

Origins and Migrations of the Enuani People of South Central Nigeria Reconsidered

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ABSTRACT This paper is a micro study of the Enuani, a west Niger Igbo subgroup in South Central Nigeria. The study is based on oral traditions collected and documented from the area over time, supplemented with archival sources and local histories written by the people of the area. It identifies the people and area in question and examines the genesis and dynamics of conflicting claims about their origins as well as the forces that sustain them. In doing this, it hopes to shed more light on the vexed issue of Enuani ethno-cultural identity and to contribute to a deeper understanding of the state formation process in pre-colonial Nigeria. The paper concludes that given the various strands of primary, secondary and tertiary movements, which settled the Enuani area, wholesale attribution of their origin to one source or area is at variance with the reality on ground and with the evidence. The evidence and reality on ground point to mixed origins from Igboland east of the Niger, from already established settlements within or neighbouring Enuani area, from Benin, Igala and Yorubaland. There is also evidence of population movements from the area to people other areas, including Benin and Igboland east of the Niger.

INTRODUCTION

The study of traditions of origins is a recurrent theme in Nigerian history. It is an issue which touches the very foundation of the group identity of a people. This is especially so in a plural society like Nigeria with many centrifugal tendencies and in which access to limited resources, political offices and employment opportunities is largely determined by ethnicity. The cynic might ridicule those who attempt digging into the origins of a people; and might ask, is it not sufficient to identify such people as they are known at present? Apart from holding the key to the ethnic identity of any people as it points to the who are we? (Atanda 1980: 65) or the collective identity of the people, it also has the capacity or potential to facilitate the achievement of the "goal of individual and group self knowledge". According to Afigbo (1998: 63):

The first question the average African of today would ask about the past of his people, ... would invariably touch on the issue of their origin, migration and settlement, ... The inhabitants of our zone of interest are no exceptions in this respect. They want to know who they are, where they came from and how they came to be the kind of people they are. It is because of the need to meet this insistent demand that scholars have continued, and will continue,

to blunt the cutting edge of their intellectual weapon by striking at this interactive problem.

For the Igbo of the west Niger area, the answer to these questions have been attempted by those who have studied them only from the perspective that the area in question was previously unoccupied until recent times (Talbot 1969: 12). By implication, this area was *terra incognita* until it was occupied by migrants from Benin (Afigbo 1981a: 18). The area is thus portrayed as "a receiver of both peoples and cultures", with "traditions of migrations into" but "not out of it", given that "there was always enough land for new comers" (Ohadike 1980: 27). Two schools of thought identify the new comers as either solely Benin immigrants or solely Igbo immigrants, and have sparked controversies. Jacob Egharevba (1968: 84), the Benin historian, attributes a Benin origin to all Igbo-speaking communities, who occupy the area between Benin and the western bank of the Niger. Afigbo (1998: 70-71) on the other hand, dismisses this sweeping generalization and the book, which propagates it as the "official mind", a history of what the Benin monarchy believes about itself, "not even a history of what the ordinary Bini man thinks or believes about the dynasty". Therefore, he concludes that the work in question "cannot throw much light on the origins, migrations and settlement of the human populations that formed

the base from which the kingdoms subsequently rose”.

Afigbo (1981b: 11-12) insists that traditions of origins from Benin by the affected groups notwithstanding, the Igbo-speaking people west of the Niger are bona fide Igbo people. He opines that the latter's migration westward was halted by the rise of the Benin Empire, a development which led to a recoil movement back to the Niger. It is this later movement, in his view, that has survived in the west Niger Igbo traditions as origins and migrations from Benin.

The problem with the controversies and the works which purvey them is that they do not derive from detailed micro-studies of the area in question. It is common knowledge that generalizations or panoramic surveys tend to present a smooth synthetic canvas, but this is usually achieved at the expense of a more complex picture or reality. Since the controversies revolve around the identity of the people concerned, an in-depth study of the area would be a step in the right direction. For as a local writer (Dieyi 2001: 15) would say, the people hold “the keys to their historical origins”. In other words, rather than perpetuate panoramic surveys of the west Niger Igbo, detailed micro studies of specific local communities or aspects of their relations with Benin should yield better results (Afigbo 1987: 24).

This paper is an effort in the latter direction. It studies the Enuani, a west Niger Igbo subgroup. The study is based on oral traditions collected and documented from the area over a considerable length of time, supplemented with archival sources and local histories written by the people of the area. It identifies the people and area in question and examines the genesis and dynamics of conflicting claims about their origins as well as the forces that sustain them. In doing this, it hopes to shed more light on the vexed issue of Enuani ethno-cultural identity and to contribute to a deeper understanding of the state formation process in pre-colonial Nigeria. The paper concludes that, given the various strands of primary, secondary and tertiary movements, which settled the Enuani area, wholesale attribution of their origin to one source or area is at variance with the reality on ground and with the evidence. The evidence and reality on ground point to mixed origins from Igboland east of the Niger, from already established settlements within or neighbouring Enuani area, from Benin, Igala

and Yorubaland. There is also evidence of population movements from the area to people other areas.

THE ENUANI DEFINED

Nigeria's upland dwelling Igbo-speaking people west of the River Niger, who are found in the present Aniocha (North/South) and Oshimili (North/South) local government areas of Delta state of Nigeria constituted the defunct colonial Asaba Division. Forde and Jones (1950: 48) note that they are described as Enuani or highland people by their neighbours. The Enuani are thus made up of two related groups, namely the Aniocha (whiteland) and the Oshimili (riverain) groups, respectively. The Enuani are commonly referred to as the “Ika Igbo”, a term popularized by Talbot (1969: 39). In Forde and Jones' classifications, (1950: 48) these two groups fall within the larger “Northern Ika Igbo” group.

The name Enuani is a topographical construct, which is derived from the physical feature of the area occupied by the people, namely *Enu* (Up or High) and *ani* (land). Enuani, an Igbo name, as Henderson (1972: 36) rightly observes, thus means “highland” or “upland dwellers”, or those who live on the hill, on higher grounds than their neighbours, the latter inhabiting “the low lying area south” (Nwabua 1994: 40) and east of the Niger. The naming of the area to reflect its geographical features is in keeping with the Igbo pattern of naming their settlements to reflect their geographical peculiarities. For instance, another Igbo-speaking group to the south of the Enuani call themselves Ukwuani, a term, which means lowland dwellers (Okolugbo 2004: 3). Enuani culture pervades the area between “Ika civilization to the west, and Anambra and Nri civilization to the east and Ndosimili-Ukwuani civilization to the south. Like other groups whose habitations are not defined by obvious natural boundaries, they tend to merge into neighbouring boundaries to the west (Ika civilization) and south (Ndosimili-Ukwuani civilization), but are separated from their eastern neighbours by the River Niger. With the passage of time, the people of Enuani have come to develop a distinct civilization known as *AKWA OCHA* (white cloth civilization). The people of Enuani are conscious of their history which is why they internalized their group solidarity in the closing years of the nineteenth century in the famous Ekumeku Movement against British colonialism (Igbafe 1971).

ENUANI TRADITIONS OF ORIGINS AND MIGRATIONS

The communities that make up the Enuani have one thing in common about their traditions. They remember the names of their eponymous founders and in many cases also can identify where such founders came from. It is for the historian to interpret and explain what is so remembered or identified.

Four broad groups can be identified in the Enuani area. The first and largest group claims a definite Benin origin. This is the Ezechima group, which makes up over ten communities east and west of the Niger. Among this group are Obior, Issele-Uku, Onicha-Ugbo, Onicha Olona, Onicha Ukwu, Obomkpa and Ezi, in the Enuani area. The second group claims origin from Nri and Nri-related communities or the Igbo groups east of the Niger. They are found in Akwukwu-Igbo, Asaba, Ibusa (Igbuzor), Isheagu, parts of Ubulu-Ukwu, Issele-Ukwu and Illah, among others. A third group claims origin from neighbouring communities but still strives to link its founders to Benin. Notable in this regard is the Ubulu clan of Ubulu-Ukwu, Ubulu-Uno and Ubulu-Okiti, Ashama and Adonta. The fourth group claims origins from Yoruba and Igala areas of the southwest and the Niger-Benue confluence of Nigeria. These are found in Ugboodu, Ukwunzu, Ebu and Illah, Ubulubu, Obomkpa, Okpanam, Okwe and Oko.

GROUPS CLAIMING BENIN ORIGIN

The Ezechima account comes in various forms. Each of the communities that make up the Ezechima clan has its own version, but some points are common to all. The groups tend to agree that they were led out of Benin by Ezechima, i.e. King Chima, during the reign of Oba Esigie, i.e. in the early 16th century. They, however, disagree on the cause of their flight. One version recorded by Okpuno (1973: 9) associates the flight with an unsuccessful bid for the Benin throne by Princess Edelayo. The account claims that she was married to Chima and could not accede to the throne because she was in her menses. She assumed the title, Eze, (*king*) and being Chima's wife, the names *Eze na Chima*, ie Eze and Chima, shortened to Ezechima, were used to refer to Princess Edelayo and her husband, Chima. Thus the Eze or king, according to this version, refers

to Princess Edelayo, while the event is said to have occurred before Esigie acceded to power.

Benin sources, as recorded by Egharevba (1968: 20), however, mention Princess Edeleyo in relation to the events preceding Oba Olua's accession to the throne i.e in the last quarter of the 15th century. The account is, however, silent on the *Ezechima episode*. Besides, the Eze title is not known to the Benin but instead is peculiar to Igbo language and political culture. Chima, if the story is to be considered, has to be the personality in question. Okpuno's account may be an adaptation of Egharevba's account.

It is said that Chima and his entire household and followers fled Benin for fear of reprisals from Oba Esigie. According to a second and more popular version of the story, as recorded by Hubbard (1948: 202), the group fled Benin to avoid being enslaved by Oba Esigie, who had defeated them. The Chima group is said to have flogged a woman who, unknown to them, was the Queen mother, for trespassing on and fetching firewood from their piece of land. The Oba was enraged and subsequently raised an army that defeated the group who then fled to safety outside the territories of Esigie. They founded settlements in the course of their flight. Apart from the settlements in the Enuani area already mentioned, the fleeing group is said to have founded Onitsha, on the eastern bank of the Niger, Obetim (Afor), Ossissa, Ashaka and Aboh in the present Ndokwa East Local Government Area of Nigeria's Delta State, as well as Ozoro, (said to have been founded by Oputa-Uku), headquarters of the present Isoko North Local Government Area, of Nigeria's Delta state all on the western side of the Niger.

Onwuejeogwu (1987: 30-33) notes the "considerable confusion found in the various versions", and the tendency, as in Asaba, to revise earlier traditions by super-imposing Chima on the already established genealogy, which traces Asaba to Nteje, east of the Niger. He observes, too, that the Chima episode is not recorded by Egharevba in the earliest version of his work on Benin, nor does the episode have its Benin version. He, therefore, draws attention to an Agbor oral tradition on the Chima episode, which views Chima (spelt Kime) as a fugitive from Alisimien clan of Agbor. According to the Agbor tradition, having failed in his plot against Obi Adigwe of Agbor about 1698, Chima fled eastward and founded the Ezechima clan as a result. Relying on his comparative ethnographic analysis,

Onwuejeogwu (1987: 33-34), insists that Agbor was “an ancient settlement founded by speakers of protoIgboid”, its nearness to Benin notwithstanding. He concludes that the near truth of the episode is that “Eze Chima came from Agbor not Benin”. In his view, the claim of Benin conquest of west Igbo towns is not supported by any evidence whatsoever, “except those claims made by Benin local historians and some arm-chair European and Edo writers”. Ezechima clan’s claim of Benin origin is attributed to “the prestige which the Benin kingdom gained in the 18th century”.

GROUPS CLAIMING ORIGINS FROM NRI AND NRI-RELATED COMMUNITIES

Ogwashi-Ukwu is identified as senior to all the groups in the Enuani area, which claim Nri origin (Onwuejeogwu 1987: 27). As recorded by Isichei (1977: 35-9) from oral traditions collected in 1974, traditions of origins of the Ogwashi-Ukwu, Akwukwu and Igbuzo (Ibusa) communities trace their founders to Nri in the same wave of migration. It is said that Odaigbo, the son of Eze Nri and his relation, Edini (variously rendered as a woman and a man) were exiled from Nri. To guide them in their choice of settlements, their father gave them pots of medicine which they were to carry on their heads as they journeyed. Each was to found his settlement wherever his pot fell to the ground; Edini’s pot is said to have fallen to the ground at a place which came to be called *Ani Udo* (land of peace). He founded his settlement there.

However, a variant recorded at Ogwashi-Ukwu identifies Edini as a woman, and Odaigbo’s sister. Edini’s pot is said to have fallen at Ani Obodo (the land or settlement of Obodo). A more recent version of the same traditions, however, identifies Obodo as an Nri princess, who was the mother of both Odaigbo and his brother, Edini. The same tradition insists that Edini’s pot fell at Ani Udo (Osadebe 2007: 28) in Ibusa (Igbuzo) in the present Oshimili South Local Government Area of Nigeria’s Delta State. Odaigbo, the tradition continues, could not establish his settlement until his pot fell down. So, he continued to the present site of Ogwashi-Ukwu, current headquarters of Aniocha South Local Government Area of Nigeria’s Delta state, at a place called *Eke*, where he built a court (Ogwa) from which the town derives its name.

Both Edini and Odaigbo are said to have encountered two other Nri settlers in their

vicinities. Odaigbo, while exploring his forest environment is said to have met an elephant hunter from Nri, Igbo, who was based at Akwukwu Igbo. The latter subsequently joined Odaigbo at Ogwashi-Ukwu. There, he married Odaigbo’s daughter and raised some children before returning to Akwukwu Igbo. He is said to have later come in contact with a Benin immigrant, Opu.

Similarly, Edini is said to have come in contact with Umejei at the present site of Ibusa. Umejei is described as an immigrant from Isu, east of the Niger. Onwuejeogwu (1987: 27-28) is of the view that Umejei hailed from Isu, north of Awka, both towns being under Nri sphere of influence between the 15th and 16th centuries. He argues that the Isu mentioned by Ibusa traditions is only one strand of a complex movement. In his view, the core of Isu settlements is Isu Ama, south of Nkwere in Imo State of Nigeria. Other Isu towns, including Isu Njaba and Isu Ulo, are found between Isu Ama and Isu, near Awka. The Isu movement, said to have pre-dated the 15th century, passed through Isu Njaba, Isu Ulo before establishing itself at Isu, near Awka. It was the second wave that moved from the Awka area to people Ibusa in a secondary migration. From Ibusa, a tertiary movement culminated in the founding of Ashama, among over a dozen settlements east and west of the Niger.

Of interest at this point is the mention of Opu in the Akwukwu Igbo area and the attempt to link his origin to Benin. Some intelligence reports (Ben Prof 4/3/8) of the 1930s seemed to convey the same impression. However, Forde and Jones (1950: 9,45-51) are emphatic that on his 1854 Niger expedition, Samuel Crowther heard of a people whom the Igala called Opu. Crowther is said to have questioned “knowledgeable informants” and “learned that the Opu were the same as the Igbo”. Northrup (1972: 224) confirms that Opu was a name for an Igbo group far removed from Benin. In his view, “it is a name used by Igala people to address the northern Igbos”. Thus the Akwukwu Igbo, including Opu, may have migrated to their present location west of the Niger from Akwukwu, east of the Niger “whose population were mainly Igbo” (Asa Div. 8/1/1936).

GROUPS CLAIMING ORIGINS FROM NEIGHBOURING COMMUNITIES

It is in the fore-going context of secondary

and tertiary migrations that groups, which claim origins from neighbouring communities, can be studied. The most prominent group in this regard is the Ubulu clan, which Onwuejeogwu (1987: 28) variously associates with the Ubulu movements of 15th – 16th century and, in his earlier study of 1972 (as quoted by Mordi 1982: 15), with the “Eri and Nri movements which peopled areas between the Agbo-Ubulu-Ukwu axis” between the 16th and 17th centuries.

The most commonly propagated Ubulu-Ukwu traditions of origin ascribe the founding of Ubulu clan to Obodo and Ezemu. Obodo, Ezemu, Alibo, Aniga and Inwagwe- five sons of Kwuye- are said to have left Afo, Ndokwa East of Delta State in company of Ekelie and Ogbeje. The five were instructed by their father to settle wherever their pot of medicine (Ududu) carried by Ezemu, hunter and herbalist, fell to the ground. Traditions collected in 1981 (Mordi 1982: 53-115) claim that some members of the group dropped off to found sections of Abbi and Amai, while Ekelie and Aniga similarly left to found Ashama and Adonta, respectively. Ogbeje is associated with the community of that name Ute-Ogbeje south of Ubulu Ukwu and Obior. The traditions further claim that the pot carried by Obodo, Ezemu, Alibo and Inwagwe group fell down at the present location of Ubulu-Uno, where they are found today. This happened, it is said, amidst *nauclea diderrichii* or “Ubulu” trees from which the *opepe* wood is derived (Mordi 2007: 70). It was at this spot in this high forest that the group established their settlement, which they marked with the *newboldia laevis* plant (egbo/ogilisi) and dedicated to the earth deity, *ani*. It thus became Ani Obodo, or Obodo’s settlement/land, named after the leader and eldest member of the group, who had performed the dedication ritual, assisted by Ezemu. It was later that the settlement was named Ubulu-Uno i.e. home founded amidst *Ubulu* trees (Emefiene 2006: 16-17).

Ubulu-Uno was thus the result of a secondary migration. It is said that it was from Ubulu-Uno that Ubulu-Ukwu was founded in a tertiary migration. Ubulu-Ukwu traditions, upheld by Ubulu-Uno accounts, talk of a disagreement between Obodo and Ezemu over the ownership of the new settlement. The latter, highly endowed mystically and in herbal science, felt shortchanged and left to found his own settlement amidst other *Ubulu* trees, which he had found in the course of his hunting forays. Alibo is said to have

encamped shortly after leaving Ubulu-Uno to form part of the present Isho Quarters of Ubulu-Ukwu.

Ubulu-Ukwu traditions of origin agree that Ezemu was not the first immigrant to settle at what is now known as Ubulu-Ukwu. He is said to have met Eshene Enweniwe, Okpuzo from Ikem on the eastern side of the Niger, Ekei Agwu Aneshe, a blacksmith, probably from Agukwu Nri, in the Nri-Awka area, and Anugwe, who is said to have migrated from Benin as part of the soldiers of an Oba of Benin in pursuit of a fleeing group. These earlier settled groups existed as autonomous communities or compounds as Umu Eshene, Umu Ikem, Umu Anugwe and Ani Ekei in different locations of Ubulu-Ukwu, where they still maintain their separate identities. They were not oblivious of one another, but seemed content with their separateness until Ezemu’s arrival. The latter is acknowledged to have stimulated developments, which led to the unification of the disparate groups into one socio-political unit with the common name of Ubulu-Ukwu, meaning larger Ubulu.

A variant of Ubulu origins legends claims that Obodo, Ezemu and others came from Afo, but their father came from Ile-Ife, *en route* Benin. Their grand parents are said to have migrated from the Middle East, to Africa (Ikem and Anene 1982: 2-21). The claim of Middle Eastern origin has been discredited by scholars who also caution against the haste to accept claims of Benin and Ife origins (Mordi 1982: 8-16). Such claims need not therefore be taken seriously here. They may be an adaptation of the Ezechima migration story, a migration which is believed to have led to the founding of Afo by Etim-Uku. Yet, a tradition recorded recently (Emefiene 2006: 18) suggests that Etim Uku, after founding Afo, married an Ubulu-Ukwu woman, Iye. The offsprings of this marriage are said to have formed the descendants of the present day Obetim, one of the major towns of Afo. It is similarly asserted that a section of Ubulu-Uno people sought refuge at Afo, returning to Ubulu-Uno only at the end of Benin wars, which had triggered their flight.

Ubulu-Ukwu and Abbi traditions also preserve conflicting traditions of the founding of the Okwelle Quarters of Abbi, Ndokwa West. While some Ubulu-Ukwu traditions claim that Abbi and Amai were founded as offshoots of the Obodo and Ezemu migratory wave, some traditions at Ani Ekei-Ubulu-Ukwu, claim that Ani Ekei was

founded from Abbi (Emefiene 2006: 17). Yet Okwelle Quarters ascribe their origin to Ogwezi Okwelle Ekei from Ani Ekei, Ubulu-Ukwu, whose foundation they ascribe to Ekei (Mordi 1991: 11) just as Okolugbo (2004: 17-20) ascribes the founding of Amai Umubu to Ubulu-Ukwu immigrants.

GROUPS CLAIMING YORUBA AND IGALA ORIGINS

Some communities west of the Niger also preserve traditions of origin from Yorubaland and Igala. Thomas (1914: 2) identifies "Yoruba islands" north east of the Enuani (Asaba district) area, namely Ukwunzu, Ugbodu and Ubulubu. These isolated communities, which he claims, were founded about the 12th century retain their Yoruba language, *Olukwumi*. The latter is said to resemble "the Yoruba of 'Usehin and Akure'". Their tradition links them to the first king of Benin, whom they identify as a son of the Ata of Idah. Onwuejeogwu (1987: 29) suggests, however, that the *Olukwumi* movements occurred around the 16th and 17th centuries. The group would appear to have settled in the Owan culture area in the 16th century before their tertiary migration into the Enuani area in the 17th century, where they constitute the Ukwunzu, Idumu-ogo, Anioma, Ugbodu, Ubulubu and Ugboba. Although they speak an ancient dialect of the Yoruba language similarly spoken in Brazil, their mention of the Ata of Idah suggests that they may have moved into their present environment in the aftermath of the Benin-Idah war of the 16th century.

Available evidence supports the suggestion of Igala influences in and of migrations from Igala into the Enuani area. Isichei (1976: 54) describes the Igala as "a nautical people" and "river nomads" with links to a whole chain of Niger Igbo towns, which claim Igala origins or have quarters claiming descent from Igala. In the Enuani area, Illah, Ebu, and Oko readily come to mind. Ebigwei (2000: 25) also ascribes the founding of Okpanam to a marriage between Olisa Olu from Nri and Princess Ogbe of the royal house of Igala. Okpanam is also fully described as Okpanam Uchi. Although, it is claimed by Ebigwei (2000: 30) that this distinguishes it from the Okpanam in the Uchi area of Ndokwa East, Thomas (1914: 8) asserts that "Okpanam are emigrants from Uci, near Abo". Asaba is similarly known to have received some Igala populations (Thomas 1914: 9). In fact, Igala

settlements evolved primarily as fishing and trading posts, which were sustained by piracy and harassment of earlier settled groups.

For instance, in Illah the earlier settled people of Omoka, were compelled by Igala harassment to move away from their original settlement on the bank of the Niger to found a new settlement further inland (Ohadike 1986: 27), thereby, displacing the earlier Ukala inhabitants of the area. Illah is said to be made up of Nteje, Igala, and Nri elements and traditions also talk of one Daike from Benin. Asaba traditions, however, trace the same Daike to Igala (Thomas 1914: 10). The overall picture, therefore, is that Igala migrants who settled among the immediate Niger communities in the Enuani area were few and easily absorbed "through trade, marriage and migration" (Onwuejeogwu 1987: 36), yet their language and material culture, especially masquerades, still survive in the area (Isichei 1977: 145-54). This is because the Igala continued to establish other settlements and thereby consolidated their presence on the Niger up to the 19th century (Isichei 1976: 55).

TOWARDS A RECONSIDERATION OF ENUANI TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN

The Enuani traditions of origins and migrations discussed above call for further comments as they suggest the need for a reinterpretation of extant material on the subject. First, it is necessary to reiterate Thomas's (1914: 2,9) apt observation that among the Enuani, "there are few towns which cannot tell the story of their foundation". Not only can they tell the story, but more importantly, they give the names of the founders of their towns, and stress that very few, if any, of the towns are homogeneous in respect of their origins. In fact, the earlier concept of the "pure tribe", "pure ethnic group" or even the "pure community", undiluted by "external" convergencies or intrusions no longer finds favour among serious historians. Second, the communities have preserved memories of tertiary movements from earlier communities to neighbouring communities or back to places of secondary migrations. Memory lapses along with political exigencies may explain conflicting claims about which group in the latter category was involved.

The clue to a resolution of such conflicting claims is provided by an account of migrations between Ubulu-Ukwu and Ibusa. It is recorded

that a group of people from the royal house of Ubulu-Ukwu left for Ibusa during the reign of Obi Awali, the second Obi of Ubulu-Ukwu, probably in the 16th century. This group was led by one of the sons of the Obi. He subsequently became prosperous at Ibusa and sought to rule his hosts who rejected him. He and his followers, probably his descendants, retraced their steps to Ubulu-Ukwu, after encamping for some years between Ubulu-Ukwu and Ogwashi-Ukwu. They maintain their distinct identity till date in different parts of Ubulu-Ukwu as Umu Awali or descendants of Awali (Ikem and Anene 2006: 30).

Similar tertiary movements, preserved in the people's traditions of origins, would seem to have characterized the area, and altered its demographic patterns. This seems to explain the noticeable similarities in the traditions of origins of Ubulu clan and those of Ogwashi-Ukwu and Ibusa, as well as in the traditions of the immediate Niger communities claiming Nri and Igala origins. Obodo, Ani Obodo, Ekei, Udo, Ani Udo and "pot of medicine" feature in all these traditions. Also, Ashama is mentioned as an offshoot of the Isu movement, just as Ubulu legends mention Ashama as part of the offshoot of Ubulu movement, even as a section of Ubulu-Ukwu traces its origin to Ashama.

These similarities and conflicting accounts suggest centuries of intermingling of these people occupying a territory with no formidable physical obstacles to movement. They are attempts to rationalize and make meaningful current relationships and present realities. Thus, the traditions need not be taken at their face values. What is certain is that movements of people into and out of the Enuani area were a constant feature of the history of the area. In the absence of writing, the people distilled what they could of such memories and experiences to explain their common identities, practices and good neighbourliness.

Such relationships and identities were further affected during the second half of the 18th century by the famous Ubulu-Ukwu-Benin war. Benin, Ugo and Ishan soldiers who were dispatched to Ubulu-Ukwu by Oba Akhengbuda to avenge the execution of Princess Adesua by Obi Olise settled among the Ubulu-Ukwu and the Enuani whom they failed to conquer. It was better to lose their "nationality" than to be executed by an indignant Oba if they returned to Benin. Their descendants retain their Edo identity at Idumu Idu, Onije, Onicha Quarters of Ubulu-Ukwu as

well as at Ubulu-Okiti (Ikem and Anene 1982: 43), and at Ashama, Ogwashi-Ukwu, Ibusa, Oko, and other communities east and west of the Niger (Onwuejeogwu 1987: 32, 36). Ajaegbo (1978) traces the foundation of Ozubulu, as well as Ubulu Ihejiofor and Ubulu Ihembosi in Anambra and Imo states, respectively, to this period of Ubulu-Ukwu history.

It follows, therefore, that Benin and related immigrants formed parts of the early population of the Enuani area. However, not all claims of Benin origin should be taken seriously. Thus the tradition which traces the Ezechima group to Benin may have received a new accent during the colonial period and was reinforced during the Nigerian civil war. For Thomas (1914: 8) early in the 20th century was emphatic that "all the Onitsha, Ezi, Obio, Obompa, and the Issele trace their descent to one town, which, according to the most reliable tradition that I could discover, was situated between Onitsha Ubwo [Ugbo] and Igbodo".

The historian working on the traditions of origins of the Enuani people, in relation to claims of origin from Benin must, therefore, tread with much caution. Even more important is for scholars handling such material to distinguish between primary, secondary and tertiary migrations. The lumping of all three together has led to the error of applying "evidence relating to secondary and tertiary movements to argue cases of primary movements and settlements". This is why population movements which occurred between or within existing settlements in the area during the 17th and 18th centuries, and even in the 19th century are erroneously cited as evidence of initial peopling of the Enuani from Benin. Whereas primary movements refer to movements from an existing settlement to a virgin territory for purposes of settlement, the same cannot be said of secondary and tertiary movements. While a secondary movement manifests as movement from one existing settlement to another neighbouring settlement, a tertiary movement merely leads to a change of location within the same settlement (Afigbo 1998: 68).

Earlier works of some renowned Nigerian historians may have contributed to strengthen the Benin thesis of Enuani migration. Ikime (2006: 61-63) admits having come under the strong influence of the works of Bradbury early in his career, but later found them not to have been based on complementary fieldwork outside the

Benin kingdom proper, nor on an extensive study of Benin by professionals. In effect the wholesale attribution of Benin origin to Enuani people is not based on solid, researched evidence. What available evidence suggests is that the area in question was populated much earlier than the rise of Benin kingdom. In effect, as Ikime (2006: 64) rightly notes, “the areas into which Bini migrants might have moved in different times in the history of Benin were not empty land”. The same conclusion would be applicable to Igala and Yoruba migrations into the Enuani area. Thus like that of the Yoruba, Igala presence in the Enuani area would not have been earlier than the 17th century when Igala was in her imperial ascendancy both as a commercial and political force in parts of the Niger valley (Afigbo 1981: 12).

Yet, it must be stressed that it would amount to a sweeping generalization to completely disregard claims of Benin, Igala or Yoruba origin merely on the basis of the predominance of the Igbo language and culture of the Enuani area. It need not be stressed that such an argument is weakened by the survival of the Olukwumi and Igala languages and cultures in the area in question. Nor does the absence of Benin or Edo language in the area provide a proof that the Benin immigrants did not contribute to the peopling of the area. For as the people of Ubulu-Ukwu would say “*Ani pua obi osushue onu*” (when a people/community permanently relocate to a foreign territory they adopt the language of their hosts). Afigbo (1965: 268) makes the same point with respect to the Efik and the Ibibio when he raises the issue as to “whether language is a sure clue to the ethnic origin of a people”. Extant evidence convincingly shows in the Nigerian environment many ethnic fragments “which were linguistically absorbed by other groups amongst whom they settled in the course of their immigration”. Adedeji (1998: 8) reaches the same conclusion in respect of some other African peoples. Yet, the fact of absorption by the Igbo language and culture means that it was into an Igbo culture area that other groups relocated. The relocation extended across the Niger. Also, Okojie (1960: 294) notes that the Ogbe quarters of Benin was populated by immigrants from the west Niger Igbo, including Nsukwa and Ukwu-Oba, just as Ubulu-Ukwu traditions record that Ubulu-Ukwu emigrants populated the Agbado and Ewaise areas of Benin for sometime.

How then does one account for the claims of Benin origin by some Enuani communities? Researches have shown that those communities claiming Benin ancestry did not do so simply because they wanted to, but rather because of some sociological and other factors which remain alive till date. Part of the explanation would appear to lie in the diversity of Igbo culture. According to Afigbo (1987: 12), Igbo-speaking peoples were not united politically, and the word Igbo or the anglicized ‘Ibo’ does not seem to be in general use as a common badge of ethno-cultural identity until quite recent times. For instance, Forde and Jones (1950: 223) argue that some sections of the western Igbo, particularly the Ukwuani people (Benin neighbours), still reject the name Igbo, “a word which they apparently have used as a term of contempt (perhaps with slave connotation) for other Igbo-speaking” peoples.

In the same vein, Green (1964: 6) argues with a considerable force that on the eastern side of the Niger: the Onitsha people who are said by tradition to be Benin would tend not to call themselves Ibo and they use the word as a term of contempt for the non-Onitsha Ibo-speaking Nwa Onye Igbo – son of an Ibo is a scornful term ... It has in this context a suggestion of slave in its meaning.

Izuegbu (2003: 16) also claims that certain practices such as *Osu* caste and cannibalism in the Igbo country in pre-colonial times may have forced groups of people to migrate out of the region to other places considered safe and peaceful. In this connection, he further asserts that the result is that once settled, the new communities would want to have nothing to do with such practitioners of what, to them, was obscene and cruel ... With time, it became hallowed by tradition that they were not Igbo.

Therefore, to construct their origin legends linking them to Benin became attractive, at least to acquire a new identity. Viewed from this perspective, the word Igbo has come to connote people of servile origin (*Osu*), which the Enuani would not want to identify with.

Another factor was the Nigerian civil war which witnessed the collapse of Biafra and the genocidal approach to the war in which it was feared that every Igbo was to be wiped out. It was glaring that the collapse of Biafra and the (subsequent) policy to which the Igbo area was subjected in consequence, showed in the words of Afigbo (1987: 16), “those who had the eyes to

see that too close an identification with the so-called Igbo heartland would be, at best, heroic suicide". Therefore, to claim Igbo became a stigma and every step was taken to distance themselves from the endangered group. Coupled with this was the marked neglect in infrastructural development of the region (the Igbo east of the Niger), which encouraged these communities that had rejected their *Igboness* to continue to do so. Even the Igbo in Rivers State adopted the same stance.

Besides, many of these claims of origin from Benin by some Igbo communities west of the Niger amount to what Ryder (1969: 3) describes as "certainly the product of hankering after prestige, or simply the adoption of the most likely story, given the canons of traditional historiography". Similarly, Afigbo (1981: 18-19) suggests that it is a common human habit to seek to "identify with the great and successful as a result of which people generally like to trace their pedigrees to great families and great empires". Such claims originated as groups devised means of safeguarding their identities, boundaries and achieving their common objectives by associating with the famous such as Ile Ife, the cradle of Yoruba civilization. Groups making this sort of claims in Enuani area, therefore, wished merely to be associated with the prestige and influence deriving from such great states. By so doing, they secured themselves against hostile, more numerous neighbours. Some also make the claim as a way of carving out separate identities for themselves. By identifying with a distant polity, they thereby attempt to show that they were different from others and not necessarily subservient to Benin.

CONCLUSION

The fore-going discussion permits the following conclusion: the Enuani people do not claim autochthony or to have fallen from the sky or sprouted from the ground as some Nigerian groups claim. The controversy surrounding their origins is indeed a perpetuation of the tendency to treat the small scale societies in question as a footnote in the study of their larger and more celebrated neighbours. What this study has shown is that wholesale attribution of the peopling of the Enuani to either Benin or Igboland east of the Niger is not supported by the evidence. Whether in terms of primary, secondary or tertiary

migrations, the available evidence suggests mixed ethnic origins and configuration of the Enuani area. This area was peopled by groups from Igboland east of the Niger, from Benin, Yoruba and Igala, just as there were population movements to Benin or across the Niger from the area. The fact that the Igbo language and culture predominate the Enuani area does not invalidate or obliterate the mixed origin of the people. It merely suggests that the earliest inhabitants of the area were Igbo and that those later immigrants did not move into an empty land. What is certain is that population movements into and out of the area were part of the dynamics and vicissitudes associated with the rival, but unstable imperialisms of Benin and Idah.

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