

EBEKWARRA YE K'IRINIRINE (Bekwarra from the Beginning)

REV. JOSEPH OKUTA AJOR (PhD)

Department of History and Intentional Studies,
University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria
1980okuta@gmail.com/okuta@unical.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper mirrors the past of the Bekwarra people of the Upper Cross River State of Nigeria and correlates its values in the past as a bridge to link with the contemporary world. Using the human progress theory, the paper examines the steps and slips among the Bekwarra people from the dawn of colonialism to the contemporary period and challenges her people to uphold the values of industry and honesty which was the culture of their forebears. It points out some areas of progress to be explored by her teeming population in the 21st century. The paper emphasizes that progress in any society, organization and or in individuals, must follow a process otherwise whatever the outcome would be abortion.

Keywords: *Bekwarra, Society, History, Economic Activities, Culture, Leadership, Education*

DOI: [URL:https://doi.org/10.36758/ijpamr/v6n6.2021/06](https://doi.org/10.36758/ijpamr/v6n6.2021/06)

OUR YESTERDAY, OUR PAST

All of us belong to the present and not the past. But why are we interested in the past? We are interested in our past because, like the mirror, its reflection shows us our steps and slips. It is wise for every society or individual to love the past. Yesterday and today are closely related and interdependent, because there would be no today without yesterday. This reasoning implied George Santayana's dictum that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Life of Reason 1905). Edmund Burke, a renowned British historian of the 18th century, eloquently reminds us that, "People will not look forward to posterity, who never look back to ancestors". Taking us further in this trend of thought, E. H. Carr posited that:

"The belief that we have come from somewhere is closely linked with the belief that we are going somewhere. A society which has lost belief in its capacity to progress in the future will quickly cease to concern itself with its progress in the past" (132).

In other words, to have a clear view of the future, a backward view is necessary. A backward view Carr warns, is not just to romanticise with the past "of old men and old societies, a symbol of loss of faith and interest in the present and future" (Carr 25). To maintain a balance, we should not love the past and forget our present, or even attempt to free ourselves from the past completely.

All societies of the world trace their origin to somewhere. Similarly, Bekwarra people believe that they are descendants of Agba, that Bette-Bendi and Igede are their brothers and that they have lived in their present abode for several millennia. We would not need to romanticise with our traditions of origins, migrations and settlement. These are things we already know. Rather, we are looking at the past as documented for us by anthropologists and historians both written and oral, especially from the colonial era, interpolating our present, as we chart the course for our progressive future.

We acknowledge the efforts of Bekwarra early chroniclers who documented aspects of Bekwarra history. Foremost in this direction is Chief Edward Odey Abua and Chief James Ashu, indigenous pioneer writers on Bekwarra documented history which were mostly unpublished. Donald Omagu followed suit with his twin works, *A History of Bekwarra People of the Upper Cross River Region of Nigeria*, and *Wind of Change: Bekwarra in the Age of Globalization*. Ogbanuko Agabi's work, "Evolution of Bekwarra as a Nation, CIRCA 1600-1960" is also acknowledged together with many other efforts on Bekwarra's past which give some insight into

some aspects of Bekwarra history. There are several research efforts of scholars in various research institutions on Bekwarra, many of which are unpublished. May this attempt encourage them to bring their works to the public domain for the benefit of posterity.

Our consideration and time of enquiry in this discourse is the period of the settlement of Bekwarra as a people and as a nation, within the parameters of customary administration of social cooperation, the intrusion of colonialism, the resultant social changes that followed and the survival strategies adopted by our forebears to cope with the strains. This will give an insight into the past as a basis of our understanding of today in preparation for tomorrow.

A Peep into the Pre-Colonial Bekwarra Society (Bekwarra Yesterday).

Bekwarra, like her neighbours, is a non-centralised polity, the family being the basic unit. Being basically polygamous, a family is composed of a man, his wives and children, as well as brothers, collectively known as *irifen* in Bekwarra and *umunna* among the Igbo. Several families together become *ikwu irifen*. A combination of two or more *irifen* evolve to *Ityang*. "Several *Ityang* merged to form the numerous village groups, *Udyara* which today answer different designations" (Omagu 24). All the arrangements were borne out of the notion of common descent from putative parents. Kinship relationship is an essential mechanism or binding force. The eldest man in a family naturally emerged as its leader and represented her at the gathering of *irifen*; the oldest man in *irifen* represented that *Ityang* at the village level. Each *Ityang* produced one elder at the meeting of *Udyara*. All these constituted the Council of Elders (*ikum udyara*). Each of these persons were answerable for the actions of members of their various levels of control. Being an egalitarian society, as Cann (18) aptly observed, "any form of autocratic administration was unnatural" among Bekwarra. In a matter of serious concern to the entire people, a general meeting of the entire community involving all categories of people, elders, women, age grades and even children would gather at the playground, *udyara*, equivalent of town hall or stadium. In other words, from the various levels of control, rules, norms, values and laws were embedded in the minds of the people through usage and application.

There were normative rules which the society obeyed. It is customary that when human beings congregate, there is the likelihood for infractions among them. There were however, infractions among the people, giving rise to rules of behaviour, for orderliness and to ensure mutual co-existence. *Udyara*, as used here, has three connotations. It could be used to represent either a meeting place, a playground and or the gathering of a community.

Pre-colonial Bekwarra society, like most societies of Africa, was a non-literate one; at least in terms of the knowledge and possession of the technique of reading and writing in the western sense. How-be-it, traditional institutions have been preserved and transmitted from generation to generation through oral testimonies. Being a gerontocracy, elders served as the linchpin, regarded as representatives of the ancestors and were therefore respected as repository of knowledge, defenders of, and transmitters of cultural norms and values to succeeding generations (Ayor 18).

Chiefs and their Council of Elders organised social stability through the application of laws, the essential mechanism of social order (Green 78). Since laws were unwritten, they derived their validity from custom and tradition. Through usage, certain customs gradually evolved into what might be regarded as customary laws, recognised by society and were used for ruling (Assimeng 143). There was a distinction between law and custom. Custom could become law. For instance, custom required that people who helped their neighbour either on their farm work, building houses or the like, shared in the proceeds of the farm, or were fed with food while on the work. It was not law. If the beneficiary of their goodwill refused to appreciate according to custom, his benefactors could only employ the weapon of public opinion against the person. However, where there was a repeated and pervasive disregard for custom, then the society could impose normative rules, in which case, what was hitherto custom, became law.

Laws emerged within the Bekwarra cosmology with their economic, social and environmental exigencies playing influential roles. Thus, incidents like kingship, kinship,

marriages, land tenure, inheritance, murder, theft, adultery, witchcraft, manslaughter, among others, were taken care of by such rules. Generally, customary laws were made to correct wrongs and adjust claims to ensure peaceful society. They were not static but dynamic, adjusting to changing times and environments.

Laws were made to ensure orderliness and happiness in society. Laws were made to defend norms and prevent them from being broken. According to Ikenna Nzimiro's reflection on Igbo society, a departure from custom was believed could incur the displeasure and vengeance of ancestors, a situation in which it was the duty of elders to prevent (130). Thus, the chief and his Council of Elders occupied a sacred place in society, because they derived their authority from the deities.

The Bekwarra society of yore believed in the existence of transcendental forces of good and evil. *Atabuchi* (God) is the Supreme Being who created all things including man. Certain actions like murder, theft, witchcraft, among others, were regarded as offences against *Atabuchi*, and by extension, man or society. Conversely, there was also the belief in the existence of *Ebefutang* (Devil), regarded as originator of evil spirits and the purveyor of all misfortunes. Nothing happened in Bekwarra society without the influence of these two forces. In recognition of the supremacy God, it was the duty of society to please *Atabuchi* and punish offences against Him. This partly accounted for the general reliance on the supernatural, by means of the ordeal, to reveal offences in which the offender was unknown; something akin to the Urim and the Thummim among the Jews.

Bekwarra society also share with humanity strong belief that the position of man in nature is that of subordination and accountability to the spirit world, of *Atabuchi* (God) or the evil spirit (*ebefutang*). Spirit beings, especially evil spirits, it was believed, are agents who caused sickness, death, aided or hindered human plans of progress. Sometimes, objects like fresh palm leaves, carved wood, or the like, put in farms, compounds or any place of importance, according to the belief, were meant to serve as guards. Thus, transcendental forces, represented by objects, served as the police force which could arrest a suspect by way of affliction with disease. Thus, when there were certain diseases, or strange happenings in society or in an individual's life, the ordeal was consulted. By swearing before an ordeal court, the suspect could either be convicted or acquitted. This sense of accountability of every person before the spirits, engendered responsible and harmonious living. Thus, the chief and elders who guided society were conscious of their position as delegated authority and are answerable for their actions. The witch doctor, in administering the ordeal, was conscious that his power was under divine watch. The same belief permeated the entire society which was why they submitted to the spirits through the ordeals. All rules were meant to give opportunities for equal participation, in agriculture, trade, game and all facets of life. This is the background of Bekwarra society on the eve of her contact with the British colonisers.

Economic Activities

As it is common with rural people, agriculture is the main stay of the people's economic life. Every member of society, including children and women were engaged in it. Nobody wanted to be associated with laziness because "the indolent person was the subject of sarcasm, social ridicule and unending ribald songs" (Njoku 10). Thus, in the traditional Bekwarra society, begging was uncommon. Farming was the major occupation. Farming, as an economic activity is one of the oldest professions among the Bekwarra people. Chief among these crops are yams, cassava and groundnuts. According to Cann, (1937) with an estimated land area of 110 square miles and a population of 16, 420 for farming and commercial activities, "There is no shortage of land". There were men who became famous from farming and traded their surplus to the emergent market as far as Bansara (*Obasara*).

Besides yam production, "the people were quick to appreciate the value of beniseed which they saw en route from Obudu and Tivland to Bansara and have adopted it as export crop" (Cann11). Groundnut production was prominent with new and improved species known as

Jawende, perhaps a corruption of Yaounde because it was introduced from Cameroun by Bekwarra traders (Omagu 107).

The spirit of individualism and a sense of shame encouraged hard work and adventure which took some of their number to places outside Bekwarra. The tendency of man generally is to move from an area where life appears difficult to that in which he believes it to be better. Because of much pressure on land resulting from overpopulation, and the quest for money to pay taxes to the colonial masters, Cann's "abundant land" could no longer sustain the growing population, land hunger set in, resulting to labour migration to areas with surplus land. The spate of labour migration among Bekwarra people began in the colonial period. It is not surprising that Bekwarra people, young and old, are all over Nigeria in various professions and vocations, some of who are migrant farmers. Indeed, it is believed that there are more Bekwarra people outside Bekwarra than those living within.

A Clash of Two Cultures

From the early 20th century, the presence of British colonial agents became entrenched in much of Ogoja are. Armed by the notion of superior culture which beclouded their perceptions of the socio-political systems they came in contact with, British colonial agents disdained African societies and their practices. We had stated earlier that laws were essential elements for maintaining social order, encapsulated in the traditional justice system. There were several judicial systems among Africans. The maintenance of social order, encapsulated in the traditional justice system which sustained and maintained social cohesion before the arrival of colonialism were regarded as "primarily designed to maintain social equilibrium..." According to Glukeman, "Equilibrium is the tendency of a system to return after disturbance to its previous state" (279). His conclusion ignored the unwritten law of human nature, namely, that human beings and all societies are perpetually in flux. All things, including man, are always on the move. Carr succinctly put that "...the philosopher is right in telling us that we cannot step into the same river twice..." (Carr 42). It a stereotyped fallacy that African societies are incapable of recognising and responding to changes.

Oral sources have indicated that some Bekwarra intermediaries participated in the human trade and human cargos from Bekwarra were part of the trade. After the slave trade, there followed a time of trade in tropical produce, cocoa, groundnuts, benni-seed, palm produce, among others. Now, the tale about white skinned people became a reality with the arrival of British colonial agents and their cultural baggage. As it was the case in other areas of the region, most people saw the white people for the first time, this time, both to trade and settle among the people. This period then began the process of cultural diffusion and/or conflict; the invading culture with an air of superiority on the one hand, and the traditional culture on the other, saddled with the burden of ensuring that the tenets, norms and traditional values of Bekwarra survived under the new cultural hurricane. As it should be expected, the serene Bekwarra society was jolted by the sudden British presence. How was the contact, what were the challenges, how did the forebears cope with this strain consequent upon the contact?

While British colonial presence was heavy in several parts, especially on the littorals of Nigeria for centuries, the people of Bekwarra and Obudu, and indeed the whole of the Ogoja region witnessed the first effective presence of British administrators in 1908. In addition to several approaches, British administrators began to keep records of the various peoples of their contact. They had many things to say about Bekwarra. Comparing Bekwarra with her immediate neighbour to the south, Cann, wrote, "...they are not as hard and strong like the Bekwarra and Yala peoples". Writing further on Bekwarra he noted, "Individually, the people are simple and friendly. Collectively they show a good clan spirit against outsiders, but amongst themselves cannot overcome a strong individualistic outlook" (9).

We can summarise Cann's statement that the people are self-assertive, come together against a common enemy in times of danger, defended the rights of the individual, and committed to rules of common existence. These are things recognised as inalienable among any free people all over

the globe. It is interesting that long before this contact, there have been declarations of the Rights of Man in the West. Unfortunately, colonial operatives, everywhere, failed to acknowledge self-expression among egalitarian societies as was found among most societies of the Eastern part of Nigeria. His later expressions belie his statement above as we shall see.

From all the gamut of evidences, both oral and written, we deduce the following as the expression of the typical Bekwarra people, they are a determined people, strong, versatile, progressive, taking risks, adventurous and lover of freedom, captured by Cann as 'individualistic'.

Politically, Bekwarra was an acephalous society (segmentary society) where everybody was somebody, a system mystifying to the self-acclaimed British civilizers. Acephalous societies are those without a distinct head like the centralised system of administrations of the Benin kingdom, Oyo Empire, Hausa Kingdom etc. Being ignorant of the modus operandi of societies without centralized political framework, the British colonial administration imposed warrant chiefs and a court system with court messengers. This bred mistrust and discontent among the people because court messengers assumed dictatorial dispositions, which Cann correctly reported that "any autocratic administration among Bekwarra people was unnatural to them" (19). Like elsewhere in Eastern Nigeria, especially among the Igbo, the excesses of court messengers and warrant chiefs were either openly or tacitly resisted by Bekwarra people, becoming of a people who love freedom, self-expression, self-actualization and freedom of association.

Socially, they are friendly (quoted by Cann, above). Bekwarra people were open and receptive of positive changes. According to Cann, "... They show more sign of profiting from European trade and outside influences than their more primitive neighbours in Ogoja Division" (11). With head portage, traders carried goods, benniseed, groundnuts, palm kernel and its oil to Bansara and other places, showing their industry. From the colonial records, Bekwarra which was adjudged to be ahead of the other groups in Ogoja, were not favoured in the provision of social amenities.

A policy trademark of British colonization was the creation of want and competition among the colonised. Allan Macphee admitted that the British created "wants among her 'natives' which will stir them to increased activity to produce increasing quantity for European market" (9). The British encouraged the production of benniseed but saw no need for social amenities for Bekwarra, rather introduced competition for the production of crops for the industries in Britain.

One major social facility of the colonial era was school. By the 1920s when most societies of Ogoja had schools, there was none in Bekwarra, which was the subject of discussion by the elders and chiefs of Bekwarra during the visit of G. G. Shute, Chief Commissioner for Eastern Province to Bekwarra, April 4-19, 1940. At that meeting were twenty-one chiefs, (21) and thirty-one representatives from all the villages. The chiefs sat in the front row flanked by their elders. Such was the dignified arrangement and comportment that Shute wrote, the chiefs "were seated in front, as befitting their position, and very dignified lot they were, with their red caps, blue robes and alligator 'collars', the badge of their authority" (48).

Also at that meeting, the chiefs and elders articulated their views pointedly; better road network, regular visit of medical personnel at the dispensary and, above all, school for their children's education. How the chiefs were quick to realise that education is a catalyst for change, social mobility and preparation for participation in the new and emerging world order is commendable. In other words, they were preparing for the future, the tomorrow of their children, which is our today. One may ask how prepared is this generation for tomorrow? Will there be Ebekwarra culture tomorrow? Are the values being preserved? Such was their augmenting presentation of Bekwarra elders at their meeting which compelled Mr G. G. Shute to write:

In conclusion, I promised to approach the Roman Catholic Mission as regards the institution of a school, which the clan sorely needs but cannot afford. They could, however, contribute towards the cost of a Missions school, and should be permitted to do so if the Mission can manage it (2).

In respect of medical services, he also remarked:

The council also asked that the Medical Officer might pay regular visits to their Clan Dispensary. I went to inspect it and found that no Medical Officer had visited for two years. I refrain, with difficulty, from comment here, but I shall pursue the matter, and so I told the council (1).

Summarising the meeting with the people, he had this to say:

A very pleasant and well-conducted council. The urge for progress is there but we can't do very much for the Bekworras so long as the tax rate remains at 4/- per adult male. We must improve their communications, encourage the production of benniseed (which at f5.14/- a tone offers the producer good return), and relieve them of the cost of maintaining their section of the Ogoja-Makurdi Road (classified as a Trunk Road B). Progress in the fields of education and Health will follow (2).

It took two years after this meeting for the first missionary school to be established in Ukpah in 1942. The provision of medical services remained a farce till today.

The desire to have schools for their children like their neighbours in Obudu and Ogoja, informed the generous and free donation of land for the establishment of schools in every community all over Bekwarra. It became the norm (unwritten law) in Bekwarra that schools, especially Mission schools and churches, during the colonial period and long after, were given land gratis, this was in addition to supporting with materials and labour, without encumbrances. The result was the opening of the first mission schools in Bekwarra in the 1940s. From the records of educational institutions in Ogoja division, Bekwarra did not benefit in the area of the establishment of centres of learning. However, the collection of taxes and conscription of forced labour for road construction without pay was well reported. The tables below illustrate this. Tables showing Names of selected Schools and Medical Centers in Ogoja and Obudu Divisions during the Colonial Era.

TABLE 1. OBUDU: SCHOOLS/ HOSPITAL

School	Location	Year of Establishment
St. Charles' Primary School	Obudu	January 29, 1922
Dispensary	Obudu	August 19, 1920
Sacred Heart Hospital	Obudu	October 27, 1924
Central Primary School	Ohong	February 24, 1935
Government Secondary School	Obudu	February 28, 1961

Source: E.J Alagoa, National Population Commission, Abuja

TABLE 2. OGOJA: PRIMARY SCHOOLS/COLLEGE

School	Location	Year of Establishment
St. Joseph's Primary School	Bansara	December 23, 1920
St. Ben's Demonstration School	Igoli	January 28, 1921
St. Theresa's Primary School	Ogoja	March 21, 1929
St. Columbus' Primary School	Idum Mbube	January 19, 1928
St. Thomas' Teachers Training College TTC	Ogoja	April 15, 1937
St. Ben's II Primary School	Igoli	September 15, 1938
St. Phillip's Primary school	Mfon I	September 30, 1938
St. Michael's Primary School	Ibil	January 19, 1939
Holy Child Convent School	Igoli	September 17, 1939
Lutheran Church Primary Sch.	Ekumtak	September 26, 1939
St. Joseph's Primary School	Mfon II	September 26, 1939

Source: E.J Alagoa, National Population Commission, Abuja

TABLE 3. YALA: PRIMARY SCHOOLS/ COLLEGE

School	Year of Establishment	Location
St. Phelin's Primary School	January 29, 1929	Alebo
St. Patrick's Missionary School of Ireland	June 19, 1932	Yala
Community Primary School	February 28, 1936	Ijibole
St. John's Primary School	January 23, 1937	Yahe
St. Anne's Primary School	January 8, 1937	Adum-Ntrigom
St. Peter's Primary School	March 27, 1938	Ugaga
Christ The King Primary School	February 14, 1940	Okpoma
Mary Knoll College	January 13, 1953	Okuku

Source: E.J Alagoa, National Population Commission, Abuja

TABLE 4. BEKWARRA PRIMARY SCHOOLS/ DISPENSARY

Schools	Location	Years of Establishment
Dispensary	March 17, 1939	Abuochiche
*St. Augustine's Primary School	January 16, 1942	Ukpah
Holy Child Convent School	January 28, 1942	Ukpah
*St. Christopher's Primary School	April 11, 1943	Abuochiche
St. Mark's Primary School	January 7, 1945	Gakem
St. Sylvester's Primary School	August 21, 1951	Ububa-Iye
Holy Child Convent School. Rev. Mary Hurbert as first Headmistress.	January 3, 1952	Abuochiche
St. Gregory's Primary School	January 15, 1952	Abuagbor-Ukum
St. Mathias' Primary School	January 27, 1952	Ijibor
St. Justine's Primary School	September 24, 1952	Ebeten
St. Celestine's Primary School	January 19, 1953	Anyikang
St. Edward's Primary School	January 19, 1953	Inyanya-Ulim
St. Paul's Primary School	January 19, 1952	Utukwe
St. Finber's Primary School	January 19, 1953	Ukparibu
St. Joseph's Primary School	September 28, 1953	Akpakpa
St. Peter's Primary School	September 14, 1954	Ebegang
Sacred Heart Primary School	January 17, 1955	Inyanya-Idigwe
St. Peter's Primary School	July 18, 1956	Akurinyi
St. Clement's Primary School	January 18, 1969	Ugboro

Source: E.J Alagoa, National Population Commission, Abuja

- Some explanations are necessary to make regarding the first primary school to be established in Bekwarra.
 1. The Roman Catholic Missionary activity in Bekwarra began first in Ukpah in 1938 through Rev. Father Douvry. From his base in Ukpah, and by 1940, he created three new stations at Afrike, Abuochiche and Gakem (Omagu 139).
 2. By 1940, no primary school had been established in Bekwarra, according to the colonial records cited earlier in this paper.
 3. In 1942, two primary schools were established in Ukpah, St. Augustine (January 16, 1942) and Holy Child Convent School (January 28, 1942), respectively.
 4. St Christopher's Primary School was established on April 11, 1943 as the third in Bekwarra.
 5. While Ukpah was the nursery of the Roman Catholic Missionary work in Bekwarra, Abouchiche was the political seat and headquarters of Bekwarra before, during, and after the colonial period. It was central, receiving colonial officials as well as an entrepot connecting Obudu to the east, Makurdi to the north, Ogoja and Bansara to the south.
 6. With these advantages, St Christopher's Primary School, Abuochiche, received more attention and attained the status of graduating pupils with Standard Six Certificate ahead of St. Augustine's Primary School, although being the first to be established.

- During those formative years, it was only St. Christopher's Primary School that prepared pupils for the Standard Six Certificate Examination. Others attained that status later, but before then, they prepared pupils who completed their primary education in St. Christopher's Primary School, Abuochiche. For example, Late Honorable Timothy Ogbang Omang, "started primary education in St. Augustine's Primary School, Ukpah, finishing at that stage of his education at St. Christopher's, Abuochiche." (Hon. Timothy Ogbang Omang KSM 1939-2013, burial programme).
7. Church missionaries and colonial agents worked in collaboration with each other, providing information and protection as partners, reflected in the promise of the Commissioner's response to the Council of Chiefs referred to earlier. This too added to St. Christopher's advantage, being the center of colonial administration
 8. The influence of Rev. Father Barn was another factor for the prominence of St. Christopher. He was a stout, audacious and radical Roman Catholic missionary who believed in using force to drive home his message; the type of Rev. James Smith in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (147). It was said that Father Barn went from house to house and forced children to attend school, threatened to set ablaze houses of parents who were unwilling to pay their children's school fee and even physically challenge people to a duel. One of the first converts of the Roman Catholic mission was Ferdinand Ogbeche Ushie. He became one of the first indigenous catechists, and the first interpreter to both the missionaries and the British agents, a loquacious interpreter from Ubepa, a community contiguous to Abuochiche.
 9. It should also be noted that most of the primary schools were built by community efforts in collaboration with the Roman Catholic Churches in their villages. Not all of them were built by the church.

TABLE 5. BEKWARR: POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

School	Location	Years
Eastern Bible College, Assemblies of God, Anyikang	Anyikang	April 19, 1957
Bekwarra Secondary School	Abuochiche	September 15, 1975
Ugboro Community Secondary School	Ugboro	September 7, 1978
Community Secondary School	Afrike	January 5, 1979
Community Secondary School	Ukpah	September 21, 1979
Gakem Community Secondary School	Gakem	September 21, 1979

Source: E.J Alagoa, National Population Commission, Abuja

Analysis:

1. The first Primary School established in Bansara was in 1920: while the first Primary School established in Bekwarra was in 1942, (22 years interval).
2. The First Post-Primary institution established in Ogoja was the St Thomas College, 1937; while Bekwarra Secondary School, established in 1975 was the first, (38 years interval); self-initiated.
3. The Sacred Heart Hospital Obudu was established in 1924. A skeletal and irregular dispensary services started in Abuochiche in 1939, (15 years interval between the Sacred Heart Hospital in Obudu).

The essence of the above tables is to show the progress made by the Bekwarra nation in self development without the advantage which others, especially in the area of educational institutions. Through the foresight and initiatives Bekwarra can pride herself to have excelled in

academics, medicine, teaching, engineering, law, and in different professions all over Nigeria and across the world.

Although the traditional educational system served their purpose at the time, the elders were proactive and perceptive enough to understand the processes and dynamics of change and prepared for it. To show appreciation for their efforts, the present generation must prepare their children for tomorrow. It is important to remember that whatever achievements the Bekwarra people have been through self-help effort. This trend has tended to continue to the present by taking their future is in our hands.

It should not be forgotten that in spite of the analysis above, some children of Bekwarra attended schools outside their home. Some parents, from the sale of their little farm produce, some petty trade, and animal husbandry, were able to send their children to schools in Ogoja, Obudu, and some areas of Iboland. By asking for school of theirs, the elders anticipated the gains that proximity of schools would bring instead of children making journeys to the far-flung schools. They realised that the farther the schools, the higher the cost, above what an average farmer could afford, thereby depriving children the opportunity for participation. The nearness of these new schools paid off and resulted in a drastic surge in the number of enrolment of children in the newly established schools than what obtained before.

The first generation of Bekwarra representatives in various fields, as teachers, administrators, medical doctors, lawyers, and the clerical vocation, were the products of the initial efforts of the initiators who themselves were, although not beneficiaries of western education, but were, however, quick in appreciating the potency of adding the western type education to their traditional type, in the emerging world order. Between the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, the first and second generation of educated persons were fewer. From the second half of the 1970s however, and increasingly into the 1980s, with an appreciable number of secondary schools in Bekwarra, turning out unprecedented number of students, the education contour changed. The result is, as Bekwarra people spread out, they have carried with them the spirit of dedication to hard work and the pursuit of goals. We appreciate all who represented the Bekwarra nation in all the disciplines. However, has this virtue been sustained? How prepared are we to pass this enterprising Bekwarra spirit on to the upcoming generation?

BEKWARRA TODAY

It is axiomatic to state that “He who fails to plan, plans to fail”. With a geometric population among the Bekwarra nation, spread across some states of the country like, Kano, Ondo, Taraba, Nasarawa, Edo, Benue, Lagos, Kadarko, the FCT and many other places, there is need for adequate planning to safeguard the future of the Bekwarra nation before the rising population becomes a curse rather than a blessing.

We have noted earlier that all the achievements of Bekwarra people came from self-efforts. How do we stand today? This section of our discussion is beyond one person to deliberate on. We are all living witnesses of the situation in our beloved fatherland. My task is to simply present to this noble gathering a few observations that I can capture, because the egg heads are here to analyse and to proffer solutions as a way forward.

EDUCATION

Peter Ustinov defines education in a hilarious way. “After all,” he says, “what is education but a process by which a person begins to learn how to learn” (Dear Me 1977). A process is a series of actions directed toward achieving a specific aim or objective. Everything in life has a process. Those who circumvent rules (due process) in any society are enemies of that society and a danger to the existence of mankind. According to the Wikipedia, “Education is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills, and habits of a group are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training and research. Or any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels or acts may be considered educational.” (www. Wikipedia.org. assessed on July 1. 2013). It is common knowledge that the world has become a global village. The notion of

global village portends challenge, competition and rapid changes. It is a world of work. Thus, the 21st century is characterized by speedy movement of people, goods, services and information across the world. For nations and individuals to survive in this highly competitive world, a careful development of their human capacity is a must. This can only come through accepted processes of education. Those who develop their citizens in this world of work will certainly dominate the rest. The social prosperity and economic viability of any nation depends on the skilled and knowledgeable citizens it possesses.

During his campaign to become British Prime Minister, Tony Blair was asked to state the focus of his administration. He replied that his focus was in three directions. The first, he said, was education; the second, education, and the third, education (BBC News). A sound educational delivery system is the high way to success. Education was first seen as competitive, but a new component has been added, that is, creativity. Due to the changing times occasioned by globalisation, education is rather more about creativity than pass time activity. From this postulation, the reason for Tony Blair's campaign slogan comes unbidden to our senses. Nobody would dare to question the fact that Britain is a highly educated country. Implicit in Blair's statement is the truth that we cannot stop learning. The day one stops learning is the day that individual actually dies. A society that stops learning, or stops reinventing itself, or reevaluates itself, is certainly going to oblivion and will soon be recolonized. One of the ways to achieve progress is a sound and creative educational system.

Bekwarra can boast of more primary schools, secondary schools, a school of health technology on her soil today, so many that the few schools of the 1970s and 1980s are at discount by their number. What is the result comparatively?

In line with the realities of our affluent world, products of these schools are neither competitive nor creative. This is as a result of wide spread cheating in examinations, aided and abated by parents, guardians, teachers, and more disturbing is, the seeming acquiescence of the controlling body. Some examination centers are tagged, "magic centers". They are 'magic centers' because candidates who register for their Senior School Certificate Examinations in these centers never fail, not for their excellence but, magically. Let me remind us that magic is an act of conjuring tricks and an illusion created in the mind of people either for entertainment or deceit. God is a miracle worker who blesses hard work and not a magician. God hates idleness and laziness he has not stopped working himself. By cheating in examinations, that student refused to go through the process of sharpening his or her God-given skills, talents and creative power. Parents who aid children to cheat at the 'magic centers' created by proprietors and teachers to help students pass examinations are enemies of society.

There is also another dubious one known as 'examination cooperation'. By this, students, and/ or their parents, contribute money into a pool, use it to bribe the examiner and also pay someone to solve examination questions for them on examination days. They come out with fantastic results, but lack the basic rudiments of the subject matter, and are, therefore, incapable of competing with others. Someone, trying to make a case for laziness, quipped, 'This is a national phenomenon, and not peculiar to Bekwarra. If we do not do it, others will, and keep ahead.' Hard work is a virtue, and virtue, it is said, is its own reward. Remember your adage, Bekwarra, "*Enwa uchon bi udim re.*" (do not take an oath just because a friend did).

Cheating is a crime, first against God, then against man which comes with the reward of bitterness. Cheating is a means of circumventing a due process in order to achieve a goal. The notion that the end justifies the means is a farce. A society which believes in using short-cut to 'success' will certainly pay for it someday and somehow. If the process for human capacity development is short-changed, that society can only expect catastrophe. That is a just reward for the ill done to a due process. The teachers who did not teach; the parents who aided to scuttle the process of learning; the schools that awarded undeserved grades to pupils to attract large numbers of students in order to make profit, will all pay for it someday; when their children will not have teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, administrators, technocrats in various fields, because hard work was rejected. What goes around, it is said, certainly comes around. We destroy the skills

and talents of our children by not allowing them go through the process of self-development by encouraging them to eat their tomorrow today and leaving them with nothing for tomorrow. Our parents did not do that to us. Hard work does not kill. Even God instructed that it is through the sweat of our brow we would eat. Let us look at a graphic description of what we have been saying by an anonymous writer:

Destroying a nation does not require the use of atomic bombs or long range missile...It only requires lowering the quality of education and allowing cheating in examination by students.
Patients die at the hands of such doctors....
Buildings collapse at the hands of such engineers....
Money is lost at the hands of such economists/ accountants....
Humanity dies at the hands of such religious scholars....
Justice is lost at the hands of such judges....
The collapse of education is the collapse of the nation and in one or two generations, the nation is gone... (Anonymous).

Bekwarra Linguistic Endangerment:

Language endangerment is a situation where the number of native speakers of a language decreases because they die out and their children speak another language. The language, therefore, becomes extinct overtime. There is a very unhealthy trend of Bekwarra parents speaking only English with their children. Even unhealthier is the use of 'pigin' or 'broken' English in communicating with their children. Children brought up this way are deprived of both their language and the foreign language which they prefer. This is most unacceptable, especially in families where both parents are Bekwarra. Even in some churches in Bekwarra, children are taught Sunday School lessons in English.

This could lead to Bekwarra Language being extinct within the next 30 years. The survival and maintenance of the cultural values of any people depends on the language because is the only unmistakable means of identifying a people. It is alarming when children whose parents are themselves fluent speakers of the language cannot speak a word of Ebekwara; in fact, sometimes among those resident within Bekwarra. This is a disservice and a let-down.

Another challenge, especially during the foundation period of western education in Bekwarra, is that of the girl child. In a bid to maintain moral chastity, especially among the girl child, few Bekwarra daughters were allowed by parents to attend school together with their male peer. The result was that the first educated elites married predominantly from outside. Today, perhaps as retaliation, the reverse is the case where some educated daughters prefer men from outside Bekwarra. This, however, is not an attempt to propagate the notion of pure tribe, because there is no pure tribe anywhere in the world. To show their support for inter-tribal marriages, Bekwarra people use the aphorism to express it; *ibu iyem a tan r'anani mia ubang*; (Human seeds should be spread among other peoples). Either way, sons and daughters in choosing their life-time partners are they also encouraged not to neglect their people.

Witchcraft Practices

Believed to be operated through the use of evil spirits, witchcraft is the employment and use of magical powers to influence things, situations, people and circumstances. The fear of these malevolent forces is widely believed to have been contributory to lack of progress, not only in Bekwarra, but in much of African societies. The contagious influence of this fear was so palpable and wide spread that Cann captured in his report as, "The great bar to social progress is the ever present fear of witchcraft which dominates the people's existence. Christianity and education have not yet approached the area to combat this evil".

Many deaths, misfortune, sicknesses, unnatural occurrences have been attributed to witchcraft, for which reason some abandoned their natal homes. The arrival of Christian missionaries of the Roman Catholic and the Assemblies of God Missions with the gospel of Jesus Christ broke the power of witchcraft. The various missionary endeavours brought deliverance to

a great number, accounting for the progress we have witnessed so far. This power is efficacious to save, and still saves all who surrender to Christ. All who still hold to the destructive power of witchcraft can be set free by their choice of Jesus.

One is left to wonder the foolery of those enslaved by this quagmire of satanic deceit because of its recurrent occurrences without result. It is believe that the possessor of witchcraft has knowledge of certain herbs which he/she and either afflicts enemies with diseases or the death of enemies and, or of the forceful initiation of new members into this club of death. After going through certain process of preparation, it is believed, the concocted recipe becomes powerful. It could kill or initiate human beings depending on the intended purpose by the user. The same recipe had the potency to destroy grasses, trees or anything it comes in contact with. If this is true, why not make public such knowledge of the 'powerful herbs', to be prepared for use as herbicides on the farms. Then, the manufacturers would have contributed to human development, with a patent, "proudly made in Bekwarra". Any knowledge not used for human development is abortion, and should therefore be abandoned.

Expensive and Wasteful Burial Ceremonies:

Since burial is not an investment burial is not an investment, traditional burial practices, as far as they are not inimical to progress, could be entertained and sustained. Most people have turned burial ceremonies to events they spend until they are spent. An intriguing aspect is that people who are unwilling to assist parents in need of paying their children's school fee, or even hospital bill to save a life, would be readily offer loans to the bereaved for burial expenses. That would be tantamount to the living burying their tomorrow with the dead today. Most people incur huge debts just to avoid social criticism from their age grade members and even family members. *Ebekwarra, ndee koo, uni imwa irimu gbe irikwuo imin bee?* (your height will not increase when on the ground than when standing erect?) The moral lesson in the adage is, be yourself and do short-change the future by unnecessary self-dissipation.

The habit of depleting resources because by giving chickens, goats, cows to different groups/ community is wasteful. The move of the Bekwarra Council of Chiefs headed by HRM Linus Ogbeche Odey to cut down on these burial expenses should be strongly supported. Change may be resisted, but in the long run, it will succeed.

Crimes and Hooliganism

The syndrome of violent killings, kidnapping, robbery, and cultism is condemnable. Although this is a global phenomenon, but it was never so in Bekwarra and should not be an excuse. These were crimes that nobody who is familiar with the history of Bekwarra would have imagined could ever happen in Bekwarra.

When many societies were already enslaved by these vices, Bekwarra society was still descent and had admirers. The author shares an experience of the image of Bekwarra in the eyes of her admirers some years ago. Trained in the Eastern Bible College, now Assemblies of God Seminary, Anyikang, Bekwarra in the 1980s as a preacher where students called by God to preach the gospel of Christ, across Nigeria and the Cameroons were admitted. Several years after graduating from the seminary, he visited his friend, Rev. Emmanuel Mbe, his contemporary from Akamkpa. When it was time to introduce him as his guest to preach on that Sunday morning, Rev. Mbe did it in a most memorable way. He told his audience, "Where this man comes from (Bekwarra), if you are a stranger and have no place to sleep over for the night, you could spend the night by the road side peacefully, wake up the following morning and continue your journey without molestation." Yes! He was right. But can this be said of Bekwarra today?

Dropout/ Early Marriage:

Most children who drop out of school and do not go to learn a trade but get married are not ready to participate in tomorrow. Such people begin to loaf around run to Benin, Ondo, Taraba, etc. to

engage in slavish labour that tends to give a short-term income today. They would be irrelevant tomorrow.

Bekwarra Tomorrow: What we Envisage the Bekwarra of Tomorrow to be

We had noted earlier that nobody knows what happens tomorrow. We have briefly looked at our past, considered our today which prepares us to face our tomorrow. This is open ended. Anybody can apply himself or herself according to their understanding. We are not pretending to know it all and, to proffer solution, or even give the magic wand for tomorrow's problems. We cannot apply all the things from our past because, society is dynamic and the times have changed. However, there are values which we hold as inalienable, which define us as a people which we should not allow to be swept away with the changing times. Let us consider a few of them. Again, lest we forget, this is not exhaustive.

Leadership. Our founding fathers were people of palpable integrity. That was why they could command respect and obedience from society. They were not known for double standard, dubious mannerism and receiving of bribe (*ahoro*). Our leaders today must lead by showing good example. Upright, honest and transparent leadership will facilitate change. Being egalitarian in disposition, Bekwarra people are informed. A perceptive person once said that, educated people are easy to lead, but difficult to suppress. This is applicable to both traditional leaders as well as leaders in other pursuit. They must also assist the younger ones by empowering them and providing jobs where such opportunities present itself.

Political Participation. Our children should be proactive, participate in political activities at all levels, and that, as responsive and responsible people's representatives. The practice where representatives of the people and governments shove off their responsibilities of providing the basic necessities to her citizens but rather resort to hand-outs is an aberration which stultifies growth and impoverishes the citizenry. Political participation should therefore be representative of the interest of the electorate, at least, consistent with Bekwarra values.

Progress in Education and Self-Empowerment

So many people complete school without acquiring the basic skills necessary for work and life. There is increasing unemployment and the labour markets are demanding more skills and vibrant work force than ever before. Our society is characterized by rapid changes which are sometimes stressful. Individuals in our society should be aware of their personal strengths, weaknesses and the entire world around them in order to function well. Our educational system should emphasize both vocational and academic programs, formulate strategies to assist graduates of both secondary and tertiary institutions fit into the expanding and changing society. The 6-3-3-4 education system was meant to prepare candidates for fulfilment in all areas, but its implementation has derailed this noble desire. The results of this shift is palpable. Education holds the key to progress.

Vocational Career

There were times when parents had dreams of having children who are either teachers, doctors, or lawyers. To them, those were the only professions with prestige. They began to prepare their ward to fit in, forgetting the peculiarity of individuals, endowed with special and unique skills. In the new age, job satisfaction should be desired above meeting societal demands. Students should resist pressure from parents, peer group, societal perception of certain occupations which do not suit them and may lead to making wrong choices. Graduates from vocational and technical colleges are as important as those from universities. Often, the idea of vocational career as a motor mechanic, for instance, to some people, is irritating. This may be because of their perception of the common place road side mechanics littered about. Let us not forget that many so called "expatriate engineers" who construct our roads and bridges are trained technicians in

their countries but are paid highly in dollars in Nigeria. A teacher is as important as either a medical doctor, a plumber, a truck driver, a lawyer, a motor mechanic, an engineer, an accountant, an electrician, etc. Choose a vocation and career that chooses you and you will be happy for it.

The Bekwarra man, man generically referred, is one who is prone to migrating and settling anywhere he finds economically and socially accommodating and conducive. This is commendable. We encourage them to feel free to not only settle and do business, but also to integrate into the destination society, acquire properties, invest in and be stakeholders in the place. They should also pray for the good of the land, for in the peace and prosperity of the land, they too will enjoy peace and prosperity.

We cannot continue to be looking up to the impoverished land to provide food and income to meet the 21st century needs. This heritage cannot be sustained because, in the first place, the land is not sufficient and, in the second place, it is no longer fertile enough, and so people migrate to other places with good land supply- Middle Belt, forest areas of Cross River State, western Nigerian, or the Middle Belt, central part of Nigeria. And when they get there, it is farming all through. Farming is good but no matter how strong a man is, once he reaches retirement years, the evil days, or dark days, he becomes a dependant looking for help from his children who may not be able to help him, because he could not prepare them for self-sustenance. The natural consequence is despair, frustration and suffering.

Spread: We encourage our children to settle anywhere in the world, participate actively in the wholesome activities of their places of abode, even naturalising there, but still maintaining strong ties with their ancestral homeland, with wholesome Bekwarra identity. Make annual visits to the homeland, or as much as it is possible. *Unwanyin ipuru ku uchi, inwa umo k'itang.* (Birds fly in the air but their source of water supply in on the ground). The meaning of this saying is, do not forget your source of life. Such visits have several advantages; they keep your knowledge of the language, give needed relief to the farming hands, and bring new innovations to the people at home.

Ebekwarra ambassadors in the diaspora are encouraged to keep the language alive in their homes and place of abode, especially the wife is from outside Bekwarra. All are encouraged to learn the language, speak and write in Bekwarra because that is your identity. The dangers of losing your tongue, your identity are too enormous and should not be taken for granted.

Innovative lifestyle. We should key into the knowledge economy characterised by, innovations, ICT- driven, which explores new frontiers of livelihood. Although no academic course is useless, the idea that education is a means to an end is misleading and no longer tenable. Instead of waiting for jobs which are non-existent, training should focus and promote entrepreneurship, skills acquisition that actualise their dreams, in spite of their areas of specialization. Education should be pursued as an end in itself and not just as a means to an end.

1. We encourage the application of knowledge to meet the needs of the individual and society. We should begin to think of living in an age in Bekwarra when petrol cars and motorcycle are phased out; where subsistence farming will be out of place; trading is done more in the internet; way-billing of goods across towns and cities, and so trading is no more localized; farming is digitally pursued.
2. We envisage a Bekwarra where there is no room for wasteful burials, wasteful marriage ceremonies, and exorbitant bride prices, among other wasteful life-style. These practices are retrogressive in consequence.
3. Innovativeness and creativity in thinking and action demand that we look around and ahead of us to see what and how we can do to solve the problems of humanity, of Bekwarra land and Bekwarra people in the light of the realities that are staring us in the face. We need to see how we can survive, nay, break

through, using our heads and hands in wholesome activities and areas of endeavor in the face of lack and scarcity.

4. We need a Bekwarra nation, whether in the homeland, or in the diaspora that is strongly cohesive and adhesive, that identify our common problems and concertedly tackle them to make us a better people than we are now.
5. We look forward to the establishment of cottage industries that will produce mango juice, orange juice, yam floor, groundnut oil etc. Our successful technocrats can come and situate themselves in any of these, create employment and enhance the wellbeing of people in the homeland.

CONCLUSION

Yesterday is gone. Today is the tomorrow we talked about yesterday. Tomorrow will not come to us. We will go to it. But, tomorrow, they say, never comes. To a reasonable level, today and tomorrow are linked, such that what we give or do today would determine what we expect to have tomorrow. Therefore, what we give to today, will be preserved for us tomorrow. A song writer wrote, “Life time is working time, spend no idle day...”

There is hope. There is wisdom in self-evaluation which is what we are doing here. We have to take an optimistic view of the future in spite of all that is happening in our nation. There is always continuity in the process of change. The Tiv historian, Akiga Sai, found his people in a similar situation and gave this timeless advice, “Let us take heart. The old mushroom rots, another springs up, (and) the mushroom tribe lives on” (Alagoa 3).

REFERENCES

- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*, London Heinemann, 1958.
- Ajor, Joseph Okuta. “African Traditional Judicial Systems: Bekwarra as Case Study” An unpublished BA (Hons) Project, University of Calabar, 1997.
- Alagoa, E.J. *Dike Remembered: African Reflections on History, Dike Memorial Lectures*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1998.
- Alagoa, E.J. *National Population Commission: Landmark Historical Events in the South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria (1940-2006)*. 2006.
- Assimang J.M. *Traditional Life, Culture and Literature in Ghana*. New York: Conch Magazine, 1976.
- Cann, A.Y. “Intelligence Report on Bekwarra Clan of Ogoja Division. EP/8848/MIL GOV/5/1/7”, 1936.
- Carr, E.H. *What is History?* London: Penguin Books, 1961.
- Glukeman, Max. *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society*. London: Basil Blackwell, 1977.
- Green, M.M. *Igbo Village Affairs*. London: Frank Cass, 1947.
- Hon.Timothy Ogbang Omang, (KSM) 1939-2013, burial programme.
- MacPhee, Allan. *Economic Revolution in British West Africa*. London: Hans Zell, 1989.
- Njoku, Onwuka N. *Economic History of Nigeria, 19th- 21st Centuries*. Nsukka: University of Nsukka, 2001.
- Nzirimo, Ikenna. *Studies in Ibo Political Systems*. London: Frank Cass, 1972.
- Omagu Donald O. *A History of Bekwarra People of the Upper Cross River Region of Nigeria*. Calabar: Achu Printers, 1997.
- [www. Wikipedia.org](http://www.Wikipedia.org). Assessed on July 1. 2013.