

## Tombia, Bonny and Kalabari in Niger Delta History

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Article History	Abstract
<b>Original Research Article</b>	<p><i>The people of Iyankpo (Tombia and Finnema) in the present Rivers State of Nigeria where one people in pre-colonial times before Tombia moved to the western Rio-Real area and settled prior to the emergence of Kalabari in the Rio Real area. But the people of Kalabari claim to participate in the trans-Atlantic trade of salt salted fish and later slaves when neither Bonny nor Kalabari was in existence in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Kalabari claim to have participated in the trans-Atlantic trade with the Portuguese is problem statement to this study. The research method is qualitative gathering materials from primary and secondary sources. Theory is post-colonial theory of correcting historical fallacies in African history. From the findings of the study the Iyankpo people settled the Bonny people at Orupiri while the Kalabari were developed by the magnanimity of the Tombia people. The Portuguese records of the period mentioned only the deity Simingi, of the Iyankpo (Tombia and Finnema) people who they traded with. Then there was no Ikuba of the Bonny people or Akaso of the Kalabari people. Thus, the need to clarify historical fallacies in post-colonial history.</i></p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Tombia, Bonny and Kalabari Niger Delta.</p>
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### Introduction

**Tombia people:** To get a clearer grasp of Tombia in the affairs of the Niger delta there is need to highlight the relationship between Tombia Bonny and Kalabari in Niger Delta history. The relationship between the people of Tombia, Bonny and Kalabari where Ekine and Owu-Ogbo is been practiced as embodiments of traditional culture. Is the masquerade tradition which in an aspect is embedded in traditional religion of the Iyankpo (Tombia and Finnema) people. Niger delta historians have refused to tell the history of the Iyankpo people because it will show their dominance of the Rio Real estuary from the 11<sup>th</sup> century positioning them as those who engaged with Europeans in trade and not the Aro, Bonny or Kalabari. Thus in a sense most of the early historians were not objective and wanted to write themselves into history like Dike an Ibo, Tamuno an Okirika, and Alagoa Nembe and Ejitiwu an Andoni. The Bonny, Nembe Kalabari, and Okrika, have legends but the Iyankpo (Tombia and Finnema) recorded by the Portuguese recognised by their deity Simingi in the 15<sup>th</sup> century have no legends to tell. Thus legends of small groups from the Central Ijaw area who migrated East and North East to settle, not in the true delta region but in its

northern margin and, in the case of Kalabari and Bonny, in contact with the Ibo and near the navigable limits of the two rivers which led from the Rio- Real into the Ibo hinterland have an history. But Iyankpo (Tombia and Finnema) have no history to tell. It was from these settlements that the Kalabari and Bonny moved down – stream into the Rio-Real to the absorbed by the Iyankpo (Tombia and Finnema) people whom they latter over populated to emerge into history as the dominant states in this region because they supported the British penetration into the interior.

### The people of Tombia and their relationship with Bonny and Kalabari in Niger Delta History

**Bonny** To get a clearer grasp of Tombia in the affairs of the Niger delta there is need to highlight the relationship between Tombia Bonny and Kalabari in Niger Delta history. The relationship between the people of Tombia, Bonny and Kalabari where Ekine and Owu-Ogbo is been practiced as embodiments of traditional culture. According to Alagoa and Fombo, (2001, p. 3), in their book, *A Chronicle of the History of Grand Bonny*

When the Bonny people came they 'were' first settled at Orupiri (Juju bush) which is (about a mile from Bonny town). They finally moved to Bonny town, which 'was' named Okoloama, that is Curlew town. At this time the Ijo peoples of Tombia were living near the site of Finima, and the Abalama were at a place now called Abalamabie."

This clearly shows that the Bonny people arrived when the Tombia (Iyankpo) had already settled at the coast and were fully engaged in trans-Atlantic trade in salted fish, salt and tobacco. The Abalama people were also settled there at a place in the creek called Abalamabie. The encounter between the Bonny people and the Nyankpo people of Tombia was between the late 15<sup>th</sup> to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century when the Bonny people were settled at Orupiri (juju bush) by the Iyankpo (Tombia) people. They lived in harmony for sometimes before disagreement ensued. The people of Okoloba people (Bonny) as they were called did not learn anything about the environment from the Iyankpo (Tombia and Finnema) people who settled there before them? Niger delta historians have refused to write about these events for reasons best known to them but the earliest recordings of the Portuguese clearly shows that the Iyankpo people settled and traded with the Portuguese before Bonny and Kalabari people came to the Rio Real area, if not they would have been evidenced in Portuguese chronicles earlier than the Iyankpo people. This must have occurred even before the incursion of the Portuguese into Benin.

### **Kalabari**

For the Kalabari their relationship with the Iyankpo people started in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century between 1769 to 1789 when the population of the Ndoki Asa people became too much and the Nyankpo people were no longer comfortable in that settlement Nyankpo (Tombia) people consolidated an alliance with the Kalabari people during the reign of Amakiri 1 at Iyankpo, at this time Tombia consisted of four major sections and subsidiary 14 wards in the early nineteenth century namely: Agarame, Orusarame, Ajeme and Otokiri or Owiye. Agarame divided into two factions when the people refused Iyalla's advice to extinct the people of Kalabari when Iyalla the son of the priest of Simingi himself a seer having foreseen the subterfuge of the Kalabari to make Tombia subservient to Kalabari in the future. Iyalla's intended destruction of the community was thwarted by an unusual storm so he left Tombia and joined forces with Igbanibo to found Bakana. Iyalla was the son of the priest of Simingi who was the seer of the community and very wealthy because he boarded the merchant ships first and was paid come when Tombia was in Nyankpo. What is the relationship between Iyalla and Awanta? Was

Iyalla the son of Awanta?

Iyalla because of his late father's wealth and position as the head of the senior section of Tombia became very rich and established his own canoe house. That is why Iyalla house is recognized as a war canoe house of Kalabari. In addition to the Iyalla war canoe house the canoe house and ward of Owiye (Fyneface) affiliated the Barboy group with themselves in Elem Kalabari to help them learn the trade at about the same time. This was when Otaji (Longwill) was the head of the main Barboy house. By the mid-nineteenth century the interaction with the Tombia people had facilitated the house founded by Awo to develop into two houses the Barboy main house under first Otaji (Longwill) and then Kombo Agolea (Braide), and the subordinate houses of Obaji, Don Pedro, Georgewill and Manuel, as well as Kombo Agoleas personal house under his son Will Braid (Young Braid). Obajis house under his son Dick Barboy (Dikio Obaji) was in the process of decline, while the others who settled and traded in Tombia were all in the process of expansion and were developing subordinate houses of their own. (Jones, 1963).

This clearly shows the Kalabari's as learning the trade from the Iyankpo people and this was precisely during the period when the slave trade was abolished. Of all the three sections of the Barboy group two resided in Owiye (Fyneface) compound in Tombia and made their fortune. While Otaji (Long Will) of Elem Kalabari, and some other members of the Barboy group were also resident in the neighboring communities of Tombia (Young Town) and Ifoko (Fouche) were they also made their fortune. The Ifoko supplied the pilots for European shipping anchoring in Kalabari water ways protected by the consolidated war canoes of Tombia. (Jones, 1963).

### **Tombia**

The Tombia people always positioned at the coast and this phenomenon did not start today as it was clearly reflected in the positioning of Elem Tombia along the coast and Elem Kalabari in the creek along the Rio Real Estuary. Then were the days of gun boat diplomacy and if you did not have the guns you cannot reside at the coast or penetrate the interior markets. Almost all the emergent Kalabari war canoe houses benefited from the magnanimity of the Tombia people. Of the Kalabari houses that benefited from the trading experience of Tombia are the Barboy's, the Harry's as Edi Abali (Harry Braide) had already settled in Tombia (Young town) where he made his fortune and founded his canoe house. Of all the Kalabari houses derived from Amakiri house, George Amakiri who became the richest and largest settled in Tombia with his in-law Igbiri Davies where he made his wealth, by declining information to his in-law and paying a

fine on his behalf thus inheriting his wealth. But for Igbanibo his in-law informed him of the plan to eliminate him. From which we have the popular obo tune “Iyogo Igbanibo akwa kiri poko fiete” my in-law Igbanibo the drum beat have changed.

The alliance between Tombia and Kalabari contributed immensely to the Kalabari participating in the latter part of the slave trade to the emergent trade in palm produce, and the formation of all the emergent houses of new Kalabari Bakana, Abonnema and Buguma. For Abonnema Oruwari became the head of the Duenala house after Asukien the great Tombia warrior left the leadership of the house when Iyalla left Tombia to found Bakana with Igbanibo Braide, which brought about Oruwari coming to head the house. Thus we see that prominent men from Tombia and Elem Kalabri founded modern Bakana, like Iyalla (India Yellowe), Abonemma (Owiye, Fyneface) and Buguma where some members of Tombia from Idonibo’s house settled because of the marriage of Ekineye-Data, Oduye Ekine (Young Town’s) daughter to Kariboye Abbey (Jones, 1963).

From this brief history we can decipher that all the major houses of Kalabari made their fortune in Tombia, not in Kula, Abalama, Minama, Bille, or Fouche but in Tombia. This clearly portrays that the alliance with Tombia opened the eyes of Kalabari to the Atlantic trade. For Bonny and Kalabari a history have been written for them by the Britis, but because Iyankpo people resisted British penetration of the interior they tried to subject their achievements to Kalabari and Bonny save for Simingi which remains their deity and link to Iyankpo (Tombia ) people.

In terms of development no Tombia family settled in Elem Kalabari to make a fortune but all the major houses of Kalabari have one way or the other benefited from the magnanimity of the Tombia people. Hence the drum lore tone “Bra bra kasakrama” meaning self-sufficiency, the Tombia people were self-sufficient before they came into alliance with Kalabari. A clear deception on the part of Kalabari towards the Tombia people was when Tombia relocated to Young Town Igbiri went and settled in Okpo, and Ekine reported to Amakiri in the name of the alliance the Kalabari chiefs made a plan to fine Igbiri because he was not aware he did not go with enough money thus when he was fined, his in-law George Amakiri made his fortune by paying the fine and by subterfuge inheriting Igbiri’s estate and even taking his place in signing European treaties. Thus in European treaties the name George Amakiri signed instead of Igbiri Davies and even compelled his son to change his name to Davies George Amakiri.

## Conclusion

If the Bonny historians claim to know and have met the Iyankpo people and Bonny was before Kalabari, it means the Kalabari new nothing about the trade in salt and salted fish with the Portuguese, but are trying to use Abalamabie which they compelled in an alliance to move with them to the interior of present Kalabari because of their weakness were placed deeply in the interior. But for the Iyankpo people they needed their wealth and experience in war to survive so they still maintained their coastal position.. The history of the Niger delta cannot be complete if the Iyankpo people are not given their proper place to ascribe Iyankpo contribution to Iyankpo (Tombia and Finnema and not to Bonny and Kalabari.

Iyankpo hold on tradition of being your brother’s keeper should not be taken as an advantage to deny them their place in history. Their deity Simingi was recognized as the deity that ruled the Rro Real estuary in the 15<sup>th</sup> century when the Portuguese came in contact with them. The Andoni’s where not salt makers nether the Kalabari or bonny people. The Iyankpo people had salt making and fishing as their traditional occupation. In Nigerian history the achievements of the Iyankpo people are erroneously ascribed to the Bonny and Kalabari people, but the earliest Portuguese records clearly showed in their interactions with the people of the Rio-Reas that their first partners in trade have a tutelary deity known as Simingi. That was in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Igwana the tutelary deity of the Bonny people came to be in modern European records from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the Akaso of the Kalabari in the 19<sup>th</sup> century . This clearly shows that there was a deliberate attempt by the chroniclers of Niger delta history to submerge some facts. It was recorded that the Portuguese were the first Europeans to trade with the Benin in the 15<sup>th</sup> century same time with the Iyankpo people. so this assertion by Erekosima et-al that Among early European explorers who made contact with the West African coast, the Kalabari are well known is a historical fallacy for there was no Kalabari in the 15<sup>th</sup> century Rio-Real. They are generally a conglomeration of people from the hinterland coming to settle in the creeks of the Niger delta at different times. Presently they are in the Rivers state of Nigeria.

If Pereira had not recorded what he saw in the Rio-Real the large wooden boats, carrying over 80 people , the yams , goats, cows, live stocks etc., being carried from the interior to the coast which the Iyankpo people bought with salt and salted fish from the interior, the Iyankpo people would have been a thing of history if not for the deity Simingi the contributions of the Iyankpo people to world civilization would have been eroded by contractual historians. If not for Alagoa and Fombo’s attesting to the fact in their Chronicle of Bonny History about the Iyankpo people as having settled in the Rio Real before the arrival of Bonny. The words of Erekosima et-al would have been relevant. But there was no mention of Kalabari by the Portuguese in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Portuguese adventurer

Pachecho Pereira , recorded in the Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis on what he saw at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, he specifically noted the size of the canoes in use, which were ‘the largest in the Ethiopians of guinea’, this being the West African coast. He said they ‘could hold eighty men and carried yams in large quantities as well as slaves, cows, goats, and sheep’,. He also noted that there was trade in cloths, beads, animal skins, and palm oil. (Jones, 1963).

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