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AN EXEGESIS OF HEGEL'S DIALECTICS OF HISTORY AND URHOBOMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This paper is a critical examination of Hegel's analysis of global historical movement and its point of resonance with Urhobo migration experience. George Hegel (1770-1831) was the foremost German philosopher of the 19th century. He was the most influential of the German idealists of the period - a list which comprise Fichte, Schelling, and Schopenhauer. Hegel's thoughts inspired such ideological movements as Marxism, existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics. At the heart of the Hegelian philosophical system is his theory of dialectics. The theory revolves around three basic assumptions: first, is that motion rather than stasis is the default state of all beings; second, that contradiction resulting in the clash of opposites is the basis of all advancement; and third is that states are the ideal context for the attainment and maximization of human freedom, which is the ultimate goal of the Absolute Spirit in universal history. Hegel applied this theory of dialectics to provide an interpretation of history. In this paper, I argue that the Hegelian dialectical theory of history adequately explains the Urhobo migration experience that occurred in the past two thousand years. During the period, the Urhobo have evolved into an organised and formidable nation with a highly developed social and political consciousness of being one people, and an ever-growing aspiration for collective advancement and the preservation of their shared cultural and scientific heritages. The Urhobo experience also exemplifies Arnold Toynbee's theory of historical movement in society which this study explores. I adopt the methodology of critical text analysis for my argument, which has the following effects as its aim: to debunk Hegel's own thesis that Africa is a historical *tabula rasa* which does not fit into his rendition of world historical events and processes; to establish the significance of the Urhobo people as a formidable nation group, and to provide a basis for Urhobo further nationalist aspirations in tandem with Hegel's projections in his idealist theory of history.

Key words: Absolute spirit, dialectics, history, idealism, migration, nation-state.

Introduction

The concern of this paper is to analyse Hegel's dialectics and its relevance to the comprehension of Urhobo migration experience and struggle for nation-statehood. Dialectics in its theoretical formal interpretation is an interaction of opposing viewpoints with the intent of attaining higher forms of knowledge or consciousness. The Hegelian dialectic forms the basis and underlying logic of his philosophical system. The focus of this paper is in the application of the dialectic in the realm of history and theory of state as it implicates Urhobo migration experience. Hegel thinks that history is a rational process, by which he means it is intelligible. He says in this regard: "The only thought which philosophy brings with it to the contemplation of history, is the simple conception of reason: that reason is the sovereign of the world; that the history of the world, therefore presents us with a rational process". (Hegel, 2001:22). Furthermore, he believes history is evolving towards a more elaborate consciousness of human freedom. He says of this: "The history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom; a progress whose development according to the necessity of its nature, it is our business to investigate." (Ibid. p.33). Hegel held in his dialectical theory of historical development the significance of the formation of state by a people, which involves a process characterized by intense struggles of varied dimensions as led by men he describes as 'world historical individuals'. The significance of the creation of such new states, according to Hegel, is that they increase the quantum of freedom on the world stage and take the Absolute Spirit closer to its destiny of self-realization.

The collective experiences of the Urhobo people in the last two thousand years aptly exemplify this Hegelian position which is the objective of this paper to justify. To achieve this goal, the paper is structured into five sections: the first section gives a brief profile of the Urhobo people. This is followed by a brief exposition of Hegel's theory of dialectics and his application in the realm of history. A discourse on the migration experience of the Urhobo people follows. A brief analysis of Arnold Toynbee's thesis on the factors accounting for the rise and fall of civilizations and how it explains Urhobo's strive for excellence forms the latter part of the study. The

argument concludes with a fifth section which discusses four areas where Urhobo experience aptly expresses Hegel's dialectical theory of history.

A brief Profile of the Urhobo People

The Urhobo are located in present Delta State, South South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. They are a major linguistic group in the oil-rich Niger Delta region. They are constituted at present into 24 sub-cultures or political units each headed by a monarch. The Urhobo people constitute the major population in Delta State. They are believed to be up to 48% of the over 5 million inhabitants of the State according to the 2006 National Population Census, although these figures are thought to be largely conservative. They occupy 8 of the 25 Local Government Areas with another conspicuous mass in Warri South and Patani Local Government Areas. A significant chunk of the Urhobo also live in Ofoni in Bayelsa State. Settlements of Urhobo migrants are in Ondo State as well as other parts of Southwestern Nigeria. Diaspora group of Urhobo can be seen elsewhere in Nigeria, Europe, Asia, the Americas and several African countries. The Urhobo Progress Union (UPU), a pan-Urhobo socio-cultural organisation, founded in 1931 as a centralized institution for aggregating and advancing Urhobo nationalist aspirations continues to interface with these Diaspora groups through its functional branches spread across the world.

Scholars of Urhobo history have held that the Urhobo migration from the Edo territory to their present location took place at different times about two thousand years ago during the period of the Ogiso era of Edo history (Ekeh, 2012). Since migration to their present territory, the Urhobo have, at different times, engaged in struggles of various dimensions in their quest for emancipation and greater freedom. There have emerged daring and courageous heroes who have fought wars to found communities, engaged in struggles for the defence and protection of their territories, and invested unquantifiable intellectual energy in the development of science and ingenious technologies. They have developed sophisticated civilisation, including languages, folklore, music, dance, with deep ideological underpinnings. In this regard, the *Udje* song-poetry tradition stands out as paradigmatic. There have been a notable exodus of an enterprising group of emigrants to "Ukale" and "Urhie" (work camps) in Yorubaland in southwestern Nigeria and the riverine areas of Ijaw in the Niger Delta for basically economic reasons. (Otite, 2011:viii). These were creative responses to challenges which confronted and threatened their survival at specific periods in time.

The Theory of the Dialectic

Dialectics is a term used to describe a method of philosophical argument that involves interaction between opposing sides. It was adopted by Socrates in the famous “Socratic Dialogues” in which he carefully engaged an opponent in intellectual discourse with the aim of pointing out certain contradictions within the opponent’s point of view. Once the contradiction was conceded, Socrates would have won the argument and the opponent had no choice than to accept that his earlier held view was untenable. The dialectic was made popular in modern times, first by the German transcendentalist philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and thereafter the German idealists - Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. Aristotle (384-322 B.C), the ancient Greek philosopher, held, in his second law of thought, that “a thing cannot both be and not be at the same time”. This is the law of non-contradiction. Immanuel Kant followed Aristotle in conceiving of the dialectic as a principle which is repugnant to thought and therefore to be avoided. Kant’s stricture against the dialectic is that it was the basis for the antinomies that human reason runs into when it exceeds the bounds of its legitimate world of appearances. In such cases, it would only yield contradictions. The conception of the dialectic by George Hegel was that it was a principle, not to be dismissed or avoided as Aristotle and Kant thought, but surpassed to higher forms of reality and consciousness. Scruton explains the Hegelian conception in this way:

The dialectical process is, then, as follows: a concept is posited as a starting point. It is offered as a potential description of reality. It is found at once that, from the stand point of logic, this concept must bring its own negation with it: to the concept, its negative is added automatically, and a ‘struggle’ ensues between the two. The struggle is resolved by an ascent to the higher plane from which it can be comprehended and reconciled: this ascent is the process of ‘diremption’ (*Aufhebung*), which generates a new concept out of the ruins of the last. This new concept generates its own negation, and so the new process continues, until, by successive applications of the dialectic, the whole of reality has been laid bare. (Scruton, 1995:64).

However, the path leading to the Hegelian dialectic extends further back in time, and may have had its roots in ancient Egyptian systems in Black Africa. (James, 1954:75). Onyewuenyi corroborates the point when he writes that the doctrine of opposites is

traceable to the Egyptian Hermopolitan and Heliopolitan systems which had opposites as partners in the creation process. (Onyewuenyi, 1994:211)

Hegel's Dialectical Theory of History

Hegel applied this dialectical theory to the realm of history. With it, he attempted a philosophical explanation of the transformation in world history from the age of empire building of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians and Romans, etc, through several centuries of struggles and deadly wars up to the present age of the nation-state. Hegel does not think that these events have simply happened by chance or haphazardly, but rather present an intelligible and rational process, whose course can be studied scientifically. Hegel's explanations are based on three interpretive principles. First, that history presents us with a spectacle of a world in a struggle towards its full self-realization; second, that a microscopic few individuals, the world historical figures, are the agents of this process; and, third, the aim of the process is enhanced freedom for both the citizen and the nation-state in general.

This transformation from empires to nation-states, according to Hegel, involves revolutions in which a hitherto disadvantaged but comfortable group within the existing political structure suddenly begins to question the justice of the situation and agitates for a change. This leads to a cataclysmic clash the result of which is a new social, political and economic order; which redraws world maps and breaks down the monopoly of the freedom the oppressor nation has hitherto enjoyed, and ultimately takes the Absolute or World Spirit a step closer to its goal of self-realisation.

The final aim of universal history, according to Hegel, is the attainment of freedom. The universal soul which Hegel calls "World-Spirit" is the underlying driver of this process. It advances its goal through the activities of men as driven by their passions. But while supposing that they act on self-interest motives, are, unwittingly, being manipulated to fulfil higher goals of the World-Spirit. Hegel expatiated on three key issues in his analysis. First is the abstract characteristics of the nature of Spirit; second, the means Spirit uses to realise its Idea, and third, the shape which the perfect embodiment of Spirit assumes – the State. (Hegel, 2001:30).

To the first question, Hegel answers that the essence of Spirit is freedom. Spirit, he says, is the opposite of matter, whose essence (matter) he describes as:

... possessing gravity in virtue of its tendency towards a central point. It is essentially composite; consisting of parts that *exclude* each other. It seeks its Unity; and therefore exhibits itself as self-destructive, as verging towards its opposite (an indivisible point). If it could attain this, it would be Matter no longer, it would have perished. (Ibid.p.31).

Regarding Spirit, Hegel writes that:

Spirit, on the contrary, may be defined as that which has its centre in itself. It has not a unity outside itself, but has already found it; it exists *in* and *withitself*. Matter has its essence out of itself; Spirit is self-contained existence. (Ibid).

Applied to history and political institutions, Hegel is, in essence, comparing the state of affairs in an empire with that of the nation-state. An empire for Hegel is comparable with Matter because of its obsession for centralizing power and holding together parts that “exclude each other”. It seeks to maintain its unity, otherwise it would perish. The components exist in ‘unfreedom’, and the priority for the ruling power is the maintenance of the status-quo. But the character of “Spirit”, Hegel says, is freedom. It has not a unity outside of itself, as is characteristic of components within an empire. Spirit is self-contained existence. Applied to political institutions, Spirit represents the nation-state which has overcome its ‘unfreedom’ as a component within an empire.

Hegel explains his conception of freedom further:

Now this is Freedom, exactly. For if I am dependent, my being is referred to something else which I am not; I cannot exist independently of something external. I am free, on the contrary, when my existence depends upon myself. This self-contained existence of Spirit is none other than self-consciousness – consciousness of one’s own being. (Ibid. p.31)

Hegel believes that universal history is a gradual exhibition of the progression in the consciousness of freedom. In the age of empires such as those of the Oriental world, only one man, such as a Nebuchadnezzar, for instance, is considered free. No other citizen within that empire has a consciousness of his freedom. Hence, the wish of the despot is an unquestioned law. But in that case, according to Hegel, even the despot is

unfree, because freedom has to be mutual for it to be real. The next epoch was the Greco-Roman world, which for Hegel manifested a significant increase in the consciousness of freedom. The practice of democracy in Greece and the establishment of the senate in Rome, implied separation of powers of a sort, indicating increase in freedom. Yet, the fact that they kept slaves whom they believed were less free than they (the citizens) showed the limitation in their thinking. Hegel says of this:

The Orientals have not attained the knowledge that Spirit – man *as such* – is free; and because they do not know this, they are not free. They only know that *one is free*. But on this very account, the freedom of that one is only caprice; ... That *one* is therefore only a Despot; not a *free man*. The consciousness of Freedom first arose among the Greeks, and therefore they were free; but they, and the Romans likewise, knew only that *some* are free – not man as such. Even Plato and Aristotle did not know this. The Greeks therefore, had slaves; and their whole life and the maintenance of their splendid liberty, was implicated with the institution of slavery; ... The German nations, under the influence of Christianity, were the first to attain the consciousness that man, as man, is free: that it is the *freedom* of Spirit which constitutes its essence. This consciousness arose first in religion, the inmost region of Spirit. (Ibid. p.32). (emphasis in the original)

The influence of Christianity which Hegel mentions above is the Protestant Revolution by the German Monk, Martin Luther (1483-1546) which questioned the authority of the Pope and redefined salvation to be attainable simply by divine grace, thus implying individual freedom. This revolution was to have wider implications in the political, social and economic spheres. In summarizing the stages in universal history, Hegel notes that:

The general statement above, of the various grades in the consciousness of Freedom – and which we applied in the first instance to the fact that the Eastern nations knew that *one* is free; the Greek and Roman world only that *some* are free; while we know that all men absolutely (man *as man*) are free – supplies us with the natural division of Universal History. (Ibid. p.33).

The second point concerns the means or agents to the realization of this change in political institutions, which corresponds to the consciousness of freedom in man at any given epoch in history. They are individuals Hegel calls “world historical figures”, who, though, driven superficially by self-interest and egoistic tendencies, also unwittingly cooperate with the Absolute Spirit in its goal.

He writes on this:

The first glance at History convinces us that the actions of men proceed from their needs, their passions, their characters and talents; and impresses us with the belief that such needs, passions and interests are the sole springs of action – the efficient agents in this scene of activity. Among these may, perhaps, be found aims of a liberal or universal kind – benevolence it may be, or noble patriotism (Ibid. p.34).

The actions of these men create a sort of social dialectic in the sense that they contradict the operative principles of actions in the existing political structure:

Their power lies in the fact that they represent none of the limitations which justice and morality would impose on them; and that these natural impulses have a more direct influence over man than the artificial and tedious discipline that tends to order and self-restraint, law and morality... (Ibid)

Among such men in history, Hegel mentions Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon. Indeed, Hegel would easily admit other candidates such as Hitler, Gandhi, Martin Luther King (Jr.), Nkrumah, Azikiwe, Nyerere, and several other world and African revolutionaries into his list of world historical individuals had he lived in their time. He writes that beyond their immediate private interests, these historical figures cooperated with the World Spirit in bringing to fruition that which was ripe for their age:

It was not, then, his private gain merely, but an unconscious impulse that occasioned the accomplishment of that for which the time was ripe. Such are all great historical men – whose own particular aims involves those large issues which are the will of the World-Spirit. They may be called Heroes, inasmuch as they have derived their purposes and their vocation, not from the

calm, regular course of things, sanctioned by the existing order; but from a concealed fount – one which has not attained to phenomenal, present existence - from that inner Spirit, still hidden beneath the surface, which, impinging on the outer world as on a shell, burst it in pieces, because it is another kernel than that which belonged to the shell in question. They are men, therefore, who appear to draw the impulse of their life from themselves; and whose deeds have produced a condition of things and a complex of historical relations which appear to be only *their* interest, and *their* work. (Ibid.p.44)

The third point concerns the nature and character of the political institution which results from these revolutionary tendencies. Hegel describes it as the State.

We infer – glancing at the institution of the State in passing – that a State is then well constituted and internally powerful, when the private interest of its citizens is one with the common interest of the State; when the one finds its gratification and realization in the Other – a proposition in itself very important... The epoch when a State attains this harmonious condition, marks the period of its bloom, its virtue, its vigor, and its prosperity. (Ibid. p.39).

He notes that this path is treacherous, even if its final achievement is harmony. Indeed, it involves conflict, struggle and despair, as the hopes and assumptions of previous forms of life (and intellectual outlooks) are dashed and disproven. From these ashes emerges a stranger, suppler system that can perhaps withstand skeptical objections. (Schroeder, 2004: 32).

Hegel comments further on this:

It is quite otherwise with the comprehensive relations that History has to do with. In this sphere are presented those momentous collisions between existing, acknowledged duties, laws, and rights and those contingencies which are adverse to this fixed system; which assail and even destroy its foundations and existence; whose tenor may nevertheless seem good - on the large scale advantageous – yes, even indispensable and necessary. These contingencies realize themselves in History:

they involve a general principle of a different order from that on which depends the permanence of a people or a State. This principle is an essential phase in the development of the creating Idea, of Truth striving and urging towards (consciousness of) itself. Historical men – World Historical Individuals, are those in whose aims such a general principle lies. (Hegel, 2001:43)

The understanding of the State by Hegel is worth nothing. First, he believes it is a creation of world historical individuals, out of a necessity; the necessity of establishing a moral entity which ensures that the individual's subjective will, and the objective will of the State, expressed in form of social, political and legal institutions, are in agreement. Furthermore, the State has as its basis the culture of a people:

The general principle which manifest itself and becomes an object of consciousness in the State – the form under which all that the State includes is brought – is the whole of that cycle of phenomena which constitutes the culture of a nation. But the definite substance that receives the form of universality, and exists in that concrete reality which is the State – is the Spirit of the People itself. The actual State is animated by this spirit, in all its particular affairs – its Wars, Institutions, etc. (Ibid., p.65)

An even more significant point to be deduced from Hegel's understanding of the State is that rather being an arbitrary conglomeration of peoples, diverse in tongue, culture and worldviews, and only forcefully held together by draconian laws, as obtained in the Oriental epoch, his view of the State is that of a natural progression from the individual to that of the immediate family, social groups, civil society and then the State. Hence for him, the State is the family-writ-large. "The family relation develops the primary form of conscious morality, succeeded by that of the State as its second phase", he says. From this basic understanding and functioning principle of the family, the State is created and represents the family in a larger context:

The Spirit of the Family – the Penates - form one substantial being, as much as the Spirit of a People in the State; and morality in both cases consists in a feeling, a consciousness, and a will, not limited to individual personality and interest, but embracing the common interests of the members generally. But this unity is in the case of the Family essentially one of *feeling*; not advancing

beyond the limits of the merely *natural*. The piety of the Family relation should be respected in the highest degree by the State; by its means the State obtains as its members individuals who are already moral (for as mere *persons* they are not) and who in uniting to form a state bring with them that sound basis of a political edifice – the capacity of feeling one with a Whole. (Ibid., p.57)

The summary of Hegel's dialectical interpretation of universal history is that freedom is its absolute aim which the World-Spirit realizes through the subjective wills and actions of world historical individuals, the culmination of which is the creation of States as the moral whole. Hegel sums up the significance of the State in the following way:

Summing up what has been said of the State, we find that we have been led to call its vital principle, as actuating the individuals who compose it – Morality. The State, its laws, its arrangements, constitute the rights of its members; its natural features, its mountains, air and waters, are *their* country, their fatherland, their outward material property; the history of this State, *their* deeds; what their ancestors have produced, belongs to them and lives in their memory. All is their possession, just as they are possessed by it; for it constitutes their existence, their being. Their imagination is occupied with the ideas thus presented, while the adoption of these laws, and of a fatherland so conditioned is the expression of their will. It is this matured totality which thus constitutes *one* Being, the spirit of *one* People. To it the individual members belong; each unit is the Son of his Nation, and at the same time – in as far as the state to which he belongs is undergoing development – the Son of his Age. None remains behind it, still less advances beyond it. This Spiritual Being, (the Spirit of his Time) is his; he is a representative of it; it is that in which he is originated; and in which he lives. (Ibid., p.68)

Urhobo History and the Hegelian Dialectical Interpretation of Universal History

Peter Ekeh (1938-2020) is the leading authority on Urhobo modern history. He thinks that Urhobo history stands out as unique for two reasons: first, is in their courage and capacity to have confronted and survived the harsh inhospitable conditions of the Niger Delta that posed huge threats to their settling successfully as a people. This for him is an uncommon accomplishment. He refers to such challenges as “Toynbean” in reference to the 20th century British historian Arnold Toynbee who argued that civilisations either rise or fall depending on their capacities to either overcome or succumb to challenges that confront them. The second reason why Urhobo history stands out as unique, according to Ekeh, is that “they do not make kingship and aristocratic moorings the centre of their historical accounting”. (Ekeh, 2006:7). What is rather emphasized is the deeds of outstanding individual leaders, a category of men Hegel calls “world historical individuals”. Recording such a history, according to Ekeh, is a much greater undertaking than that involved in chronicling the glories of kings and the great deeds of aristocratic families.

In Ekeh’s view, Urhobo history can be conveniently divided into three periods: Ancient Times (which was the Ogoiso period and was the time when the *Edoid* group of languages began to separate), Middle Ages (which began from Ewaka dynastic era up to the 1890s) and Modern Times (which began with British imperial ambitions up to the present) (Ekeh, 2006:12).

The Ancient Times of Urhobo history is the point in time, Ekeh says, when the group of languages referred to as Edoid began to separate into their individual peculiarities. The concern for us is the Southwestern Edoid group that consists of five sub-linguistic groups: (a) Urhobo (b) Isoko (c) Erowha (d) Okpe and (e) Uvwie. (Ibid., p.13)

Ekeh supports his argument with the findings from Kay Williamson, a prominent scholar of the languages of the Niger Delta. Kay Williamson’s findings establish that the proto-groups of the Urhobo and Isoko, among others, inhabited parts of the delta some 2,000 years ago. (Otite, 2003:38, quoted in Ekeh, 2012:25). As to the factor that could have given impetus to this separation of languages from their original proto-Edoid forms into their divergent linguistic epiphenomena, Ekeh answers that it was migration that accounted for this. However, the wave of migrations were not linear. They were multiple and followed different trajectories at different times of the ancient historical era of Urhobo. For instance, he says there was the primary migration into Urhobo land some time during the clan-based Ogoiso era which laid the initial

foundation stones for the development of the Urhobo language (the *primeval clans*); then there were the secondary instances of immigration from other regions whose migrants were absorbed into an existing Urhobo language and culture (the *secondary clans*); and third, there was a considerable amount of internal migration inside Urhobo country, such as those of AgbarhaAme, Idjerhe and Oghara, (the *tertiary clans*) – that spread Urhobo culture and language and conquered and developed the difficult lands and waters of the Western Niger Delta. (Ekeh, 2012:44). (emphasis in original).

The Middle Ages of Urhobo history, Ekeh says, can be dated from around the 1450s to 1891A.D. By this time, much of Urhobo twenty-four subcultural units were settled and there were no external political authorities interfering with the innocence of the autochthonous people in their political, economic and social affairs. This self-regulating harmonious system was interrupted by the entrance of the Portuguese to the area in the 1480s. The Middle Ages was thus characterised by the breaking up of the independence of ancient Urhobo and the ushering in of the people into a new era of European imperialist rule and lopsided trade alliances. (Ekeh, 2006:23)

The onrush of modern times happened to Urhobo from the 1890s. It was dominated by British imperial ambitions of maximum exploitation and effective domination of the natives. To achieve this, the western powers restructured the society into a more central political entity for administrative convenience. This period also saw the transformation from a largely rural agrarian economy to an urban one requiring western education. There was also the introduction of foreign religious systems, in this case the Christian religion, which competed with the traditional worship system. More significantly, the 1914 amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates of Nigeria up to the 1960 independence imposed on the Urhobo people a new artificial identity – “Nigerian”, in addition to the natural one of being Urhobo. (Ibid. 36)

A second point Ekeh clarifies is that regarding the route of migration by Urhobo progenitors from Edo territory. His view is that given that waterways were the easiest and safest means of transportation in ancient times, the Urhobo progenitors reached their settlements through the River Niger and its smaller diverse tributaries and creeks. The implication of this position is that the southernmost areas around Patani were the first areas of settlement. It was from here that secondary and tertiary migrations were embarked on that stretched Urhobo territory to its present western and northern boundaries. On this point, Ekeh writes:

The earliest Urhobo settlements were on the banks of rivers and creeks whose southernmost reach was Patani River and River Ase. From this perspective, the progenitors of the Urhobo people arrived in areas that are now named as Isoko and Southern Urhobo. Their route of arrival was most probably through the River Niger and its tributaries of Ase River and Patani River and associated creeks. It was from these lands in the South that central and northern Urhobo were gradually settled across the centuries. (Ekeh, 2012:26)

This Ekehian perspective debunks the view that the routes of Urhobo early migrants were via the dense rainforests of Ologbo and Ethiope to the south of Benin City. This view holds further that these progenitors negotiated their ways through these forests and across the two rivers of Ologbo and Ethiope to settle first in northern Urhobo. By this position, the earliest areas of settlement would be around Abraka – which the holders interpret as “Oba Ra Ka” allegedly named in memory of the king of their place of departure. Such views, according to Ekeh, do not take cognizance of the huge fact of the impenetrability and high risks involved in travelling through the dense rainforest in ancient times. They were hazardous and unpassable environment at the time with “menacing presence of predator animals and reptiles” (Ibid). Besides, the concept “Abraka” which the defenders of this perspective allude to is not even native to Urhobo. It is a corruption of the term “Avwraka” by the British who could not manage the pronunciation of “a triconsonantal compound “vwr” in Avwraka. (Ibid).

Urhobo Migration Experience and Arnold Toynbee’s Analysis of Societies in History

The above experiences reveal the struggle of the Urhobo people in the past two thousand years in their journey to collective self-actualization. This experience encourages a comparison of the Urhobo situation with Arnold Toynbee’s analysis on how cultures either rise or fall depending on their capacities and resilience in confronting challenges that threaten their collective survival. Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) was a British historian and philosopher. In his works, he studied different societies and world civilisations and tried to account for the reasons why they either rise or fall. He held that what matters is the different reactions of individual nations to the same “general” challenges which confront all civilisations. Those which approach them creatively and intelligently sustain themselves in history while less intelligent

ones sow the seeds for their own destruction and ultimate demise through the poor choices they make in combating challenges. As he expresses it:

A society, we may say, is confronted in the course of its life by a succession of problems which each member has to solve of itself as best as it may. The presentation of each problem is a challenge to undergo an ordeal, and through these series of ordeals, the members of the society progressively differentiate themselves from one another. Throughout, it is impossible to grasp the significance of any particular member's behaviour under a particular ordeal without taking some account of the similar or dissimilar behaviour of its fellows and without viewing the successive ordeals as a series of events in the life of the whole society. (Toynbee, 1960: 3)

Toynbee illustrates his point by examining the case with the city states of ancient Greece during the four centuries between 725 and 325 B.C. The three states he examines – Corinth, Sparta and Athens, all had the common social challenge at the time of a threatening overpopulation with the attendant possible pressure and strain this would bring on the resources of the states. Yet, they reacted differently to this social problem.

Corinth's reaction, Toynbee says, was the "seizing and colonizing of agricultural territories overseas – in Sicily, Southern Italy, Thrace and elsewhere", and the disposition of their surplus population to these conquered territories. By so doing, "they simply extended the geographical area of the Hellenic society without altering its character". Sparta on its part addressed the looming overpopulation challenge by attacking and conquering her nearest Greek neighbors. The consequence was that Sparta only obtained her additional lands at the cost of obstinate and repeated wars with neighboring peoples of her own caliber. (ibid, 4). To meet this new challenge, the whole of Spartan life had to be militarized from top to bottom, thereby adopting modes of societal organisation which, both in Greece and other places of the world, were already proving themselves out of tune with existing realities of the time.

Athens' approach was the most intelligent of the three, says Toynbee. Faced with the same social problem of overpopulation and limitation in land, she specialised her agricultural production for export, and also concentrated much effort in the manufacture of exportable products, and then developed her political institution in

such a way as to give a fair share of political power to the new classes which had been called into being by these economic innovations. As Toynbee describes it, the Athenians brilliantly turned a social challenge into an economic and political advantage through skillful adaptation and innovation, thereby opening up a new avenue of advance for the whole of the Hellenic society.

Going by Toynbee's analysis, it poses little difficulty in identifying striking similarities between the approach of the Athenians of the 4th Century B.C. and those of the Urhobo people in the past two thousand years. It remains a matter of historical conjecture regarding the direct factors that informed the various primary migrations from the Edo territory in the Ogiso era about two thousand years ago, but the most likely reasons may be the challenge of overpopulation, limitation in land and the envisaged opportunities in yet-to-be explored virgin territories. In describing this situation, Ekeh writes that:

In important ways, Urhobo's twenty-two cultural sub-units are defined by the degree to which opportunities have arisen that enabled them to survive together as historical units. Each of the twenty-two units is an historical entity that has conquered its territory and environment as a people. Their deeds in doing so are the stuff from which authentic history is constructed. Urhobo people tend to respond to challenges, Toynbean challenges if we may so label them, in ways that will ensure their elementary survival in the circumstances of the Niger Delta. (Ekeh, 2006: 6).

Urhobo Migration Experience and the Quest for Self-Determination and Enhanced Freedom

The foregoing analysis shows how the Urhobo people have been daring and creatively inventive in their struggle for self-determination and enhanced freedom, in agreement with Hegel's thesis on the drift of universal history. To illustrate further, the following experiences have been considered for brief analysis. (i) Challenges of migration and settlement into new territories (ii) Efforts towards adaptation to new environmental challenges (iii) Resistance against reprehensive European colonial policies.

(i) Challenge of Migration and Settlement into New Territories: Scholars are agreed that the essential characteristics adequate to delineate a group as a nation are a

definite territory, a common language which may have slight variations in dialects, a common history and a distinct psychological trait. When these factors are complemented with the consciousness of being a people and complemented with the subjective readiness to be politically assertive and economically self-reliant, then such a society is on its way to full self-realisation. This has been the experience of the Urhobo in their long struggle towards independent status. The Urhobo journey to self-discovery, in the light of Ekeh's analysis, dates back to the pre-Ogiso era in Benin history. While some scholars have argued that the basis for those migrations may not be strictly adversarial, it is not unlikely that certain oppressive policies inhibiting the freedom of the people may have aided the decision to begin to seek greener pastures elsewhere. Besides, Toynebean challenges in the form of overpopulation and limitation in lands may have also informed the migratory relocations. These risky adventures were led by daring and courageous individuals who "had conquered the fear of death" and merited to be classed among Hegel's world historical figures.

(ii) Efforts Toward Adaptation to New Environmental Challenges: Having settled into the various territories and delineated their boundaries, the Urhobo, within their various republics, simultaneously began the process of understanding and surmounting the challenges of the new environment. This quest was driven by the imperative need of, first, survival, and second, comfortable living. Taking advantage of the green vegetation of the tropical rain forest, they engaged in agricultural activities of diverse kinds. The Urhobo also developed spiritual philosophies to explain metaphysical experiences. The concepts of *erhi* (spirit), *otarhe* (destiny), *Oghene* (God), *Ughwu* (death), *erivwin* (after-life), *odjuvwu* (God's abode) (Nabofa, 2011: 363), were meant to explain supra-human experiences. An indigenous dating system to mark days in form of a calendar was also one of the remarkable inventions. Four days - *Edewor*, *Omamede*, *Eduhre* and *Edebi* made up a week in the traditional dating system. These progenitors deserve commendation for their creative capacities to study, master and utilize the products of nature for meeting their needs.

(iii) Resistance against Reprehensive European Colonial Policies:

The 1884/85 Berlin Conference encouraged British incursion into the hinterlands of the Western Niger Delta of the Urhobo for economic, but more essentially imperial purposes. The British adopted divide-and-rule policies which were largely injurious to Urhobo national interest. An example was the forced union of Urhobo and Itsekiri administrative division -Jekri-Sobo, in the Warri Province in the 1930s. The situation

inspired the rise of heroic nationalists such as MukoroMowoe (1890-1948) and AdogbejiSalubi (1906-1982). The Urhobo Progress Union was created in 1931 to address these issues. The 1927 Anti-Taxation Revolt in Warri Province was led by OshueOgbiyerin of Orhunwhorun, a community in Udu sub-culture. The movement was dominated by Urhobo nationalism; it included Isoko, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Aboh (Ukwuani) ethnic groups which constituted the Warri Province. Oshue was the revolutionary leader of the uprising; he was unanimously elected “head of state” of the independent Warri Province with headquarters in Otor-Udu. The British employed armed troops to suppress the revolt. The UPU’s insistence for the correction of the wrong spelling of the name of Urhobo in British documents from “Sobou” or “Sobo”, which was achieved in 1938 is a struggle for identity worthy of note.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Urhobo history of migration which began in ancient times in the pre-Ogiso era of Benin society has been characterised by courageous confrontations with challenges which threatened the survival of the various sub-cultural units. Their successes in subduing these challenges towards the realisation of social, economic and political emancipation for their people is a significant accomplishment worthy of note, and proves the point made by Hegel in his interpretation of universal history that all states and peoples must of necessity enter into dialectical struggles of various nature and dimensions, and overcome them, before their attainment of greater freedom. This Hegelian thesis establishes that, concealed behind the glitter and glamour of thriving developed states is an ugly history of contentions, struggles to the death, and deadly quarrels with artificial and natural forces which contended with their quest for freedom, emancipation and self-realisation. The study has shown that the Urhobo have been active participants in this dialectical historic struggle for freedom and greater conditions of living for her people. While it is apparent that a lot of economic, political, social and cultural challenges still stand in the way of the Urhobo people in their collective journey for self-actualization, the numerous significant victories of the past two thousand years in taming the inhospitable dense forest of the western Niger Delta provides a basis for optimism that present and future challenges can be overcome and better conditions of living attained for the generality of the people.

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