



## **Indigenous Socio-political and Cultural Similarities in Africa: The Case of the Igbo of Nigeria and the Jola of the Gambia**

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### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was the collaborative efforts of three authors. Author CIN designed and formulated the template and did the major discussions of the article. Author FWO did the analysis and added value to the work while author EJM handled the finishing touches of the work. However, all authors read and approved the final manuscript as is.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

A major thrust of this paper's analysis is the indigenous socio-political and cultural similarities in Africa, in particular the case of the Igbo of Nigeria and the Jola tribe of The Gambia. The study aims at identifying the areas of similarities between these cultures in a context in which indigenous cultural and socio-political framework of society has witnessed significant transformations over the years. Using multi case studies strategy of inquiry, this paper addressed two key broad research questions, first, whether veritable similarities could be found between the two cultures, or whether identified similarities mere coincidence or did arise from the fact both groups having the same ancestry but subsequently dispersed into different directions and locations in search for arable lands? Second, does ethno-cultural interrelatedness of societies arise from shared historical

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ancestry? In this context, it established strong link between the cultures the Igbo of Nigeria and the Jola ethnic of The Gambia suggesting that the similarities are real and pervasive. The paper further suggests that the complex network of relationships and kinship ties found in both Igbo and Jola cultures appear to provide the impetus for persisting social consciousness and observance of the customs, traditions, and cultural ethos, attitudes and perceptions that animate and sustain cultural colourations, which have survived over the years retaining some key cultural elements of traditional society that sets them apart from other ethno-cultural groups in contemporary West Africa.

*Keywords: Igbo; Jola; culture; patrilineal; matrilineal; kinship; indigenous; ancestor.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous African cultures and traditions are closely related, and there is evidence of mutual understanding, co-existence and collaboration among the several but diverse cultures of the continent. Though diverse, there appears to be much that they share in common. Some of these shared traditional cultural characteristics include highly structured social systems rooted in socio-philosophical concepts of spirituality, mysticism, compromise, contentment and happiness. The social concept of mysticism is about self-discipline and submission of personal ego to the general interest of the community. These similarities are rooted in certain common cultural elements derivable from this paper's definition of culture as well as anchored on the anthropological theory particularly Schmidt's Diffusionist theory on cultural change. Culture is about the totality of life of a people. It is about the practice by which a people creates, celebrates, sustains and develops itself and by which it introduces itself to history and humanity. The diversity in the cultures around the world is also a result of the mindsets of people inhabiting different regions of the world whereas similarities could be explained in terms of evidence grounded on anthropological theories of historic particularism, diffusion or both [1].

Though every country has its own traditions and cultures, African culture stands unique among cultures of the world, and on the background of contradictory claims in literature about its history and the potential insights, which empirical work on African history and culture could offer in explaining African political instability, diplomacy as well as its political economy, this work becomes even more necessary. In this context, the relevance of this study on the similarities observed points to same historical origin of the two societies and more importantly tends to explain the readily political openness of relevant stakeholders and managers of the two states

over the years, the cooperation and diplomatic ties between them, which seem to be rooted in the observed cultural affinity that has remained nevertheless unexplored and unexplained in literature.

The paper argued that whatever cultural differences in the pattern of behaviour and socio-political organization of the Jola and Nigeria could be attributed to Schmidt's Diffusionist theory on cultural change. Overall, there was this shared and persisting religion-cultural conception of monotheism in the primitive societies of the Jola and Igbo, which through the mechanism of change over the years had yielded though not quite significant differences in modern days. However, in acknowledgment of the limitation of the diffusionist theory, this theoretical position tends to underplay the possibility of independent invention and local adaptation to one's environment, which nevertheless amounts to a denial of human inventiveness. In addition, apart from cultural differences stemming from varying impacts of colonial experience and western cultural exposure, whatever cultural changes between traditional and modern Jola and Igbo societies were further explained in terms of changed tools for organizing and structuring social experiences, from those that incorporated mystical elements and empirical to tools that are essentially empirical, precise and measurable' in line Claude Levi-Strauss's structuralist theory.

In African cultural context, contentment is a philosophical attribute of what the traditional African considered a good life, which summarizes the simplicity of the African mode of living. Compromise, which is essentially spiritual, if you like, psychological, placed that social obligation on the traditional African to seek the preservation of the group, rather than self-pursuit in conflict situations. Thus, the highly spiritualized traditional African operated in a cultural context that ensured social cohesion and system's maintenance in the simplicity of pursuit of good

life and happiness, which is measured in terms of ability to overcome one's worries over material things. African socio-political system, processes and structures are deeply rooted in these shared cultural features, customs and traditions of peoples of Africa, which were important in ensuring balance, maintaining order, settling or eliminating conflict and disputes, and regulating the indigenous society [2]. These features in fact highlight the uniqueness of African culture, history and socio-political organization.

The Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria and the Jola of The Gambia are selected for this study primarily because of their comparable cultural values. The paper thus argued that both cultures demonstrated respect for indigenous knowledge and institutions and in spite of cultural infiltrations of modernism and western colonization over the years has tended to maintain shared cultural values and beliefs. Further, in spite of changes over the years through diffusion in both cultures, established traditional and religious systems continue to shape the behaviour of individuals and families in the contemporary era. These cultural groups share similar culture, traditions, norms, values, socio-political and economic organisation within the West African sub region. The Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria are found mainly in south-eastern Nigeria, with a total land area of about 15,800 square miles or about 41,000 square kilometres [3]. As a people, the Igbo are located on both sides of the River Niger and occupy most of south-eastern Nigeria. Its geographical location includes the old provinces of Onitsha, Owerri, East Rivers, Southeast Benin, West Ogoja, and Northeast Warri. In contemporary Nigerian history, the Igbo have claimed all these areas as the protectorate of the "Niger Districts." Thus, in the context of contemporarily regional politics in Nigeria, began the process of wider unification of the tribal group and their incorporation into wider political and administrative units. Presently, they constitute the entire Enugu State, Anambra State, Abia State, Imo State, Ebonyi State and the Ahoada area of Rivers State. Other Igbo-speaking people west of the Niger are inhabitants of the Asaba, Ika, and Agbo areas of Delta State [4]. On the other hand, the Jola ethnic group is one of the ethnic groups in The Gambia and is found mainly on the Atlantic coast around the southern banks of The Gambia River, the Casamance region of Senegal and the northern part of Guinea-Bissau. The Jola settlement is believed to have preceded the Mandinka and Fula peoples in the river-line coast of Senegambia and may have migrated

into Casamance, which was their original homeland before the 13th century [5]. The Jola ethnic group consists of numerous communities or village groups. These communities are based on extended clan settlements, which are considered large enough to be given independent names such as the Jola Karon, Jola Mlomp, Jola Elinnkin, Jola Caginol, Jola Huluf, Jola Jamat, Jola Joheyt, Jola Bayot, Jola Brin, Jola kassa, Jola Seleky, Jola Kabrouse, Jola Jiwat, and Jola Foni [6].

Stories abound affirming relationships between peoples or ethnic groups now widely separated in spatial, historical, and cultural terms persist today, not only in West Africa but also throughout Africa, in other parts of Asia, Americas, and Europe. The basis of such stories is the assumption of a Judeo-Christian (and Islamic) biblical framework as applicable to all of human history. In reference to West Africa, this has taken the form of assuming the putative descent of Africans from Noah's offspring, a model which firmly centred the beginning of West African history in the Near East rather than in West Africa itself. It is therefore in this historical context (Franz Boas' theoretical framework – historic particularism) that the cultural nexus between the Igbo and Jola groups and considered. However, analysis of findings on observed similarities between these two cultures further anchored on anthropological theories of Claude Levi-Strauss's structuralist theory and James Clifford's constructionist theoretical framework by which observed reality is predicated on 'text construction' [7].

However, since both ethnic groups appear to have many things in common, perhaps seemingly similar cultural values, customs and traditions, socio-political organization of society, and economic system, systematic investigation and analysis are justified. In this context, the research questions are, first, whether the apparent similarity could be mere coincidence or do both groups have the same ancestry but subsequently dispersed into different directions and locations in search for arable lands? Second, does ethno-cultural interrelatedness of societies arise from shared historical ancestry? And third, what are the socio-political implications of these similarities? The broad objective of this study is to examine cultural similarities between the Igbo of Nigeria and the Jola ethnic group of The Gambia and the nature of their cultural link. Specifically, it further attempts to establish a historical nexus between the two cultures, to

offer explanation and explore the implications of the findings on the socio-cultural commonalities found for the socio-political organization, diplomacy and political economy of the groups under study.

The study adopts multiple case studies as a strategy of inquiry and qualitative data collection methods, which allows for the use of selected cases to explore a social, political, religious, cultural or economic phenomena of interest based on the researcher's curiosity [8]. Data collection method was essentially focus group discussions and personal interviews involving oral evidence, which consisted of interview protocols involving randomly drawn groups of very elderly persons in The Gambia and Nigeria. However, secondary data sources included archival and already published works in related research area in literature, which though appear scanty. A case study is intended to describe, understand and explain a research phenomenon. However, unlike quantitative research, the findings of a case study are not usually generalized to the rest of the population, though using critical reflexivity theory testing framework [9], this paper in treating the case as having critical relevance to dominant theoretical position in literature, established generalizable conclusions. The study objective is also theory testing, which aims at confirming or otherwise rejecting the general theoretical stance in literature that establishes cultural nexus between cultures. Thus, the number of participants in a study does not matter for a case study to be considered acceptable, provided the study has met its objective of describing the phenomenon being studied [10]. The research tools used, namely interview and observation (of transitional rites and festivals), made it possible to examine both the religious and socio-cultural history of the people, which existed, mostly in oral traditions. In this sense, a peripheral contribution of this research lies in its role in "awakening and rescuing the memory" of the indigenous peoples of Igbo and the Jola. This effort becomes more relevant as the possibility of losing this important aspect of the peoples' identity increases, as the older generation passes-on from this life and as the reality of the emerging new breed of people becomes imminent. The authors argued that though the passage of time has done much to reduce the cultural similarities between the Igbo and the Jola; and that present day African culture as depicted in the Igbo and the Jola are neither primordial entities nor colonial fabrications but a representation of constructions by this study

participants. Using the indigenous Igbo and Jola of Gambia as one case, the authors traced these similar cultural identities back to antiquity.

The paper is organized in four sections. The first examined the pattern of the Igbo and the Jola indigenous socio-political system. Section two examined authority and space in the indigenous Igbo and Jola ethnic groups. Section three provided insights into the kingship systems of the two ethnic groups and lastly, and explored the religious and expressive cultural link between the Igbo and the Jola tribes. The paper ends with analysis of findings, conclusions and comments on research limitations and areas for future research.

## **2. THE PATTERN OF THE IGBO AND THE JOLA INDIGENOUS SOCIO-POLITICAL SYSTEM**

A critical look at the socio-political and cultural systems of the Igbo of Nigeria and the Jola of The Gambia portrays striking similarities. According to [11], some writers variously described the indigenous socio-political organization of both the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria and the Jola ethnic group of The Gambia as a cephalous, stateless, egalitarian, gerontocratic, classless, decentralised, fragmentary, segmentary. There are numerous communities or village groups in Igbo and Jola ethnic groups. These communities are based on extended clan settlements, which are large enough to be given independent status and names. A typical clan settlement is run by a strong willed ruling personality often elected for a particular assignment. The idea of chiefs in Igbo socio-political system, and Seyfo, a parallel traditional political institution in the Jola, cuts across these ethnic groups today, and both are results of their European contact. With a few exceptions such as the Obi in the old Onitsha kingdom, there was nothing like traditional chiefs in their pre-colonial society. Both ethnic groupings were more or less egalitarian and republican. The village group is the highest political unit of the traditional society. Each community is segmented into smaller groups known as villages (clans). The villages are in turn, segmented into Umunna or Jola equivalent of hubukau –hanorou (patrilineage or literally meaning children of the same father). The village is the central and the most influential and the basic socio-political unit of their indigenous society. It comprises the descendants in the male line of the founder ancestor by whose name the

patrilineage is sometimes called. Njaka, aptly described the hubukau –hanorou, an equivalent of the Igbo Umunna, as “the catalyst of political behaviour and attitude; being a major controlling factor in the community’s political power structure, which regulates and powerfully influenced citizens’ participation the political process [12]. This group provided the source of authority and reason for political and social participation in the town-state government.

The Umunna/ hubukau –hanorou is a communal group holds allegiance to an ancestral father, physically represented and symbolized by a shrine and common meeting ground or eluweyi, which is a large open square where the patrilineage members meet to attend to issues of common interest to the group. It is an exogamous group but there could be intermarriage among members of these groups. Nevertheless, in a situation where the lineage has become larger indeed, the lineage within the patrilineage may separate themselves from the main body to establish a new patrilineage. The Umunna/hbukau –hanorou is again divided into Umunne in Igbo and hilhakon in Jola (literally meaning children of the same mother), which constitute the extended families. The members of Umunne or hilhakon have close blood-relationships while the founding father is traceable to generations past. The position that the hilhakon occupies in the Igbo and Jola political structures underscores the significance of the position of the woman in the political culture of both peoples. In both societies, motherhood is perceived as a binding force in intra-group relations. For this reason a person is never rejected in the mother’s patrilineage (maternal home). In Igbo and Jola cultures, a man who has problems in his paternal home or with his Umunna or hubukau –hanorou can escape to his mother’s patrilineage where he finds solace in times of trouble or oppression. Under no circumstance is he ever rejected. The family as the domestic organization is made up of the man, his wives, children and his sons’ wives. On maturity, these sons, except the first son known as Opara in Igbo and anyil anifanon in Jola, move out of the compound to establish their own individual compound. While the family head resides at the obi in Igbo and eluweyi in Jola located most often at the centre of the family compound, the wives’ houses are situated as adjoining buildings or huts within the compound in an enclosed formation where each wife and her children reside. The political implications of this similarity in household organization between

the groups would be examined under the section on Space and Authority in the indigenous Igbo and Jola societies. However, this study further established the dominant role and force of Umunne in Igbo and hilhakon in Jola in inter-group relations. In this context, it is reasonable to conclude that women and women groups could have dominant influence in shaping state policies. This probably explains why several decades since 1994 the foreign policy Gambia President Jammeh (a Jola tribesman) and his diplomatic relations with Nigeria, particularly in terms of relations with Nigerian Igbos domicile in the Gambia has ever remained cordial and productive. Women groups generally in the Gambia have constituted powerful political forces driving state policy, and it also possible that in Nigeria a similar political scenario is re-enacted as parallel Igbo women groups had had cause to pressurize the presidency and influence relations with the Gambia. Overall, the socio-cultural similarities between two groups studied have tended to be a relevant factor in the foreign policy orientations of the Gambia and Nigeria.

Besides, another similarity is found in both cultures because in both traditional societies, hamlets were made up of several compounds whose residents constitute members of clusters of patrilineages from the same village. These clusters simply constitute a geographical unit providing some considerable solidarity based on neighbourhood rather than an immediate blood relationship [13]. Among the Igbo/Jola people for instance, a settlement is based on patrilineage relationships as members of the same extended family tend to reside closer to one another than with members of other unrelated patrilineages. The reason for this kind of settlement structure is that each nuclear family shares its land usually a large expanse among the male children. As residence is patriarchal and localized, this had meant that ultimately members of the same Umunna/hbukau –hanorou resided closer to one another than close to people of other patrilineages. The system of relationships built through blood ties and everyday interactions tended to promote closer fraternity amongst kinship groups. It further encouraged support from kinsmen. For the Jola ethnic group, a gift in either cash and or in kind is an obligation to the distressed or needy and an essential part of social relationships within the kinship network.

Each of the Igbo and Jola ethnic community protectively recognizes and upholds the social value of independence and therefore tended to

be self-supporting in carrying out its internal communal activities and is conscious and protective of its identity in its overall relationships with neighbouring communities. Before the European contact, each of the ethnic group warriors, priests, elders, and heads of component families, exercised influence and authority at the village- group level. They were the elites of the traditional society. The duties of the elderly and titled folks were to direct discussions and recapitulate decisions in the assembly of the whole village-group and carry out adjudication duties, which included the settlement of disputes and conflicts that may arise amongst kinsmen. The elders and titled folks, warriors, and priests were the watch-dogs of the customs, norms and traditions of the society. Currently, however some of these traditional roles have been eroded and increasingly replaced by new cultural values, beliefs, attitudes and roles following contact with other cultures. There are now formal hierarchical positions and roles such as those of political leaders, cabinet members and the district union executives. However, this shift in power structure has not occurred without challenge from the traditionalists in these societies, though overall in both cultures, the political role and relevance of elders and titled folks (including retired generals as in Nigeria as well as similarities found in kinship ties, have tended to be the building bloc social; bond that sustains present day socio-cultural and to a lesser extent political cooperation between the Igbo of Nigeria and Jola of the Gambia. In specific terms, there has been increasing collaboration between the Gambian President who is a Jola and Governors of the South Eastern States of Nigeria. Governor Orji Kalu of Abia State of Nigeria has several heavy investments in the Gambia, one being the First International Bank, Gambia Ltd. and there are other several banks in the Gambia owned by political and economic juggernauts from Igbo land of Nigeria.

Moreover on cultural similarities, The Opara in the Igbo ethnic group or the anyil anifanon in the Jola (i.e. first son who is usually the eldest in the patrilineage) in each constituent family unit, occupies a unique leadership position in the hierarchy ranging from the Umunna/hubukau-hanorou (patrilineage) level down to the extended family. His headship is derived from his position as the eldest man in this patrilineage. He is accordingly, the living representative of the ancestors and the holder of the staff of authority and justice (Ofo, in Igbo) acting as a spiritual link

between the living and worldly departed ancestral spirits. Although, the Opara or anyil anifanon occupies a leadership position, that position is basically a moral one. Consequently, he cannot take unilateral decision but implement decisions taken by his kinsmen. The eldest son plays the symbolic role of coordinator of lineage or family affairs in the general interest of all. Much like the Opara, the anyil anifanon's position is entrusted with a lot of other duties such as presiding over the sharing of family or patrilineage lands. He is also the principal host in traditional marriage ceremonies in the unit that he leads. Every Umunna or hubukau – hanorou (patrilineage) has its own meeting square called eluweyi (for the Jola). The implication of this finding is that for both cultural groups, spirituality in governance and traditional consensual element continue to play a dominant role in the political process at least at the local political hierarchy.

Besides, in the indigenous socio-political organization of the patrilineal Igbo/Jola society, female institution of Umuada/kurimanak (i.e. the institution for daughters consisting of married, unmarried, divorced or widowed) provide a significant platform for women to contest for both social and political power. The decisions of this female group in the abdication of disputes are supreme. The groups function as the custodian of public morality. Thus, the women have formidable assemblies of their own liaising with different units and constituting an important force in the Igbo as well as Jola socio-political power structure. For instance, each hihakon (extended family), Umunne/hubukau hanorou (patrilineage), village and village-groups have similar women's groups and associations. In such meetings, the women address issues affecting the women folk of that particular patrilineage and the community in general for the mutual benefits of all. They nevertheless share to a great extent in the social life of their natal homes when married. The system of exogamy as practised in most Igbo and Jola societies ensures that a woman who marries outside her patrilineage in the patrilineal society is a peace advocate and a role model.

Another striking similarity in institution building among the indigenous Igbo and Jola societies is the age grades system or age regiment. The regulation of political relations and implementation of customary rules in the village rest squarely with these age-based associations. These associations are viable and strong groups, which carry out community based works, carter

for the welfare of their age mates and implement local laws made in the village interest. The associations are constituted through the principle of age and selection.

However, the socio-political philosophy of communalism, spirituality and duality of man in both Igbo and Jola traditional societies is all embracing. Indeed, it essentially highlights the role of the dead in the lives of the living. In Igbo as well as the Jola, it is believed that the ancestors constantly intervenes in the lives of the living, live around them and offers protection. For this reason the living pour out libation, offer sacrifices and consult the spirit of their ancestors in time of severe peril and traditional calamities such as famine and drought. It is usually believed in Igbo and Jola traditional societies that natural disasters are outcomes of ancestral wrath; which requires that the spiritual elders appease the gods and goddesses by offering sacrifices, which are usually performed as dictated by the gods. Thus, this further underscores the spirituality in governance that ensures public probity and accountability for public office holders at least at the local political leadership in both societies.

### **3. AUTHORITY AND SPACE IN THE INDIGENOUS IGBO AND JOLA SOCIETIES**

In the context of both Igbo and the Jola cultures, space whether spatial or figurative plays out important individual and group roles. Within the domestic framework, for example, the Obi in the case of Igbo group and eluweyi in Jola as the abode of the head of the family represents the symbolic function of decision making and power house from where decisions emanate from a bargaining and consultation process. Moreover, every woman in the polygamous household has her own apartment, which is an enclosure containing a bed room, kitchen, store room for keeping her valuables, poultry house, pen house for her domestic animals consisting of goats and sheep, and cattle. Also found within this enclosure are barns for her agricultural produce as well as few economic trees like orange and mango. She also has water well to meet her immediate food and sanitary needs. All these are walled round with a door linking her compound to the bigger family compound at the centre of which the Obi or eluweyi for that matter is situated. Within the women apartment or quarters, she lives with her children and grandchildren as the case may be. In this traditional arrangement, the household mother is

in complete control of both the economic and cultural production as she plays basic roles in economic activities and socialization of offspring to the cultural norms, values and beliefs of the society. Though the man-of-the-house, as the head of the family, takes significant decisions regarding the overall interest of his family, there is a limit to which such decisions can encroach on the woman's power on domestic matters.

Both the Opara of the Igbo and the eluweyi of the Jola patrilineage play important roles in political decision making in the context of the larger society. As the residence of the eldest son in the patrilineage, the eluweyi also becomes symbolic, as it functions as the tempo-spiritual essence of the collective identity [14]. Within this spatiality, rituals and libations are performed using the Oji/ekruayi ((kolanut) and/or staff of authority, justice and peace as key objects of ritual performances invoking the earth's goddess (mofamu emit in Jola and chi in Igbo) as the intermediary between the physical and the spiritual world [14]. Thus, in the context of the concept of spatiality, interesting patterns emerged from analysis of qualitative data. Qualitative evidence shows that both ethnic groups share certain social and religious philosophies. These include the religious view or concept of duality of man, the immortality of man's soul, sacrifice and atonement, which are lucidly presented by [15]. Man is both a physical and metaphysical being having a physical body, which cloths the immortal soul. Upon death, the soul sheds its physical clothing and returns to the spiritual world from where it intervenes in particular in the worldly affairs of the immediate family. The souls of the departed represent the spirit of ancestors who may be offended by ignoble acts of the family members, and must necessarily be appeased either by means of confession, sacrifice or repentance. Thus, the link with ancestral spirits ensured acceptable social behaviours among the living, a link that is symbolically represented and sustained by the Opara or eluweyi who holds the family ofo (a symbol of justice and peace) and performs the necessary sacrifices to appease the ancestral spirits or mediate on behalf of the living. The sacrifice is seen as atonement for wrong doing or socially condemned transgressions. This priestly role of the Opara or elewuyi places him in a significant hierarchy in the political power structure. However, for the Igbo and Jola, power belongs to all. Everybody has the right to freedom of expression at the village assembly where political decisions are made. Hence, both

ethnic societies are essentially republican, which implies that both cultures reject intimidation or oppression and arbitrary exercise of political power. Power serves as a main resource without which other necessities may elude the individual. With equitable access to power, justice and equity can thrive and seen to be applied. In fact, without power, according to [16], it may be difficult to access resources, retain resource or commercialize resources. Nonetheless, this belief on political equality, justice and the principle of fair opportunities for all to grow and have his chance are not contradicted by an equally important social belief shared by both cultures that all men are not born equal. This aristocratic thinking emanates from perception of inequality evident in nature itself, which is the rivers, mountain, the sun, moon and stars are not equal in depth, height, or brightness; animals are unequal in strength while men are unequally endowed with intelligence as their fingers are unequal. The outcome of this social philosophy is the phenomenon of social stratification in both cultures.

Moreover, in both Igbo and the Jola traditional societies, women were active participants in the socio-political life of the people, hence the idea that a woman possesses the power to influence decision making, especially the groups of first female members of households, the Umuada in Igbo and kurimanak in Jola. These groups exercise significant power and influence in crises situations involving disputed within and between family groups. As the custodian of community morality, women can use satirical songs such like *ikpe* in Igbo or *ekim-eteme* in Jola to criticize a young man or lady in order to caution him or her against immoral behaviour. Songs are sung to either praise or to condemn. '*ikpe*' or '*ekim-eteme*' are used to criticize the unacceptable behaviours serving thereby as a corrective or deterrent instrument against actual and potential offenders. In songs of praise, the individual's positive attributes are appreciated, eulogized and recommended to the people. In this way, songs remain one of the traditional instruments for peace building. In stateless traditional societies like the Igbo and Jola with no centralized government, such group approach to problem solving goes a long way in upholding high moral standards in the community and sustaining peaceful relationships among people. Eventually, it has the potential to reduce the scale of deviant behaviour and to protect the society from moral debauchery. These suggestions echo the view in literature that the lives of men run on lines quite

distinct from those of women [11] and females have their own power base from where they impact significantly on the lives of people in the society. Thus, amongst the Igbo and Jola, the institution of Umuada and kurimanak present women as instruments of peace and power negotiation. This assures them a place in the affairs in their community. In the context the patrilineal society, the system of exogamy offers them double citizenry of their society [14]. As members of the Umuada or kurimanak institution, this group of first female born of households control burial rites and punish any married woman in their patrilineage who maltreats her husband or refuses to take care of him. However, the punishment which may not be a physical could be sanctions denying privilege of the offender from participating in women's activities for some specified period. In rare case, the woman could be ostracized for a given period or even permanently.

Another striking similarity between the two cultures is found in one's relationship with mother's relatives, which is an integral part of the Igbo and Jola kinship social structure. These extended families are a person's *nna-ochie* or *nne-ochie* in Igbo and *ampa-afan* and *enya-afan* in Jola, which means ancient father or ancient mother of the patrilineal and matrilineal families respectively. Children are regarded as *nwa-nwa* in Igbo or *kusonpulo* in Jola (son of son) in their mother's patrilineage. These relationships are so closely knit and integrated into the kinship system that it offers a patrilineally-organized people special rights and privileges in their mother's patrilineages. Such rights and privileges include those that they would not ordinarily receive in their own descent group, which is their father's patrilineage. For this reason, the *kusonpulo* in Jola is inviolable in his or her mother's patrilineage and as such could not be harmed or maltreated in that group. In both Igbo and Jola traditional societies, the *nwa-nwa* and *kusonpulo* further plays significant role as peace-advocate in his/her mother's patrilineage. This practice gives the Igbo and Jola marriage system relative stability and further strengthens intergroup relations. Such established networks contribute in no small way to strengthening the structure of groups and kinship cohesion.

#### **4. THE KINSHIP SYSTEM OF THE IGBO AND THE JOLA**

Kinship describes the social relationships that exist among people in the same blood lineage,



which is traced from descending of some distant fatherhood. An equivalent of the Igbo and Jola are the Umunna and hubukau-hanorou respectively, which are patrilineage groups, literally meaning children of the same distant generation father. This is a general social phenomenon in both ethnic groups. Membership of kindred group becomes important in shaping individual and group behaviour and relationships. The bases of kinship system in most African indigenous society are the social and cultural affinity and the symbiotic relevance it portends. This fact appears to explain why most traditional economic, social and political activities are carried out on communal basis. For instance, rules against incest and regulations governing marriage rites and those that define rights of the natives at the kindred level are traditionally enacted by kinsmen who make up the kinship system. The kinship system thus maintains group cohesion and solidarity as it provides invaluable platform for the orientation and integration of individual members into the wider social system. Moreover, evidence indicates that the Igbo and Jola societies build kinship alliances and relationships through multi-lineal parentage system, which is through both the male (patrilineal) and or female (matrilineal) line. While most of the Igbo and Jola societies commonly practise the patrilineal descent system, there are some noticeable matrilineal elements in the social systems. For instance, in Igbo and Jola traditional system, the nwa-nwa or kusunpulo (maternal son) has a role to play in his/her mother's patrilineage. The nwa-nwa or kusunpulo constitute a powerful force in making and advocating for peace in the mother's patrilineage home.

Analysis of data further shows that the Igbo and the Jola societies are each endogamous in nature, which allows a man to take a wife among his kinsmen, especially those not closely related. It is believed that this practice fosters peace, co-operation and harmony among families. The matrilineage is also exogamous though the residential group is the patrilineage. Mostly, however, patrilineage system is more common among the Igbo and the Jola than the matrilineal system from where the line of descent or genealogy is traced to the mother. In a patrilineal descent system, ancestry is established by tracing descent solely through the male lines from a founding male ancestor. In fact, the fundamental principle of a patrilineal parentage is the unity of the male group. Although, both men and women are included in the patrilineage, only

the male links determine successive identity of a group through generations.

On the other hand, according to Ganyi and Utsoal [17], in a unilineal descent system there are no well-defined objectives, the group's unity and character reflect bonds formed upon common origin and identity and are concerned with the general welfare of the members. This system's relevance lie mainly on its role as an unmitigated group and as an institution of corporate entity, which customarily recruit natives based on conditions of inherited status and identity. In this context, kinship often constitutes a corporate group that assumes a corporate legal status exercising discernible collective right on behalf of its members and over their estates. The unilineal descent system has tended to contribute to the development of social organization of the group. For this reason, as it is widely said in Igbo and Jola local parlance that kinsmen are the basis of strength (Umunna wu ike), communalism is the defining basis of Igbo and Jola traditional economic, political and cultural activities. Offering explanations for this practice, [18] postulated two major theories, one economic, the other, political. The author's economic theory focused on the communal land ownership system and argues that since land is corporately owned, individuals need the parentage system for its equitable distribution and as well as the allocating of other economic resources that the kinsmen are endowed with. Besides, collective ownership provides the basis for regulating the individual's right to productive goods and the right to call for assistance in time of need or distress. The political reasons according to Schwimmer, focus on the need for social order and cohesion in stateless societies which lack centralized political systems with formal institutions of law-enforcement. Under these conditions, strong and permanent alliances within and between large family-based organizations are necessary to establish the sanctions needed to control disruptive behaviour among their members and to assist them when violence does occur. This approach is associated with the structural-functional school of thought. In addition to group membership, patrilineal descent controls the course of succession and hence helps in preventing conflict over succession claims. Overall, the system of descent as practised in both societies helps in determining parenthood, identifying ancestry, controlling the line of inheritance and assigning people to social categories, groups, and roles. For instance, the child a patrilineage daughter bears in her

husband's house is recognized in the kinship structure as nwa-nwa in Igbo and kusunpulo in Jola (maternal offspring) in her patrilineage. In this way, such children have certain rightful social claims and share to some extent in the membership of their mother's patrilineage. In the case of the Igbo of Nigeria, marriage conducted according to the custom of the people determines where a child belongs in the kinship network, particularly among the Igbo, east of the Niger. Marriage according to custom becomes an important factor, which is underscored by the practice that the biological father or genitor of a child may not culturally be recognized as the father of the child if he failed to fulfil certain cultural responsibilities involving in particular payment of bride wealth, or proper marriage so to speak. This result from analysis of qualitative data is supported by argument in literature that in Igbo traditional society, custom determines who the father of the child is, as a child born outside wedlock belongs to the mother's patrilineage [14]. However, in sharp contrast to the Jola system, any child born outside wedlock belongs to the patrilineage, a difference that seems attributable to cultural modifications from invasion of western civilization. However, both cultures appear share cultural element relating to the rule of primogeniture, which means that apart from family property, inheritance of personally acquired assets of a man passes to his first son who will undertake the responsibility of caring for his younger ones. In the exceptional case of a polygamous family, the property is shared amongst the most senior sons of the deceased's wives in which case each of these sons in turn goes back to his mother's homestead to divide this share/portion with his male brothers. In pre-colonial Jola society, the '*anyil anifanon*' (eldest son) was not entitled to inherit the dead father's widow as it is regarded as *nyinyi* or an abomination in the Jola society, though in contrast to the Igbo cultural practice in this context, the first son or 'opara' could inherit the father's wife(s). However, according to Jola cultural practice, the widow may opt to re-marry or even remain unmarried in the late husband's house bringing up her children. In this case, the late husband's brothers will be helping her to perform duties that are gender-specific in the culture like climbing palm trees, clearing the bush, repairing her leaking roof etc. This helps her to have sense of belonging and hope in the family despite the death of her husband. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that the complex network of relationships and kinship ties found in both Igbo and Jola cultures appear to

provide the impetus for persisting social consciousness and observance of the customs, traditions, and cultural ethos, attitudes and perceptions that animate and sustain cultural colorations, which have survived over the years retaining some key cultural elements of traditional society setting them apart from other ethno-cultural groups in contemporary West Africa.

## 5. RELIGION AND EXPRESSIVE CULTURE

Though many Igbo and Jola peoples are now predominantly Christians and Muslims respectively, traditional Igbo and Jola religious practices still abound, which are built around similar religious philosophies. Though both ethno-cultural group share the religious philosophy of monotheism, the idea of one god, each like in most African religious philosophies, accept the religious doctrine of 'many gods under one God'. In their traditional religious philosophy are found the belief in several gods including the earth goddess, sun god, god of thunder, a host of other male and female deities, spirit of ancestors, who protect their living descendants, and personal guidance angels (one's *chi*). Equally, in this doctrine is found the belief in one major Deity who oversees these other "lesser gods and spirits serving Him in their specialized functions" [15]. Revelation of the will of certain deities is sought through oracles and divination. The Igbo and Jola acknowledge a creator, God or Supreme Being, '*Chukwu Okike or Chineke*' in Igbo or Emitae in Jola in addition to their beliefs in the existence of other deities. Some scholars argue that this religious philosophy has a historical underpinning within the context of centralized political formations because it is essentially African having originated from belief in Sun god as the only god of the universe by Amenhotep IV of Egypt during his reign in 1375 B.C. A parallel belief is found in Islamic and Christian doctrines. In both cultures, the primordial earth goddess and other deified spirits have shrines and temples of worship and are believed to influence the living in very real and direct ways [19]. The earth goddess encapsulates both politics and religion in both Igbo and Jola society by fusing together space, custom, and ethics.

The Igbo concept of personhood and the dialectic between individual choice/freedom and destiny or fate is embodied in the notion of *chi*, variously interpreted as spirit double, guardian

angel, personal deity, personality soul, or divine nature. Igbo have varied accounts of myths of origin because there are many gods and goddesses. According to one Igbo worldview, Chukwu created the visible universe, 'uwa'. The universe is divided into two levels: the natural level, uwa, or human world, and the spiritual level of spirits, which include Anyanwu, the sun, Igwe, the sky and Ala, the earth. Taboos provided the means by which the Igbo forged a mediatory category of relations with nature and certain animals such as pythons, crocodiles, tigers, tortoises, which are described as totem. Other characteristics of traditional religious philosophies and practices found common to both cultures include two different kinds of religious priests: the hereditary lineage priests and priests who are chosen by particular deities for their service. Diviners and priests are those empowered with, the symbol of authority, truth, and justice. These categories interpret the wishes of the spirits, who may bless and favour devotees as well as punish social offenders and those who unwittingly infringe their privileges. They can also placate the spirits with ceremonial sacrifices. The living, the dead, and yet unborn form part of a continuum. Enshrined ancestors are those considered as great souls who lived good and upright lives and died in a socially acceptable manner (i.e., were given the proper burial rites). These ancestral spirits live in one of the worlds of the dead, the spirit world that mirrors and intervenes in the world of the living. The living pays tribute to their ancestors by honouring them through sacrifices. Overall, these shared social and religious philosophies suggest that both groups could have the same historical origin, though however limitations in obtaining relevant data presented inclusive evidence to test this hypothesis. For this reason, an important area for future research is the nexus between ethno cultural interrelatedness of societies / groups and shared historical ancestry.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This paper established veritable similarities in cultural elements found in both Igbo and Jola traditional societies most of which have survived even today in spite infiltrations and transformations coming from their colonial experience and globalization influences. Striking similarities were found in their modes of socio-political organization of society and authority symbols associated with space indicating spatial synergy that portrays the blending of structure of housing and authority and roles common to both

ethno cultures. Research evidence further demonstrated that the Igbo and Jola societies build kinship alliances and relationships through multi-lineal parentage system, which is through both the male (patrilineal) and or female (matrilineal). Moreover, both cultures appear share cultural element relating to the rule of primogeniture, which means that apart from family property, inheritance of personally acquired assets of a man passes to his first son who will undertake the responsibility of caring for his younger ones. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that the complex network of relationships and kinship ties found in both Igbo and Jola cultures appear to provide the impetus for persisting social consciousness and observance of the customs, traditions, and cultural ethos, attitudes and perceptions that animate and sustain cultural colorations, which have survived over the years retaining some key cultural elements of traditional society setting them apart from other ethno-cultural groups in contemporary West Africa. Analysis of data further showed that both Igbo and Jola ethnic groups share similar social and religious philosophies suggesting the both groups could possibly have common historical ancestry. In this context, the paper presents the hypothesis that ethno-cultural interrelatedness of societies could arise from shared historical ancestry, which thus constitutes an area for future systematic investigation. However, this paper argued that overall, the similarities observed point to similar historical origin of the two societies and more importantly their common ancestry tends to explain the readily political openness of relevant stakeholders and managers of the two states over the years, the economic and cultural cooperation as well as diplomatic ties between them, which seem to be rooted in the observed cultural affinity that has remained nevertheless unexplored and unexplained in literature.

## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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