



A map of the Igbo-speaking community within Nigeria and within Africa, wikipedia.



Riverine and coastal towns

The slave trade in the riverine and coastal towns was dominated by their middlemen, who purchased slaves primarily from the Aro and other traders. The Aro, however, refrained from raiding the towns because they were landlubbers, unskilled in canoe warfare. In addition, the Aro realized that it would be suicidal to mount military operations against the towns fortified with cannons and other imported weapons that were unavailable in the Aro homeland. Slavery in the area was thus conducted by riverine towns like Aboh, which took advantage of its superior weapons to raid nearby towns on the Niger, such as Onitsha, forcing its king to transfer the central market to a more secure place near the Anambra River in the middle of the nineteenth century.

John N. Orij, 'Igboland, Slavery, and the Drums of War and Heroism' in Sylviane A. Diouf, *Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies* (Ohio University Press, 2003)

Highlight the methods used by riverine and coastal Igbo communities to protect themselves from the Slave Trade.



Southeastern Igboland

Abam raids in southeastern Igboland are relatively few because the Aro discouraged military incursions in their homeland to avoid the disruption of trade and the large number of pilgrims and others who were visiting Arochukwu to consult their oracle. In addition, the Abam and other communities in the so-called Aro confederacy are said to have formed a pact not to raid one another. They also used the Ekpe/Okonko society associated with the Aro to promote their commercial interests. Local leaders of Okonko, for example, provided security and hospitality to itinerant Aro traders and also sold slaves to them, in exchange for firearms, gin, and other imported goods. Okonko helped the Aro to trade and at times settle in communities. In spite of the peaceful method the Aro adopted in their expansion, that they and their Abam warriors engaged at times in kidnapping and raids in some southeastern Igbo communities.

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Why were south-eastern towns not raided as much?

Why do you think the Aro decided to participate in the Slave Trade?

Give 2 reasons.



Western Igboland

Individuals who violated the sacred laws of Ala involving homicide, incest, and stealing of farm crops were accused of committing acts of sacrilege (Iru Ala) and held liable and responsible for their actions. The Igbo system of law was hard on the guilty person. An individual, who committed homicide for example, might be killed or sold into slavery, unless he/she paid adequate compensation to the injured family, and carried out a protracted and expensive ritual cleansing ceremony in Ala shrine (Isa Ihu, or washing one's face)...

The earliest documented account of slave raids and kidnapping in the Igbo area comes from the memoir of Olaudah Equiano... The memoir provides some insight on the diverse measures the Igbo were taking to prevent the depredations of the slave raiders. According to Equiano, he had undergone some military training, including shooting and throwing javelins. Presumably, he and other young boys, after their training, were expected during their adolescent years to become members of the local militia responsible for defending their community against the incursions of slave raiders and other agents of violence. The militia was equipped with "firearms, bows and arrows, broad two-edged swords and javelins". Equiano also revealed that some children acted as scouts, helping in the absence of their parents to reconnoiter the movement of the slave raiders (Jones 1967, 84–85). Admittedly, we do not know if the slave raiders Equiano discussed were from communities in his homeland Igboland.

The notorious Ekumeku society is known to have carried out intensive raids in the area during the nineteenth century. It is also



likely that the raiders were the Abam, whom the Aro used in recruiting slaves in these parts.

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How were people enslaved in Western Igboland?

What did Equiano and other young boys do to defend themselves against Slavery?



Northern Igboland

In this area, we find a big presence of the Aro – whom had a very extensive trade network- and the Abam warriors. Aro people were established far away from their lands (Arochuku) but they adopted diverse methods in recruiting slaves in Northern Igboland. The Abam warriors constituted the primary organ of violence the Aro used in dominating the slave trade during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A majority of the slaves they recruited were obtained by raids, kidnapping, and at times, slave wars involving the Abam.

The success the Abam achieved in warfare lies primarily with the skillful guerilla tactics they adopted during an incursion, and is not due to their superior weapons. Lightning raids were often conducted at night against an unsuspecting community, enabling the Abam to return safely to their base. As this study will show, there were some cases when vigilant communities that caught Abam spies or had inklings of an impending invasion routed the invaders. The semisavanna environment of the north also helped in facilitating the movement of the Abam in the area...

Abam incursions into Awka elicited a different response from its inhabitants. They mobilized themselves, forming a local vigilante group armed with Snider rifles to repulse the incursions. The sound of the guns alerted the local population to an invasion and thus helped in aborting Abam raids. The Awka also built high walls around their houses to foil kidnappers. During slavery the walls not only had perforations for firing guns but towers for monitoring the movement of intruders.



Some communities, however, reasoned that due to their limited manpower and material resources they could not effectively defend themselves against the Abam. Such communities allied with their neighbors for their mutual defense.

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What did the Aro use the Abam warriors for?

Why the Abam?