



The typology of ibibio indigenous economy: an emic analysis

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Abstract: *At the beginning of the colonial enterprise in most parts of Africa, lay economic anthropologists, sociologists, economists and colonial agents were commissioned to study non-Western societies to inform and facilitate the development of a template for effective colonial rule. From an etic pedestal, these commissioned scholars accordingly came up with an arbitrary branding of non-western economies compared to Western economies. As a sequel, non-Western economies were categorized into the “substantivist” typology while Western economies were assigned the “formalist” compartment. Under substantivism, which tallies with the gemeinschaft paradigm, non-Western economies were regarded as “primitive”, “static”, “subsistent” and “uninteresting”. On the other hand, the “formalist” category which identifies with gessellschaft is associated with Western economies. This type of an economic system is regarded as formal, devoid of the over-riding influence of customs and traditional sentiments. It is largely propelled by price mechanism. To be sure, the Ibibio indigenous economy was slotted into the “substantivist” arena irrespective of the arbitrariness of this categorisation. Deploying an emic approach, this paper gleans information largely from secondary source materials for analysis. The findings of this paper harps on the fact that the typology of the Ibibio indigenous economy straddled both substantivist and formalist paradigms on account of their customary and market-oriented economic undertakings. It was neither autarkic nor static. Rather it was characterised by appreciable degrees of change and adoptiveness to circumstance under market principles in some instances.*

Key Words: *autarky, emic, indigenous, production, and subsistence.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

The Ibibio indigenous economy is quite peculiar to the Ibibio people who occupy the south-south zone of Nigeria between latitudes 4^o 32 and 5^o 53 North of the Equator and longitudes 7^o 25¹ and 8^o 25¹ East of the Greenwich Meridian. According to Imoh Ekpoh, the land area of Ibibioland approximates to “an irregular triangle in a strict trigonometrical sense.¹ The peopling of the area has been cast in relative antiquity, probably to about 8000BC.² However, drawing inspiration from the autochthonous hypothesis of human settlement, Koko Ete Ina posits that “the Ibibio seem to have no tradition or legend of origin and migration outside their present location. They maintain that they have always been where they now live.”³

Be that as it may, the Ibibio, according to the Willinks Commission Report of 1958, constituted the preponderant ethnic group in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria which corresponds to the modern south-south zone of Nigeria.⁴ It would be noted that the Commission was instituted at the instance of the colonial government with little or no hue and taint of sectional politics in the area.⁵

¹ Imoh J. Ekpoh, “Physiography, climate and vegetation” in S. W. Peters, Edet R. Iwok and Okon Edet Uya (eds.) *Akwa Ibom State: The Land of Promise – A Compendium* (Lagos: Gabumo Publishing Co Ltd., 1994), p. 230.

² Monday Effiong Noah, *Ibibio Pioneers in Modern Nigerian History* (Uyo: Scholars Press (Nig). Ltd. 1980), p. 6.

³ Koko Ete Ina, *The Changing Faces of Ibibio History, 1885-1987*. (Uyo: Ndeco Educational Publishers, 2017), p. 3.

⁴ Otoabasi Akpan, *The Niger Delta Question and the Peace Plan*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 2011), p. 7.

⁵ For more information, see Koko Ete Ina, *The Changing Faces of Ibibio History*.



2. THE CONCEPT OF AN ECONOMY :

It has been severally canvassed that it is the economy that provides the bedrock for any society to thrive on. Over time, it develops into an economic system with variegated definitions and discourses both in orthodox and materialist reckonings. Man is first and foremost a *homo economicus* or what George Dalton in *Economic Systems and Society: Capitalism, Communism and the Third World* calls the “economic man.”⁶ This perforce implies that men as a collective become “economic men” who develop an economic configuration and/or typology with key three discernible and pandemic elements, namely, production, distribution and consumption.

Cook, as cited in Bassey Andah’s, *African Anthropology*, posits that

An economy is a culturally, medicated filed of a human population’s activity in which its members interact with their physical and social environment in the calculated attempt to a living directly and indirectly.⁷

The above condition of affairs over time, gives birth to an economic system. In Materialist or Marxian parlance, this is known as a “mode production” or a “socio-economic formation”. It is constituted by the organic unity of the productive forces (labour power, objects of labour and the means of labour) as well as the social relations of production.⁸ In tandem with this, Roger M. Keesing notes that a mode of production has two sides. One side is technical. In this wise, resources are created by man from the natural world and from natural endowments. The other side is social in orientation and practice. In this case, man is organized in productive activities.⁹

The point to note is that economic activities are primarily concerned with the satisfaction of human wants, irrespective of how vast and variegated as they could be.¹⁰ Corroborating this view point, Bassey Andah contends that, “all human societies (past and present) have structured arrangements to provide the material means of individuals and community life. These structured rules constitute a society’s economic system.”¹¹

3. THE TYPOLOGIES OF ECONOMIES :

In orthodox or West-centric scholarship, the economic life of non-Western societies are regarded as “primitive” “peasant”¹² “subsistent”, “uniform”, “unchanging” and therefore “uninteresting” to study,¹³ This descriptive appellation is without recourse to the complex, diversified, enduring and sustaining nature of non-Western economies such as the Ibibio indigenous economy.

In Toennies’ classificatory model, as ventilated by Anthony G. Hopkins, two types of societies have been identified. These are called *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*.¹⁴ In a *gemeinschaft* typology, the sense of community and communal life is very strong with relatively unassailable group consciousness and solidarity. Economic pursuits are multicentric and are circumscribed by roles, status, emotions and sentiments, religious identity and solidarity, family and clan identity and feelings in concert with other communal trappings. A *gemeinschaft* is also said to be essentially characterized by the absence of “markets, money and systematic knowledge.”¹⁵ It is a society which is also largely governed by the emotions of kinship with assigned roles, to members of the kinship descent.

On the other side of Tonnie’s model is the *gesellschaft*. Under this typology, economic behavioural patterns are predicated on formal rules of contract and “market-oriented” systems rather than tradition. It is a condition of affairs

⁶ George Dalton, *Economic Systems and Society: Capitalism, Communism and the Third World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1983), p.38.

⁷ Cook cited in Bassey Andah, *African Anthropology*, (Ibadan: Shaneson C.I. Ltd, 1988), p.182.

⁸ For clear ventilation, see Zoya Berbeshkina, L. Yakovleva and D. Zerkin, *What is Historical Materialism?* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), pp. 50-52; V.I. Lenin, *On Marx and Engels* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), pp. 19-22; Claud Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa* (New York: Longman Group Ltd., 1981), pp. 10-13.

⁹ Roger M. Keesing, *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective* (New York; Holt, Rhinehardt and Winston, 1976), p.317.

¹⁰ Michael Brown, *The Economics of Imperialism* (Harmondsworth; Penguin Books Ltd., 1974), p. 43.

¹¹ Bassey Anda, *African Anthropology*, p. 193.

¹² Anthony G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1973), p.9.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 5-6. See also Margaret Peil, *Consensus and Conflict in African Societies: An Introduction to Sociology* (Essex: Longman Group Ltd., 1977), p. 28.

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ *Ibid*



which is typical of cities, states and/or large-scale societies which of course, are supposedly identified with Western societies.

Harold Schneider, while expounding *The Evolution of the Economy*, examines the older development theory of Lewis Henry Morgan, who in his book titled *Ancient Society* and published in 1897, maintains that the history of the human society is basically teleological. By implication, according to him, the human society moves along a defined and pre-ordained path from savagery through barbarism and then to civilization.¹⁶ He further maintains that the world is divided into two compartments, namely, “primitive” and “civilized” worlds. Concomitantly, “primitive” societies are correspondently “underdeveloped” while the “civilized” societies are “developed.”¹⁷ Morgan’s categorization, it would be emphasized, developed into an intellectual creed which was canonically followed by early economic anthropologists who tried to slot non-Western societies into a paradigm which was essentially predicated on Western theoretical concepts, models and stereotypes.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, the speculative nature of the evolutionary theory of the economy was repudiated by the Functionalist School with Bronislaw Malinowski and later A. R. Radcliffe-Brown as major proponents.¹⁸ In spite of this rejection however, the functionalists could not extricate themselves from time-laden classification stereotypes.

In the 1950s Karl Polanyi invented the “substantivist” doctrine of an economy and readily confined the use of the term to non-Western economies, while the West was assigned to the “formalist” category. According to him, The substantivist meaning of economy derives from man’s dependence for his living upon nature and social environment, in so far as this results in supplying him with the means of material want satisfaction.¹⁹

The “formalist” theory on the other hand, is quantified and obviously priced.”²⁰ Within this category, economic activities are held to operate in a “rational sense.”²¹ As also argued by Harold Schneider, substantivism derives from functionalism in that the former like the later, views societies from a “static, self-supporting and closed angle.”²²

Flowing from the above mental construct, non-Western economies, especially African economies, are branded as “peasant, lacking in features like self-regulating markets, supply demand ratios and pricing mechanisms.”²³ This branding is made much more adhesive by Paul Bohannan and George Dalton in their book titled *Markets in Africa* with the postulation that African economies are better understood “substantively.” They also argue that market places in Africa function as non-economic institutions.²⁴

Akin to the substantivist configuration of African economies and still an out-crop of Lewis Henry Morgan’s evolutionary imagery is the “coconut tree theory” which sees the African as not only a “savage” and “primitive” but also as a man whose natural environment provides him with “everything” Arising from this natural providence, the African and by implication the Ibibio man therefore had no need to exert himself to develop beyond the precinct of transcendental providence. In tandem with the Diamond coconut model as espoused by an American economist, Peter Diamond in 1982, 2010 Alfred Nobel prize winner, people’s expectations generally influence the level of economic activities of people in a given condition or space gladdened with taboos and attendant inefficiencies.²⁵ This theory reinforces the time-long self-sufficiency theory and other related notions of subsistence economy.

In point of fact, Alfred Marshall, a celebrated economist of the 20th century had portrayed Africans as people who live,

under the dominion of custom and impulse, scarcely ever striking out new lines for themselves; never forecasting the distant future; fitful in spite of their servitude to custom;

¹⁶ Harold Scheider, *The Evolution of the Economy*, n. d. p.1

¹⁷ *Ibid*, see also Abraham Roseman and Paula G. Rubel, *The Tapestry of Culture: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. 3rd Edition (New York: Newberry Award Record Inc. 1989), p.15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19. See also Basse Andah, *African Anthropology*, p. 181.

¹⁹ Karl Polanyi *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (New York: The Free Press, 1957), p. 243.

²⁰ Harold, K. Schneider, *Economic Man: The Anthropology of Economics* (New York: The Free Press, 1974), p. 16.

²¹ Bryn Jones, “Economic Action and Rational Organization in the Sociology of Weber” in Barry Hindess (ed.) *Sociological Theories of the Economy* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977), p. 39.

²² Harold K. Schneider, *Economic Man: The Anthropology of Economics*, p. 181.

²³ Basse Andah, *African Anthropology*, p. 181

²⁴ Paul Bohannan and George Dalton, *Markets in African: Eight subsistence economies in Transition* cited in Harald K. Schreider, *Economic Man: The Anthropology of Economics*, p.7.

²⁵ En. M. Wikipedia.org, wiki>Diamond. Accessed and retrieved on 17/05/2024.



governed by the fancy of the moment; ready at all times for the most arduous exertions, but incapable of keeping themselves long to steady work.²⁶

In keeping with the above descriptive and “intellectual” construct, the Ibibio, and by extension, Africa’s indigenous or traditional or domestic economy has been labeled as “autarkic” “backward”, “barbaric”. “static” and “subsistent” by most “West-centric scholars.

Of more consternation, it should be emphasized, is the fact that some African and by implication, some Ibibio scholars have also fallen prey to the booby trap of these categorizations. As a matter of fact, quite a sizeable number of them have unsuspectingly branded their indigenous economies as largely “subsistent.”²⁷ But this paper contends otherwise.

4. THE PROFILE OF THE IBIBIO INDIGENOUS ECONOMY :

The Ibibio indigenous economy had always been quite peculiar to the Ibibio people. To be sure, it straddled the boundary between the so-called “substantivist” and “formalist” typologies. It was neither backward nor static and neither autarkic nor subsistent. In this wise, John E. Flint in his article titled “Economic Change in West Africa in the Nineteenth Century” emphasizes the fact that the characterization of Africa’s traditional economy as “subsistent” is not only fallacious but also “virtually meaningless” and “absurd”.²⁸ Anthony G. Hopkins also notes that Africa’s indigenous economy was more diversified than has been generally recognized. Production was not only aimed at the lubrication of the “subsistent” profile of the people but was also aimed at trade which was regular, widespread and of great antiquity.²⁹

The point to note is that among the Ibibio, production was not merely for use value which would have presupposed autarky but was also geared towards surplus value which was a basic paraphernalia of the Ibibio indigenous economic profile. R. Olufemi Ekundare in *An Economic History of Nigeria: 1860-1960* curiously notes that early exchanges arose from output far in excess of subsistent demands.³⁰ It is curious in the sense that this subsequent notion of his is a complete departure from his earlier assertion that the socio economic conditions of Nigeria was based on subsistence.

To be sure, contemporary research works have shown that the Ibibio indigenous economy was not “subsistent” and timeless. Rather it was dynamic and elastic enough to accommodate periodic elements of inventiveness, adjustments and renovations. These conditions of affairs were made manifest in the manner environmental endowments were harnessed to engender survival, development and progress. Given this set of circumstances, the assertion by Emile Durkheim that non-Western economies are stochastic, that is, governed by the laws of chance,³¹ withers away in the face of concrete and ubiquitous evidences.

In point of fact, the conscious and deliberate interaction of the Ibibio people with their environment overtime, gave rise to the peculiarity of their material and intellectual culture. According to Zoya Berbeskina L. Yakovelva and D. Zerkina in *What is Historical Materialism?*, material culture embraces the,

Achievements identifying the extent man has mastered nature, the level of instrument of labour, the technical level of production, people’s technical skills, the scientific organization of labour, ministering to man’s material and everyday need.³²

Intellectual culture on the other hand is,

The sum total of qualitative achievement reached in science education, ethics, literature and art. It also embraces political ideas, political education, and legal relations. Intellectual culture is also embodied in languages, speech, thought (logic) and standard behaviour.³³

²⁶ Alfred Marshall cited in A.G Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, p.10.

²⁷ Among the legion of several African scholars would include R. Olufemi Ekundare, *An Economic History of Nigeria: 1860-1960* (London: Methuen & co. Ltd, 1973), p. 46; E. J. Etuk “The Traditional Ibibio Economy: A Retrospective Analysis” in Monday Abasiattai (ed) *The Ibibio: An Introduction to the Land, the People and their Culture* (Calabar: Alphonsus Akpan, 1991), p. 204.

²⁸ John E. Flint, “Economic Change in West Africa in the Nineteenth Century” in J. F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder (eds.) *History of West Africa* Vol II (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1974), p.381.

²⁹ A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, p.78.

³⁰ R. Olufemi Ekundare, *An Economic History of Nigeria: 1860-1960*, p. 46.

³¹ Harold Scheider, *The Evolution of the of the Economy* p.1.

³² Zoya Berbeskina, Yakovelva, L. and Zerkina, D., *What is Historical Materialism?* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), pp. 173-174.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.174.



It would be noted that the organic unity of the material and intellectual culture of the Ibibio people over the years, like every other human society, influenced their indigenous economic profile and fortunes. The economy, it must be emphasized, sustains the maintenance of the superstructure of any given society and it has been recognized variously that the substantialist meaning of the economy is universally applicable.³⁴ This is premised on the fact that man needs maintenance everywhere and he achieves this through the manipulation of his political and socio-economic conditions. His productive proclivities are concerted and consciously aimed at his up-keep and therefore, calculated and rational. As a matter of fact, human societies represent an organic network where people are bound together by multi-centric wants and goals. Production efforts are accordingly coordinated to meet set goals and thereby sustain human lives.

By and large, the Ibibio indigenous economic typology expressed itself in the three discernible elements of an economic system or socio-economic formation in Marxian parlance. These were production, distribution, and consumption.

5. PRODUCTION :

The classical factors of production, namely, land, labour, capital and entrepreneur were essentially subsumed in land, land ownership and labour in Ibibioland. The Ibibio indigenous economy was largely premised on "land and its social relations of ownership and utility."³⁵ Land was crucial for production as well as life sustenance. According to Ini Etuk,

An inseparable affinity existed between the land and the people as placatory sacrifices and casual offertories were regularly made to the land goddess, *Abasi Isong*, who indeed, was acknowledged to be the owner of the land. Land was of communal holding and access to its utility was gained by being a member of the descent group and community.³⁶

Land was communally owned, howbeit, with transcendental affinity. The living had no expropriatory rights whatsoever to appropriate land from communal ownership. Even lineage family heads were never invested with such powers and authority. Land was not recognized as a commodity for sale. However, the authority of the village on land matters was over-riding, "supreme, untrammled and absolute."³⁷ There were several indigenously recognized land holding categories. The first category comprised sacred lands which included the sacred groves (*Akai efak iso ndem, ikot okpo*) secret societies groves such as *Idiong* society grove (*akai idiong*), *Obon* society grove (*akai Obon*), *Ekong* society grove (*akai Ekong*), *Ekpo* society grove (*akai Ekpo*) *Ekpe* society grove (*akai Ekpe*) and village burial grounds (*ikot Okpo* or *akai Ekpo*). Sacred lands were regarded as the habitats of the gods, deities and spirits. Farming in these plots by unauthorized persons and non-initiates was restricted.

The other category of land holding in Ibibio land were lineage lands (*ikot ekpuk* or *ndoon*), communal land (*ekpene* or *ikot isong*), individuals land (*nno nkama ikot* or *nto nwuo*) pledged land (*ikot ubiong*). Personal land (*okpokpo ikot*) was hereditary and mostly close to individual homesteads.³⁸ Land holdings among the Ibibio also had usufructuary dimensions which were basically inherited from forebears. In any event, land use and exploitation of land resources "followed a canonical pattern which was sanctioned by tradition and sanctified with rituals."³⁹

Major economic activities included farming which was the mainstay, trade- both short distance and long distance, fishing, hunting, tapping, indigenous medical practice, membership in secret or title societies, cottage industries, mat-making, weaving, pottery, blacksmithing, carving, salt production, craft works and so on.

Labour organization was a veritable adjunct of production among the Ibibio. In all economies, organizational mechanisms and practices are usually employed to direct land, labour and other resources for production purposes. Kinship relations, it would be emphasized, was fundamental in the determination of residence, access to land and land resources. It was also the pivot of production relations. The household, nuclear and extended, provided the basic workforce of production in sizeable engagements. However, if labour engagements were quite vast, other agnatic kins, friends and age mates were enlisted and deployed to provide requisite labour force. This typology of labour relations approximates to what Roger M. Keesing in his book titled *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective*,

³⁴ For more ventilation on this, see Bassey Andah, *African Anthropology*, pp. 182- 185.

³⁵ Ini Etuk "Ibibio Indigenous Economy in Philip Afaha (ed), *Witness to History: In Honour of Sir Sebastian J. Umoren* (Abuja: Command Publishers, 2015), p. 276.

³⁶ Etuk, I. "The Economics of Mary Slessor's Missionary Enterprise in Ibibioland, 1876-1915." *International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)* 4, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 2024)

³⁷ Edet A. Udo, *Who are the Ibibio?* (Onitsha: Africana – Fep Publishers Ltd, 1983), p. 206.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Ini Etuk, "Ibibio Indigenous Economy", p. 278



describes as a “motley of variable cluster off kins, friends and neighbours and not simply lineage mates”.⁴⁰ Family heads usually made arrangements to co-opt various people to accomplish any appointed task.

Essentially, labour demand was communal and it was, for the most part, based on the principles of *Nwana*. According to Ini Etuk,

Nwana was prismatic of the indigenous contract system which was based on the principles off *uberimae fidei* (of the fullest confidence). This among things, involved suretyship and partnership. Generally, the spirit of camaraderie and a communal sense of direction were the obvious complexion of labour relations.⁴¹

In *Nwana*, people joined hands to help each other out in turns. It was incumbent on the person whose turn it was to be helped by the *nwana* group to feed the group sumptuously and provide other forms of entertainment. All told, labour relations in Ibibio-land was also intended and indeed, deployed, to lubricate group solidarity.

6. DISTRIBUTION :

Distribution is the median between production and consumption. The Ibibio indigenous economy, as gleaned earlier, was neither autarkic nor subsistent in the real sense of the word. Trade arose from surplus production and also from the fact that no household could produce all that it needed for sustenance. Again, no economic system or socio-economic formation was autarkic which presupposed a condition of economic self-sufficiency. In Ibibioland, trade which was intense and ubiquitous, was a graphic expression of surplus dimension of the production which was appropriated through short distance and long distance trade, as well as reciprocal and redistributive exchanges. Mediums of trade included barter, cowrie shells (*mbamba*) stick money (*okuk eto*), copper wire (*sittim*), manilla (*okpoho*) and so on.⁴²

The above narrative debunks the disparaging characterization of non-Western economies as substantivist. The point to note is that the Ibibio indigenous economy was not bereft of markets and market principles. Again, market principle did not also operate peripherally, rather, they were inherent in the economic tapestry of the people. There were veritable elements of demand and supply mechanisms and production was geared toward meeting these elements. To be sure, B. W. Hodder and Roger Lee define the market as “a public gathering of buyers and sellers meeting at appointed locations and at regular times”.⁴³ Markets were sessioned in Ibibioland regularly and systematically in various communities. This development concomitantly shoots in the leg Max Weber’s description of African economies as being destitute of “cultural directionality” in the sense that production decisions were not driven by “market prices,”⁴⁴

7. CONSUMPTION :

Consumption is the consummation of an economic process. It reinforces and lubricates the systemic gamut of human existence. Abraham Rosman and Paula Rubel expouse that consumption flows from the heels of production and distribution. They also maintain that to a great extent, consumption is “culturally determined.”⁴⁵ Flowing from this premise and as noted earlier, the mode of production of the Ibibio people was essentially predicated on communalism. Without much details, consumption was also communal in determination and configuration.

Reciprocal and redistributive exchanges doubled as distributive relations as well as consumptive relations among the Ibibio. These were clearly and freely demonstrated in giving, receiving and return of gifts during childbirth, marriage, burial, initiation, title-taking ceremonies and so on. Reciprocity, as also noted by the two authors is a “type of exchange (which) involves two sides of equal status, in continuing exchange with each other. This kind of exchange is found in egalitarian societies in which rank differences are absent.”⁴⁶ Similarly, Karl Polanyi has it that “reciprocity is the exchange of goods that takes place neither through the markets not through administrative heirachies.”⁴⁷ In

⁴⁰ Roger M. Keesing, *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1976), p. 311.

⁴¹ Ini Etuk, “Ibibio Indigenous Economy”, p. 279. See also Ini Etuk “Indigenous economic Production Parttern in Akwa Ibom Area in the Pre-colonial and Colonial Times and its Implications for Rural Development in Monday AbasiAttai (ed) *Ibom Journal of History and International Studies*, Vol. 13 No.1,

⁴² For more information see Ekpo Eyo, *Nigeria and the Evolution of Money* (Central Bank of Nigeria, 1979), pp. 61-63; Edet Udo, *who are the Ibibio?* pp.230-233; E.U. Okoko, *Ubiom History, and Culture* (Calabar: Paico Ltd, 1988), p.37 and Ini Etuk, “Ibibio Indigenous Economy”, p.287.

⁴³ B.W. Hodder and Roger Lee, *Economic Geography* (London: Methuen and Co Ltd., 1974), p.136.

⁴⁴ Max Werber cited in Bryn Jones “Economic Action and Rational Organization in the sociology of Weber” p. 13.

⁴⁵ Abraham Rosman and Paula Rubel, *The Tapestry of Culture: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, p.136.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ Karl Polanyi, “The Economy as an instituted process in Karl Polanyi (ed.) *Trade and Markets in early empires* (New York: The Free press, 1957), 59.



Ibibioland, reciprocal exchange was a routine affair as gifts of various kinds moved across fences and boundaries, among agnatic kins in-laws, friends and neighbours freely and willingly. A self-centred person (*unyim*) therefore assumed a pariah status in the community. As a sequel he or she could not benefit from the benevolent magnanimity of others. Communal reciprocal and exchange relationship and its philosophy was encapsulated in the ubiquitous local parlance “*eto isidaha ikpong ikappa akai*” – meaning “a tree does not make a forest.” Interdependence was seen as the hallmark of communal existence.

Redistributive exchange concomitantly ensured that ordinary people did not suffer undue deprivation and marginalization. Karl Polanyi defines redistribution as the “movement of goods up to and administrative centre and their re-allotment downwards to consumers.”⁴⁸ In Ibibioland, the younger generation usually supplied the labour force to the older generation in various spheres such as planting, harvesting, house building, palm oil production and so on. In such situations as noted by Ini Etuk, “it was incumbent on the elders to treat the youth to sumptuous meals with adequate supply of palm wine (*ukot*), gin (*ufofor*) and gifts of various sorts.”⁴⁹ This was replicated in other instances of socio-political and economic engagements. The practice was largely in keeping with the paraphernalia of communalism which held sway in Ibibioland under its indigenous economic profile.

8. CONCLUSION :

Non-Western economies were arbitrarily categorized and taxonomised by early economic anthropologists, sociologists and economists of Western classical orientation and mould as being “substantivist” in configuration. Located within the province of *gemeinschaft*, substantivism is an economic system which is regarded as being “primitive”, “static”, “subsistent”, “uniform”, and therefore “uninteresting”.

On the other side of the divide is the “formalist” typology which identifies with the advanced economies of the West. It is a definitive and descriptive compartment which is known as *gesellschaft*. Under this umbrella, economic behavioural patterns are said to be based on formal rules of contract and market – oriented systems rather than custom and traditions. Accordingly, economic decisions and undertakings are largely informed by price mechanism.

Ibibioland in the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria in relation to the above typological compartments was said to belong to the substantivist category and assigned obvious disparaging characteristics. However, this paper has noted that the Ibibio indigenous economic profile was much more robust and diversified than the West – centric branding.

An Economy or an economic system or a mode of production in Marxian parlance, is made of three crucial elements, namely, production, distribution, and consumption. To be sure, the indigenous Ibibio principles and engagements in production, distribution, and consumption moved in and out of the provinces of substantivism and formalism as clearly shown in this paper. Surplus value production as well as market-oriented decisions and elements were obviously identified with the Ibibio indigenous economy. Its configuration was quite adaptive, changing and consistent with the lores and mores of their political, economic and social system with the crucial elements of continuity and change. Its typology cannot therefore be slotted unassailably into the province of substantivism.

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⁴⁸ *Ibid*

⁴⁹ Ini Etuk, “Ibibio Indigenous Economy” p. 300.



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