

A STUDY IN THE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF UGHOTON, CA. 1440-1897

by

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the social Transformation of Ughoton from 1440-1897. It examines the deities worshipped by the people before 1440 and after. The impact of the introduction of Christianity on the people and the community came to focus. It analyses the reforms that took place in the annual Igue festival celebration during the reign of Oba Ewuare (1440-1472). It studies the transformation in the marriage institutions and other festivals in the community. The study relied on primary sources such as oral interviews and archival materials. It also consulted secondary sources like books, newspapers, articles, journals, theses, dissertations etc. The study found that the people of Ughoton worshipped many deities like Olokun, Osa, Ikhimwin, Oronwon, Egbile, Ovia in the earliest times, but Iso and Olokun-Ewuare were introduced after 1440. It was also found that the introduction of Christianity affected negatively the worship of these gods. Again it was found that marriage institutions and festivals witnessed serious reforms. The annual celebration of Olokun communal worship was greatly enhanced when Oba Ewuare came to power. It was discovered that the introduction of beads and red cloth by the Portuguese and the Dutch into Benin brought much respect to the traditional institutions. The study demonstrated that the British invasion of Ughoton in 1897 affected badly the celebrated deity “Olokun”.

Keywords: Marriage, Deities, Christianity, Transformation and Festivals.

Introduction

Ughoton also known to the Europeans as Gwatto, lies about 42 kilometers South-east of Benin. The town was probably founded in about the eleventh century by Prince Ekaladerhan, the only child of Ogiso Owodo, the last Ogiso of Ogiso dynasty of the Benin kingdom¹. In the traditional Ughoton society, there existed four major streets or Idumwun namely. Idumwun-Ode-Edo, Idumwun Elase, Idumwun Ukpo called (Gelegele road) and Idumwun Okeagor. From its rudimentary stage, Ughoton

witnessed rapid social transformation from the fifteenth century. This was facilitated by its strategic location on the Benin River which enabled it serve as the Port of Benin kingdom. As Ughoton grew in economic status, the political organisation and social activities of the community equally underwent rapid transformation processes.

Ughoton is a household name in Benin villages because the place is the home of the deity called “Olokun” worshiped by most Benins and known as the god of the sea, the giver of riches and children as well as posterity. They also worship other gods like Egbile, Oronwon, Ikina, Osa, Ovia etc. Ikhimwin is a tree symbolizing the earth, though it is not a god but it is highly revered in Ughoton like other Benin villages. In the same vein, the missionaries came through Ughoton as the chief port of Benin kingdom to introduce Christianity to Benin and the people of Ughoton. The presence of Assemblies of God church and the Ark of God in Ughoton is a credit to early missionaries who came through the port of Ughoton from the fifteenth century.

From 1440, the population of Ughoton increased as a result of the migration of different traders, visitors and missionaries to the community. From the fifteenth century, transformation took place in Ughoton arising from its religious activities. The religious activities included traditional African religion and Christianity which came into Benin kingdom through the port of Benin, Ughoton.

Again there were changes in the marriage institutions in Ughoton between 1440 and 1897. The different festivals like Igue, New yam (Iyan) and Ikpebor witnessed serious transformation. Although the new yam festival is not celebrated on a large scale among the Benins like the Ibos, there are certain rites to be done by the elders before the consumption of new yam.

The Concept of Transformation

Before discussing the issue of social transformation of Ughoton, it is necessary at this point to examine the concept of “Transformation”. Such an examination will give us a clear understanding of the social transformation of Ughoton from 1440-1897. Transformation connotes change as it relates to society or an organisation. It implies a positive movement from one stage to another. The occurrence propelled by the presence of certain indicators hitherto unknown in the society.

In this sense, transformation is change brought as a result of response to some influence. Hence R.W. Cox in his theory of transformation focuses on change which emanates from the bottom-up.² He argues that we should expect pressure for social change to take the form of political backlash like protest from those who are economically marginalized.³ Aligning with this view, Maclean argues that “in equalities has become a threat to human security..., people whose needs are not met are less likely to be productive economically and they are more likely to become militarily aggressive in protesting their condition.”⁴

One may accept change because of the obvious advantages or benefits derivable. Change can also be resisted if it goes against one’s traditions or norms or ethos of the society. That is why Sheldons says that although during the colonial era, most Mozambican urban spaces were male dominated, women who migrated from country side helped transform cities by crossing spatial economic and social boundaries and reducing notions of gender, particularly through work.⁵ Stressing the benefits derived from change, A.M. Howard, contends that it was residents themselves who have formed and transformed each city by building physical infrastructure and by co-operating through a multitude of network and associations in work and leisure.⁶

Transformation can take place at the level of organisation or individuals. In an organizational context, transformation is a process of profound and radical change that orients an organisation in a new direction and takes it to an entirely different level of effectiveness. That is why Sullivan and Decker define transformational leadership as a leadership style focused on effecting revolutionary change in organisations through a commitment to the organisation’s vision. In that sense, transformational leadership redefines people’s missions and visions, renews their commitment and restructures their systems for goal accomplishment through a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents.⁷

Transformation could be gradual which in this case involves phases and it could also be sudden depending on the circumstances or the forces at the top or centre dictating or influencing the change. What is also critical about transformation is that there is response to change. Based on the above analysis, the social transformation of Ughoton from ca. 1440 to 1897 can now be examined.

Religious Activities

The Worship of Deities

The number of gods worshipped in Ughoton increased compared to the earliest period. In the earliest times, the people of Ughoton worshipped many gods, which include Egbile, Oronwon, Olokun nick-named ‘Asonmwonhirhi, Osa. Ikhimwin, Ovia etc.

Olokun

The most celebrated and highly acknowledged by foreigners is the deity “Olokun”. The temple of Olokun was built by Prince Ekaladerhan, the founder of Ughoton. The Benin tradition acknowledged Prince Ekaladerhan, the only child of Ogiso Owodo, the last Ogiso of Ogiso dynasty, as the founder of Ughoton in about the eleventh century. The idea of initiating an Olokun worship in Ughoton could be attributed to its closeness to the sea or the Ovia Rivers⁸. Osemwegie Ebohon describes Olokun as the god of the sea and the giver of riches and children⁹. It is also the god of wealth, fertility and of the sea. Since life in Ughoton revolved around the sea, Prince Ekaladerhan used water and sea creatures as symbols, thus was the origin of Olokun communal worship.

In the earliest times, the annual celebration of Olokun was organized for 14 days usually in the month of November and during the celebration period, the Ughoton-Benin road was particularly closed to traffic road users. According to Ling Roth, people were allowed to go to Ughoton but they could not return to Benin until after the celebration¹⁰. Prince Ekaladerhan left the control of Olokun temple to his closest relative, Aigbovbiosa, when he was under pressure to leave Ughoton. Aigbovbiosa now took the title Ohen-Okun as the chief Priest of Olokun temple and the political head of Ughoton. The real worship of Olokun in Ughoton as in other villages in Benin kingdom is done with songs, accompanied with drums (ema-olokun) maracas (Ukuse and gongs (egogo) to invoke the god¹¹.

From 1440 the number of deities worshipped in Ughoton increased with the introduction of new gods which were Iso and Olokun-Ewuare. The Olokun which Prince Ekaladerhan started at the time the

village was founded in the eleventh century witnessed much transformation and decline between 1440 and 1897. Olokun spread to many towns and villages hence the village was described as the headquarter of Olokun worship. From the fifteenth century especially from the reign of Oba Ewuare, the reigning Oba of Benin sent tribute in the form of cow. However when the Olokun temple was destroyed during the British invasion in 1897, the tribute stopped. Serious encounter between the British Soldiers and the Benin strike force took place at Olokun temple at Ughoton. In spite of the resistance of the Benin soldiers, the Olokun temple was destroyed in that unfortunate invasion. The chief priest of Olokun temple was killed¹².

Again the worship of Olokun suffered lack of concerted public participation during this period because the title of the chief priest of Olokun temple has remained restricted to one family. Gone are the days when public enthusiasm including support of the reigning Oba during annual celebration could be assumed¹³. Roth argues that “Irekhu” as the celebration is called at Ughoton is no longer observed, the memory of it has passed into history¹⁴. It was in 1896 that the Olokun communal worship was last celebrated in Ughoton.

The British invasion of Ughoton affected Olokun worship in another way. It was argued that the celebrated Olokun was expected to revenge seeing the temple was destroyed and the High priest killed. Since this did not happen, the people lost their confidence and faith on the deity. This psychological reaction by the people of Ughoton following the British invasion of the place affected the worship of Olokun at Ughoton and other Benin village as apathy set in. Even when Oba Ovonranmwen was deported to Calabar in 1897, the Olokun could not prevent it, especially as the Oba was sending a yearly tribute of cow during annual celebration. The other gods that were introduced to Ughoton from the fifteenth century were Olokun Ewuare and Iso. This now increased the number of deities worshiped at Ughoton.

Olokun Ewuare

Olokun Ewuare was brought to Ughoton by Oba Ewuare in the 15th century. Olokun Ewuare shrine was where the people of Ughoton offer sacrifices and prayers for long-life and prosperity for the reigning Oba. The origin of Olokun Ewuare can be traced to the 15th century when Oba Ewuare visited Ughoton and requested to see river called “Ezeniminikpor” and the hill “Okenalubode”, thus Olokun

Ewuare came into existence ‘Dayi-Niken’ is the chief priest of Olokun-Ewuare and he presides over the proceeding and activities.

Iso

Iso was another deity which came into existence in Ughoton after 1440 whose’s main function was to give protection and security to the Odionwere, elders and the entire people of Ughoton. The deity is always kept at Odionwere’s residence. The Odionwere worships or serves this deity on behalf of the people. When Odionwere dies, it was an abomination to weep or cry in his residence because of the presence of Iso, until the Iso is taken away to ‘Ogua-Edion’ (meeting place for elders) awaiting the crowning of a new Odionwere.

Christianity

The coming of Christianity to Ughoton was another turning point in the town’s social transformation. The missionaries came through the port town in their quest to introduce Christianity to Benin and the people of Ughoton. Ughoton heard for the first time the existence of a new religion called Christianity in the fifteen century.

The first attempt made by the Portuguese to introduce Christianity to Benin was in the fifteenth century when King John II of Portugal sent d’ Aveiro to Benin on a trade mission. He was received by Oba Ozolua who ordered the Ohen-Okun of Ughoton to accompany the party to Portugal. It is said that when John Affonso d’ Aveiro came to Benin City for the second time, during the reign of Oba Esigie (1514), he advised the Oba to become a Christian and said that Christianity would make his country better. Oba Esigie again sent Ohen-Okun, the Olokun Priest of Ughoton, as Benin Ambassador to Portugal, asking the King of Portugal to send priest who would teach him and his people the faith. Oba Esigie sent one of his sons to be baptized and be taught to read by the missionaries.

On the strength of this, one can say that Ughoton was affected by the policies of Oba Esigie in Christianity. Since the missionaries came through the port of Ughoton to Benin, it may also be said that at the initial stage, Ughoton people may not have been interested in Christianity because of their long commitment to the worship of many deities, but after long acquaintance with the Portuguese, many of whom may have spoken to them on the issue found genuine interest in the alien religion.

The main purpose of the international relationship between Benin and Portuguese was trade. Trade went with religion, when Ohen-Okun of Ughoton was sent by Oba Ozolua as Benin Ambassador to Portugal, one of the requests was for the king of Portugal to send them missionaries to teach them the faith. The chief of Ughoton was received with great festivities and was shown many of the good things of Portugal and he was returned to his land in a ship of the king of Portugal¹⁵. Ruy de Pina wrote that Benin ambassador to Portugal was a man of good speech and natural wisdom¹⁶. Such positive comment gave an indication that the Benin Ambassador was already acquitted with the Portuguese culture in which Christianity is uppermost.

There is no doubt that the people of Ughoton contact with the Christian missionaries gave them some elements of Christian doctrine. Also the people of Ughoton had the singular advantage of having their Ohen-Okun as Benin Ambassador to Portugal from 1486-1580. They might have introduced the white man's culture including Christianity into the community. Hence some Ughoton people after many years saw the need to embrace Christianity.

Although there is no concrete evidence to show that Ughoton embraced Christianity during this period, the fact that many missionaries came through Ughoton must have influenced their embracing the new religion. Some of them lived and died there. Aveiro lived and died at Ughoton though buried in Benin City. Duarte Lopes also lived and died at Ughoton. Their effort at converting the Benin people to Christianity started at Ughoton.

Apart from the relative acceptance of Christianity by the Benin ambassador to Portugal, the Ohen-Okun of Ughoton, Pero Barroso, an interpreter at Ughoton was a Christian. Although there are no clear indications to show that churches were built at Ughoton, however, it is clear that structures were erected by the missionaries at Ughoton to serve as centres or places of worship while they resided there. The presence of churches like Assemblies of God and the Ark of God give credence to the efforts of these missionaries.

Marriage Institutions

Marriage system in Ughoton during this period also witnessed transformation. The old method of betrothing a female child to a male child at childhood was no more popular in this period. Generally, there were definite strands of identity running through various marriages of Benin communities which gave any indigenous marriage its essence¹⁷. This method of betrothing a female child to a male child at

childhood was the oldest method of marriage. The common practice in the case of betrothal was for the little girls to be betrothed to men who paid the bride price and rendered customary services like helping in farm work, house building or any work the infant girl's family might request, until the girls reached marriageable age. This method was strictly based on family love for another family.

There was also the marriage by inheritance. This was the practice whereby the elder or the younger brothers of a deceased were allowed by tradition to inherit the wives.

Another marriage practice in Ughoton was the infant type. The suitors usually signified their intentions some days after the birth of the female child. The suitor, usually sent bundles of firewood to the mother, the acceptance of which meant the consent of the child's parents and recognition of the suitor as the girls future husband¹⁸. If there was more than one suitor a family meeting was called and after serious deliberation, parents chose the bundle of firewood belonging to the man adjudged by the family to be the most likely to make the best husband¹⁹. Most important of all was the annual homage of honouring the girls' family with some tubers of yam. The family of the girl was honoured with regular palm wine, tobacco lumps and other befitting presents.

The official or ceremonial marriage day was when both families agreed and concluded that their children were matured enough to come together as husband and wife. Bride's family gives a list of items to be provided and a day is fixed for the traditional marriage. The most important thing on the day of marriage was the payment of bride price and the provision of other items contained in the list. The items in the list before 1440 include, tubers of yam, kolanuts, palm wine and two legs of antelope.

Disputes were always settled by the families of the couples because a typical marriage in Ughoton was a family affairs. It was a form of contract between the two families of the marrying pair and not between the individuals. The families had a stake in the success of the marriage. Benin indigenous marriages before 1440 were largely polygamous as applicable to Ughoton²⁰.

However, the marriage system in Ughoton after 1440 went through some changes. First, marriage by inheritance was reduced as a result of the preaching of the missionaries who saw the practice as barbaric. Second, the couples now have the right to decide who to marry compared to the earliest period when the boy or girl had no choice about whom to marry and when to marry as it was the exclusive right of the parents. From the fifteen century, prospective couples prefer to enter into a form of

courtship for some years with the intention to study each other before informing their parents of their interest to marry. This could be attributed to the presence of the Christian missionaries in Ughoton who were emphasizing the right of couples to marry based on love, tolerance, trust, affection, honesty instead of their parents deciding.

This is not say that parents were completely left out, they could still give useful advice to their children on how to succeed in marriage, find information about the partners, offer suggestions on issues and encourage them when they are confused²¹. It was only after this proper investigation of the partners that the groom's family comes officially to inform the family of the bride of their intention to marry their daughter²². A day is then fixed for the traditional marriage. As in the earliest period, a list of items will be given to the groom's family which they must comply with on the day of the marriage.

The items included palm wine, tubers of yam, kolanuts, coconuts, hot drink, cloth and two legs of antelope. From 1440, illicit gin and coconuts were now included in the items to be provided by the groom's family. Coconuts were brought into Benin through Ughoton as the port, by the Portuguese. As in the past, the most important thing on the day of marriage is the payment of bride price²³. Transformation took place as the bride price was paid in the currency of that period which included cowries, manila, copper, brass, and coins.

Also from the fifteenth century, adultery was punished by fines as well as by compensatory damages to the injured party to defray all expenses connected with purification rites forced on him by the wife's offence²⁴. In Ughoton in the pre-colonial period, the separation of husband and wife was an extremely rare occurrence. Once an indigenous marriage was contracted under native law and custom, it had a recognised stamp of permanency as divorce as a judicial proceeding was unknown under the indigenous system²⁵.

However, from 1440 in Ughoton, divorce was granted for reasons of impotence on the part of the man or sterility on the part of the woman, persistent and unbearable cruelty as well as for incurable and loathsome disease in either party. Adultery was considered a serious offence for divorce. This filtered into the culture of Ughoton because of the preaching of the Christian missionaries.

Also from this period, the practice of monogamy came into existence in Ughoton especially with the introduction of Christianity. The Holy Bible condemns a man marrying more than one wife, so in

Ughoton the people were now encouraged to marry one wife. Thus, the period marked the beginning of Christian marriage. While in the earliest period, polygamy was a practice, the coming of the Christian Missionaries made the people particularly the Christians to embrace monogamy which meant one man, one wife, it was because of the relevance of marrying many wives in the earlier period that made C.G. Okojie argued that Benin woman were very useful in yam cultivation for they assisted in providing labour in the farm thus, a typical Benin farmer usually had more than one wife²⁶.

Festival

Igue Festival

Igue festival celebrated throughout all Benin villages including Ughoton witnessed transformation. Basically, the Igue festival is celebrated all over the whole of Benin kingdom towards the end of the traditional lunar year which coincides with December and January months of the Gregorian calendar. Literally, Igue is the thanksgiving ceremony or service which God, the giver of life requires every human on earth to perform in fulfillment of his own side in the covenant of being preserved in health and wealth throughout the months of the year²⁷. In the earliest time in Benin, as applicable to Ughoton, the ceremony was not a festival. It took the form of a simple appreciation for what God had done in supplying their desired needs. It was not until the days of Ogiso Oriri (c. 960-1000AD) that the first Royal Igue was done as a national festival²⁸.

However, the joys of the elaborate handling of the Igue festival was suspended in 1384AD when Oba Ohen's was killed by the people of Benin following Oba Ohena assassination of Iyase Emuze. Fortunately, when Oba Ewuare came to the throne in 1440 he revived the Igue festival²⁹. Ughoton community featured very well in this festival every year. Before the coming of Christianity every household held and observed the period in high esteem in which the male leader as the eldest person of the home became automatically the presiding priest of the family. Among other events, kola-nuts were shared to every member of the house and prayers were said to thank God for sparing the lives of people for the past year. It was an exciting period in Ughoton each year.

From the reign of Oba Ewuare, and other kings who came after him, the main features of the festival were:

“Thanksgiving, marked by offerings, dancing and feasting with the joys of Iselogbe (I have survived through the year) and the prayers of continuity into another year (Ogbei-ma-gbarreo)³⁰ .

Oba Ewuare revived Igue festival to enable him celebrate the anniversary of his happy and prosperous marriage to Ewere by sacrificing goats, cows, leopards and offering kolanuts and coconuts. Ubi, Ewere and Oyoyo were daughters to a chief called Ogieka, who lived on the Benin-Ughoton road. While Ubi was disrespectful and disobedient to Oba Ewuare as his wife, Ewere acted humbly and honourably. Ugiewere was instituted therefore, as part of Igue festival to thank God for bringing princess Ewere to his home, who was seen as a harbinger of good luck. The Igue festival was also instituted to thank gods of good luck for making him succeed in his struggles to occupy the Benin throne henceforth the celebration was rounded off with Ugie-Iwere in which all citizens trouped out to pluck ‘ebewere’ (luck leaves) with which the people dance round the whole community exchanging presents in appreciation of God’s guidance throughout the Ugiewere day, the greeting ‘Ise N’ Ogbe rents the air everywhere.

Ughoton as a traditional community in Benin kingdom fully participated in this festival. However, after 1897, the plucking of ebewere and dancing round Ughoton village was no more popular, rather the celebration was done in individual homes.

New Yam (Emorho) festival

In the pre-colonial Benin, the main harvesting of yams fell within the last quarter of the year with the new yam often heralded by ceremonies and festivities³¹. Yam was the only crop which required a festival, in Ughoton, as in the past, individual families or the farmers would not start the consumption of their new yam with excitement until the new yam festival is performed. This takes place in the later part of September or early October each year.

However, it is significant to add that the enthusiasm associated with the annual celebration of new yam festival is long gone as individual family decides on the nature of the celebration this day.

Ikpebor Festival

Another festival which witnessed low patronage after 1440AD was the Ikpebor festival. This festival is celebrated in honour of the deities, Egbile and Oronwon. The celebration of these deities last more than a period of one month. During the celebration of Egbile and Oronwon, “Ozigbo” appears who

acquits the people with the current news in the village and informs them of future occurrences. As part of the Egbile or Oronwon festival, Ighodo festival also features. It is a day celebration. A source confirmed that Ighodo festival in Ughoton is always a memorable or historic day in Ughoton³².

Unfortunately, this important festival in this contemporary period is no longer regular as it used to be. A major factor responsible for this is the acrimony over who should be the traditional head of the village between the Odionwere and the Ohen-Oken, the chief priest of Olokun temple which started after the 1897 British invasion of Ughoton. Also, most of the elders are now more concerned with the material wealth which they can derive from Dubril Oil Company which operates in the area. They now pay little attention to the implementation of the natural laws of the land³³.

Ughoton As A Source of Accommodation and Interpreters

Ughoton grew to the status of a cosmopolitan town as a result of its contact with the Europeans after fifteen century. Many European traders, adventures, missionaries etc resided at Ughoton during the period of Benin European trade relationship. Some of them lived at Ughoton for a long time to transact business and others lived and died there, while some others lived temporarily there before continuing the journey to Benin City to have audience with the Oba of Benin. Still others established factories and warehouses at Ughoton which implied that they were there for a longtime to supervise the operation of their factories. The Portuguese, French and the Dutch established factories and warehouses at Ughoton. The Ughoton people did not only provide houses for the strangers but they ensured that they were thoroughly protected, as the Oba of Benin forbids any person to maltreat traders or other European visitors in his domain. Infact, it was a capital offence to maltreat foreign traders in Benin kingdom.

Again some people of Ughoton serving as local interpreters brought about a change in their social status and improved their standards of living. The long acquaintance of the people of Ughoton with the Europeans especially Portuguese enabled some of the natives to hear and speak the Portuguese language. These interpreters became so useful to themselves, the Benin chiefs and the Oba of Benin. The Portuguese found them very useful in the course of trade transaction in Ughoton and Benin City. Other Europeans like French, British and the Dutch also find them very useful. Oba Esigie's reply to King Manuel's letter dated 20 November, 1514 was carried to the Portuguese Monarch by a Benin Christian Pero Barroso, an interpreter at Ughoton³⁴.

From fifteenth century, the population increased because of the presence of different people that came to trade. The coastal trade attracted large number of people from the hinterland to settle permanently at Ughoton. These included the traders from the neighbouring communities like Ugbine, Igo, Ikpako , Ekenwuan and distant traders like Urhobos, Itsekiris, Ijebus, Ijaws, Ughoton water side also known as Gele-Gele became highly populated as a result of the coming of the Europeans to trade at Ughoton.

Ughoton transformed from a village before 1440 to a cosmopolitan town in the fifteenth century due to the influx of people from different areas. Also of relevance to this discussion was the introduction of coral beads and the red cloth (Ododo) into Benin by the Portuguese and Dutch after c. 1440. The importance of these beads and the red cloths to Benin traditional institutions cannot be over-emphasized. These red cloths became widely used by the reigning Obas and chiefs on special occasions. Thus was also applicable to Ughoton chief, Ohen-Okun, Odionwere, chief priests of other deities and their worshippers. The beads became associated with the regalia of the Oba and chiefs, Ohens including the Ohen-Okun of Ughoton. The reigning Obas began to give beads to illustrious sons and daughters in Benin kingdom because of their contributions to the development of the kingdom. It was a common practice seeing men and women putting on beads on their ankles and wrist³⁵. The beads distinguished a typical Benin man and woman from other tribes in Nigeria today. Ughoton men and women are not exempted because they are Benins.

Conclusion

The annual celebration of Olokun at Ughoton was enhanced when Oba Ewuare started sending cow in form of tribute which other Obas emulated. The psychological reaction of the people of Ughoton following the British invasion of the place affected the worship of Olokun. From the fifteenth century, the people of Ughoton heard for the first time the existence of a new religion called Christianity.

Again the introduction of beads and red cloth by the Portuguese and the Dutch into Benin brought much respect to traditional institutions. The beads distinguished a typical Benin man and woman from other tribes in Nigeria today. The red flannel cloth (ododo) later became the exclusive reserve of some traditional chiefs.

The marriage system in Ughoton went through changes from 1440-1897. The currency of the period was used to pay the bride price. The practice of one man, one wife was introduced into Ughoton.

The main features remained as in the past especially the payment of bride price and the provision of palm wine, kola nuts, two leg of antelope etc. However from 1440, illicit gin and coconuts were now included. Coconuts were brought to Benin by the Portuguese. The people of Ughoton from 1440 derived a source of wealth as the community soon became source of interpreters and accommodation during the period of Benin-European trade relations. From fifteenth century, the population increased because of the presence of different people that came to trade. The coastal trade attracted large number of people from the hinterland to settle permanently at Ughoton. The Europeans were also present at Ughoton being the Port of Benin and from 1440, it became the centre of attraction and a cosmopolitan town.

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31. P. A. Igbafe “The Pre-Colonial Economic Foundation of Benin Kingdom”, in I. A. Akinjogbin and Segun Osoba (eds.), *Topics on Nigeria Economic and Social History* (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Printing Press Ltd, 1980), p. 35.
32. Interview with Priest Frank Ukhuegbe, 50, Farmer, Ughoton, 14-1-2014.
33. Ibid
34. A. T. T. Fragmentos Macoa, Letter dated, 20 November, 1514.
35. Interview with Frank Iyangbe, 60, Farmer, Ughoton, 30-5-2013.