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PORT-HARCOURT: *Between the Diobu-Ikwerre and the Okrika*

By Akachukwu Vitalis

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FEATURE
IMAGE

The beautiful city of Port-Harcourt

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PORT-HARCOURT

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The Diobu were originally linked to the Okrikans by trade and intermarriage and the anglicization of both Okrika and Diobu furthered the bond between the two communities.

As a result of the Anglican Church's earlier penetration into the Ijaw country, Ijaw missionaries and educators (some of Okrikan origin) became the Diobu's first ministers and teachers.

The Diobu and Okrika were also linked by the contempt both groups held for the people from the Owerri hinterland (Isoma) to the North.

This attitude of contempt stemmed from the identification of the Owerri(province)-Ibo as slaves or in the years following the cessation of the slave trade as casual labourers who traveled South to work on the increasingly profitable Ikwerre palm plantations.

To the Ikwerre as to the Ijaw, the Owerri-Ibos were "bush" to be scorned as social inferiors.

The British negotiators of 1913 accepted the Okrikan claim to the ownership of the largest acreage but it was quite possible that the Okrikan success in the early land negotiation was due to the higher status the Okrikans occupied in the eyes of the Europeans traders and missionaries.

The Okrikans with much exposure to the Europeans by 1913 were already very involved with the British, both economically and administratively.

The more parochial less educated Diobu farmers were therefore at a considerable disadvantage.

Against this background, the continuing Diobu feeling that what the Okrikans took was out of cleverness rather than out of rights, became understandable.

The colonial government's appointment of an Okrikan to supervise the removal of the town of Diobu for a new site, was indicative of this imbalance.

Unlike the Okrika and the communities that were party to the 1913 land acquisition, the Diobus violently objected to the expropriation of their land by the colonial authorities nor did they take enthusiastically to their proposed resettlement in an area nearby.

The Okrika made no effort to resist the 1913 government acquisition and whatever identification they may have had with Port Harcourt prior to that time was effectively terminated by their acceptance of £3000 compensation."

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