Time Measurement and Management in the Niger Delta: The Kugbo Experience. From Pre- Colonial to Post Colonial Period

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Abstract

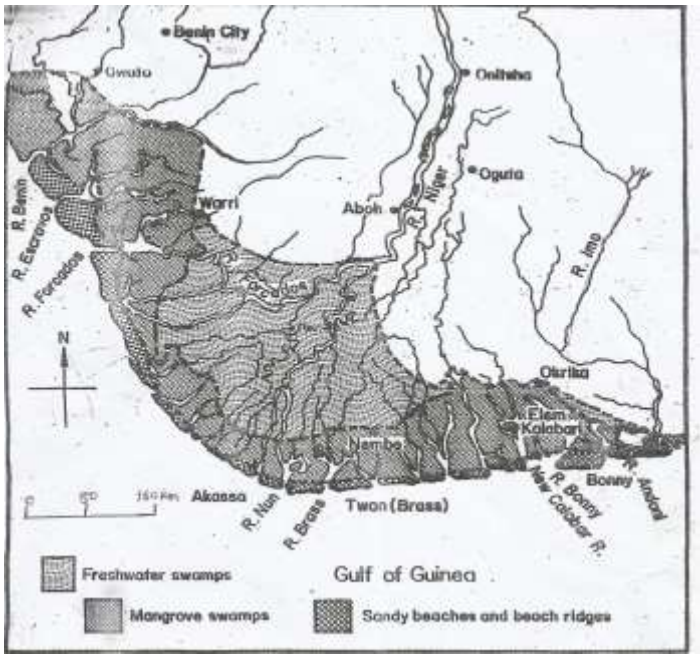
Generally, people may think that time measurement and management had been only through the Europeans. This was buttressed by their introduction of wrist watches, cell phones or televisions and or through the radio. With the application of inter-disciplinary approach, historical methods of research (primary and secondary sources), the truth was revealed that time keeping has also been very much observed by Niger Delta people. The people of the Niger Delta with particular reference to the Kugbo - Kingdom have also observed time measurement and management from the pre-colonial period to the post-colonial. The introduction of the modern gadgets in time keeping is only an addendum to the various methods of time management to Kugbo -Kingdom, in the Central Niger Delta. Till the time of writing this work, traditional methods of time management in Kugbo such as, ebb-tide or flow tide, shadow cast, the sun rise and sun set, among others were still in vogue though gradually giving way to the modern methods of time keeping like wrist watches, radios, televisions, cell phones among others. Secondly, there is convergence in both traditional and modern methods of time keeping in Kugbo- Kingdom like any other part of the Niger Delta. This work is important because it will form as a foundation for further research. Also, to expose to the young generation that the people of the Niger Delta had various means of time measurement and management even before the colonial period.

Key words: Time, measurement and management,

Introduction

Many people think the present modern methods and gadgets of time keeping (measurement and management) such as watches, clocks, televisions, radios and cell phones have been the only methods that the Niger Delta people have been keeping time with. They do not know that the time the Europeans developed their first means of keeping time, Niger Delta people also had their traditional means of keeping time from the Pre -colonial periods to Post -Colonial. These included the natural and traditional means such as the sun rise and sun set, sounds of insects and birds, ebbtide and flow tide, shadow cast, morning dews, a leaf (inyadigi) and cock crow had been the traditional methods of keeping time with the special experience from Kugbo Kingdom in the Central Niger Delta.

We are to look into the Niger Delta. This is because, Kugbo is located in the Central Niger Delta, the very spot where the study is based.



Map of the Niger Delta[1]

The Niger Delta is the delta of the River Niger. It is like a tree with its branches turned upside down from the Forcados River to the west, to the Imo river in the east with the Atlantic Ocean in the South.[2]

It also covers the "three former divisions (Ogoni, Degema and Brass) together with the Southern Ijaws. Today these divisions are to be found in the three natural Niger Delta States of Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers. As a result of domination and dishonest act by the former Eastern Region against them, they moved for their own states but could not succeed. From the British-inspired, Niger Delta Basin and Development Board (NDBDB) was later established in 1961.[3] This board was to allay the fears of the minorities on the marginalization by the major tribe (Igbo) in the former Eastern Nigeria.

Recently, the Niger Delta is described as a triangle with its apex between Ndoni and Aboh, descending eastwards to the Qua Iboe at Eket and Benin Rivers in the East and West respectively along the Atlantic coast. [4] Again some people define the Niger Delta as "Core" and "Periphery" areas of the Niger Delta. While Delta State, Rivers State, Bayelsa State and to some extent, Akwa Ibom State are regarded as the core Niger Delta States, the Periphery States comprise; Ondo, Edo, Abia, Imo and Cross Rivers states. However, they are jointly called the Nine Niger Delta States.[5] The peoples of the Niger Delta are mostly believed to have migrated to the East and West from the Central Niger Delta. They are fishermen with little farming due to the enormous rivers which include from Western Fringes of the Benin River, Escravos and Forcados. The Central Niger Delta is from the Pennington River to Nun River. Brass, Kalabari and Bonny are in the Eastern Niger Delta. Then from Andoni River to Imo River forms the Eastern Niger Delta fringes.[6]

The vegetation of the Niger Delta is fresh water swamp in the Central, then Mangrove swamps in the West and East. The rivers mentioned above run to the Atlantic Ocean. The area (Niger Delta) is endowed with enormous natural resources like palm trees with their economic advantages, timber, crude oil, sea foods, different species of animals, and so forth.

The peoples of the Niger Delta beginning from the West, we have the Itsekiri, Edo, Urhobo and part of Ijaw. In the East we have the Nembe, Kalabari, Ibani, Opobo

and Wakirike. On the Eastern fringes, we have the Obolo, Ibibio, Efik, Ogoni and some Ndi- Igbo. In the Central Niger Delta, we have the Ijaw Yenogoa, Epie-Atisa, Ogbia, Engeni, Abua, Odual and the Kugbo. All the peoples of the Niger Delta interrelated among themselves through trade, wars, festival and even to the outside world like Europeans from the Pre-Colonial, Colonial and Post-Colonial periods.

Kugbo Kingdom

Kugbo is located in the fresh water swamp portion in the Central Niger Delta. In the north, it is bounded by Odual, in the South West, Oloibiri then East by Orusangama and North East by Degema. It is a kingdom that is composed of four communities such as Akani, Amurukeni, Amuruto and Emago in Abua/Odual Local Government Area in Rivers State. In all official documents, they are known as Akani-Kugbo, Amuruto- Kugbo, Amurukeni –Kugbo and Emago-Kugbo. Amurukeni became part of Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State (BALGA) since 1958. [7] Till the time of this work, it is in Ogbia Local Government, with the new creation of Local Government during Babangida's regime.[8]

Kugbo according to Esadi said as long as language is concerned, it fell in the Abua, Odual, Ogbia and Idema group of languages in the Kwa sub-group of the Benue Congo languages of the Niger Congo group of languages in Africa.[9]

Time Measurement and Management in Egypt, Greece and Rome by 1300 AD.

Man's first idea of the time was based on the day, and was directly linked to movements of the sun. Observers noticed that a tall straight object, such as a pole, cast a shadow that moved in a regular pattern each day. By noting the position of the shadow, they could tell what fraction of the day had passed, and the pole thus acted as a simple sundial.[10]

Egyptians and the Greeks used long sticks (poles) with cross bar and measured the shadow it threw. They (Egyptians) split the period between sunrise and sex set into 12 equal parts, and from this division came the hour, at the first very time [11] Neither sun nor the stars could be used to measure or divide time indoors. Hence several kinds of clocks were invented. One of the earliest form of clocks was the candle. The candle was marked with notches corresponding to hours, which were

counted off as the candle burnt. King Alfred of England is said to have used that as clock. [12]

Meridian was used by the Roman empire. The sun moved from east to west, in the morning, the sun rose on the east called antemeridian. Afternoon the sun would be very high and is called meridian and the post meridian is when the sun was moving to the west. That was when it was called I am, 12:00 noon and 2pm.

Another system was called clepsydras. This was a system when water filled in an upper cylinder to run into a lower container. Meanwhile the upper container was marked. The lesser the water in the upper container as they run to the lower container, determined the time spend. Hence was even used in courts while trying cases. They timed the speeches of the people based on the available water as it ran to the lower basin.[13]

Still, was the water clock. Water would be filled in a cylinder, then a geared wheel and a vertical stick with a stick fixed on a floating base. Then the water turned clockwise of 24 hours round.

Kugbo Experience on Time Measurement and Management in the Pre-Colonial Period

In Emago-Kugbo, an old system of measurement of time was also in vogue just like in other parts of the continent like Egypt in Africa or the Greeks in Europe. These styles of time keeping included, (a particular grass, leaf, *inyadigi,* Shadow *Okokh,* Ebbtide *Okeleghel- Amum* and flow tide *Obhagan amum*, insects and birds *ekier* Cock *Olobhiri-enur* morning dews, *Okuroghor* and Sun rise and set *Ogugo* [14]

From the pre-colonial and colonial times, the people of Emago Kugbo used a particular leaf they called *inyadigi* as a major time measurement aparatus. This was because, early in the morning the leaf could be seen opened, but as time reaches afternoon it could be gradually opening its leaf, and the moment it is sharp afternoon, the leaf could be automatically and completely open flat. Then as time approached evening the leaf would be closing by itself. This would continue until the night evening fully come, the leaf would be completely closed. This method was particularly depended upon by farmers as they went to their farms. Farmers

never went to their farms when the leaf had opened completely and they never came back when it was closed that was in the dark part or night of the day unless a willful activity. Secondly, was, shadow *Okokh*. In the morning of every bright day, a shadow was almost very long. However, as the day gradually became afternoon, the shadow became shorter. Then as the day progressed towards evening the shadow increased in length and by evening proper it became very long from one or two poles standing Emago Kugbo dwellers depended heavily on this style of time measurement it was used by farmers, and other groups in time keeping.[15]

Another method of time keeping was the flow of the water in the river (both ebb-tide and flow tide). Fishermen normally timed the ebb-tide for fishing. Just like other people in the Niger Delta with creeks and rivers, they normally depended on the flow of the waters in the river for fishing. The ebb-tide was always the better time for fishing. Even the fishing gears that were being fixed during flow tide; the targeted time and tide was the ebb-tide when the fishes could move following the water(tide). [16]

Still under this flow or ebb-tide, there were periods when at the beginning of the day, it would be ebb-tide and continued until the afternoon when it would stay and halt the tide. Then as the day became older, the flow tide could continue. By the evening of the day, the river bank would be full of waters. Hence people did not want for the ebb-tide to stop in the afternoon for their mission to their farms or other economic activities. And that they timed to follow the flow tide to come back home.

A method of time keeping was also the sound of insects and birds *ekier*. As farmers and others in their farms did the farm work, later in the day birds would be singing and these sweet sound of the birds would signal those in the farms that it was time to be retired home. It was later noticed that the birds normally sang from 4.00pm (the beginning of the day's evening).[17]

Also was the cock crow in Emago Kugbo. A major time keeper for the people was the cock. Every approach of the morning (twilight) of the day, cock crow would

be heard. This frequently acted as an alarm to farmers and fishermen who targeted to leave their dwellings early in the morning to meet up the challenges of the day. Still was morning dews *Okoroghor*. Farmers in Emago Kugbo dared morning dews to their various farms. They never waited for the dews to dry from plants leaves before they went to farm. And since the dews were always in the morning, it acted as time keepers for them. That was the reason, late comers to farms always linked to these who were afraid of meeting the morning dews along the farms path in the morning. As old song sang morning dews never touched my wife by *Igbelema* dancing club of Emago Kugbo talked about a lazy wife who always went to farm late every day. It was a bad recommendation.[18]

Last and not the least was the sun. The sun rose from the east in the morning, then from the afternoon, the sun is high and straight on their heads. In the evening the sun set on the west. Every daily activity even farmers, never waited for the sun to be high before going to the places of work to exhibit their economic activities. They went in the morning when the sun was far east and came back home when the sun was set in the west, in the evening. [19]

The Transformation

Trade was a very big avenue by which goods and services were exchanged between the Europeans and Africans. From the 15th century when the Europeans came to Africa for trade and they were welcomed by Africans, they frequently interacted with the coastal peoples of Africa. That period was the Atlantic slave trade. Later, they gradually left the obnoxious trade and changed to the legitimate trade or the trade on goods. This was from the 18th to the 20th centuries. The Europeans came with finished goods and exchanged with African cash crops like cocoa, rubber, latex, palm oil, groundnuts among others. The goods they exhorted with these goods were used hats, rum, J, J. Peters, cloths, lances, clocks and wrist watches, among others.[20]

In this work, since time measurement and keeping is the crux of the mater, clocks and watches remain paramount for they are instrument of time keeping, management and measurement. From the colonial period, various methods of time management and measurement came up. One of them was wrist watch. Wrist

watch might have been introduced to Africa even in Kugbo kingdom. It was used by the wealthy few who came in contact with the whites or elites.[21]

Still from the wrist watch, stop watches were used in sports like traditional wrestling or other competitions. Specific duration was set and at the aspiration of the time kept for that bout, it would give a sign and the umpires or referees would stop the competitors.

Another method used in colonial time by the Kugbo people was radio. Radio in news broadcast in their broad cast normally tell the time before they gave the broad cast. Whether 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 pm or an. People normally targeted news hours to look for radio owners to listen to news, and knowing the time of the day. Some people even went to the farms to come back before 4:00pm network news. Hence they work all through and aiming at the 4:00pm to listen to network news.[22]

Still after the colonial, the post -colonial period witnessed the observance of time through phones and televisions. These methods are more accurate and vastly used. One things very important is that there is convergence in both the traditional methods and these modern system s of time management. Though depending on the longer nights and longer days based on the rotation of the earth in relation to the sun.

Conclusion

With the application of inter-disciplinary approach, historical research methods including oral interview, the work has been able to reveal that the people of the Niger Delta with particular reference to the Kugbo- Kingdom like any other African society have been measuring and managing time through traditional means from the pre- colonial period to the post- colonial. Secondly, there is convergence in both traditional and modern methods of time keeping in Kugbo-Kingdom like any other part of the Niger Delta. This work is important because it will form as a foundation for further research.

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Africans Had Not Been Lazy. The Kugbo Experience

African from 1990 had been in one subsistence strategy or the other to meet up their daily needs. They engaged in various economic activities or the other in different seasons and locations. The northern Africans (Magrib) engaged in farming and other economic activities examples the Egyptians who depended on the Nile River for their survival. Cultivating grains after the floods of the Nile at the river banks brought good harvest.

Those in the central Africa like congolese engaged unlimbering due to the high rain that encouraged high forest with big trees in the region. Those in the central Africa exploited the trans Saharan traders and the routes. Sub Saharan Africa/west Africa Like Nigeria, Ghana, Seirra Leone also occupied their time with farming and those situated at rivers engaged in fishing and other activities.

In South Africa, the zulus, for an example also utilized their land exhaustively for allocation of crops and rearing of animals. That was the reason there was high demand for land hence bears doing the coast due to the British topic in curses, decided to, move inward or in land with the topic called the "great trek"

In Nigeria, the Hausa people engaged in cattle rearing cultivates of grains, little fishing, trading etc. the Yoruba people or were mostly farmers, fisherman and women especially those doing the River Ogun, blackmths, traders among others. The Ijo people were river network. These whose lands were fertile or tolerated agriculture, they successfully did it.

While some in cervirg and arts, others engaged in trading.

Genially, in Nigeria even before the 20th century, the see foods were exchanged with crops by farmers of the north by the southern dwellers. Trade by barter has been the method of excharge. You get what you need with what you have. That was a very dominate methed of trade by the Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Itzekiri amongst others.

Just like any other African community, the Kugbo people were not left behind in engaged in one subsistence strategy or the other to meet up their daily needs from the earlieslation. They engaged in different and diverse economic activities. These included, farming, fishing, trading, arts, sard-quering, care caring, weaving, blacksmith, amongst others