



## The Urhobo-Ndakwa Relations: Analysing the Core Delta Claims in an era of State Creation Agitation

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**Abstract.** The research examines the relationship between the Urhobo and Ndakwa ethnic nationalities in Delta State. Throughout history, the Urhobo have asserted that the Ndakwa ethnic minority is part of what they define as the core Delta. Consequently, they argue that Ndakwa should be incorporated into the authentic Delta State, thereby excluding the other Western Igbo groups (Enuani and Ika) known as Anioma, with whom they share socio-cultural connections. This study seeks to examine the origins of the Ndakwa and Urhobo peoples and their connections that may have led to such assertions. The research relies on a combination of primary and secondary sources to achieve its objectives. The approach utilises a descriptive historical reconstruction methodology for data analysis. The research posits that there is a lack of evidence indicating a connection between the Urhobo and Ndakwa; instead, the association leans towards the Western Igbo groups, all of whom trace their origins to the Igbo east of the Niger, primarily due to linguistic factors and other elements of cultural heritage. The research further reveals that the enduring relationship between the adjacent Urhobo and Ndakwa communities, alongside colonial influences, likely contributed to the emergence of such a claim. Of greater significance, the presence of crude oil deposits in Ndakwa land raises the possibility that, should the core Delta aspiration materialise, the Urhobo would seek to assert control over this wealth, particularly in light of the mono-cultural economic framework currently in operation in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Urhobo, Ndakwa, Origin, Core Delta, State Creation.

### 1. Introduction

The establishment of states has emerged as a significant aspect of Nigeria's political evolution. The inception occurred in 1967 when General Gowon's

military junta instituted a twelve-state framework in Nigeria. Movements advocating the establishment of new states are predicated on the notion that such actions not only resolve issues of minority representation by transforming minorities into majorities but also facilitate a more direct connection between governance and the populace. Consequently, various ethnic nationalities often engage in fervent pursuits aimed at establishing a state, seeking to gain control over finite resources and access to power. Nevertheless, these processes have not consistently unfolded in a tranquil manner within Nigeria, a nation marked by its pluralistic nature. Plural societies demonstrate significant societal fractionalisation, characterised by ethnic and class divisions (Jibo, Simbine and Galadima, 2001, 1). The Ndakwa and Urhobo communities of Nigeria's Delta State exemplify the complexities inherent in this political narrative. The Delta State of Nigeria also exemplifies a pluralistic society, encompassing a significant array of ethnic groups, each with distinct socio-political institutions (Ikime, 2006, 287) within the South-South geopolitical zone of the nation.

In the aftermath of independence, the Delta-Edo communities, guided by the Action Group (AG), sought to establish a distinct region for themselves, driven by concerns of potential marginalisation (Willink's Commission of Enquiry, 2003, 274). Consequently, the Midwestern region came into existence. Nonetheless, the establishment of the area appeared to foster a significant divide between the Edo-speaking populations and the Delta minorities, who had historically gravitated towards one another within the same geographical context and had united in their pursuit of statehood. In 1991, Delta State was created from Bendel State under the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida. The state, in its essence, comprises various groups such as the Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ijo, Isoko, and Igbo (including Ndakwa, Anioma, and Ika), among others (Otite, 2000, 46). Consequently,

individuals developed a heightened awareness of their political surroundings, with each faction striving to optimise the opportunities available within it. It is important to recognise that the State was established to tackle the matter of minority concerns. Nonetheless, the formation ultimately led to the diversification of the state, leading certain groups to perceive themselves as the majority and, consequently, entitled to a privileged position within the political framework, in contrast to others.

To that extent, certain factions, spearheaded by the Urhobo, asserted their identity as the ‘Core’ Deltans, simultaneously designating the Delta Igbo as ‘non’ Deltans. Consequently, they advocated a separation from the latter, who reside in the state’s upland regions. In their fervent discussions, they assert that the Ndokwa, a segment of the Delta Igbo, should be included in what they define as the Core Delta. The assertion is that Delta State should encompass the communities that were part of the former Delta Province, as established by colonial governance, including the Ijo (Ijaw), Itsekiri, Urhobo, Isoko, and Ndokwa groups. As noted by Ikime (2006, 281), there exists a greater sense of familiarity among themselves than with individuals from the former Benin Province; for them, the makeup of Delta State represents a union of disparate elements. The remaining groups indicated that the upland people, or Anioma people, were to be excluded. It is noteworthy that the Urhobo people, as articulated by Ikime (1977, p. 84), contended that the Ukwuani and Aboh groups, historically and collectively identified as the Ndokwa people, ought to be included within the boundaries of Delta State.

Upon the establishment of the state, a multitude of suspicions, assertions, and counter-assertions emerged from various factions regarding the allocation of resources, timing, and locations. The Urhobo group, asserting its position as the majority and leader among the core Deltans, has expressed a desire for Delta State to be governed by the Delta people. This encompasses the various groups that constituted the Delta Province during the colonial period, namely the Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Isoko. Given that the Urhobo and Ndokwa peoples communicate through separate, mutually incomprehensible languages, what rationale underlies the Urhobo group’s assertion that the Ndokwa people should be included in what it designates as the core Delta State? This study embarks on the premise of exploring the potential connection to the Urhobo and critically examining its assertion regarding the Ndokwa land as an integral component of the Urhobo’s envisioned Delta State.

## 2. Research Methodology

The research was grounded in existing secondary sources pertaining to the topic at hand. The collection encompasses published books, scholarly journals, and pertinent reports. To conduct a thorough examination, both descriptive and analytical methods of historical reconstruction are employed. These methodologies are suitable for the investigation, as alterations in oral narrative patterns may have arisen from various influences, including pride, fear of the unknown, and other factors. Oral traditions are highly relevant to this study, as they help bridge critical gaps in the reconstruction of the early history of African peoples, despite their inherent limitations. Their significance increased when addressing the complexities of group origins and migration. The research examines the early history of the Urhobo and Ndokwa communities, focusing on their origins and migratory patterns to assess the nature of their early interactions and to evaluate the validity of the Urhobo assertion that the “Core Delta” encompasses the Ndokwa populace.

## 3. Review of Related Literature

In his 2015 analysis, Egenti articulates the connection between language and ethnic identity, emphasising that linguistic usage reveals and affirms a community’s identity. This is due to its capacity not only to structure thought but also to forge social connections. Furthermore, it functions as a reflection of social identity and affiliations, akin to modes of attire, culinary practices, and other cultural expressions. For her, language is a significant indicator of ethnic identity. This trait is fundamental to the essence of ethnic identity. Individuals belonging to a particular ethnic group regularly use a language that markedly sets them apart from other ethnic groups. Based on the aforementioned, it can be inferred that there exists no connection between the Ukwuani and Urhobo peoples, as the languages spoken by these two groups are mutually unintelligible.

Lenshie and Yenda (2015) argue that a significant challenge that persists in colonised territories, stemming from a notable characteristic of British colonisation, is the question of citizen versus settler identity. This occurs because colonial authorities tend to amalgamate diverse cultures and backgrounds in pursuit of their own economic gains, disregarding the socio-political ramifications of such actions. Consequently, individuals find themselves engulfed in a state of identity perplexity within a specific clan. While the aforementioned is indeed a reality, there was a notable absence of proposals addressing the pressing issue of identity among African individuals, a matter

that has persistently hindered interpersonal relations, specifically in Nigeria, since the departure of colonial powers from the political landscape.

Onu and Oche (2019) assert that in Nigeria, there exists an unresolved dichotomy between indigenes, those who assert their status as native owners of the land, and settlers, individuals perceived as immigrants who have coexisted with the native owners for an extended duration. They pose a question about the rationale for labelling an individual or a collective as a foreigner solely on the basis of relocation from one locale to another, particularly when they establish residence among others who have also migrated from different origins to the same destination, albeit arriving prior to the former group. Nevertheless, the authors neglected to identify the underlying factors contributing to inter-ethnic conflicts and the potential strategies for their management.

Oko and Ogbodo (2022, 20) assert that Africans tend to define their identities through cultural connections rather than geographical boundaries, a phenomenon observable among the communities of European descent in South Africa. In his view, Africa embodies a richly varied tapestry of social values, transmitted across generations and often observed among neighbouring tribes living in close proximity. One of these societal values is the acknowledgement and esteem for individuals as persons, thereby engaging with them as integral members of the community in which they exist. Nevertheless, a period characterised by a propensity for tribalism and a lack of tolerance for differing perspectives will inevitably arise. Although the aforementioned stance is indeed true, it does not adequately examine the underlying factors that may contribute to tribalism and intolerance within communities.

While there is a plethora of research concerning inter-ethnic relations, the studies examined do not provide a comprehensive analysis of Ndokwa-Urhobo relations. This research endeavours to investigate the historical ties between the Ndokwa and Urhobo, with a particular focus on elucidating the reasons behind the Urhobo group's assertion of Ndokwa as an integral part of the core Delta, to the exclusion of other Anioma groups.

### 3.1 The Land and Peoples

The Ndokwa and Urhobo are adjacent ethnic groups in Nigeria's western Niger Delta region. Within the present geopolitical landscape, the Ndokwa and

Urhobo represent the North and Central Senatorial districts of Delta State, respectively. The term 'Ndokwa' refers both to the territory and its inhabitants, originating from the appellations of two colonial district councils within the Aboh Division: The Ndoshumili and Ukwuani District Councils. The term 'Ukwuani' refers to the language used by the community. This occurs despite the fact that one of the contemporary local councils governing the populace is named after the language (Ukwuani), while the inhabitants of this region have gradually distanced themselves from their original designation, Ndokwa, and have instead embraced the term Ukwuani.

Ndokwa is derived from the initial three letters of Ndoshumili combined with the second, third, and fifth letters of Ukwuani. The region is organised into three distinct Local Government Areas: Ndokwa East, Ndokwa West, and Ukwuani, with administrative centres located at Aboh, Utagba-Ogbe (Kwale), and Obiaruku, respectively. The region is situated within the longitudinal coordinates of 60° 60' to 60° 420' East and the latitudinal coordinates of 60° 310' to 50° 250' North, specifically in the Niger Delta (Okolugbo, 1984).

Oluka-Nwaeze (2009) asserts that the pre-colonial Ndokwa land functioned as a dual communal society; whereas Aboh operated as a military and commercial kingdom, the remaining upland communities, with the exception of the Emu clan, were posited to lack centralised political authority. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Ukwuani local council maintain proximity to and engage more frequently with the Urhobo communities of Abraka and Orogun. Consequently, this may lead to a heightened level of attention directed towards them in comparison to the Ndokwa East and Ndokwa West councils. Consequently, Ndokwa and Ukwuani will be utilised interchangeably throughout the study.

The Ijaw people, one of the oldest and largest ethnic groups in the Niger Delta region of southern Nigeria, despite being richly endowed with natural resources—particularly crude oil—the region has faced environmental degradation, socio-economic marginalization, and political unrest. Understanding the Ijaw people requires an exploration of their complex relationship with their environment, their history of resistance and resilience, and their significant role in the broader narrative of Nigeria's oil economy and ethnic politics. This chapter is devoted to geographic milieu and genesis of crude oil exploration and theft in the region.

### 3.2 Geographical Settings and Demographics of the Ijaws in the Niger-Delta

**Figure. 1:** Map of the Western Niger Delta showing Study Area.



Source: Okpevra. ?.

*A Peep into* **Figure 1:** Map of Delta State showing the contiguity of the Ndokwa and the Urhobo people.

Source: Okpevra, U.B. (2022). "A Peep into Isoko Relations with her Neighbours under British Colonial Rule in the Niger Delta of Nigeria". *Abraka Humanities Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1

The Ndokwa represents one of the three subdivisions that constitute the Igbo community west of the River Niger, alongside the Enuani and Ika groups. The three subgroups are now collectively recognised as Anioma (Good Land), situated within Nigeria's Delta State. In the Western Igbo region, the Ukwuani reside in the low-lying, marshy terrain at latitude 50° 50' 70" North and longitude 60° 6' 50" East. The assembly consists of fifteen distinct clans: Abbi, Akoku, Amai, Ebedei, Emu, Eziokpor, Ezionum, Obiaruku, Ogume, Onicha-Ukwuani, Umuebu, Umukwata, Umutu, Utagba-Ogbe, and Utagba-Uno. The term Ukwuani emerges as a conceptual framework rooted in its geographical context. This term refers to inhabitants of low-lying areas, reflecting the Igbo tradition of naming settlements according to their geographical characteristics (Opone, 2017, 133). Ogbogbo (2014, 108) observes that Ukwuani is not merely one of the notable residents of Delta State, but rather a significant entity within the broader South-South region, which is constitutionally encompassed by the states of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers.

The term 'Urhobo' refers both to the community and its indigenous language. The Urhobo community communicates in Urhobo. They represent a unique collective within the diverse array of ethnic communities found in the Niger Delta region. Their primary presence is noted in the Local Government Areas of Ethiope East, Ethiope West, Okpe, Sapele, Udu, Uvwie, Ughelli North, Ughelli South, and Warri South. The Urhobo people are recognised as the largest ethnic group in Delta State and rank among the top ten major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Otiye, 2003,

21). Their location is situated in the western region of the Niger Delta, south of latitude 60 North, encompassing a contiguous territory of approximately 5,000 square kilometres. This area is defined by longitude 50, 400 to 60, 250 East and latitude 50, 150 to 60 North, within the southern portion of the state (Aweto, 2005, p. 684). The northern boundary is defined by the Bini (Benin), while the Ijo (Ijaw) delineate the southern edge. To the west, one finds the Itsekiri and Ijo, with the Isoko positioned to the southeast and the Ukwuani to the northeast (Adjara and Omokri, 1997, 1; Eghagha, 2017). Socio-culturally, the Urhobo is made up of twenty-two (22) clans which include Oghara, Idjerhe, Okere-Urhobo, Ephron (Uvwie), Okpe, Agbon, Avwra (Abraka), Agbara-Ame, Agbarho, Orogun, Udu, Agbarha-Otor, Ughievwen, Ughelli, Ephron-Otor (Effurun-Otor), Ogor, Olomu, Evwreni, Eghwu, Uwheru, Okparabe, and Arhavwarien (Ekeh, 2005. 3).

### 3.3 Origins and Migrations

In a diverse society such as Delta State, characterised by various centrifugal forces and where access to scarce resources, political positions, and job opportunities is predominantly influenced by one's group affiliation, the examination of ancestral traditions has emerged as a persistent topic within the political discourse. This is because it pertains to the fundamental essence of a community's collective identity (Mordi and Opone, 2009, 47). The pursuit of access has engendered instability across nearly all domains of the state (Ifidon, 2012, 334).

Much of what is recorded about the origins and migrations of the Ndokwa people is sometimes believable and, in other cases, speculative. Consistent with many peoples of the region, their traditions of origins and migrations are not written; instead, they rely on information passed down over generations (Ifinedo and Opono, 2024). In an attempt to document their origins, a considerable number of scholars, throughout the years and continuing to the present, have persistently, yet mistakenly, maintained the perspective that the Ukwuani people, or indeed the majority of their communities, trace their origins to the Benin kingdom. Okolugbo (2004) delineated “three waves of migration,” indicating that Benin served as the genesis of the various communities that presently comprise Ukwuani land prior to the British incursion into the region. He asserts that the initial and subsequent waves of the aforementioned migration, which transpired in the 15th and 17th centuries respectively, can be traced back to the Benin Kingdom; whereas the third wave represents a confluence of Benin and Igbo migrants. Ojieh (2003) further supports that assertion, yet approaches the third wave from a distinct perspective, positing that individuals are indigenous to their place of residence. It is likely that they would have overlooked, in their haste, the fundamental truth that every community—be it a family, clan, village, town, or state, regardless of its size—must have originated from a specific point in history. The community may fragment, relocate, and integrate new influences, or be overtaken by external forces and incorporated by incoming populations, thereby resulting in the emergence of a novel tradition of origin for the group (Dike and Ajayi, 1988, 395).

The aforementioned expression assumes that all individuals possess their own unique traditions of origin. In other terms, they neither descended from the heavens nor emerged from the ground. Nevertheless, certain misunderstandings persist regarding the origins of specific groups, influenced by bias and various other factors. In a diverse society such as Nigeria, where limited employment opportunities, political significance, and the overall welfare of the populace are heavily influenced by one's identity and background, inquiries into a person's origins have become increasingly prevalent. Moreover, there is a tendency among “smaller” groups to align with and trace their origins and migrations to groups perceived as more prestigious, in order to maintain their relevance within society. When such occurrences transpire frequently, the indigenous populations tend to become disconnected from their historical narratives, particularly in the absence of contemporary methods for chronicling events in Africa.

An account recorded by Mordi and Opono (2009) details how a group sought refuge from Benin to escape the enslavement imposed by Oba Esigie, who had emerged victorious over them. The Chima group reportedly punished a woman, unaware that she was the Queen Mother, for trespassing and collecting firewood from their land. The Oba, filled with indignation, subsequently mustered an army that vanquished the group, compelling them to seek refuge beyond Esigie's borders. In the midst of their exodus, they established settlements. In addition to the settlements located in the Enuani region, it is reported that the group in flight established Onitsha, situated on the eastern bank of the Niger, along with Obetim (Afor), Ossissa, Ashaka, and Aboh within Ndokwaland. Nonetheless, Nwadiolor (2012, 90) notes that these names carry Igbo connotations and suggests that if they are indeed of Igbo origin, it would be reasonable to infer that within the Ndoshumili (Ndokwa) community, there existed a blend of individuals from both Igbo and Benin backgrounds, and in this scenario, the Benin linguistic influences did not prevail. Consequently, it seems that the Benin migrants encountered other communities that had established themselves in the region prior to their arrival. Consequently, one can assert that the Ndoshumili people likely possess a greater historical depth than the Benin migrants in the region. Isichei (1976) posits that the ancient origins of their settlement along the Niger are encapsulated in the designation assigned to them by other Igbo groups, ‘Ndoshumili,’ which translates to ‘people of the Niger.’

Furthermore, Opono (2017, 144) has questioned Ukwuani's claim of origin from Benin and argued that such a claim does not reflect historical reality. He interrogates the oral traditions of the various communities that make up Ukwuani and observes that: The dominant narrative that the Ukwuani people are Benin immigrants is not supported by evidence. The people speak Igbo language (the most eloquent cultural badge), bear Igbo names and share similar religio-cultural traits with the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria, which are obvious indications that they are Igbo settlers. However, claims of origin from Benin by some Ukwuani communities may not be unconnected with their early contact with the Benin kingdom. The Igbo migrants appeared to have gone deep into Benin territory earlier to a place called Ado na Idu. Such movements might have continued for some time before being forced to recoil by Esigie's hostilities in the 16th century. On their way they founded many settlements in the Western Igbo area including the Ukwuani land.

It is thus clear that the Ukwuani people do not share a connection with the Urhobo. This is particularly noteworthy given that the languages of both groups, which serve as essential socio-cultural elements for their people, bear no relation to Urhobo. Atanda (1980, 2) emphasises this point, asserting that language is a fundamental factor in defining an ethnic group's identity. It functions as the primary means of communication, and in its absence, the collective existence and distinct identity of that ethnic group become unattainable. Despite the debates regarding the origins of the Ukwuani people, forensic research has established that they are indeed part of the Igbo ethnic group (Izuegbu, 2003, 14). This conclusion is further supported by linguistic evidence demonstrating their ties to the Igbo communities east of the Niger River (Afigbo, 1980, 75).

Throughout the years, various narratives regarding the origins of the Urhobo people have been proposed. Nevertheless, they are accompanied by a range of controversies. This is especially true given the scarcity of documentary evidence and the absence of archaeological and palynological data, which have compelled scholars to turn to oral traditions that may be shaped by various influences (Otite, 1971). Nonetheless, the majority of interpretations adopted by scholars, such as Ekeh (2005, p. 10), Otite (2003, pp. 26-27), and Ikime (1969, pp. 6-7), appear to trace the origins of numerous Urhobo clans back to Benin. This belief may be related to the linguistic classification of the Urhobo language within the Edo-Igbo language group (Ekeh, 2005a, 9; Thomas, 2010), as well as to parallels in political and socio-cultural practices, including the monarchical kingship system.

Conversely, some assert that the inhabitants are indigenous to their respective locales. For example, Ometan (2002) and Idjakpo (2010) argue that the Urhobo people did not migrate from elsewhere, but are native to their land and have resided there since ancient times. There is a belief that humanity either descended from the heavens or emerged from the soil, akin to the mythological narratives concerning the Yoruba genesis at Ile-Ife, regarded as the epicentre of dispersion to various locales (Ogeroju, 2021, 195-196). Though these assertions have been thoroughly discredited by historians over an extended period. Irrespective of prevailing beliefs, it is evident that the Urhobo and Ndokwa communities lack any intrinsic connection regarding their origins and migratory patterns.

### 3.4 The Contention

The inquiry that persists in stimulating contemplation is: why does the Urhobo, asserting its status as the

majority in Delta State, argue that the Ukwuani constitutes a segment of what it designates as the Core or authentic Delta State? Initially, one might consider the geographical positioning of the two groups prior to the arrival of Europeans and the subsequent blending of populations. The Urhobo territory is delineated to the north by Benin, to the south by the Ijo, to the west by the Itsekiri, to the south-east by Isoko, and to the north-east by the Ndokwa people, specifically situated between the Abraka and Aragba-Orogun as well as the Obiaruku and Abbi clans respectively. The closeness inherently establishes both groups as neighbours. Otite (2003, 21) notes that both groups possess similar geographical characteristics and natural resources, particularly the Ndokwa people in the present-day Ukwuani Local Government Area of the State. The primary characteristic that sets apart the two regions is the tropical rainforest belt, marked by a rich tapestry of dense vegetation. This includes an evergreen forest composed of towering trees, with a thick undergrowth of climbing plants that intertwine closely along streams and creek channels (Ojeh and Ojoh, 2012, 313). This forest belt, however, is characterised by the predominance of the oil palm tree within its natural vegetation. This emerged as a significant factor in shaping relationships among individuals as they participated in a shared endeavour of palm oil production (Ikime, 2004, 89).

Moreover, within the regulated trade in palm oil, the Itsekiri, who interacted directly with European traders along the coast, depended heavily on the Urhobo community for acquiring oil palm. The explanation for this phenomenon lies in the geographical separation between the Utagba-Ogbe (Kwale) and Aboh communities, both of which engaged in oil palm cultivation, and the Itsekiri (Ikime, 1969, 66). The Urhobo relied on the adjacent Ukwuani communities, which possess comparable natural vegetation, to provide supplementary palm oil and kernels to the Itsekiri. As a result, this interaction may have deepened the association between the two groups.

Moreover, in 1960, Abraka, an Urhobo community, and Obiaruku, a Ukwuani community, which are in close proximity to each other, were of significant importance to the British authorities during the colonial administration, to such an extent that they were perceived as a unified entity owing to their intertwined cultural interactions. As a result, this closeness has cultivated a strong bond between the two adjacent communities from multiple perspectives to the present time (Okolugbo, 2004, 2).

In the third instance, during the colonial era, when individuals in authority were partitioning Nigerian

territories in the 1930s, the Jekri-Sobo Province was established, with its administrative centre in Warri. The province comprised the Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ukwuani, Isoko, Ijo, and Aboh (Ikime, 1977, p. 84). The consequence of such a confederation would have been that the constituent groups of the province engaged with one another, either through a shared comprehension or under compulsion to unite in their opposition to the British authorities. It can be argued that this phenomenon represents a colonial remnant, in which disparate groups were indiscriminately combined, leading to a protracted engagement that has shaped the Urhobo group's perception of the Ukwuani people as potential constituents of what they define as the authentic Deltas.

Ultimately, and of paramount significance, is what may be referred to as the politics of oil. This appears to be the most likely interpretation of the argument, with the ongoing debate centring on who holds authority over various matters. From the inception of the state, Ikime (2006, p. 281) articulates that the factions within the colonial Delta Province, which the Urhobo assert to be the predominant group, exhibit a greater affinity towards the entities in the federation compared to those associated with the Benin Province, encompassing the Ika and Aniocha/Oshimili (Asaba) Peoples. Nevertheless, an examination beyond the fig reveals that this sense of comfort is likely contingent on the potential benefits of including Ukwuani land within the proposed federation.

Among the Igbo-speaking Deltans, the Ukwuani community, which encompasses the three Local Government Areas of Ndokwa East, Ndokwa West, and Ukwuani, is notably rich in the valuable resource known as black gold. It is evident that the discovery of significant oil reserves in 1958 marked a pivotal transition in the economy of Nigeria, particularly in Delta State, from agriculture and traditional vocations to a focus on crude oil. This occurs notwithstanding the significant contributions of palm oil to Nigeria's economy prior to this revelation (Aboyeji, 2021, 25). At present, the Ukwuani Local Government Area ranks as the fourth-largest oil-producing region in Delta State, following Itsekiri, Ijo, and Isoko. It is noteworthy for having the largest gas deposit in Africa, surpassed only by Russia's. The possession of these resources within a state will ensure a consistent flow of revenue, thereby fostering economic development. It is undeniable that the Urhobo group seeks to deny the Anioma people access to this natural wealth, thereby positioning themselves to dominate the resources as the purported majority through the anticipated establishment of the core Delta State. This observation stems from historical analysis, indicating

that the two groups are more interconnected through economic factors than through other considerations.

#### 4. Conclusion

The research has critically examined the enduring debate and advocacy of the Urhobo regarding the inclusion of the Ukwuani in a coalition, to the degree that it (Ukwuani) ought to be recognised as a component of what the Urhobo refer to as the Core Delta. Evidence clearly demonstrates that the Ukwuani people are of Igbo origin and thus lack significant socio-cultural connection to the Urhobo. It was revealed that, despite interactions occurring between the two groups before the colonial era due to geographical necessities and inherent characteristics, they remain politically and socio-culturally distinct. The Urhobo community operates under a centralised political structure known as Ovie-ship, which provided a stable foundation for British authorities to exert effective control over the region. Conversely, the Ukwuani community operates under a decentralised political framework characterised by a gerontocratic structure known as the Okpala-Uku system, wherein the eldest male of each clan assumes oversight functions alongside various age-grade groups. Moreover, the two groups communicate in mutually unintelligible languages, serving as a fundamental indicator of their cultural divergence; their lifestyles are significantly distinct from one another.

The study revealed that the fragmentation of the region by colonial authorities compelled the two groups, among others, to operate under a unified political framework. It has also been revealed that both groups, among others, possess natural resources—specifically crude oil—which the Urhobo, as the recognised majority in the state, may seek to dominate. One must consider that, should the Urhobo people pursue this self-serving endeavour, the issue of pluralism, which the creation of states was intended to address, would only intensify. The artificial political constructs established by colonial authorities were fundamentally designed for the exploitation of African populations. Nostalgic and irredentist tendencies often manifest when groups in question lack cultural compatibility, particularly when they are denied the socio-political benefits afforded by their society.

It is important to acknowledge that should the agitation materialise, the issue of pluralism, along with the accompanying fears of minority groups that have troubled the state, will persist. This is evident, as noted, in the lack of any affinity between the two groups. Nevertheless, the essence of this matter concerning disunity may not lie solely between core

and non-core Deltans; rather, the contention revolves around self-serving politicians who exploit the populace's lack of awareness and education, inciting discord among them to further their own agendas and secure electoral support. It is of paramount importance that successive governments, particularly at the state level, fulfil their responsibilities to initiate and ensure equitable developmental progress across the various groups within the state. Ultimately, there is a pressing need for fairness, equity, and justice among the state's populace. The perpetual evolution of history has facilitated the convergence of diverse groups, regardless of any inherent comparative advantages. One must consider that what appears to be an advantage may not endure indefinitely, while what seems to be a disadvantage could potentially be transformed into an advantage, as exemplified by the situation in Great Britain. Yesterday, the focus was on agriculture, specifically palm oil; today, it shifts to oil; and tomorrow, it could very well be an entirely different matter beyond those that claim majority's grasp. Thus, all ethnic nationalities of Delta State should promote unity in diversity to provide an enabling environment for the State's development based on equity, fairness, and justice.

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