife in western Nigeria and other places as far as Egypt and Sudan appear to be mere guesses rather than facts. In the midst of these contradictions, two hypotheses seem to offer themselves as plausible accounts for the origin of Urhobo people in Niger Delta. They are namely: (i) migration through River Ethiopie and (ii) migration through River Niger and its deltaic formations.

² The New World Order commenced with the Age of Exploration in the middle parts of the 15th century and continued onto the Colonization of West Africa in the later parts of the 19th century. The earliest European voyages to the Americas and the west coast of Africa created a system of economic and cultural exchanges among people from the Americas, Africa and Europe, that was to have a significant impact on Urhobo way of life.

The hypothesis of migration through River Ethiope is based on Benin imperial history as formulated by Benin palace historians like Jacob Egharevba. It postulates that the ancestors of Urhobo came through tropical rain forests north of River Ethiope, crossed the river and settled in areas immediately south of the Ethiope. A modified version stipulates that the migrants' first stop was Avwraka from where dispersals were made to other parts of the area that now constitutes Urhoboland. The hypothesis further declares that the bands of Urhobo migrants were under the direction of some restless Benin princes who were eager to create new kingdoms for themselves outside the Benin Empire. In contrast to the idea of a movement through River Ethiope, the other hypothesis points to a pattern of settlement within the western Niger Delta basin. Urhobo ancestors were said to have arrived through the River Niger to settle along the western banks of the Ase and Patani Rivers, both parts of the network of tributaries and creeks of the Niger Delta. The descendants of Urhobo migrants, at some point, had to move from these swampy lands northwestwards into drier lands, resulting into the cascade formation of 22 clans with distinct sub-cultures of Urhobo.³ The movements were also said to be in cohorts of kinsmen who took advantage of Iron Age implements to conquer the dense rainforests. The conquest and settlement of these difficult terrains could not have been possible without the existence of some form of social organization that enabled the people and their leaders to carve portions of the rainforests for themselves and their progenies.

Both hypotheses are in agreement with the stipulations of the folk memories of migration from *Aka*, now known as lands of the Benin people. What is debatable, however, are the times and direction of migrations. The hypothesis of migration across the Ethiope River is premised on a time line which suggests that Urhobo migration occurred during the Benin Eweka Dynasty that began in 1440s. The hypothesis tends to give credence to some folk historians who postulate that Urhobo clans migrated as fully-formed kingdoms under the leadership of some Benin princes into various locations of the Niger Delta now collectively known as

³Ekeh classified the 22 sub-cultures based on their supposed age of settlement into three groups, namely: (i) six primeval clans: Arhavwarien, Eghwu, Ewreni, Iyede, Okparebe and Uwherun (ii) seven of secondary clans: Agbarha, Ephron, Ogor, Olomu, Orogun, Ughele and Ughievwen and seven tertiary clans: Agbarha-Ame, Agbarho, Agbon, Avwraka, Idjerhe, Okere, Oghara, Okpe, Udu and Uvwie (Ekeh's *Olomu and Development of Urhoboland & Western Niger Delta*, p.45).

Urhoboland. The hypothesis thus gives credit for the settlement of Urhoboland to Benin princes and ignores the contributions of Urhobo ancestors who must have labored to reclaim parts of the dense rainforest. On the other hand, the hypothesis of migration through River Niger and other waterways of the deltaic formation indicates that Urhobo migration occurred in prehistoric times which have been identified in much of Urhobo folklore as the clan-based era of the Ogiso dynasty, long before the rise of Benin Empire in 1440s and before the arrival of the Portuguese through the Atlantic Coast to the Niger Delta in 1482.

Both Benin and Urhobo do share a common proto-Edoid history and culture that began in pre-royal proto Edoid Society.⁴ Elugbe (1973) and a number of other linguists have pointed to the existence of a proto-Edoid language which was spoken about 3,000 years ago. The proto-type language became separated with time into various members including Urhobo about 2,000 years ago, most likely by way of migrations. The development of Edoid languages is thus similar to the splitting up of Proto-Germanic language that was spoken in mid-first millennium BC in Iron Age northern Europe, into various languages including English. As Ekeh (2012) inferred, just as the classification of English language as a Germanic language does not make English people Germans, so it is that all those who speak any of the Edoid languages are not necessarily Edo people.

Besides the disparity over periods of migration, the hypotheses also raised other issues of development that deal with the role of Urhobo leadership in these early times. One is the question of whether the leadership for the development of Urhoboland was home grown or imported from outside. The notion that Urhobo lands were developed under the leadership of Benin princes may well be attributed to the false assumption that societies and cultures emanate from kingdoms built by immigrant princes. On the contrary, kingdoms do arise from clan and village societies that probably have been in existence for thousands of years. This false assumption has been compounded by the habit of people in non-centralized societies like that of Urhobo of telling their history based on

⁴ The term "Edoid" is coined by linguists to refer to a group of 25 languages in southwestern Nigeria. The members of the linguistic groups can be found in all of Edo State, all local government areas of Urhobo and Isoko and two communities in Rivers State of Nigeria (B. O. Elugbe. 1973: *A Comparative Edo Phonology*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis,

landmarks established in some centralized states like Benin, Ife and Egypt (see Robin Horton, 1985). The model of *Toynbean challenge and response* may be better suited for analyzing Urhobo history and for revealing the role of early Urhobo leaders in organizing responses posed by the challenge of conquering the dense rainforest of Niger Delta.⁵ One can also infer that the migration through River Niger is more probable than that through River Ethiope when one compares the ages of different settlements in Urhobo. If, for example, Urhobo migrated across River Ethiope, Urhobo communities, including Oghara and Idjerhe sub-cultural units that lie along banks of the Ethiope would be among the oldest settlements in Urhobo. The reverse is the truth. Oghara and Idjerhe, by comparison of ages, are the last areas of Urhobo to be settled. The people in these coastal areas contend that their communities were founded by immigrants from Urhobo older settlements in Agbarha-Otor and not by migrants from Benin. In recognition of their ancestral homes, they named their sub-cultural units after the towns of Idjerhe and Oghara in Agbarha-Otor where their ancestors once lived, just as immigrants from England, called their new homes in North America, New England.

The ability of Urhobo early leaders to respond to *Toynbean challenges* seems to be a direct consequence of the fact that Urhobo ancestors built their communities on a clan system they inherited from the pre-royal proto-Edoid culture. In a clan system, people tended to invest a lot in the building of their communities and leaders who advanced the fortunes of the state were rewarded. By the same token, the people did not hesitate to mete out severe punishment to leaders who downgraded or threatened the welfare of the people.⁶ After Urhobo's migration from Ogoja lands, Edoid kinsmen now known as the people of Benin who were left behind, chose to abandon the clan system and evolved a centralized system of

⁵ Arnold Toynbee (1899 -1975) had argued in an essay: *Challenge and Response* that civilizations endure when their societies are able to organize adequate responses to overcome fundamental problems that threaten their survival (Jubin Kang.blogspot.com)

⁶What appears to be a state's execution of a past leader of the Okpe people, Ezezi I, believed to have occurred in some early period of Okpe history could be considered as an example of how people in a clan setting rose against the excesses of their leader. The leader, an Orodje, was accused of highhandedness and extreme brutality to the people (see Otite's *Autonomy and Dependence: The Urhobo Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria*, p.67)

kingship. The institution of kingship, apparently borrowed from the Yoruba royal systems, provided them with the impetus to conquer other lands and build the great Benin Empire. Urhobo for their part retained the clan system that they brought with them from pre-royal proto-Edoid lands. Urhobo has no history of conquest of lands beyond the apparently uninhabited rainforest belt of Niger Delta.

Urhobo march into prominence in response to a New World Order Pre-colonial era (c1500 – 1891)

Current estimates suggest that Urhobo land mass which lies between the Patani River and the Ethiope River, had been settled for more than 1,000 years before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1480s. Urhobo was isolated from the rest of the world and thus severely disadvantaged in the struggle for advancement into the New World order. The remoteness of its location in the Niger Delta was clearly responsible for Urhobo's late entry into the international trade.

Politically, no outside authority had sought to control Urhobo territory until the rise of Benin Empire and the arrival of the Portuguese through the shores of the Atlantic coast into the Niger Delta basin. The arrival of the Europeans to the Niger Delta coincided with Christopher Columbus's encounter with the Americas in 1492, an engagement that led to the rise of tri-continental international trade, often dubbed as the Atlantic World involving Africa, America and Europe that was to involve Urhobo. The trade in the Atlantic World was a flourishing one in which agricultural products and raw products from Africa and manufactured goods from Europe were traded. Urhobo was said to have provided pepper and palm oil. Plants and roots like plantain and yams from tropical Africa, for example, were exported to the tropics in America. On the other hand, roots like cassava and coco-yams and fruits like mango were brought from the tropics in America to West Africa. Cassava, for example, introduced to West Africa in the 15th century has become a staple in Urhobo diet. The apparent late entry of cassava into Urhobo food culture probably explains why Urhobo people do not consider cocoyam and cassava products as traditional foods to serve during rituals such *asiye-egò* performed in veneration of their ancestors.

The Atlantic World also led to the international slave trade which was used for the supply of cheap labor for the occupation and development of the Americas and the Caribbean Islands. Many of the slaves were removed from the west Coast of Africa to the Caribbean and the Americas for sale in markets frequented by plantation owners. Although the Niger Delta was a heavy source of slaves, Urhobo and some other nationalities in western Niger Delta were not as seriously affected as those in the eastern part of Niger Delta. The Benin Empire, a regional power at the time, was said to be averse to the slave trade and so offered its neighbors some measure of protection against slave raiders.

Perhaps the most dynamic effect of the Atlantic World trade for Urhobo was the rise of coastal states, namely those of the Efik, Kalabari and the Itsekiri in Niger Delta. These states were instigated and nourished to maturity by the Portuguese to facilitate trade in the area. The Efiks, for example, were fishermen of Ibibio origin, who migrated up the Cross River Estuary sometime between the 15th and 16th century. Here they came in contact with Portuguese and became notorious middlemen for the slave trade, and later for the legitimate trade in palm oil following the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. The Itsekiri nationality, unlike the Efiks, was a new creation, built sometime after 1530, from the fusion of Yoruba migrant fishing communities and the descendants of a Benin fugitive prince, Ginuwa. Apart from instigating the new nationality, the Portuguese placed the Itsekiri State under their influence and nurtured her through trade and missionary activities to full maturity and independence from Benin.

The coastal states and societies as middlemen in the trade of the Atlantic World, invested a lot of efforts to prevent Urhobo people, and others like Igbo and Ibibio in the hinterlands from any direct contact with the Europeans for as long as four centuries (c1500 – 1891). The policy of exclusion was to collapse in 1891 when the British arrived to create the Oil Rivers Protectorate and later the Niger Coast Protectorate, and pushed inland for the colonization of Urhobo people and other nationalities in the hinterland of the Niger Basin.

Early Parts of Colonial Rule (1900 -1930s)

Although Urhobo's release from encasement offered hope that came with the advent of colonial rule, the people found themselves unprepared to deal with the exigencies of the new order. As a result, they were marginalized as they lacked the wherewithal to compete with other nationalities for resources in a colonial Nigeria. The marginalization of Urhobo that continued well into the 1920s when people could not take advantage of the opportunities provided by colonial rule, was essentially due to lack of education. Fortunately, the British push into Urhoboland was followed by the efforts of the British-based Church Missionary Society (CMS) which sought to use education as a tool for the evangelization of the people.

Most of the educational instruction involved was conducted in rudimentary church buildings as no comprehensive government school program was put in place until the 1920s. The first sets of schools in Urhoboland were CMS primary schools: Saint Luke's School, Sapele in 1902 and Saint Andrew's School, Warri in 1903. These were followed by Government Schools: 1903 in Warri and 1904 in Sapele. The schools were however not popular and only a handful of Urhobo youth attended. Most of the students were Itsekiri. Nevertheless, the schools provided the early crops of graduates that served as court clerks, bailiffs, tax collectors and in a host of other positions in colonial administration. By 1920, CMS had established more schools at Avwraaka, Okpara Waterside, Ovu, Ughweru and other towns for people outside Sapele and Warri (see Ikime, 1969).

Ijirigho Esiri believed to be among the first few Urhobo persons if not the first to receive a western education, attended Hope Waddell Institute, Calabar in 1890⁷. He became a teacher in 1895, a court clerk in 1901 and had served as a warrant chief before he died in 1935. Except for a few cases like that of Ijirigho Esiri, Urhobo people as late as 1927 were still in no position either to compete for jobs that required a western education, or to participate meaningfully in the political

⁷Ijirigho Esiri was the father of Fred Esiri, who is regarded as the first indigene of Urhobo to qualify as a medical practitioner in the western mold.

life of colonial Nigeria. The period of 1900 -1930s was therefore a time when Urhobo interests were severely undermined; when colonial authorities appointed Itsekiri stranger elements to run the affairs of Urhobo. The predominance of Itsekiri in colonial administration was further enhanced by the rise of Dore Numa, an Itsekiri as a paramount chief for Sapele and Warri Districts. The Chieftain was known to have used his position to advance Itsekiri interests much to the detriment of Urhobo people.

Rise of Ethnic Organizations and the Birth of Urhobo Renaissance (1920-1950)

The establishment of various native authorities in the 1930s gave rise to ethnic organizations often styled as “progress unions” across southern Nigeria. Many of the ethnic organizations in collaboration with village and clan councils were able to work with native authorities in developing their respective areas. Colonial authorities had called on native administrations to encourage the people to engage in development projects: the building of schools, roads, dispensaries, maternity centers and other works of public utility. The colonial strategy was one of persuasion by appealing to ethnic-cultural identities and consciousness among the people with the goal of mobilizing them to work together in executing projects that benefitted all of their people.

Among the various ethnic organizations that responded to the call for local development during the colonial rule were Urhobo Progress Union in 1931, Egbe Omo Oduduwa in 1948 and the Federal Ibo Union later Ibo National Union in 1949. The Ibibio Union was formed earlier in 1928. Urhobo within its own ethnic nationality also had a host of sub-ethnic group associations including the Okpara Young Men in 1925 and later Okpara Improvement Union in the 1930s, Okpe National Union in 1930, and Ughelli Improvement Union in 1925, later Ughelli Descendants Union in 1930. The Urhobo General Meeting that was summoned in 1934 operated as an ad-hoc committee and seemed to have ceased functioning within a few years of its existence.

The decades of the 1920s and 1930s that witnessed the rise of sub-ethnic organizations may well be described as momentous for Urhobo people and their leadership. The period was remarkable for signaling the birth of Urhobo renaissance, an era geared towards the transformation of Urhobo past into a promising future. The transformation was driven largely by the determination of the Urhobo people to end the dominance of the Itsekiri over their affairs. Many of Urhobo people faced up to the challenge by moving to other areas of colonial Nigeria, including Benin as well as places as far as Okitipupa, Ondo, Ife, Oshogbo, Ikale and Ilesha in Yoruba country, to make money not only to send their children to school but also help to develop their areas of Urhobo. Itsekiri dominance eventually ended with the reorganization of the 1930s leading to the abrogation of the corrupt native court system that was largely controlled by the Itsekiri. Itsekiri warrant chiefs were replaced by Urhobo traditional authorities, thus giving Urhobo people the opportunity for the first time in colonial Nigeria, to man their own affairs, free of Itsekiri domination. In the process of the reorganization, two administrative divisions were created, the Jekri-Sobo Division in 1932 with headquarters in Warri and Urhobo Division in 1934 with headquarters at Ughelli.

Urhobo Progress Union (UPU) and Urhobo General Meeting (UGM)

Although the colonial reorganizations of the 1930s brought Urhobo into prominence, it nevertheless exposed the relative weakness of the Urhobo people in their ability to respond to the needs of a pluralistic society as envisaged by the colonial administrators for Nigeria. Urhobo in pre-colonial times had conducted their affairs on the basis of structures of the clan system as the utmost authority in dealings with either the Benin Empire or the more distant problems posed by the Atlantic World. What had become clear was the need for consolidation of all Urhobo sub-ethnic units into a larger formation that could easily be mobilized to compete with other ethnic groups for political and economic resources in the colonial administration. As Peter Ekeh (2007:32), observed, the need to revise

Urhobo social thought to meet the demands of the new era must have been a huge intellectual challenge for Urhobo leadership of the time as they tried to understand the dynamics of colonial rule. Before long, they came to realize that Urhobo could be left behind if they failed to act together for their own interest and survival.⁸ One could then infer that the realization of the need for a pan-Urhobo association brought people together. In that response, Urhobo people created a series of discussion groups such as the one at Okpara Waterside in 1925 and another at Forcados in 1924 to deal with issues of self-awareness and on how to handle incidence of discrimination against Urhobo people by people of other ethnic groups (Otite1982:263).

Among the many ethnic associations that emerged in Urhoboland, Urhobo Progress Union and Urhobo General Meeting were considered outstanding in rendering services that greatly benefitted Urhobo people. The Urhobo Brotherly Society, the predecessor of Urhobo Progress Union was formed by a group of Urhobo merchants in Warri and a number of junior civil servants in colonial administration on November 3, 1931. By 1934, branches of the Society had been established in many parts of Urhobo and in other areas of Nigeria that had sizeable populations of Urhobo emigrants. Urhobo Brotherly Society, renamed Urhobo Progress Union in 1935, was transformed into an active service organization in keeping with its mission of raising the social and economic status of Urhobo people. The original motto of *Higher Thoughts, Higher Aims* was changed to *Unity is Strength* in the third (1956) Constitution of UPU. Two main aims and objectives of the Union were namely (1) to foster the spirit of love, mutual understanding and brotherhood among Urhobo People, and (2) to encourage wide-spread education and higher learning among Urhobo People. Other objectives included the maintenance of Urhobo traditions and culture,

⁸ Some of the earliest attempts to create self-awareness included the formation of Ball-Room Dance Club in Warri by a number of Urhobo elites sometime in 1929. They extended their activities to include the staging of *Ikenike Dance*, every year in the years preceding the inauguration of Urhobo Brotherly Society. The *Ikenike* an Urhobo traditional dance was a popular event that attracted people from near and far. Some believed that the spirit of get-togetherness fostered by these annual events helped to overcome feelings of individualism, clannishness and aloofness among Urhobo people (T. E. A. Salubi: Witness to British Colonial Rule in Urhoboland and Nigeria, p. 306)

development of agriculture, and maintenance of cordial relationship with local government bodies in and outside Urhobo.

UPU early leaders very much kept to the principles on which the organization was founded. Every significant achievement of UPU can then be attributed to the ability of the early leaders to sensitize people from all Urhobo sub-cultural groups to recognize UPU as a proper vehicle for promoting pan-Urhobo unity and the development of Urhoboland. As Otite (2007:615) noted, the idea of the formation of Urhobo Progress Union as a cultural organization and its working motto of *Unity is Strength* constitute symbols that order the life of Urhobo people as one social-cultural entity. The symbols were not only agreed upon but also seemed to have been universally accepted by all Urhobo, an acceptance that enabled UPU to easily make inroads into Urhobo indigenous political systems. UPU thus enjoyed a commanding influence among the people who showed respect for and confidence in an organization that worked for them. A few examples of UPU achievements will suffice to demonstrate the effectiveness of its leadership in the delivery of services to Urhobo people.

- UPU created a tradition of acting as a brokerage house through which Urhobo communities and their leaders came for help in settling disputes. For example two communities of Oghara and Idjerhe, namely Ogharefe and Oghareki, and Idjerhe and Mosogar respectively had at different times in the 1960s appealed to UPU to mediate disputes over the control of land rents and royalties paid to the two sub-cultural units by businesses operating in their respective areas. UPU also helped to broker peace between the Clan head of Ewu and the people of Orere, and in the conflict that arose from the tussle for who should be *the President* of Uwherun Clan Council in the 1940s.
- UPU was involved in humanitarian services when for example, its President-General T.E.A. Salubi took over the care of an Urhobo orphan, Stephen Ishani who was abandoned at Zuma Memorial Hospital Irrua, Ishan Division now of Edo State. Stephen's mother died at child birth and his father also died a few days later. The boy was left at the hospital

unclaimed for twelve years until the UPU President came to rescue him and cared for him on behalf of UPU and Urhobo People until the boy became an adult.

- UPU spearheaded the drive to get colonial authorities to recognize the Orodje of Okpe, Esezi II, when he was installed by the Okpe people in 1945. What was considered an internal affair of the Okpe people was developed into a concern for all Urhobo people. UPU leadership was particularly incensed that the colonial authorities had no trouble in recognizing the *Oluship* of Itsekiri in 1936, yet had cause to delay the recognition of an Urhobo King. The recognition after several petitions pressuring the colonial authorities to do the right thing came through in 1948.
- UPU launched in 1936 a Scholarship Scheme renamed Urhobo Education Scheme in 1939 to serve the education needs of Urhobo people. The Scheme led to the awards of overseas scholarships in 1944: M.G. Ejaife to study at Fourah Bay College and Ezekiel N. Igho to attend Cambridge University; the 1946 acquisition of Wey's Collegiate School of Commerce renamed Urhobo Collegiate School of Commerce; and relocation of the school in 1949 to the present site along Warri-Sapele Road, opposite the former Native Authority Oil Palm Nursery near Effurun Town. The school became known at the new site as Urhobo College. As planned, M.G. Ejaife returned home just on time and E. N. Igho a few months later to assume the positions of the Principal and Vice-Principal respectively of the College.
- UPU attracted into Urhoboland, Christian mission schools and other institutions including Warri College relocated from Warri in 1951 to Ughelli in central Urhobo and renamed Government College Ughelli, and Baptist Hospital, Eku opened in 1945.
- UPU established branches in major cities in Nigeria, Gold Coast, now Ghana and overseas in England, and was able to raise funds from the branches and wealthy donors for the benefits of pan-Urhobo causes.
- UPU had a youth policy that allowed Urhobo in the Diaspora to negotiate quotas for their sons in Urhobo College. In pursuit of this policy, the first

entrance examination into Urhobo Collegiate School of Commerce in 1946 was conducted in seven centers spread across Nigeria, namely, Warri, Sapele, Okitipupa, Ile-ife, Lagos, Jos and Kano to accommodate the interests of Urhobo youth, both locally and in the Diaspora. When Ejaife took over the affairs of the college, he also had to send a memorandum on October of 1948 to sixteen UPU branches all over Nigeria requesting for help in arranging for the conduct of entrance examination on November 6, 1948, for admission to the College in January, 1949.

- UPU was able to insulate itself from party politics. Although many influential members of UPU were councilors, and had been in the Western Nigeria Legislature as well as in the Federal Legislature, they never allowed party politics to bear on the activities of the Union in spite of their leanings towards different political parties of the time.⁹

Urhobo General Meeting at Orerokpe in 1934

The meeting was summoned in response to an inflammatory Daily Times report of June 13, 1934 that was attributed to Pastor Aghogin Omatsola, Head of Sapele Baptist Church. The article had referred to Urhobo people as Itsekiri slaves. Attendance of the meeting was made up of the Chiefs of Okpe, Agbon, Uvwie, Udu and Oghara, and representatives of UPU, under the leadership of Chief Ayomanor of Sapele. The representatives from Agbon, Oghara, Okpe, Udu and Uvwie, the five Urhobo sub-cultural units that were under the jurisdiction of the Jekri-Sobo Division were particularly offended by the report.¹⁰ Idjerhe was then under Benin Division, while Avwraka and Orogun were aligned to Aboh/Kwale Division. All the other Urhobo sub-cultural units were in the then newly created Urhobo Division with the headquarters at Ughelli. Although the emphasis was on Western Urhobo, other Urhobo leaders like Ijirigho Esiri, Jessa Ogboru and Makpamaku from other divisions also attended the meeting. Orerokpe in these

⁹ Among the early politicians was Jessa Ogboru the first Urhobo man appointed in August of 1943 to represent Warri Province in the Nigerian Legislative Council. He was replaced by Mukoro Mowoe who won an election to get into Western House of Assembly under the Richards Constitution in 1946. When Mowoe died in 1948, Jessa Ogboru and W. E. Mowarin were elected at the Provincial Electoral College

¹⁰ The representatives were Chiefs Ayomanor (Okpe), Agofure (Agbon), Akemu (Uvwie), Dukuye (Udu), and Atuma (Oghara) (see T.E.A. Salubi: *Witness to British Colonial Rule in Urhoboland and Nigeria*, p.310)

days may well be likened to a military camp where the elderly Chiefs and the younger leaders of UPU constituted themselves into a fighting force. As Salubi noted, the firebrand activist fervor of the young UPU representatives mellowed by the wisdom and persuasion of the elderly chiefs constituted a formidable team that colonial authorities could not ignore but had to accept and respect (see Ekeh, 2008).

The main goal of Urhobo General Meeting was to push for the separation of the Native Treasury of the Jekri-Sobo Division so that Urhobo and Itsekiri could have separate control of their money. Another was to bring all Urhobo people then scattered in three administrative divisions of Benin, Aboh, Jekri-Sobo divisions into one unified Urhobo division. Urhobo felt that a unified Urhobo division would better be able to act as a watch-dog over Urhobo lands particularly on the southwestern borders that had so often been trespassed upon, and to fight land disputes between Urhobo and her neighbors. Urhobo leaders took good advantage of the Daily Times article to push for changes needed to resolve what had been a simmering problem for Urhobo unity and development.

Through the efforts of Urhobo General Meeting, the Urhobo sub-cultural unit of Idjerhe was transferred from Benin Province to become Urhobo sixth sub-cultural unit to be part of Jekri-Sobo Division following an agreement between the Oba of Benin and the people of Idjerhe in January 15, 1937.¹¹ The request for the separation of Jekri-Sobo Division was granted in 1938, although the newly created Western Urhobo Native Administration with headquarters at Orerokpe still existed within the Jekri-Sobo Division until 1949. Western Urhobo was eventually transferred to Urhobo Division in June of 1950. The Urhobo communities in Avwraka and Orogun sub-cultural units were also excised from

¹¹ The transfer of Idjerhe from Benin Division to Urhobo Division in 1937 was only a partial victory for UPU. The Ethiope corridor that stretched from Idjerhe to Obadjere on the northern banks of River Ethiope, referred to in colonial records as *Sobo Plains* was home to Urhobo people who have settled in the area for centuries. Before the separation, representatives from different communities in the area were placed under the jurisdiction of the Native Court sitting in Otoro r' Idjerhe. The separation of Idjerhe left the other Urhobo communities under Benin, who now had to attend a newly created court, the *Obanakhoro Native Court*. The effect of the continued alignment with Benin has been severe for Urhobo people in the area as they continue to be treated as minorities, and marginalized in a Benin dominated administration. There is no visible sign of government presence for an area that was once a food basket and known for the transshipment of timber through its shores of the Ethiope River to Europe in colonial times.

Aboh Division and reunited with their kith and kin in Urhobo Division as directed by Public Notice Number 22, of January 30, 1951. The transfer thus completed the consolidation of all sub-cultural units into one administrative division for the first time in the history of British Administration in Urhobo that began in 1891. In the meantime, Urhobo leaders were also able to persuade colonial authorities to refer to Urhobo people by their proper name, instead of the offensive word “Sobo” that was used earlier in colonial records. The name change was published in the Government Gazette of October 1, 1938.¹²

In its determination to protect Urhobo lands, UPU helped to win the Ogharefe land case involving land disputes between the Itsekiri and people of Ogharefe at both the High Court in 1936 and Appellate Court in 1939. In another two years, the people of Oghareki backed by UPU also went to court in a land dispute between the people of Oghareki and the Itsekiri over Aja-Igbodudu. In 1941, Justice Jackson entered a consent agreement demarcating the boundary between the Itsekiri side of the land and Oghareki. UPU also provided substantial assistance to Okpe people over the Sapele land case which they won both at the High Court in 1941 and at the Appellate Court in 1943. Also won was the Okere-Warri land case in 1970 at the Warri High court and at the Supreme Court in 1974. Although UPU was not directly involved in the Okere-Warri case, Urhobo celebrated the judgment along the streets of Lagos, Nigeria, as a victory for all Urhobo.

Some Notable Leaders and their Contributions to Urhobo Cause

Much of the progress made towards the uplift of Urhobo would not have been possible without the contributions of a number of dedicated and patriotic individuals. These leaders had the foresight for the development of Urhobo human capital and they became the driving engine for many of the successes

¹²Urhobo had been called by different names, all variants of the word “Sobo”. At about 1505, Duarte Pacheco Pereira, a Portuguese who traded at the Bight of Benin referred to Urhobo as Subou. Others used Soobo, Subo, Sobo, Uzobo while Dr. Dapper in about 1688 used Oedobo, Udobo or Sobo. In the nineteenth century, other Europeans like Snape, Dr. Baike, Richard Lander, M. Lecomtr, C. N. Decardi, Captain Alan Bosidragon, Mary H. Kingsley and more recently P. A. Talbot, Sir William Geary and Sir Alan Burns all referred to Urhobo as Sobo. Incidentally there is an indigenous nationality called Sobo in County of Sinoe in Liberia (Salubi: *Revolution of Our Time*, a lecture delivered on Urhobo National Day, November 3, 1962).

attributed to UPU. Many of these early leaders came of age during the 1920s through 1950s, and they moved on to build and upgrade Urhobo. They were individuals whose everyday lives of duty, honor, achievement and courage helped to push Urhobo from obscurity into prominence. They responded to the call of duty as expressed in UPU's admonition to its leaders: *You pay to serve Urhobo people*. While Urhobo was blessed with many of such leaders, only a partial list will be presented here to show how selfless and effective they were as leaders.

- **Legends:** Ovedje Osadjere, a pioneer that was best known as one of the early crops of Okpare merchants. Many believe he exploited friendship with European traders to enhance his fortunes and those of others including the legendary Mukoro Mowoe. As an Urhobo leader, he led the Delegation of Urhobo Council of Chiefs to Western Nigeria's Conference of Chiefs, Ibadan, in 1943. He used his wealth and position to promote Urhobo interests. He helped to settle disputes among Urhobo leaders and caused roads to be built in Urhoboland. Mukoro Mowoe became a protégé and rose to become the greatest Urhobo nationalist of all times.
- **The founders of UPU:** Included Omorowhovo Okoro, the founding president, Thomas Erukeme the pioneer Secretary, Arube Uyo, credited for founding as many as five branches of the Union, Samuel Jereton Mariere and the trio of Agbotaren Udih, Mukoro Mowoe, Charles Kousin Ezewu, all of whom were signatories to the UPU Certificate of Incorporation. Besides being the member of the Board of Trustees for Urhobo College, Udih was the President of the Benin Branch of UPU for many years. He was known for his hospitality to Urhobo persons travelling through Benin City. He visited the Armel's Bus Station regularly at night to seek out Urhobo travelers stranded at the station, whom he brought to spend the night at his home before continuing on their journey in the morning.
- **Visionary leaders:** Perhaps one of the most prominent was Joseph Akpolo Ikutegbe, first Financial Secretary and later Vice-President of the Lagos Branch of UPU. He was credited with initiating the plan for the establishment of a scholarship scheme in 1936 for the training of Urhobo Youth. The Scheme which was renamed Urhobo Education Scheme in

1939 ultimately led to the award of two scholarships for studies overseas and the founding of Urhobo College. Ikutegbe, true to his firm belief in education, was in fact the first man to sponsor a fellow Urhobo person to the United Kingdom for a professional study. The scholar, the first of its kind in Urhobo was Michael Thomas Ighotite Borke from Avwraaka, who left Nigeria in 1937 to study law but unfortunately died in the United Kingdom on December 5, 1945.

- **Educators who established schools in Urhoboland:** Among the better known were Ifaka (a chain of Ifaka Providence Primary Schools in Ughelli and Ughievwen areas). Demas Akpore (Orogun Grammar School Orogun), Vincent Uvieghara (Midwest College, Effurun) A.T. Rerri (GES College of Science and Technology, Warri), Sam Warri Esi (Essi College, Warri), Nakpodia (Nakpodia Memorial School, Okpara Waterside) and Benedict Onokpasa (Trinity College, Okwidiemo, Okpe).
- **Early Administrators of Urhobo College:** Included P. K. Tabiowo as a Manager, J. A. Obahor Treasurer, I. Okandeji, Chairman of Management Committee; J. A. Okpodu and J. E. Odiete both former President-General and Vice President-General of UPU, who helped with negotiations to acquire additional 18 acres of land for Urhobo College, Johnson Ighomrore, Bursar and later General Manager; Gordon Ako, a pioneer teacher and who helped to negotiate the sale of Wey College to UPU. Others like Bobson Emuohwomuere Eshalomi and S. E. Oteri who served as members of the Board of Governors at one time or the other.
- **Entrepreneurs:** Include Mukoro Mowoe, Michael Ibru, Wilson Odibo, Moses Taiga and G. Agofure who established businesses that employed thousands of Urhobo women and men. Moses Taiga also gives annual scholarships to deserving Urhobo youth to study in the university.
- **Religious leaders** include Ejovi Aganbi, Prescott Onosode, AgoriIwe, Enajero Arhavwore, J. A. O. Emoefe and Vincent Muoghereh opened churches in Urhoboland, helped to translate the Bible from English to Urhobo, and improved the writing of Urhobo language. Agori Iwe and Vincent Muoghereh who became pioneer Bishops of Benin and Ughelli

Anglican Dioceses respectively were known for their peace-making efforts. Muoghereh served as Principal of several schools in Urhobo where he taught students the dignity of labor by getting them to work on farms established to raise funds for the schools under his control.

- **Promoters of Urhobo language** include Daniel Ojite Ohwovorirole (Secretary, Urhobo Language Vetting Committee). M. O. Ighrakpata (Pioneer Chairman of Urhobo Language Committee), Benedict Onokpasa (Author of books in Urhobo including Modern Urhobo Readers, and Urhobo poems) and J. A. Oghenekaro (Chairman Urhobo Language Committee).
- **Financers and Donors:** J. O. Aghoghovbia, J. Akpoteheri Edewor, J. A. Obahor, J.A. Okpodu, and Onogagamue Oghenebrume who came to the aid of the Union when Colonial authorities disapproved UPU's overseas scholarship awards for reasons of insufficient funds. Others included Edward Akponehwe Esiso, Galugbo Esienakpotoma and in recent times Michael Ibru and David Dafinone who made handsome donations to UPU. The Union also organized Presidential tours of its branches to raise funds, for example by Mukoro Mowoe for scholarships and the building of Urhobo College, and in the 1960s by Adogbeji Salubi to augment UPU finances.

The Beginnings of the Decline of Effective Leadership and the Subsequent Loss of Urhobo Virtues

Many of the problems afflicting leadership in Urhobo in recent times could be said to have started with the rise of multi-party politics and the series of military interventions in Nigeria. The rise of multi-party politics followed the decolonization process of the 1950s that began with the Ibadan Conference of 1950 and ended with Nigeria's independence from Great Britain on October 1, 1960. The decolonization process was a series of intense negotiations for a constitutional framework for governing the affairs of an independent Nigeria. The negotiations resulted in the choice of federalism in response to the desire of the

people to have a system of government that would be close to them. Another outcome of the negotiations was the recognition that the state and its government belong to the people. The acceptance of this principle was a clear indication that the people wanted ethnic nationalities to constitute the basis for governance. Under colonial rule, it had been assumed that the state and its government were the property of the colonial rulers and their home government in England. The colonial rulers did not allow inter-ethnic politics as they made all decisions of governance which they imposed on the people.

However by 1951, the colonial ban on politics began to be lifted in stages and by 1954 Nigeria has become a federation with an expanded scope of politics. The expansion allowed Nigerians to become unrestricted decision makers as legislators in Regional Houses of Assembly and at the Federal Parliament sitting in Lagos, the colonial capital of Nigeria. Unfortunately, many saw politics as a game of conquest, providing opportunities for the rise of majority power blocks that undermined the interests of minority groups like those of Urhobo. The consequences of this power play led to political violence and the military intervention of January 1966. Military rule overthrew the political achievements of the 1950s and changed the course and political landscape of Nigeria. The military destroyed federalism and substituted an unworkable system of central government that breeds inefficiencies in governance. The military banned politics and abolished many administrative agencies and ethnic organizations including Egbe Omo Oduduwa, Ibo National Union and Ibibio State Union. Although UPU was spared, it was nevertheless sent into stupor, a state of extreme inactivity. The military also seized schools even those like Urhobo College that were privately owned by individuals, ethnic associations and Christian missions.

The military operated on the assumption that the state belongs to its rulers. The military thus reversed the basic premises of the decolonization, that what was good for the ethnic nationalities was also good for all Nigerians. In fact, the military regarded ethnic nationalities as politically irrelevant and inimical to the national progress. Military regimes by their nature are notorious for shrinking space for public debate on issues of governance and participation in government.

Would anyone doubt that the Capital of Delta State of Nigeria, created by a military fiat in 1991, would have been somewhere other than Asaba if the issue of location was left to local decisions?¹³ Such decisions without public input, of course are the evil aberrations of military rule.

Consequences of Multi-party politics and Military Rule for Urhobo People and its leadership

One of the early consequences of multi-party politics was the decision of the then ruling Action Group Party of Western Nigeria to invoke a property of Urhobo culture that every sub-culture is entitled to have an Ovie. The Action Group Party orchestrated the selection of candidates in each of the sub-cultures that had no seating Ovie. The party then moved in to support its own candidates for the office, often against the wishes of the people. This intrusion into Urhobo cultural affairs has now expanded Urhobo royal institutions beyond what Urhobo themselves wanted or liked.¹⁴ With the people unable or unwilling to support the royal institutions, many of the new class of Ivie have become more dependent on the Government than their own people for survival. The dependence on the government has thus opened up a new dynamic in Urhobo affairs that allows the Government to meddle needlessly with the culture of Urhobo people.

A major consequence of military rule for Urhobo people was that it dampened the activism of UPU, in the fear that the military might react harshly to any action of UPU that may be deemed unfriendly or hostile. Many however grew unhappy with this cautionary approach and the inactivity of UPU. As a result *Urhobo Trust* was set up in 1988 with Gabriel Sefia as Chairman to prepare a

¹³The City of Warri remains the only provincial headquarters of the colonial era that did not emerge as a state capital. The fact that the location of Asaba on the south-eastern fringes of the new Delta State of Nigeria renders Asaba as an unfavorable place to site a state capital was not of concern to the vulgarism of military rule.

¹⁴ The Government of Western Nigeria facilitated the creation of kingship by its enactment of the Local Government Law of 1952 (No. 1 of 1953) and the Appointment and Recognition of Chiefs Law of 1954 (No. 1 of 1955). These laws were viewed as parts of efforts by the new political elites in Western Nigeria to appropriate traditional authority. His Highness M. A. Obutor, Orefe II, the Ovie of Oghara before his coronation was a police sergeant stationed at Ikeja, Nigeria. Crowned on January 19, 1954 he became one of the first set of Urhobo kings to emerge under these laws. There is no evidence in living memory of any one holding that office in Oghara before his appointment.

memorandum to address the widespread dissatisfaction with UPU leadership. The Trust recommended that the Office of President-General act as a clearing house for individuals or activist bodies interested in advancing Urhobo agenda. Michael Ibru convened a series of meetings in Lagos to discuss the recommendations. These meetings in turn formed a consultative team led by Michael Ibru to work with UPU Home leaders on modalities for reforming the organization.

Without waiting for Michael Ibru consultative team to fulfill its mandate, UrhoboIvie took it upon themselves to remove Fred Esiri as President-General of UPU, and installed James Edewor in his place. James Edewor unable to cope with the pressure of the office resigned and was replaced by David Ejoor who also had to quit. Benjamin Okumagba took over the reins of leadership in 1999. By the end of Okumagba presidency in 2007, UPU had lost much of its original character, purpose and mission, thus leading to the current crisis that has affected the once venerable UPU.

The Failure of Urhobo Leadership: The Ineptitude of UPU and the Hybrid Role of Urhobo Ivie

With UPU plagued with problems of discipline, lack of principles and sense of purpose that had guided the progress of UPU in the past, UPU lost focus and was clearly unable to articulate Urhobo interests, let alone promote them. The following are some of the glaring examples of the inability of the current UPU leadership to serve Urhobo interests.

- UPU no longer has an Education policy. The leadership showed no interest in reclaiming Urhobo College at a time when other agencies seized the opportunity offered by Delta State Government to recover their institutions.
- UPU no longer cares for the masses it once served. The Union is fast degenerating into an elite club, out of reach for many.
- UPU no longer attends to the affairs of its branches in Nigeria and other African countries. The only visible visits by the President-General were those made to UK and USA, where the President, his entourage and

accompanying politicians donate huge sums of money to the branches instead of engaging in the usual practice of raising funds from the branches for pan-Urhobo causes.

- UPU leadership has become an agency for gaining access to monies from the state, and Federal governments, and politicians, albeit corruptly acquired.
- UPU leadership is no longer able to settle quarrels within warring factions in Urhobo sub-cultural units. The inability to settle the leadership rifts in Idjerhe and Avwraka is a sad indictment of UPU as lacking in influence and ability to mediate crises or conflicts among Urhobo people.¹⁵
- UPU has failed to address security concerns in Urhobo. It is said to have a youth wing that serves as its military arm. It has been revealed that many of the youth are also being encouraged with financial inducements to participate in partisan politics in ways that lead to intimidation, violence and rigging of elections on behalf of politicians.
- UPU has failed to provide adequate representation or submit memorandum to explain Urhobo position as needed for tribunals or conferences. For

¹⁵ Many remain disgusted with the inability of UPU to settle the leadership rifts that led to the splitting up of Idjerhe and Avwraka sub-cultural units of Urhobo into factions seemingly to satisfy the desire of ambitious politicians to lord over others. UPU by giving tacit recognition to the two units of Idjerhe and Mosogar in Idjerhe in the first place, seems to have created a gateway for more 'kingdoms' to emerge in Urhobo. This type of undue approval of illegal acts reminds one of how the unwise decision of Organization of African Unity (OAU) to recognize the military government of Gnassingbe Eyadema in Togo, in 1963 provided impetus for the staging of many more military coups that have now devastated governance in Africa (see Peter Enahoro's *Then Spoke the Thunder*, p. 183).

What is more distressing about these new creations in Urhobo is how politicians falsify history including making claims of unproven periods of interregnum of kingship in order to justify their actions. The people of the two sections of Avwraka, for example, somehow referred to as Umiaghwa-Abraka and Oruarivie-Abraka were said to have migrated into their present locations, one from somewhere in Benin and the other from a locality in Ishan. The validity of these accounts would be doubtful to a true lover of Urhobo history when one realizes that the people of Avwraka speak neither Benin nor Ishan but Urhobo. They speak the common Avwraka dialect of Urhobo and one cannot distinguish between individuals from the so-called sections of Avwraka, when they talk. Neither is there any difference in the way people from Idjerhe and Mosogar factions of Idjerhe speak.

Besides, it is sad to note that these maneuvers are being carried out with the connivance of a state government that has no authority to create local government areas (LGA) or even adjust (LGA) boundaries, yet feels it has the wherewithal to create fathom kingdoms in Urhobo. Those who have conspired with the government in creating kingdoms have brought neither peace nor development to the areas concerned but divisiveness among people that had lived together peacefully under one traditional authority for centuries.

example, UPU could not come up with any position paper for submission to the *Danjuma Task Force on Warri* and *The Constitutional Reform Committee*, when other ethnic nationalities in the area had ready-made memoranda/proposals to go.

The position of UrhoboIvie as traditional leaders has also become difficult. Prior to the introduction of multiparty politics, Urhobo noted for their egalitarianism were reluctant to embrace the concept of kingship. The newness of the practice of kingship further complicated by the undue interference of state agencies has pushed Urhobo kings into what van Nieuwaal called a hybrid role.¹⁶ As a result, they are neither here nor there on matters of service to their people. Consequently, they appear to have been forced into a position in which they are unable to fulfill their leadership role as custodians of Urhobo culture and traditions.

The Way Forward: Revamping Urhobo Leadership and Reversing the Decline of Urhobo Fortunes

In spite of the failures of UPU, many among the Urhobo still believe that the organization has a role to play not only in restoring Urhobo fortunes but also in spearheading efforts for the progress of Urhobo in the 21st century. Urhobo had prepared and implemented their agenda for unity and development in the past through the agency of the UPU. Some among the people therefore view the organization as too precious to be allowed to fail and would rather have it restored to its proper place of honour from where it can resume activities for the progress of Urhobo people. But how does someone go about the process of reforming an inept organization like UPU?

Perhaps, it would be necessary for a Caretaker Committee to take over the affairs of UPU in the interim. The take-over is necessary in lieu of the fact that the current UPU leadership is corrupt and therefore too dysfunctional to reform itself. Such a committee should be made up of no more than five members drawn from

¹⁶Van rouveroy van Nieuwaal defines hybrid role as a vulnerable position in which kings have to choose between pandering to government interests and serving the interests of their people (see Chieftaincy in Africa: 'The three facets of a hybrid role as cited in *The Dynamics of Power and the Rule of Law*, ed. Wm van Binsbergen, p. 101

among eminent, nonpolitical and patriotic Urhobo men and women. A larger number could make taking of decisions or reaching compromises difficult. Individuals needed for the work of reforming UPU could be found among the ranks of Urhobo clergy, retired and experienced civil servants and astute business men and women. The selection process should ensure that those chosen for the task have no record of any form of impropriety that could impugn their integrity, and undermine or compromise their ability to be honest and sincere in their work of reforming UPU. For timely results needed to restore integrity to the organization in the shortest possible period, the committee will proceed on a firm time table and a well thought-out agenda for some period of no more than two years.

With the looming vacuum in Urhobo leadership, the only alternative is to turn to UrhoboIvie to assume the responsibility of setting up the Committee. The Ivie as the custodians of Urhobo culture and traditions must therefore eschew their personal interests and ideologies for the good of Urhobo people. Armed with such frame of mind and determination to curb corruption, the Ivie should be in position to call on the out-going UPU leadership to surrender to the Committee as a matter of patriotic duty, all monies, gifts of vehicles and other tangible properties owned by UPU or received on behalf of UPU for proper documentation and custody. In order to send a loud and clear message to all and sundry, that Urhobo people will no longer tolerate incidences of unaccountability among their leaders, especially those in UPU, the committee will need to be empowered to investigate and prosecute any member of the leadership who fails to turn over any money or property due the UPU and the Urhobo people.

Concluding Remarks

In concluding the presentation that has motivated the writing of this essay, one must not forget that

- The presentation is part of an on-going dialogue among the Urhobo people to call attention to the need for selfless and effective leadership.

- The call for good leadership is directed to every individual Urhobo person alive. No one is exempt. Urhobo belongs to all of us and we all have to contribute individually and collectively to save our homeland from the threat of further marginalization and even extinction.
- The government cannot solve all our problems for us. Ethnic nationalities that for example, leave the development of their language and education of their children to corrupt and inefficient governments, will have themselves to blame as they will be left behind in the dustbin of history.
- Participation in voting and other electoral processes as essential civic duties needed to produce quality representation and advocacy for Urhobo interests or causes.
- The dictum by the Lebanese poet, Kahlil K. Gibran (1883-1931) which the United States President, John Kennedy sneaked into his inaugural challenge of January 1961: *Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can for your country*, is also directed to all other peoples of the World beside the Lebanese and Americans, who desire progress for their nations, that of Urhobo included.
- Mukoro Mowoe, President General of UPU (1937 – 1948) during a Presidential tour of UPU branches sometime in the 1940s, had also expressed his own version of the dictum in this way: *My belief is that every being born into the World has a duty to perform to his people, either to the village or town or countryFrankly speaking, any one of you who should fail to play his or her part for the uplift of our dear tribe, it [would be] better that she or he had not been born*
- Gibran's commanding legacy must have lived in the hearts of past Urhobo leaders from pre-historical times to recent times, it inspired, to get involved in their communities to help among other things to build village/town halls, hospitals, establish schools, educate their children and improve their neighborhoods
- Urhoboland was transformed by the energy and the dedication of a generation of selfless and effective leaders, and the Urhobo people remain grateful for their sacrifices.

- Now it is up to us, a new generation, to redefine that commitment of selfless services to our people for our own time as this series of dialogue among Urhobo people portends to do.

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