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Warrior Regime in Africa: Igbu's Socio-religious Relevance in Countering Radical Herdsmenism in Urhoboland of Nigeria

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Abstract:

Since Nigerian Fulani herders have access to contemporary firearms and communication tools, their assaults have taken on a more lethal dimension. In particular, the Fulani herdsmen's acts of homicide, robbery, rape, and abduction have caused suffering for the people of Urhoboland, posing a severe security threat that the government has failed to address. This article discusses the socio-religious significance of Urhobo Igbu (Eagle-Feathered Warriors) in addressing this radical herdsmenism in Urhoboland. The research relies on oral interviews and extant literature to achieve its objective. The study demonstrates that the onslaught by the Fulani herdsmen threatens food security and production, results in the loss of life and property, and causes extreme unemployment and hunger in Urhoboland, thus endangering the peace, safety, and unity of the Urhobo people. The study concludes that the Igbu are still important on a social, religious, fundamental and military level in dealing with the radicalism of the Fulani herdsmen in Urhoboland.

Keywords: Igbu, Warrior, Urhobo, Nigeria, Herdsmenism, Socio-religious.

Introduction

Indigenous African civilization had its own customary means of avoiding, controlling, and resolving conflict even before the slave trade and colonialism. The existence of warriors is not alien to Africa. Warriors excelled not just in battle but also as great leaders who guided and controlled their subjects with prudence and clever tactics. African warriors who governed throughout history are one thing that cannot be forgotten. Due to their exceptional leadership abilities and the wonderful things they accomplished during their time, their names are still acknowledged even among the present generation. Many ancient

warriors, emperors, and leaders have endeavored to lead their people to victory and prosperity throughout history. Ancient warriors had a strong sense of strategic planning for their military force, comprehensive persuasive ability for communication, and a continual feeling of respect since they were watched and trusted by their communities. For instance, the warrior regime in Urhoboland in ancient times and even today cannot be forgotten due to the socio-religious roles they played.

The Urhobo ethnic group is located in the Niger-Delta, Delta State of Nigeria, a region limited by latitudes of 6° and 15° North and longitudes of 5°, 40°, and 6°, 25° East and shares boundaries with the Isoko in the southeast, the Itsekiri and Ijaw in the west, Edo, Ijaws, and Ukwuani in the north and northeast.[1] According to Ottuh and Erhabor, the Urhobo people make up about two million of Nigeria's total population.[2] The language spoken by the people is Urhobo. The Urhobo political system has two tiers: the kingdom and the town.[3] In Urhobo governments, the *Ovie* (king) is the most important political figure. His council members are the *Ototа* (speaker) and the Ohoveworen or Okakoros (chiefs). Other title bearers are the executioners (*Ikoikpokpo*) and eagle-feathered warriors (Igbu or Itu-Igbu). The main focus of Urhobo traditional religion is the worship of *Oghene* (the Supreme God), as well as the recognition of divinities. Four categories may be drawn from the Urhobo deities, which likely correspond to the tribe's historical progression. The guardian deities, war deities, prosperity deities, fertility deities, and ethical deities are among them. *Oghene*, however, is the primary element and expression of all divinities in the Urhobo religion. Another crucial component of the Urhobo religious system is the worship of the ancestors and predecessors (*Esemo* and *Iniemo*), also known as *Erivwin*.[4] While some Urhobos still stick to their traditional worship, and the majority of them currently practice Christianity. Currently, Urhoboland is facing serious security challenges as a result of Fulani herdsmen attacks. According to Ottuh and Aitufe, these security challenges which include kidnapping have not only impediment the Urhobo land but also the entire Niger Delta region of Nigeria.[5]

The Urhobo as a people have not lost the ability to live in peace, to communicate with one another, to respect one another, to bargain, to pardon, and to reconcile in order to resolve their issues. Justice does not always bring about peace and

[1] Onigu Otite (ed.), *The Urhobo People* (London: Shaneson C. I., 2003), 208
[2] Peter Ottuh and Felix Erhabor, "Assessing the Relevance of Ize-Obo (Sacrifice) in Traditional Religion of Idjerhe People of Nigeria." *Calabar Journal of Liberal Studies-Cajolis,* 20.2 (2018): 310-327.
[3] Samuel Erivwo, "Urhobo Religion and the Urhobo Nation." In *History of the Urhobo people of Niger Delta,* edited by Peter Ekeh, 26-49. Ibadan: Urhobo Historical Society, 2006.
[4] Erivwo 2006, p. 28
[5] P.O.O. Ottuh and V.O. Aitufe, "Kidnapping and Moral Society: An Ethico-Religious Evaluation of the Nigerian Experience". *European Scientific Journal*, 10.14(2014): 420-434.

coexistence for a people, in contrast to what happens in today's contemporary, formal judicial system, with the establishment of law courts, paralegals, the police, and other elements of law and order. Today's onslaught by Fulani herdsmen on Urhoboland has assumed a terrifying new dimension that needs to be studied. Rarely does a week go by without some report of assaults and killings in one Urhobo community or the other. Each of these heinous crimes sometimes results in the massive destruction of life and property worth millions of naira. Therefore, the main goal of this study is to investigate the threat posed by Fulani herders to Urhoboland and the relevance of the Igbu (Eagle-feathered warriors) in curbing this menace since government security measures have failed to address the challenges. This research adopts historical and phenomenological methods to investigate and analyze information gleaned through published works and oral interviews. The functionalist theory was selected as a theoretical framework to complement the study. This theory is used to examine the usefulness of Igbu in reducing the danger posed by the radical Fulani herders in Urhoboland. Due to the nature of the discontent brought on by society and the resulting aggression, restorative justice may be required to resolve the conflict between Urhobo people and Fulani ranchers. Because banditry is a problem in most Nigerian communities, there are already a lot of studies being done on community policing. One of such studies by Peter Ottuh is "Amotekun: Assessing the Religious Paradox of a Community Policing Typology in South-Western States of Nigeria".[6] In addition to those studies, the current research also contributes to knowledge in this domain.

The Dilemma of Radical Herdsmenism in Urhoboland

Between 20 and 25 million Fulani people live in the world.[7] There are typically three different types of Fulani: the nomadic-pastoral or Mbororo, the semi-nomadic, and the settled or "town" Fulani. According to Ottuh and Idjakpo, the Fulani were believed to have been assimilated into Northern Nigeria's Hausa culture after the Uthman dan Fodio jihad.[8] Today, they are everywhere in Nigeria, including Urhoboland. In 2014, Fulani ethnic group militants are believed to have murdered at least 1229 people in Nigeria.[9] According to the 2019 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), herders murdered more Nigerians in 2018 than Boko Haram did in the nation.[10] For the fifth time since 2015, the GTI study

[6] Peter. O.O. Ottuh, "Amotekun: Assessing the Religious Paradox of a Community Policing Typology in South-Western States of Nigeria". *Matondang Journal,* 1.2(2022): 54-64.
[7] L. Ludovica, "Fulani Militants: Herdsmen Accused of Killing 1,200 People in 2014". *International Business Times,* 2015, 11.
[8] Peter O.O, Ottuh and Onos G. Idjakpo, "Migration and Religious Socialization in Nigeria: The Fulanization Dilemma." *Journal of Liberty & International Affairs,* 8.3(2022): 418-428.
[9] C.I. Ndubuisi, "A Critical Analysis of Conflicts between Herdsmen and Farmers in Nigeria: Causes and Socio-religious and Political Effects on National Development". *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies,* 74.1 (2018): 5065.
[10] Cited in Cletus Ukpong, "Herders Killed more Nigerians in 2018 than Boko Haram – Report". In *Premium Times*, 2019. Accessed November 28, 2022, https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/364355-herders-killed-more-nigerians-in-2018-than-boko-haram-report.html

classified Nigeria as the third-worst nation in the world for the effects of terrorism.[11] According to Ottuh and Erhabor, herdsmennism and radical Islamism are arguably the most pervasive socio-economic and security challenge facing the Federation of Nigeria today, as evidenced by even a cursory glance at Nigerian newspapers and social media.[12] The Fulani people of Northern Nigeria and their activities are exclusively associated with the term "herdsmenism". Ottuh and Omosor affirm emphatically that the ongoing conflicts (which include killing, maiming, or wiping out thousands of farmers) between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria have gotten out of hand, and due to their politicization, the problem has remained unresolved.[13] It is impossible to overstate the threat that Fulani herdsmen pose to Nigeria's political stability, economic success, and food security and production. Most of the time, farmers' homes and communities are destroyed, and they are overpowered, maimed, raped, or killed by radical Fulani herdsmen.

Urhobo leaders are very concerned about the thorny problem of herdsmen's cattle grazing on farmlands, particularly in the villages of Uwheru, Avwraka (Abraka), Ughelli, Idjerhe, and Eku, just to mention a few. This has often resulted in the deaths of innocent farmers. The productivity and profitability of the people and farmlands are severely hampered by the presence of these deadly herders.[14] The Urhobo ethnic group in Delta State has expressed concern about Fulani herdsmen's activity in a few areas inside Urhoboland. According to Ottuh and Idjakpo, the migration of herders had caused a lot of damage to the Nigerian society including Urhoboland, and it is stressed that the loss of their farmland is gradually leading to famine.[15] The corporate existence and security of Urhobo are seriously threatened by the violent actions of the Fulani herders. The rule of law and order has been severely weakened by these conflicts in Urhoboland. Many people have moved away from where they were farming, which was their main source of income. This fosters a climate of mistrust and hostility amongst people. The Fulain herdsmen's radicalism has also led to the disruption of educational activities in Urhoboland. Residents of areas subjected to frequent attacks by Fulani herdsmen typically move to regions not at risk. Edoja in an interview claims that many strangers had decided to move down to their homes, thus reducing the population of their former community's

[11] Ukpong 2019
[12] Peter Ottuh and Felix Erhabor, "Radical Islamism: Trajectories of Human Rights Violations and Abuses in Africa". *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs,* 8.1(2022): 243-264.
[13] Peter O.O, Ottuh and Festus O. Omosor. "Examination of Religiophobia and Politicization of Religious Conflicts in Postcolonial Nigeria", *Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 14.4(2022): 37-54.
[14] O.A. Chukwuma, "The Trajectories and Dynamics of Herdsmen Militancy in Central Nigeria". *Journal of Humanities and Social Policy* 2.1(2016): 22 – 30.
[15] Ottuh and Idjakpo 2022, 418-428.

residents.[16] In Urhoboland, the conflict between the herders has also hurt religious events like night vigils and midweek services.

Using Functionalism as a Theoretical Framework

Functionalism is a way of thinking that takes a broad view of society and is based on Emile Durkheim's theories. It looks at the fundamental institutions that support a society and how each one contributes to its stability. Talcott Parsons' social theory, or functionalism, was developed in the first part of the 20th century and his theory was built on his synthesis of the ideas of Durkheim, Webber, and other thinkers.[17] Functionalism, according to Parsons, takes the form of a description or schema of society, its elements, and how they interact.[18] According to Bell, in this theory, a society is made up of interconnected pieces, each of which has a purpose and contributes to the stability of the society as a whole.[19] Between 1910 and 1930, two variations of functionalism emerged: Radcliffe-structural-functionalism and Brown's and Malinowski's biocultural (or psychological) functionalism.[20] According to Malinowski, consistent psychological reactions are correlates of physiological requirements, and by satisfying these demands, the culturally significant activity evolves into an acquired desire via psychological reinforcement.[21]

According to Porth, Neutzling, and Edwards, Radcliffe-Brown prioritized social organization over biological requirements, as opposed to institutions, which are structured sets of interactions with the goal of maintaining the society as a system; thus, they propose that a society is a system of relationships that maintains itself through cybernetic feedback.[22] The focus on Malinowski's conception of functionalism obscures their parallels and complementarities. Both saw society as being organized into a functional totality in which the many components coexist while still maintaining the whole. According to Radcliffe-Brown, social levels must be used to create explanations for social phenomena. Radcliffe-Brown disagreed with Malinowski's focus on the importance of people, seeing them as unimportant.[23] They did, however, have the strong belief

[16] Oyubu Edoja, Personal interview, Oria-Abraka, August 21, 2022 (transcripts in authors' possession).
[17] Richard Ormerod, "The History and Ideas of Sociological Functionalism: Talcott Parsons, Modern Sociological Theory, and the Relevance for OR". Journal of the Operational Research Society, 71.12 (2020: 1873-1899.
[18] Thomas Parsons, *Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 81.
[19] K. Bell (ed.), "Functionalism". In *Open Education Sociology Dictionary, 2013.* Accessed October 23, 2022, https://sociologydictionary.org/functionalism/
[20] Bell 2013
[21] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 22.
[22] Eric Porth et al., "Functionalism". 2022. Accessed September 16, 2022, https://anthropology.ua.edu/theory/functionalism/.
[23] A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Method in Social Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 113.

that societies have a strong tendency to preserve their stability and internal coherence as if they had homeostatic characteristics. The many components of a society are compared to the organs of a live creature using the biological analogy. In this way, a society, like a biological entity, is able to retain its fundamental functions via the interactions between its constituent elements. In this way, restorative justice may be needed to solve the conflict between aggrieved parties because of the way society makes people angry and aggressive. Thus, the relevance of Igbu in curbing Fulani herders' threats in Urhoboland can be studied using the functionalist theory. In this way, the conflict between the Urhobo people and radical Fulani herders may need restorative justice to end because of the way society makes people unhappy and makes them act aggressively.

Some Earlier Research on African Warriors

A warrior is a person who participates in combat and is renowned for his or her bravery and skill. Most African societies are known for their successes in battles due to the bravery and combating skills of their warriors. Alpern makes the case for Dahomey's female warriors (Mino, or "Our Mothers"), also called "Amazonian warriors," and argues that they were fearless, devoted, and lethal fighters, unlike all other female guards.[24] Although, they were legally married to the monarch, they kept their virginity. Edgerton argues that Dahomey was a significant port for the slave trade in the seventeenth century.[25] As a result; there was a reduction in the number of males during the Atlantic Slave Trade. Hence, when males were not available, women filled the roles of hunters (Gbeto) and fighters in Dahomey. Alpern adds that through the ages, the Mino have horrified and awed European rulers, but they were, however, dissolved after colonial France's conquest of Dahomey in the late 1800s.[26] According to Jones, an all-female regiment of warriors guarded Dahomey from the late 1600s until the early 1900s.[27] African warriors and the state in pre-colonial Africa were studied by Uzoigwe.[28] He contends that no state, whether ancient or modern, has ever totally separated the military from the political structure of the people. For instance, in the pre-Zulu state, the military and politics were dangerously entwined. In the inter-lacustrine countries of Buganda and

[24] Stanley Alpern, *Amazons of Black Sparta: The Women Warriors of Dahomey* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2011), 23.
[25] Robert Edgerton, *Warrior Women: The Amazons of Dahomey and the Nature of War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 85.
[26] Alpern 2011, p. 23
[27] Jones Rachel, "The Warriors of this West African Kingdom were Formidable and Female". In National Museums of Kenya, 2022. Accessed August 21, 2022, https://artsandculture.google.com/story/the-warrior-a-people-s-defender/SgKy75TCti6JJA
[28] G.N. Uzoigwe, "Precolonial Military Studies in Africa". *The Journal of Modern African Studies,* 13.3 (1975): 469-481; G.N. Uzoigwe, "The Warrior and the State in Precolonial Africa: Comparative Perspectives." *Journal of Asian and African Studies,* Xii.1-4 (1975): 20-47.

Bunyoro Kitara, the warrior in politics has a long history as well.[29] The warrior was the ideal embodiment of politics in the non-kingdom state of Kikuyu. As administrators and military leaders, they had important administrative duties in the governance of the area. Refusing to support the king during a military crisis constituted a rebellion.[30] In Africa, the military and state coexisted, transforming the warrior into the ideal political being. According to Uzoigwe, the warrior was a citizen first and foremost, and his schooling was a master class in social control and manipulation.[31] The work of Laband narrates the experiences of the militarily inferior African cultures while telling the tale of this conglomeration of battles as a whole.[32] It combines the very different European and African viewpoints on events; examines why many Africans enlisted in the British and colonial troops; and recounts the disastrous choices made by certain commanders and generals. Hutchings adds to this argument by using the Xhosa, Zulu, and other African military cultures to show how different ideas of warrior honour and manliness have had different effects on African fighting men and their society.[33]

Peers assert that the warriors of East Africa had a reputation for being as ferocious while being less well-known than the Zulu of South Africa.[34] According to him, for the majority of the 19th century, the skills of the lion-hunting Masai prevented any outside intrusion; the Ngoni, who were driven north by the Zulu; the HeHe; the Ruga-Ruga, who produced two formidable warlords and decorated themselves with bloody trophies; the Nandi, who displayed reckless bravery even in the face of machine guns; and the Turkana, who controlled one of Africa's most ruthless wildernesses. Launay wrote about the Dyula and the Senufo, who were two different ethnic groups that lived in the north-central Ivory Coast area between Korhogo and Ferkessedougou.[35] It was formerly conceivable to classify the former as patrilineal Manding-speaking Muslim merchants and the latter as pagan farmers. According to Launay, the Dyula societies operated similarly to the Senufo poro to keep a disciplined corps of available soldiers willing to submit to the ruling authority.[36] The Dyula kabila's succession structure required that the chief nearly always assume his

[29] Uzoigwe "Precolonial Military Studies in Africa,"1975, p. 469.
[30] Alli Mazrui, "The Resurrection of the Warrior Tradition in African Political Culture". *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 13.1(1975): 67–84.
[31] Uzoigwe 2001, p. 26.
[32] John Laband, *Zulu Warriors: The Battle for the South African Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 43.
[33] Anne Hutchings, "Ritual Cleansing, Incense and the Tree of Life-Observations on some Indigenous Plant Usage in Traditional Zulu and Xhosa Purification and Burial Rites". *Alternation,* 14.2(2007): 189-217.
[34] , Chris Peers, *Warrior Peoples of East Africa 1840–1900* (London: Osprey Publishing, 2005), 62.
[35] Robert Launay, "Warriors and Traders: The Political Organization of a West African Chiefdom. *Cahiers d'études africaines* 28.111-112(1998): 355-373.
[36] Robert Launay, *Electronic Media & Islam among the Dyula of Northern Cote de'Ivoire*. *Africa,* 3(1997): 67.

position as an elderly man.[37] Although they were regarded as Muslims, Tun Tigi did not adhere to the text of the law with the same rigour as the Mory. Wilks argues that the Muslim Dyula of Kadioha acknowledged that their ancestors had engaged in slave raids and plunder, therefore, warfare was a crucial component of political authority in both kingdoms and chiefdoms.[38]

In their article, Taiaiake and Lana sought to convey accurate information on the history and present-day situation of warrior cultures in indigenous communities.[39] They argue that Indigenous peoples have struggled to overcome the impacts of colonialism throughout modern history. Taiaiake and Lana state further that one facet of indigenous peoples' broader struggle for survival is the resurgence of warrior societies among them in the modern era. In this sense, indigenous peoples use warrior societies as a method of taking direct action against colonialism and the history of their dispossessed. According to Adedeji, Oshun (a Yoruba female divinity) finds herself at conflict with the gods after being chosen to embark on a mission to save her land from the murderous King Adua. Oshun, Ogun, Morimi, Yemaja, and Shango were equipped with superpowers and were anticipated to journey through the Nla jungle to join forces with other warriors.[40] Oshun believed the gods must be wrong when she discovered she possessed abilities. The gods had chosen the warriors to free the peasants from the murderous king's rule. Thornton writes about the Kongo warrior. According to him, many indigenous military systems may be seen in the Kongo area, especially in the kingdoms of Kongo and Ndongo.[41] The majority of the fighting hosts consisted of volunteers and general-purpose levies, but most Kongo polities kept a small core of devoted warriors as the foundation of a regular army. These units were utilized for a variety of operations. Only a few arrows, some of which were poisoned by an effective concoction known as cabanzo, were carried into combat by the most courageous warriors. According to Ukpabi, military installations in Africa had as many differences as the traditional cultures that shaped them, yet the former nonetheless provided comparable services to the latter.[42] It was utilized externally against other communities in an effort to maintain the power balance.

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[37] Launay 1997, p. 67.
[38] Ivor Wilks, "The Juula and the Expansion of Islam into the Forest". In *The History of Islam in Africa,* edited by N. Levtzion and R.L. Pouwels, 281-395. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000.
[39] Alfred Taiaiake and Lowe Lana, "Warrior Societies in Contemporary Indigenous Communities". 2021. Accessed July 3, 2022, https://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/inquiries/ipperwash/policy_part/research/pdf/Alfred_and_Lowe.pdf
[40] Wande Adedeji, *The African Warriors: Epic Fight for Liberation* (Ibadan: Abik Press, 2021), 42.
[41] John Thornton, "The Art of War in Angola, 1575–1680". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30.2 (2009): 360–378.
[42] S.C. Ukpabi, *The Military in Traditional African Societies (*New York: Afrika Spectrum, 1994), 54.

Eliseeva writes about warriors that would not desecrate the places of their ancestors nor of saints.[43] He explains that it was strictly forbidden for Fulani warriors to desecrate sacred places such as the tombs of chiefs and ancestors, mosques, and buildings erected over the tombs of individuals regarded as saints. Eliseeva adds that when Fulani warriors captured wounded prisoners of the opposition, they were turned over to the women to treat and care for. This emphasizes the fact that there is a special place for strangers in African culture; hence, wounded prisoners were treated with respect and dignity. Mazrui examines the period of initial resistance when Africa first had to deal with western penetration and has lately received more attention.[44] Mazrui first delves deeper into the fundamental components of the warrior tradition, then moves on to Shaka as a representation of the warrior tradition in Africa before widespread colonization, and finally to Idi Amin as a representation of the birth of a new warrior tradition in Africa. According to Ranger, for Eastern Africa and Michael Crowder for Western Africa, the early military resistance to colonial authority by Africans is where contemporary nationalism on the continent really began.[45] By this logic, the Maji Maji and prior uprisings against German rule from the 1880s forward serve as the ancestors of Tanzania's governing party and its role as a liberating force.[46] African resistance movements did not start with contemporary political organizations and intellectuals with western education; rather, they were led by the first basic resisters, who were armed with spears to counter western military equipment. Moyd also supports this claim that the warrior culture did not begin with the arrival of the white man in Africa.[47] Instead; it was a very important part of the culture of most African countries before the white man came.

According to Kithuka, in African societies warrior class played a crucial part in the communities since those who belonged to a given age group would have certain responsibilities and perform a specific function within their community.[48] In the majority of towns, the warriors planned attacks that resulted in significant riches from the vanquished communities. Since they were a significant cause of inter-communal strife among pastoralist groups, cattle raids are now forbidden in Kenya.[49] Warriors were required to demonstrate

[43] Anastasya Eliseeva, "African Values in War: A Tool on Traditional Customs and IHL", 2020. Accessed June 30, 2022, https://www.icrc.org/en/document/african-customs-tool-traditional-customs-and-ihl.
[44] Mazrui 1975, p. 70
[45] Terrence Ranger, "Religious Movements and Politics in Sub-Sahara Africa". *African Studies Review*, 29.2(1986): 1-69.
[46] Mazrui, 1975, p. 72.
[47] Michelle Moyd, "Resistance and Rebellions (Africa)". In *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, edited by Daniel Ute et al., 285-399. Berlin: Freie Universitat Berlin, 2017.
[48] I. Kithuka, "The Warrior: A People's Defender", 2022. In National Museums of Kenya. Accessed June 3, 2022, https://artsandculture.google.com/story/the-warrior-a-people-sdefender/SgKy75TCti6JJA
[49] Jeffrey Herbst, "The Europeans and the African Problem". In *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Scholarship, 2014.

their masculinity by doing great deeds since they were essential participants in their tribes' political and social standing. For instance, a moran in the Maasai culture was supposed to demonstrate his manliness by killing a lion.[50] This was accomplished one-handedly with nothing but a spear. To denote their position, they wore beads across their chests and wielded spears. There was often a predetermined interval between initiation rites in most tribes. The transition from childhood to warriorhood was marked by an initiation ritual for a whole age group. According to Kithuka, one's status as a warrior historically started with circumcision and ended after marriage.[51] In most societies, archery was one of the physical endurance or courage tests that were part of the training. Regardless of how long the warrior tradition has existed, change affects most African tribes. The younger generation is more drawn to modern culture and the charm of the metropolis, which lessens the importance of the warrior in contemporary society.

Igbu (Eagle-Feathered Warrior) in Urhoboland

In Urhoboland, Igbu (singular Ogbu) are traditional warriors with eagle feathers attached to their caps or hats. This means that, in Urhoboland, not every warrior is considered an "***Ogbu***" (eagle-feathered warrior). To be promoted to an "***Ogbu***", such a warrior might have killed human beings during war or killed a lion or a leopard or an elephant. The cap or hat that an ***Ogbu*** wears is decorated with eagle feathers, and the number of eagle feathers on the cap or hat represents the number of human beings or/and lions or leopards he has killed. According to oral tradition, Urhoboland experienced frequent inter-tribal and inter-community wars in its early migration stage and final settlement in its present permanent location.[52] As a result, many Urhobo people lost their lives and properties, including farmlands. During that era, the people became afraid of their enemies, but some communities within the Urhoboland summoned the courage to defend themselves against their enemies. Some of these communities included Orogun, Kokori, Ovu, Evwron (now Effurun), Agbasa, Ughelli, Idjerhe (or Jesse), Eko (now Eku) and Agbarha, among others.[53] As a result of the frequent wars and insecurity in the land, each of these communities began to search for a divinity in-charge of war to defend, protect, and provide for them.

To resolve the insecurity challenges in Urhoboland, there was a search for war divinities or gods. They achieved this by consulting and inviting some notable and powerful native doctors and medicine men from other lands.[54] The

[50] Kithuka 2022, p. 221.
[51] Kithuka 2022, p. 221.
[52] Benjamin Ododo, Personal interview, Ovu, June 3, 2022 (transcripts in authors' possession).
[53] Fabian Ukueku, Personal interview, Eku, June 23, 2022 (transcripts in authors' possession).
[54] Wilfred Akpobaro, Personal interview, Agbarho town, August 11, 2022 (transcripts in authors' possession).

medicine men who were asked to come were those who knew a lot about war charms and could call on the war gods. According to Emajemite, the war charms were activated using human sacrifices.[55] For Mbiti, sacrifice refers to cases where animal or human life is destroyed and offered in order to appease a deity or gods.[56] In this sense, the highest sacrificial object is a human being. This means life for life. Mbiti approached sacrifice from the perspective of worship.[57] In Urhoboland, sacrifices are not just for the supernatural; they're also used to turn on and turn off powerful charms. At this point in Urhoboland, the powerful war charms that were needed to repel their enemies were those that needed human sacrifices to activate.[58] The medicine men that prepared and activated the war charms were not allowed to live afterward but were also used as sacrificial lambs. This is because the people (beneficiaries) do not want their enemies to know the secret of their powers or bribe their charm-makers in order to revoke the potency of their charms.[59] Any brave man or warrior in the community that could kill and bring the head of any of the powerful war charm-makers for sacrifice was given the title "Ogbu" and with an eagle feather pegged on his cap or hat to represent the title.[60] Hence, the literal meaning of "Ogbu" is "eagle-feathered warrior". The plural form is "Igbu" (eagle-feathered warriors).

The Igbu are constituted into Itu-Igbu, which means "cult of eagle-feathered warriors". This was the genesis of the existence of Ogbu or Igbu in Urhoboland. In addition, the war charm-makers killed by the Igbu were deified as war deities or war gods. Oral tradition has it that the beheaded charm-makers were immortalized with festivals organized and celebrated in their honour on a yearly basis. In addition, the war deities also became objects of worships every *edewor* or *edeki* (market day – every four days). These war deities or gods were traditionally named by the different communities in Urhoboland. For instance, the war deity of the Idjerhe people is called "Okunovu"; "Ovughere" for Ovu; "Egba" for Kokori; "Eruse and Edjororiarha" for Orogun people; and "Echeroko" for Eku, among others. The traditional name for a war deity or god is not only limited to the Urhobo people but cuts across some other communities in Delta State. For example, among the Ukwuani, it is called Egba, and it is known as Egbesu in Ijawland. According to Awolalu and Dopamu, Egbesu is conceived as a war god.[61] In the past, its worship played an important role in the conduct of

[55] Freeborn Emajemite, Personal interview, Onyobru-Jesse, March 13, 2022 (transcripts in authors' possession).
[56] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980), 71.
[57] Mbiti 1980, 71
[58] Matthew Umukoro, Personal interview, Isiokolo, August 19, 2022 (transcripts in authors' possession).
[59] Peace Ojada, Personal interview, Okpara Inland, July 7, 2022 (transcripts in authors' possession).
[60] Miler Amakeke, Personal interview, Otumarha-Jesse, March 7, 2022 (transcripts in authors' possession).
[61] Omosade Awolalu and Adelmno Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: Onibonoje Press, 1979), 66.

war against any neigbouring village. According to them, the emblems of Egbesu were carried in the war-canoe after the warriors would undergo some purificatory rites. The leader of the warriors held a horse tail, which was part of the god's symbol. People thought they were sure to win unless there was sin in the camp, which was the same as defiling and desecrating the warriors.

After the era of the killing of the initial war charm-makers, the status *quo* qualification to earn an Ogbu title or be initiated into the Itu-Igbu (eagle-feathered warriors' cult) changed. Afterward, for any brave warrior or man in Urhoboland to become an Ogbu or earn the Ogbu title was predicated on his ability to: (1) kill an enemy (human being) during war and present the head to the Onori-Igbu or Onori-Itu-Igbu or Ogbu-r'ode (Commander or Head or Chief of the eagle-feathered warriors' cult) who will proclaim him an "Ogbu" and initiate him into the Itu-Igbu; (2) or kill an elephant or a lion or a tiger or a leopard and present the head to the Onori-Igbu) who will proclaim him an "Ogbu" and initiate him into the Itu-Igbu. The number of eagle feathers (*uvwo-ro-omokho*) on an Ogbu's cap or hat signifies the number of human beings or wild animals he has killed.[62] This is colourfully displayed on the caps or hats they (Igbu) wear during the community's festivals or other important ceremonies. During the festivals, the Igbu, in their regalia adorned with some traditional weapons (bows and arrows, swords, spears, shied, raffia helmets, and so on) of war, pay homage to their war deities and entertain onlookers with their traditional war dances for two days. The Igbu are respected in all the Urhobo communities, and festivals and ceremonies marking their transition into this stage were also performed to strengthen their defenses and guarantee their protection from those they had killed. One thing that is common with an Ogbu is that he does not drink wine or water with his right hand but with his left hand. An Ogbu does not enter his hut or house facing the door but through his back.[63] Being an eagle-feathered warrior (Ogbu) was historically associated with manliness and masculinity in Urhoboland. Warriors with eagle feathers were required to display their masculinity by doing heroic deeds. They live in a civilization that has been devastated by war, where one's worth is determined by the quantity of people, wild animals, or territory one has killed or taken. Warriors are revered and adored for their physical prowess outside of the context of combat. In Urhoboland, they collaborated with the elders, who had the last word on everything, and they had to be inventive and proactive.

Igbu's Socio-religious Relevance in Urhoboland

Socio-religious activities in this context suggest a fusion of both social and religious elements. Such social factors have an impact on the way of life of an individual or a community. Wealth, religion, habits, level of education, family

[62] Johnson Omene, Personal interview, Oroakpor, April 29, 2022 (transcripts in authors' possession).
[63] James Ekroda, Personal interview, Agbarha, July 29, 2022 (transcripts in authors' possession).

size and structure, and population density are a few examples of these. The religious viewpoint of a people is shaped by their culture and surroundings, which also contribute to other parts of the community's development and the awakening and growth in their religious belief systems. The Igbu in Urhoboland play both social and religious roles. People's lives are at stake; preserving social cohesion and stability in their neighborhoods; acting as agents of social control over people's behaviour, fostering physical and psychological wellbeing among community members; and inspiring people, particularly young people, to work for positive moral and social change. The Igbu are fearless and brave men who stand at all times to defend Urhoboland from intra and inter-aggressions. The Igbu play important roles in Urhobo religious, social, political, and cultural life. Militarily, the Igbu serve as the protectors of the land. They chase away neighbouring enemies believed to have laid an ambush for their people. They chase away neighbouring enemies believed to have laid an ambush for their people; invariably, they protect them from being attacked.

Apart from protecting the people, the Igbu also avenge the deaths of their people who are killed in another land or community.[64] For example, if one of their loved ones is killed by another community, they avenge such a death by killing seven people (beheading them and bringing their heads to their community) belonging to that community. Such an act serves as a signal of war or warning to other communities to stay away from any member of their community. The Igbu are among the various traditional title holders as well as positions that constitute the social, political, and traditional administrative structure of Urhoboland.[65] Apart from their religious and military lifestyles, they were also expected to live an upright life devoid of social vices and immorality. These included avoiding anything or acts that constitute taboos, such as adultery, sexual intercourse in the bush, oppressively taking people's farmlands, and raping, among others.

Igbu warriors played an important role in Urhoboland's socio-religious framework as part of efforts to preserve the stability and existence of the land. Every warrior was once a commoner and only important in terms of a larger society. The most important objective of this manipulation was to achieve the following: The propagation of nationalism and patriotism-based inculcation of a shared identity, past, and future. The Igbu tradition also manifests as a variety of interrelated social, cultural, and economic relationships within Urhoboland's socio-religious framework. The warrior was essentially a target of socio-religious manipulation by the community in order to preserve the stability and existence of the land. The most important objectives of this socio-religious manipulation, at least in terms of the people's immediate needs, were to achieve: the propagation of nationalism and patriotism-based inculcation of a

[64]Thomas Ezomoh, Personal interview, Orogu, June 25, 2022 (transcripts in authors' possession).
[65] Otite 2003, p. 199

shared identity, past, and future; the success of business partnerships and other social agreements based on social transformation; and regarding the regulations and penalties of a social therapy-based moral code that is widely accepted in society. Every Ogbu comes from a family.[66] According to Eseieba, the Ogbu, for instance, is answerable to his Itu-Igbu, his Orho or egbo-Orho (community or clan) and his Ovwrha or Ekru (family), all of whom hold him responsible.[67]

The Itu-Igbu (Eagle-Feathers Warrior Cult) initiation process, which fundamentally leads to the knowledge of an African warrior, is another kind of socio-religious control. The presence of Igbu in Urhoboland unites and maintains the whole tribe in all of its endeavors. It is a technique for enhancing the community's security system with the goal of organizing the community for both offensive and defense. The Itu-Igbu (Eagle-Feather Warrior Cult) initiation process, which fundamentally leads to the knowledge of the African warrior, especially in light of his relationships with his community, is another kind of socio-religious control. A common method for determining status and behaviour patterns as well as for uniting the community is the initiation into Itu-Igbu. It is a technique for enhancing the community's security system with the goal of organizing the community for both offensive and defensive purposes as well as bringing about social and religious changes.

The Relevance of Igbu in Countering Radical Herdsmenism in Urhoboland

Most vulnerable societies are dealing with escalating insurgencies, so they must contract out some security duties to vigilante groups or non-state actors. Igbu in Urhoboland can be referred to as vigilantes, community defense forces, civil militias, or self-defense organizations for civilians. The likelihood that they will act as local militias, possibly more powerful than local authorities, is increased because they are frequently recruited through the ritualized initiation of local communities. In their war with radical herders in Urhoboland, the Igbu can use several defensive and offensive tactics. Archery equipment, including bows and poisoned arrows (*agbidada*), were used by Urhobo warriors. Spears served as both throwing and thrusting implements and were less powerful than those later developed in southern Africa by the Zulu.[68] According to Osadolor, these traditional cutting, thrusting, and smashing weapons were used by the tropical kingdoms of West, Central, and South-Central Africa.[69] Also, defense of fortifications by bowmen was important, and people like the Yoruba occasionally used crossbows for this purpose.[70] However, the flaw in the weaker bows can be fixed by using poisoned arrows from the African plant *Strophantus*

[66] Ezomoh 2022
[67] Omare Eseieba, Personal interview, Okuechi-Eku, June 23, 2022 (transcripts in authors' possession).
[68] Hutchings 2007, p. 190; Ukpabi 1994, p.58.
[69] Benson Osadolor, *The military system of Benin kingdom 1440–1897* (Hamburg: Hamburg University, 2021), 36.
[70] Adedeji 2021, p. 44

hispidus and other sources.[71] There are competent blacksmiths in Urhoboland who are experts in forging mined and smelted iron into arrows, spears, and other battle implements. Such war weapons unquestionably provide a tactical edge in both intra- and inter-tribal conflicts, it is evident. In this way, the Igbu armed with bows, spears, arrows, and axes, could attack and defeat the extremist Fulani herders.

According to historians, the spread of weapons had a significant influence on the capture of slaves in Africa in the colonial period.[72] As a non-state actor civil defense group, Igbu cannot defend themselves against the sophisticated weapons of the Fulani herdsmen with only bows and arrows and cutlasses. Instead, they have to use guns. In the past, raiding was the most common form of inter-tribal conflict. The raiding troops took advantage of the topography, concealed their approach, and knew where to find drinking holes and other sources of supplies. Until the objective was seen, the marching order was usually single file. The Igbu might assault their prey by encircling them in this manner. Training Igbu to be active, reserve, and militia-like will be crucial. In order to perfect their tactics, the Igbu should display impressive ingenuity by adopting guerrilla tactics and other military-like methods to overcome the Fulani insurgency in Urhoboland. To assist the Igbu defense regime, Urhoboland's communal jungles should be built with secret pathways and ditches and be covered in rows of sharp spikes. Shrubs may be surrounded by a variety of earthworks, woodworks, and walls in certain areas of the community. Interior fortifications work like a maze of defensive walls that can be used to trap enemies and fire at them from different angles.

A witchcraft weapon known as monitoring spirit (also known as "black power") manipulates its target to ruin his life by causing him to lose out on his blessings and leave him or herself open to bad luck, failure, and dissatisfaction.[73] An illustration of the monitoring spirit is the predicament of the children of Israel during the time of Gideon, when Israel was being persecuted by the Midianites and the Amalekites (Judges 6 and 70; cf. Revelation 13:17-19; Act 13:6-12; Genesis 37-45). It can be used as a weapon to keep track of Fulani herders' movements, slow them down, confuse them, and scare them. One of the key components of a war's overall strategy is deterrence. It includes averting conflict and war; defending allies; sustaining people's fundamental beliefs in individual liberty, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law; as well as

[71] Peers 2005, p. 64; see Kithuka 2022, p. 220.
[72] Walter Goldschmidt, "Functionalism". In Levinson, David and Melvin, Ember (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* Vol 2 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 381.
[73] Segun Adewumi, "The Monitoring Spirit". Ibru Ecumenical Centre. 2017. Accessed June 19, 2022, https://guardian.ng/sunday-magazine/ibru-ecumenical-centre/the-monitoring-spirit/

safeguarding their freedom of choice and action.[74] A key component of community defense systems like those in Urhoboland should be enhancing resilience by improving communities' ability to plan for, react to, recover from, and adapt to the whole spectrum of threats and hazards posed by radical Fulani herders. Igbu are capable of fending off a variety of threats from Fulani herdsmen, including assaults meant to murder, maim, rape, take possession of property with force, and destroy crops.[75] Resilience is a crucial component of deterrence because it may persuade an enemy not to strike by showing it that an assault would not accomplish its planned goals. We argue that community civil defense systems like Igbu should get enough support, including civilian infrastructure and resources, which are essential components of resilience initiatives. Zulu troops developed and spread passwords as a way to tell friends from enemies when they were encamped or on the march.[76] Shaka's use of this kind of information lends credence to the idea of operational art at the operational level, where the commander must transform strategic aim into tactical action. If the Igbu use coded passwords in their operations, they may be able to make more progress in their fight against the banditry of Fulani herders in Urhoboland.

Having argued that Igbu in Urhoboland are capable of addressing the insecurity challenges posed by radical Fulani herders, it is also noteworthy to state that several disadvantages abound. The nation will be faced with a problem when citizens mobilize and take up arms to defend their local areas. Thus, they may also destabilize a centralized authority, escalate a dispute by focusing on racial or political foes, or jeopardize long-term stability. However, the temptation will be tremendous for powerful political players to back a militia or vigilante organization, in this case, the Igbu, with or sometimes without the community's agreement, especially when the government is too weak to deal with an insurgency alone. Community defense groups, such as Igbu, may develop into predatory, borderline criminal or anti-state organizations. Community leaders and all levels of government should, at the very least, draw lessons from the past, work to minimize abuses, watch out for mission creep within community defense organizations, and make plans for how to deal with them once the fighting has subsided. So, every local government in Urhoboland should register the Igbu so that they can keep track of how they work.

[74] North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). 2022. "Deterrence and Defence". Accessed May 22, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_133127.htm; Crisis Group. "Double-edged Sword: Vigilantes in African Counter-Insurgencies". 2017. Accessed July 12, 22, 2022, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/sierra-leone/251-double-edged-sword-vigilantes-african-counter-insurgencies

[75] Emmanuel Iheanacho, "The Menace of Fulani Herdsmen in Nigeria: A Threat to National Security". *South East Political Science Review* 1(2017): 236-243.

[76] · Adedeji 2021, p. 46.

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Conclusion

So far, the relevance of Igbu in curbing radical herdsmenism in Urhoboland has been studied from a socio-religious context and using the functionalist theory. In this sense, restorative justice may be necessary in order to reconcile the Urhobo farmers-Fulani herdsmen dispute due to the nature of the society-induced frustration and ensuing aggressiveness. In order to combat the extremism of the Fulani herders in Urhoboland, the Urhobo Igbu (Eagle-Feathered Warriors) are considered to have considerable social, religious, fundamentalist, and military significance. Sociologists and political analysts have replaced the traditional military structure in Urhoboland as a major field of study, but no one field can really take over the whole field. Significantly, understanding African global history and how it influences current events is made easier by studying African warriors, including Urhobo warriors (Igbu) in particular, in the context of their history, religious, political, cultural, and social settings. Thus, this study complements the several studies on community policing that are already happening in most Nigerian communities as a result of the dilemma arising from Fulani herdsmen banditry.