



Groundwork for Inter-Group Relations and Solidarity among Remo Communities of Yorubaland in the Pre-Colonial Period

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Abstract. The Remo, a sub-group of the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, are today generally acknowledged as a unified and culturally-monolithic people. This is particularly so with the thirteen Remo groups that federated in founding the largest and the most urbanised of the Remo settlements, Sagamu, in 1872. However, this political, socio-cultural and economic affinity is a product of a long period of interaction and historical processes, which only crystallised in the third quarter of the nineteenth century as a result of the insecurity and brigandage that pervaded Yorubaland during this period. It is against this background that this paper interrogates the socio-cultural, economic and political underpinnings for inter-group relations and solidarity among the various Remo communities in the pre-colonial period. The paper argues that despite the variations in the traditions of origin of the various Remo groups, which foreshadow differences in cultural background and origin, the Remo communities actually had so much in common. It is these commonalities, which predated the imposition of colonial rule in the area, that explain the solidarity that manifested at the establishment of Sagamu Township in which thirteen Remo communities came together under a confederal arrangement. The paper adopts historical research methods. Given this, both primary and secondary data constitute the main sources of information for the study.

Keywords: History, Inter-group Relations, Pre-colonial, Remoland, Sagamu, Yorubaland

1. Introduction

Remo is one of the sub-ethnic groups of the Yoruba race, which is one of the foremost nations that were amalgamated to form the Nigerian state in 1914. Although the smallest Division in the old Southern Provinces of Nigeria, Remo was one of the most

vibrant because of its proximity to Lagos, the then seat of the British colonial administration and its strategic location as an important gateway to the interior of Yorubaland from the coast of Lagos. The area is a constituent of the Ijebu Province, one of the many provinces that made up the defunct Western Region, which became the Western State of Nigeria in 1967 (Ademiluyi and Okude, 2001). It is situated between longitude 3.35⁰ and 3.5⁰ East and latitude 6.4⁰ to 7.0⁰ North, with an approximated area of about eight hundred and forty-eight (848) square kilometres all within the tropical rain forest (Ogunlami, 2015). Remo has Ipara as its northernmost town, sharing boundaries with Owode-Egba villages. In the south, Ogiro became the boundary town after the cession of Ikorodu, a Remo port town, to the Colony of Lagos in 1894. It has Ikenne and Irolu as its boundary towns to the East, with surrounding Ijebu towns such as Aiyeye, Odogbolu, Ijesa-Ijebu and Ago-Iwoye villages. It has Siun to the West sharing boundaries with Mowe, Ibafo and other Owode-Egba villages (Ayodele, 2008).

Although the people of Remoland belong to the main Yoruba-speaking group of Western Nigeria, they, however, speak the Remo dialect with distinctive intonation and vocabulary, which distinguishes it from the main Ijebu language. Even within Remo itself, there exist different dialectal variations. For instance, northern Remo and southern Remo dialects vary and easily give away the speaker as a person either from Remo North or from Remo South (Ayodele, 2008). The differences between the Ijebu and Remo dialects are not too profound or discernible to a stranger. Perhaps, it is for this reason that E. A. Ayandele opined that "... there was no problem posed by the dialectal difference between the Super-Ijebus and the Remo" (1992: 124). Geographically, the relief of the area is generally flat, with undulating

plains and some hilly areas rising to a height of over five hundred feet above sea level, making Remo a more fragmented society than the rest of Ijebuland. The climate is of the tropical type, with two main seasons - rainy and dry. The rainy season lasts from April to October; while the dry season is from November to March, with the Harmattan coming up in December (Odonlami, 1989)

Despite the rich past and eminence of Remo and its people, the region has suffered scholarly neglect from historians as much has not been done to unravel its history. One of the reasons for this neglect is that for a very long time, Remo had been regarded as a part and parcel of Ijebuland. Hence, its history has often been told as a component of the larger Ijebu Kingdom. Some of the extant studies on Ijebu in which Remo received significant attention include O. O. Ayantuga's *Ijebu and Her Neighbours*, an unpublished PhD Thesis of the University of London in 1965; E. A. Ayandele's *Ijebu of Yorubaland: Politics, Economy and Society* in 1992; O. O. Olubomehin's (ed.) *The Ijebu of Western Nigeria: A Historical and Socio-Cultural Study* in 2001; G. O. Oguntomisin's *Studies in Ijebu History and Culture* in 2002; Tunde Oduwobi's *Ijebu Under Colonial Rule* in 2008 and O. O. Olubomehin's (ed.) *Themes in the History of the Ijebu and Remo of Western Nigeria* in 2010. The efforts of B. A. Odonlami have resulted in the publication of *Remo and Her Neighbours up to the 19th Century* in 2008 and *Remo in Yoruba History: Politics, Inter-Group Relations and Socio-Economic Dynamics* in 2011. Another important study on Remo's history and politics is Insa Nolte's *Obafemi Awolowo and the Making of Remo: the Local Politics of a Nigerian Nationalist* published in 2009.

This study, therefore, examines the traditional patterns of relationship that existed among the various communities in Remoland in the pre-colonial period and how these helped to forge solidarity among the groups and laid the foundation for communal understanding during the colonial period and up till today. To make the discourse easily comprehensible, this study opens with an introduction creating a background to the research. Thereafter, there is an attempt to explicate intergroup relations from a conceptual and theoretical point of view. The succeeding sections of the work shall discuss the traditions of origin of the Remo people and the bases for inter-group relations among the Remo communities, with special reference to the political, economic and socio-cultural linkages, before the appearance of the Europeans and the establishment of colonial rule in the area. The work

concludes by contending that despite the differences in the traditions of origin, dialects, economic opportunities and physical features of the area that sometimes impeded mobility and made inter-group relations difficult, the Remo communities had so much in common. It is these commonalities, which predated the imposition of colonial rule in the area that explains the solidarity, that manifested when thirteen communities came together to establish Sagamu Township, the most urbanised Remo town, under a confederal arrangement.

2. Intergroup Relations: A Conceptual and Theoretical Clarification

By intergroup relations, we mean the patterns and dimensions of interaction between or among different groups from diverse cultural backgrounds, historical experiences and social orientations. Some relationships could be described as tolerant or peaceful, while others could be said to be clear examples of intolerance and conflict. Inter-group relations could take economic, social and political dimensions (Muojama, 2012). Two dominant patterns of intergroup relations are discernible in sociology, which is relevant to this study. The first, which is the most tolerant form of intergroup relations, is **pluralism**, in which no distinction is made between minority and majority groups, but instead, there is equal standing. True pluralism is characterised by mutual respect on the part of all groups, both dominant and subordinate, creating a multicultural environment of acceptance. In reality, true pluralism is idealistic and utopian. At the other end of the spectrum is **amalgamation**, which is an example of intolerant inter-group relations. This represents the model in which two groups combine to form a new group. Amalgamation creates the classic "melting pot" analogy in which the combination of cultures results in the emergence of an entirely new and different culture (Conerly, Holmes and Tamang, 2021).

To further elucidate inter-group relations, several suppositions have been canvassed to underscore the dimensions and patterns of relationships that exist among the various peoples at any given time in Nigeria. For our purpose in this endeavour, we shall limit our attention to the theory of 'fundamental diversity' or 'strange-bedfellows' and 'unity in diversity'. The theory of 'fundamental diversity' or 'strange-bedfellows' postulates that the different peoples of Nigeria had little or nothing in common in terms of language, religion, social orientation and political organisation in the pre-colonial days. Hence, there was no basis for the amalgamation that the

British colonialists birthed in 1914. Hence, the amalgamation can simply be regarded as a marriage between strange bedfellows. This theory is often employed to explain why the different peoples of Nigeria had found it difficult to co-habit peacefully without acrimony and crises in the post-independence period (Muojama, 2012)

The flip side of the theory of ‘fundamental diversity’ is the idea of ‘unity in diversity’. The adherents of this theory opine that there were a series of interactions, connections and relationships that had existed among the different peoples of Nigeria before the appearance of the Europeans on the coasts of Africa and the establishment of colonial rule in Nigeria. These relationships took the form of trading activities, intermarriages, conflicts and other forms of socio-economic and political interaction. The argument of the proponents of the theory of ‘fundamental diversity’ concerning the difference in languages as a hindrance to intergroup relations in Nigeria was considered obsolete in the face of new facts in linguistic studies. In support of the argument for fundamental connections of many Nigerian languages, R. G. Armstrong (1962) asserts that, “...most languages of the sub-Saharan Africans belonged to one language family known as the Niger-Congo family. On the other hand, most Nigerian languages such as Igbo, Ijo, Edo and Idoma, belonged to the Kwa language sub-family, and they started diverging from their ancestral root between 5,000 and 6,000 years ago” (p. 26).

Furthermore, many other factors that promoted intergroup relations in the pre-colonial period included the geography of Nigeria, which allowed for differences in occupation and livelihood and fostered economic exchanges among the ethnic groups and nationalities. For instance, the people of the forest zone, because of the presence of tsetse fly and the danger it posed to cattle rearing, relied on the people of the savanna zone for their supply of meat among other things, while they, in turn, supplied the savannah dwellers with tuberous plants that are vastly available in the forest region. In the same vein, the people dwelling in the mangrove provided the forest and savanna dwellers with their demand for salt and fish and vice versa. More so, tracks, pathways and waterways that crisscrossed the entire landscape of the country facilitated easy movement and exchanges across the different zones and by extension intergroup relations. This paper aligns itself with the position of the theory of ‘unity in diversity’ that there had existed socio-cultural, economic and political interactions among the various peoples of Nigeria in general and the

different Remo communities and groups before the imposition of colonial rule in Nigeria.

3. The Origin, Migrations and Settlement of Remoland

Like much of pre-colonial African history, the history of Remo, without the benefit of written records, is shrouded in obscurity. However, from what we now know, Remo is populated by people who for centuries had migrated into the area that had come to represent a convergence of diverse groups with different legends of origin. It is noteworthy that the unified Remo kingdom under a single ruler as we know it today did not exist before the coming of the British and the establishment of colonial rule in the area. To be sure, the area consisted of a litany of independent and sovereign towns and villages each with its own traditional political and administrative set-up (Olubomehin, 2010). These traditional towns and villages were thirty-three in number and are often referred to, in local parlance, as the *Remo Metalelogbon*. With each town claiming different migration and tradition of origin, it will be fallacious to talk of a common tradition of origin for the whole Remo people. The traditions of most Remo towns often identify two major waves of migration tracing the origin of the people to either Ile-Ife or Ijebu-Ode.

The first wave of migration, claiming Irewo Quarters in Ile-Ife as the take-off point, was led by Eneyi Amunigbuwa, which other accounts simply referred to as *Owa* or *Akarigbo*, at about 1000 B.C. The travelling party, comprising many Remo groups and chiefs, first settled at Okun-Owa and later moved to Orile Ofin. Ofin, the group *Akarigbo* led, settled at Okesensen near Majopa stream on the outskirts of present-day Sagamu, while the rest of the party settled in different locations in and around Orile Ofin. Each group settled as a community with its own head, maintaining its individuality. The Remo towns that consider this tradition sacrosanct include Ilishan, Ilara, Irolu, Akaka, some parts of Ikenne, a majority of Ode-Remo people, and eleven of the Remo towns that formed Sagamu in 1872 (Martindale Report, 2009).

The second wave of migration involves a group of Remo settlers who claimed they originated from Ijebu-Ode. This group was led by the *Ewusi* of Makun. Although there is a variant of this tradition, which claims that this group had earlier migrated from Ile-Ife, they settled in Ijebu Ode and have ancestral leanings and genealogical attachments with the *Awujale* of Ijebu-Ode (Ayodele, 2008). From Ijebu-Ode, this party, comprising different Remo

groups, dispersed to establish new settlements either on the commission of the *Awujale* or on account of other circumstances. Whatever was responsible, they migrated from Ijebu-Ode and established new kingdoms in Remo and they continued to remain subservient to the *Awujale* and he exercised control over them. Ayodele (2008) opines that his tradition is popular among the Remo towns such as Makun, Ogere, Isara, some parts of Ode and Iperu. One account holds that the *Ewusi* of Makun was the son (or grandson) of Obaruwa, the tenth *Awujale* of Ijebu-Ode. Obaruwa reigned after the *Awujale* Ofinran and *Awujale* Obaganju was Obaruwa's successor.

Apart from the majority of oral traditions among the Remo people that uphold either the Ile-Ife or Ijebu-Ode origin, the historical accounts of some Remo towns reveal that they claim a different ancestry from both Ile-Ife and Ijebu-Ode. For example, a popular tradition in Emuren, a southern Remo town, indicates that the people of Emuren were never part of the original migration from Ile-Ife and that Owuyo, who is considered to be the first *Elemuren* of Emuren was a son of the *Ajalorun* of Ijebu-Ife (Coronation Pamphlet, 2017). Other accounts claim that few Remo towns, such as Okun-Owa, Odogbolu, Aiyeye and Ijesa-Ijebu, were already in existence before the dispersal and mass migration from Ile-Ife. There is another version of oral history that claims that Iperu had close links with the Old Oyo Empire, while Ilara claims close affinity and origin with Aramoko in Ekiti and Ilara-Mokin in present-day Ondo State (Nolte 2009).

Little is known about the autochthonous people that inhabited the Remo area or about the name by which the area was called before the arrival and settlement of the Remo groups. However, the traditions of origin of such Remo towns as Ilisan, Irolu, Ogere and Ode Remo suggest that the Remo migrant parties that settled in the area met some aboriginal inhabitants. Like in many parts of Yorubaland and has been established in the case of the Oduduwa and Obatala groups in Ile-Ife, these autochthones were either conquered or absorbed by probably stronger and better organised migrant groups (Ayodele, 2008).

The growth and expansion of many Remo towns after the settlement of the Remo groups in the area could be attributed to many factors. First, few Remo towns, such as Ofin and Makun, found themselves strategically positioned on important trade routes, which brought socio-economic and political advantages. This also brought some unhealthy rivalry and competition between them. Second, some Remo

towns, such as Iperu and Ode Remo, became market towns, thereby attracting people from far and near for trading and economic exchanges. The economic prosperity of these two towns made them prime targets for invasion and attacks from the Egba and Ibadan armies. In addition, the population of many towns in Remo increased dramatically as a result of the nineteenth-century Yoruba wars and the addition of refugees who fled war zones, war captives, slaves and even warmongers and warriors. Ipara, Isara, Iperu and Ogere are good examples of this (Nolte, 2009). In any case, the development of the Remo towns was so impressive that they were "well established and settled in their homesteads by 1840" (Soewu, 1987: 6) and were able to participate effectively and control the flow of trade as middlemen in the economic exchanges between the coast of Lagos and the hinterland of Yorubaland.

Despite the differences in the traditions of origin, migration stories and political allegiance, it is important to emphasise that Remo groups and communities share a lot in common in terms of their economic, socio-cultural and political institutions since time immemorial. Moreover, having found themselves together in a proximate geographical space, they have come to regard themselves as a political unit. To an undiscerning mind, the political unity and group solidarity among the different Remo communities were forced by such factors as the nineteenth-century fratricidal warfare in Yorubaland in which, as a result of devastating military raids, the various Remo groups came together to form stronger units of resistance and defence resulting in the founding of such towns as Ikenne and Sagamu. This was to be consolidated when colonial rule was established in the area in 1894 through a treaty that saw the promotion of the status of the *Akarigbo*, the ruler of Ofin, to the paramount ruler of Remoland. However, these two nineteenth-century events were products of centuries of socio-cultural connections and political intercourse among the different Remo groups and communities. It is to the analysis of the dimension of these age-long interactions that we shall turn in this essay.

4. The Political Foundation for Intergroup Relations in Remoland

The structure of government throughout Yorubaland in the pre-colonial period was monarchical and the key political unit on which governance was based was the town, *Ilu*. Although each kingdom consisted of many towns, this did not mean that there existed independent governments within a particular kingdom. The reality was that the capital (*Olu-Ilu*)

acted as the central administration while those of the outlying towns and villages (*Igberiko*) served as local administrative units (Atanda, 1980). At the head of the administration of the town was the *Oba*, or king, who ruled with powers that derived from the customs and traditions of the people. The *Oba* was entitled to wear a crown but in towns where the head chief was not entitled to wear a crown, the head of administration was called a *baale* (literally, “father of the land”). However, noticeable differences existed in the practice of this administrative system among the various Yoruba sub-groups to reflect local dynamics and realities. For instance, Oyo-Yoruba operated a political system that was a little different from the non-Oyo groups. In Oyo, the *Alaafin* was assisted by a group of kingmaker chiefs known as *Oyomesi* with members of the *Ogboni* (secret cult) mediating between them. In Remo political system, the *Ogboni* (known in Remo as *Osugbo*) played more significant political roles than they did in Oyo. Such was the importance of the members of the group in the politics and administration of an Ijebu or Remo town that Biobaku (1957) described them as ‘the real rulers of the town.’

It is important to make the point, from the onset, that there was no united or monolithic Remo kingdom ruled by a single sovereign before the advent of the British and the establishment of colonial rule. Rather, Remoland comprised many towns and townlets that operated as mini-states with each having its distinct traditional political, economic and administrative paraphernalia such as a palace, a special meeting house (*Iledi*) and at least a market. The original traditional Remo towns numbered thirty-three, *Remo Metalelogbon*, many of which were destroyed and annihilated as a result of the nineteenth-century Yoruba internecine wars. Today, Remoland comprises eleven principal towns which have subsumed many of the remaining traditional towns and villages of which the largest and most urbanised, Sagamu, was formed when thirteen villages and townlets federated for defence and security in 1972 (Martindale Report, 2009: 1). It was for this reason that Remo has been described as a mere geographical expression rather than a political entity.

Like other Yoruba towns, Remo towns were headed either by a crowned king (*oba*) or an uncrowned ruler, *baale*. The crown (*ade*) connoted power, sovereignty and independence and therefore, any town headed by a *baale* was considered to lack these political elements. Thus, such towns deferred to a town which had its crown (*ilu alade*), usually the capital, in certain matters. The *Oba*, or *baale*, in all Remo towns, was the head of traditional political

administration. Though believed to be divine and wielding power bordering on the absolute, he was not a despot. He was referred to as *Kabiyesi* (the one no mortal could question or query) and *Oko-Ilu* (the owner or the head of the town). However, he deployed this power sparingly and with great continence and discretion. This disposition was generally understood in any Remo town as crucial to the existence and progress of the town. He was assisted in the day-to-day running of the town by a council of chiefs, *Igbimo*, who represented compounds or quarters and other important institutions in the town. This council constituted a check on the power of the *Oba* and could ask the king, in agreement with the *Osugbo*, to commit suicide if he committed a grievous crime against the town through the abuse of his power (Nolte, 2009).

The *Osugbo* was another visible and dynamic organ of traditional government in Remoland. As a civic court and town executive, their role was so significant that the administration of Remo towns would not have been possible without them. They served as an advisory body to the *Oba* and approved certain orders in the town. In their regular meetings which were held at *Iledi* every sixteen days, the *Osugbo* deliberated on matters affecting the town and heard serious criminal cases such as murder, burglary and other sacrilegious acts (Nolte, 2009). Various secret cults existed to assist the king and the *Osugbo* in the execution of justice and cleansing of the town such as *Oro* and *Eluku*. They also performed certain traditional rites, particularly those associated with the burial of a deceased *Oba* (Odunlami, 2008). Considered as the custodian of the covenant that established a town, the *Oluwo*, head of the *Osugbo*, took over the administration of most Remo towns during interregnums such as the demise of an *Oba*, wartime or mass migration to a new location (Nolte, 2009; 43). It is for this reason that the *Osugbo* was often referred to itself as the town, *ilu*, itself.

The other organs of the traditional political system included the *Pampa* society, which is an association of traders. The society controlled market prices, settled market disputes and were also employed in coordinating labour for communal projects such as roads, river clearing, town walls and so on (B. A. Odunlami, 26 March 2022). The titled members of the *Pampa*, the *Jagun*, *Akogun* (or *Likotun*) and *Asipa*, sat with the *Osugbo* as judges on matters that concerned commerce. Though generally concerned with trade and commerce, E. A. Ayandele (1970) suggests that the officials of the society were initially saddled with defence and security responsibilities. The titles of the leading members of the society lend

credence to this claim. There was also the *Lopere* or *Opere* society, a military association that consisted of young men of fighting age. It was compulsory, but more fashionable, for young and able-bodied men to join the *Lopere* in all Remo towns. This was one of the ways young men integrated themselves and serve the interest of their towns. The principal officers of the association were the *Balogun*, *Seriki*, *Bada*, and *Kakanfo* in that order. The titles were not hereditary or life titles. Holders were chosen through acts of bravery and exploits on the battlefield. Hence, these titles could be lost through incapacitation, mental illness or death. When a title-holder died, his next in rank held the post.

Every Remo town was made up of quarters (*itun*) with each quarter having its head, *Olori-itun*. A quarter comprised many families (*ebi*) with each headed by family heads (*Olori-Ebi*). These were also loci of traditional power and influence in the pre-colonial Remo society. The family heads settled all disputes among the members of their families. Similar functions were performed by the quarter heads in their domains. There were also age-grade associations (*Regbe-Regbe*) in every town to complement democratic practices. The association of peers or age mates imposed a standard of conduct on their members and saw to it that none of them convened the laws of the land or brought their group to public ridicule through any misdemeanour. The traditional system ensured cooperation among the organs of government and this promoted peace, order and smooth governance. More importantly, the political system engendered popular participation in the political system and the people had a strong feeling of belonging to the society.

5. The Economic Foundation for Intergroup Relations in Remoland

Without a doubt, one significant facilitator of intergroup relations and ethnic solidarity among the Remo communities in the pre-colonial period was the economy. Agriculture, the cultivation of crops and animal husbandry, was the mainstay of the Remo economy right from when the food revolution took place in the area. The location of the region in the tropics, where rainfall and soil fertility were adequate for the cultivation of several food crops made this imperative. Some of the crops popularly cultivated among the Remo people in the pre-colonial period included the various species of yam, cocoyam, guinea corn, maize, cassava, potato, melon, beans, groundnut, okra, oil palm, kola nut, cocoa, bitter kola, locust beans, pepper and various types of vegetables. Simple implements, such as cutlass, axe

and hoe, were used in cultivating these crops and the commonest farming methods were shifting cultivation and mixed cropping. Landholding and physical control of native lands rested in the family or lineage (*ebi*) and was guided by the traditional land tenure system (Salami, 2001). It was taboo in the traditional Remo society to put land for sale or to see anyone alienated from the land. Even strangers could acquire land for agriculture or other purposes through farm tenancy which could be through borrowing, leasing or outright gift (Price, 1939).

Different types of farms existed for Remo farmers to plant their crops. There were the compound farms where vegetables of all kinds, maize, tomato, pepper and fruits were cultivated. Usually located within the vicinity of the household or family compound, such farms were tended by women and children. There were also farms popularly called *oko etile* or *oko ebale* (nearby farms) because they were usually not more than three kilometres outside the town. Such farms were visited early in the morning and workers returned to town in the evening. Crops cultivated on these farms included yam, kola nuts, cocoyam and other food crops. The other type of farm was the *oko egan* or *oko ejina* (distant farms), which is usually located deep in the forest, between five to fifteen kilometres from town (Odunlami, 2008; see also Johnson, 1921). As a result of this distance, farmers who attended and worked on these farms stayed on the farms for days and sometimes weeks. Huts (*ewu*) were usually erected to cater for the accommodation of farmworkers and attendees. Crops such as yam, cocoyam, maize, cocoa, kola nuts, oil palm etc. Food crops cultivated on these farms were usually meant to provide food for farm workers and attendees.

The surplus products from these farms were diverted into trade. Although B. A. Odunlami (2008) believes that the kind of trade that existed in the Remo area in the pre-colonial period can be regarded as local trade, available evidence indicates that Remo traders had economic exchanges with other Yoruba towns like Ijebu Ode, Epe, Ejinrin, Abeokuta, Ibadan and other hinterlands of Yorubaland and also participated in long-distance trade particularly as from the first half of the nineteenth century when the region embraced the cultivation and trade in a variety of kola, *Cola acuminata* or *Cola nitida* (Agboola, 1980). To facilitate trade, two types of markets were established in Remoland and these are daily and periodic markets. The daily markets were held within the towns every day and was meant to meet the daily need of the people living within the town. Food and perishable goods, especially farm produce, were sold at such markets and they recorded impressive

attendance in the evenings. The periodic markets were those held at intervals of five or nine days. Such market days were held in turns among the neighbouring towns to avoid clashes in market days.

Although several popular markets existed throughout Remoland such as those in Ode, Iperu and Ipara, *Obu Makun* was by far the most important periodic market in Remo land. On market days, traders from within and outside Remoland such as the Ijebu, Egba and Ibadan converged on the market for trading activities. Some items of trade included pottery materials, which were commonly used for fetching water, water storage, frying cassava flakes (*gari*) and for other household use; mats of various dimensions; woven cloth materials of various kinds; all sorts of food crops and items; farm implements and many other materials made of either iron or wood. There were no articles of trade that could not be found at *Obu Makun* in those days. Even within the market, there was a section for the kolanut traders and the Hausa/Fulani customers had a quarter near the market popularly referred to as *Sabo Makun* (Ayodele, 2008; Madam Elizabeth Eniola, 90 years, Sagamu, 20 February 2022). Traders conveyed their goods by head portorage and trekked long distances to come to the market. The widespread use of cowries (*owo eyo*) as a medium of exchange facilitated trade and exchange. This subsisted until the Europeans introduced paper money and coins as legal tender during the heydays of colonial rule.

Apart from agriculture and trading activities, the Remo developed simple industries and manufacturing. Two of the commonest and most important of these were iron smelting and cloth weaving. The blacksmiths, or *agbede*, produced all articles made of iron and steel especially farm implements such as hoes, axes, cutlasses, local guns and other tools used in other occupations. Charcoal from burnt hardwood and shells of palm nuts were the materials generally used for generating the great heat required for the furnace, which was kept on fire all round the year. Few families were known to practice this craft in many Remo towns and it was done on a small scale. Although the cloth weaving industry was generally dominated by women folks, a few men were known to be expert weavers among the Remo. The cloth materials produced were generally of two types. There was the narrow-loom type of about six inches wide called *Alawe* produced by men and the broad-loom type, popularly called *Kijipa*, produced by women (Falola, 2017; see also Johnson, 1921). The process involved the use of a mechanical contrivance operated with both hands and legs. In this way, a variety of plain and multi-coloured cloths with

numerous patterns and designs were produced. It is important to note that these cloths were usually of high quality (Falola, 2017).

Closely related to the cloth industry, and sometimes deriving from it, were the dyeing and tailoring occupations. It was the responsibility of the dyeing industry to give yarn for weaving and sometimes finished clothes the desired colours. This was exclusively done by women through the use of *Elu* (indigo), which was obtained from the indigo tree. Indigo balls were also made for sale at markets, which was also a lucrative trade. The commonest colour was blue or blue-black from the indigo dye. Besides these colours, the scarlet called *Alahari* and rough silk, *Samayan* in grey were also very common in the Remo yarn (Johnson, 1921). This occupation was not widespread among the Remo as only few people engaged in it. Tailoring, on the other hand, was an art engaged in exclusively by men as it was only men's dress that required tailoring. It involved making embroidery on the neck and breast of men's gowns. Unlike women, who were simply wrapped in plain clothes, men cut and sewed to specifications. They also prepared ready-made robes of various sizes. Whether cut to specification or not, the tailors produced light wears like *buba* and *dansiki* and heavy wears like *agbada* and *dandogo*, with *sokoto* (trousers) and *fila* (caps) to match in each case (Falola, 2017).

Apart from all the mentioned industries, many other industries produced food, household utensils, industrial and trading equipment such as beer brewing, oil production, pottery, woodwork, basket weaving, calabash carving and leatherwork. In all these endeavours, there were guilds to regulate the activities of the artisans in each category. These guilds were responsible for exercising control over the entry of new members into the crafts, standards of production, workmanship and regulating prices (Hopkins, 1973). The Remo economy, therefore, exhibited all the indices of a vibrant and diversified economy in the period leading to the nineteenth century. Production, in all ramifications, did not only meet local consumption but also external demand. It was based on this that the Remo groups were able to cope with the demand of the period when the European trade in commodities and raw materials, in the aftermath of the abolition of the obnoxious slave trade, began on a large in the second half of the nineteenth century.

6. The Socio-Cultural Foundation for Intergroup Relations in Remoland

The socio-cultural underpinnings for inter-group relations in any society are many and varied. These are socially and culturally-determined characteristics that condition the worldview and cosmology of a people and these encapsulate elements such as language, religious observances, customs and traditions, belief system, social organisation (including acceptable gender roles), dietary practices, intellectual and occupational practices and other aspects of behaviour and social orientation. In the same manner, many of these factors, if not all of them, have a significant impact on forging intergroup relations and solidarity among the Remo communities in the pre-colonial period. However, for our purpose in this work, we shall be examining only three of the socio-cultural elements and these are language, religion and festivals.

One basic feature of inter-group relations is communication and this is remotely impossible without a commonly intelligible language. Apart from the broader Yoruba language spoken throughout southwestern Nigeria and beyond, the pre-colonial Remo communities spoke a commonly understandable dialect. Common language facilitated a lot of socio-cultural connections, such as marriage, cohabitation and integration, in Remoland in the pre-colonial period. As noted earlier on, the Remo dialect, a variant of the Ijebu branch of the Yoruba language, is uniquely endowed with its distinctive vocabularies, tonation and word formations that made the dialect comprehensible throughout the Remo region in the period under review. Although slight differences are discernible between the northern Remo communities and their southern counterparts, they certainly did not constitute significant drawbacks for intergroup relations among the traditional societies of Remoland.

In the realm of religion, the Remo people, like every other tribe of the Yoruba race, were polytheists. They venerated every object or force of nature that confounded them. Hence, they worshipped such physical phenomena as rivers, earth, sun, moon, mountains etc. Some people believed in and worshipped deified heroes and mythical individuals such as *Ogun*, the god of iron; *Sango*, the god of thunder; *Orunmila*, the deity of wisdom and divination, and *Obatala* or *Orisa Nla*, the creator god. Apart from these deities which were common throughout Yorubaland, some other deities were specifically popular among the traditional communities in Remoland and these included *Obaluwaye*, *Balufon*, *Yemogun*, *Yemoro*, *Obaruwa*, *Oluweri* and *Olipakala* (Ayodele, 2008). These gods, known in local parlance as *Orisa*, were believed to

possess metaphysical powers to intervene and direct the affairs of humans. They were regarded as intermediaries between the people and the supreme and all-powerful Being, *Olodumare* or *Olorun*, who was considered to be somewhat remote and difficult to approach. The worship of these deities was carried out at personal, family and community levels and had fixed annual festivals, while others are propitiated any time during the year. It was on the occasion of these propitiations and festivals that intergroup solidarity and relations among the Remo communities come into focus.

Of all the religious beliefs, traditions and practices of the people of Remoland, the one that had significantly impacted intergroup relations and the forging of unity and solidarity among Remo communities of Yorubaland was the worship of *Ifa*, Yoruba religion and system of divination. The centrality of *Ifa* and its literary corpus to the belief system of the Yoruba race in general and the Remo groups in particular stems from the general notion of its ability to inform mortals of the wishes of *Olodumare*, the sky god of destiny and fate. As a medium of obtaining instruction and discerning future events, the Remo people consulted the *Ifa* priest (*Babalawo*) whenever any important decision or action was to be taken, from choosing the time to go to war, who and when to marry, when a house was to be built or when to go on a journey. This consultation was usually done either at a personal or corporate level. It is on record in the oral traditions of all Remo towns that the migration of all the Remo groups to their present location was coordinated by regularly consulting with the *Ifa* Oracle. Consequently, every Remo town and village has its peculiar *Ifa* code (*Odu Ifa*) for its migration and settlement.

This *Odu Ifa*, which captures the migration and settlement experience of the people of each town, was usually well-known and recited at important events within the town such as coronation anniversaries and the installation of a new king. On the occasion, certain rites and rituals were performed and instructions were sought through divination for the peace and progress of the community. For instance, concerning the founding of Sagamu, *Ifa* had instructed the migrant party to settle at a place where water flows from a well-placed pot. It was at the discovery of this wonderful sight that the people concluded that it was an *Orisa* who had kept the mysterious pot, from which flow some healing water (*Orisa gun amu ewa*) from which Sagamu was derived (Soewu, 1987). *Orisa gun amu ewa* is today an annual celebration in Sagamu. As a common

celebration among the entire Remo people, the celebration of *Ifa (Odun Ifa)*, usually done with pomp and pageantry, helped to forge the idea of sameness and oneness among the different communities in the pre-colonial period.

Festivals were very effective as a socio-cultural facilitator of inter-group relations in the pre-colonial Remo society. Festivals, which were held mainly every year, were meant to venerate and worship gods and goddesses and the practices were almost the same throughout Remoland. Although some festivals were peculiar to certain towns, there were a few, which were celebrated throughout Remoland. Of these community festivals, the most popular were the *Egungun*, *Oro*, *Eluku*, *Agemo* and *Obalufon* (Ayodele, 2008). These festivals were not only meant for excitement and consumption of food and wine, they also had social and cultural significance. For example, the *Oro* and *Eluku* festivals provided ample opportunity for carrying out rituals and sacrifices for the cleansing of the land and the warding off of evil spells and spirits from the community. They were also deployed in the execution of criminals in the traditional societies in Remoland. Women were forbidden from watching, let alone participating in, the activities of *Oro* and *Eluku*. Ayodele (2008) observes every Remo town had its *Oro* grove, *Ugboti* or simply *Uti*, which was usually, situated a reasonable distance from the town. The head of the *Oro* cult and the custodian of its festivals is the *Onimale*.

No less important and glamorous was the *Agemo* festival among the traditional communities of Remoland. The *Agemo* represented the ancestor spirit of the people and community. The head and custodian of the *Agemo* deity in each Remo town was the *Alase*. After the usual propitiation of the deity and other necessary rituals had been observed in the grove, the town's palace or market square became the bee-hive of entertainment and pleasure in the town. In Remo, two types of *Agemo* were on display during the annual *Agemo* festival. The most popular are the ones that used the raffia mats (*Agemo Eleni*) because they danced vigorously and also performed feats and magics. The other type is the *Olire (Agemo Oniko)*, a huge masquerade with a raffia mask (*iko*), which was more accommodating and was not known to perform feats or magics. Supplications and prayers were offered to *Olire* with pledges to be fulfilled if requests were fulfilled by the following year. The *Agemo* festival is a week-long (seven days) programme.

Other important festivals included the *Egungun* (masquerade) festival, which was associated with the veneration of the departed relatives and forebears and is also an important celebration among the Remo people. The masquerades were more associated with families, compounds or lineages although there were community masquerades too. Individuals were completely masked and covered up in a special costume (*eku*) and spoke in a bizarre tone of voice. The male head of the *Egungun* cult is the *Alapeni*, while the female counterpart is *Iya Agan*. There was also the *Balufon* festival, which was believed to be responsible for procreation or childbearing. It was the only festival in which women were given full participation without any restriction. Women were adorned in their best attires, with camwood used to rub their heels as decoration and armed with all kinds of babies' stuff. This way, they converged to seek the blessings of the goddess for the opening of their wombs for childbearing. They danced in circles to the beat of the drum, singing different songs in expectation of the fulfilment of their desires. The custodian of the *Balufon* deity and its annual celebration is the *Losi* of every town.

7. Concluding Remarks

This paper has examined the political, economic and socio-cultural bases for inter-group relations and ethnic solidarity among the Remo communities in the pre-colonial period. From what we know of these groups in the period preceding the establishment of colonial rule in the area, there existed different independent political mini-states each with its traditional characteristics such as boundaries, market(s), *Osugbo* and other insignias of state authority such as beaded crowns. All these reinforced socio-economic distinctiveness and political independence, which was jealously protected among the communities of the traditional Remo society. The differences were further entrenched by the variations in the traditions of origin and migration in the different communities. However, despite these factors that emphasised the individuality of the different groups and communities, there existed bases for communal interactions strengthened by a common language, socio-political organisation, economic orientation and cultural practices in the pre-colonial Remoland. For instance, the traditional festivals provided a veritable platform for bringing together people both within and from surrounding towns and villages thereby forging solidarity and close ties among the people and kingdoms of Remo. More important in forging cooperation, inter-group relations and ethnic solidarity in pre-colonial Remoland were the institutionalised forums and

assemblies of the thirty-three traditional towns (*Remo Metalelogbon*). This arrangement, a form of regional federation, brought together representatives from the traditional towns to a centrally-located town, Idarika near Iperu, to discuss issues of common interest and concerns (Nolte, 2009: 49). In the same manner, members of other civic associations throughout Remoland also held regional assemblies to coordinate and harmonise their activities. For example, the joint-headship of Ode Remo and Makun of the *Pampa*, the trade association is a testimony of the prominence of the northern Remo towns in trade and commerce in the nineteenth century. For the *Lopere*, the warrior or military association, Ofin called the shots as the leading town in Remo (*Ibid.*, 69). Even regional cooperation was brought to bear on professional and trade associations, usually referred to as *Egbe*. Such associations included the guild of general traders (*Egbe Alajapa*), the guild of itinerant traders (*Egbe Alarobo*), the guild of smelters (*Egbe Alagbede*), the guild of carvers (*Egbe Onisona*) and the guild of *Ifa* diviners (*Egbe Babalawo*) to mention few. For example, Ijagba (a town now in Sagamu) was renowned throughout Remo as the headquarters of the guild of *Ifa* diviners.

These and many more represented the groundwork for the solidarity and understanding that came to the fore in the second half of the nineteenth when these towns as a result of the internecine Yoruba wars came together to form stronger political units and consolidate the already existing confederal arrangement. The result of which is the establishment of cosmopolitan towns such as Sagamu, which comprises thirteen of the traditional towns. These thirteen towns are Ofin, Makun, Sonyindo, Epe, Ibido, Igbepa, Ado, Oko, Ipoji, Batoro, Ijoku, Latawa and Ijagba. The same situation can be found in Ikenne, a town that accommodated Idotun, another Remo town. In the same manner, Remo towns of Eposo, Idarika and Idena, which were overrun and destroyed in the 1830s and 1840s by the marauding Egba warriors, resettled as quarters in Ode Remo (Eposo) and Iperu (Idena and Idarika). All these were results of the age-long dynamics of inter-group relations that found clear and unmistakable expression in the nineteenth century.

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