

TRADITIONS OF ORIGINS OF AFRICAN COMMUNITIES AS INDICATORS OF INTER-GROUP RELATIONS: THE EXAMPLE OF Ogoni AND HER NEIGHBOURS IN THE NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

It is an acknowledged historical fact that Africa is the most ethnically heterogeneous continent in the global village while Nigeria is the topmost country in Africa with much diverse ethnic nationalities. Evidently, despite the variegated nature of their ethnic composition, arrays of disparate cultures, languages, power, sizes, influence, resources, and so on, African communities are intricately linked together by critical integrative variables. One of these ancient links is their traditions of origins. It is against this backdrop that this paper takes a critical look at how traditions of origins foster inter-group relations among African communities with special reference to Ogoni and her neighbours. This paper argues that it is instructive to study the roots of connections, which may be peaceful or war-like, between African ethnic groups as a means of providing answer to societies affected by the rising tide of centrifugal forces of inter-ethnic violence, sanguinary conflicts and keen inter-ethnic competitions. This work, which adopts combined evidence in addition with historical methods in its analysis, maintains that as their traditions of origins do not separate them from their neighbours. The work contends that the knowledge of their past historic interactions will continue to forge more intricate linkages and result-oriented connections between African ethnic nationalities.

Keywords: Nigeria, Ethnic Nationality, Neighbours, Traditions of Origins, Inter-group Relations.

Introduction

The modern African continent comprising ample of distinct diverse ethnic nationalities with disparate histories that are linked together by critical integrative variables. Prominent among the ancient linkages that bind them together is their traditions of origins, migratory and settlement histories. The existence of connections and relations were further facilitated by the important vectors like trade, trade routes, and markets, oracular links, diplomacy and war.

Essentially, a major characteristics of Africa like other preliterate societies is the transmission of their cultures and histories through oral traditions before written traditions were introduced. A tradition is “a testimony transmitted verbally from one generation to another” (Vansina, 1981, p. 142) while oral tradition is “historical information transmitted orally by process peculiar to each community” (Alagoa 2014 ,p. 6). Its peculiar attributes are that it is oral and its data may be transmitted by word of mouth. Also, it may be song,

rectifications, poetry, talking drum, myths, legends, and others. This basic features distinguishes it from written civilization. The chief point is that it would be grossly out of place and unscholarly to “reduce the civilization of the spoken word to a merely negative absence of writing”. (Vansina, 1981, p. 142). As Ki-Zerbo (1981, p. 9-10) tearfully argues:

Oral tradition takes its place as a real living museum, conserver and transmitter of the social and cultural creations stored up by peoples said to have no written records.... Oral tradition is by far the most intimate of historical sources, the most rich, the one which is fullest of the sap of authenticity. As an African proverb has it, ‘the mouth of an old man smells bad, but it says good and salutary things’.... Tradition clothes things in flesh and blood and colour, it gives blood to the skeleton of the past.

One has to be intellectually honest to admit that, inspite of the inherent short-comings of the oral tradition, it provides clues to the understanding of the historical identity of a settled group of people, their roots to their distant neighbours and why/how their founder-heroes were intricately linked culturally, politically, linguistically and economically. Indeed, the real knowledge of man's origin certainly throws a fresh perspective of the 'outside influence' on African communities and the key to his history and culture. Citing Dike & Ade-Ajayi, Nwaokocha (2011, p. 50) writes that "traditions of origin promoted understanding of and a respect for the institutions and practices of the communities". Alagoa and Kpone-Tonwe (2002, p. 188) support:

A study of tradition of origin reveals the ideological thrust of such historical documents. Communities use them as a charter of identity, to be utilized for wagging wars of priority against neighbouring communities.... These traditions do testify to the early histories of the communities concerned.

It is, therefore, instructive to study the roots of connections and interactions, which may be peaceful or war-like, between African communities as a means of providing answer to societies affected by the rising tide of centrifugal forces, of inter-ethnic violence, sanguinary conflicts and keen inter-ethnic competitions. As their traditions of origins do not separate them from their neighbours, it is hoped that the knowledge of their past historic links will continue to forge more intricate linkages between African communities.

2. Traditions of Origin of African Communities: An Overview

There is ample linguistic and other socio-cultural evidence that most African communities share considerable affinity in antiquity. They were well connected by various significant factors. One of such linkages is traditions of origins. A popular tradition of origin in Africa that tries to provide historical explanation for most African states, kingdoms, emirates, chiefdoms, polities, and so on and how they related amongst themselves is the fast-growing incidence of traditions of origin from the Middle East, perhaps ancient Yemen, Mecca, Baghada, and others. This is known as the Hamitic theory. The hypothesis holds that "whatever vestiges of civilization there were in Africa either in terms of developed political, cultural, religious or economic institutions must have been the handwork of imaginary Hamites or consequent upon a miscegenation occurring as a result of racial mixture

taking place between these Hamites and the Negroes" (Maishanu, 2012 P. 349).

Proponents of this theoretical construct believe that the premigrators of the Efik, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and others migrated from the Middle East. An arch-exponent of this school of thought Herbert Richmond Palmer, contends that the Legend seems to provide a plausible explanation of the historical origins of the Sahara, Central and Western Bilad al-Sudan, an area covering parts of Northern Nigeria, Republics of Niger and Chad, Southern Libya, Southern Egypt and Northern Sudan. He maintained that at a time in history which he pegged between 5000-2000 B.C, a multitude of less virile races were forced out of Asia into Southern Arabia thence to Africa and from East Africa further migration took them to West Africa where they intermixed and interacted with the aborigines of these areas through trade and inter-marriage. The local inhabitants were later supplanted through conquest by a horde of immigrants. Arising from this contact, there was the acquisition of basic skills and techniques of state building as well as cultural borrowings (Palmer, 1967). As far as Palmer is concerned, the civilizations of the ancient Ghana, Mali, Songai, Hausa states, Kanem-Borno, Kwararafa, Nupe and the Yoruba stemmed from the Zaghawa, pure descendants from the Hamites' stock.

At an unspecified date in remote times, one Bayajidda fled from Baghdad Kanem-Bornu which was already an important state in the Chad Basin. There the Mai of Bornu gave Bayajidda his daughter in marriage but deprived him of his followers. This and other subsequent events caused Bayidda to flee the country in fear of the Mai.

Travelling westwards, Bayidda left his wife at Biram-ta-Gabas to bear him a son. At Gaya, near Kano, he met some blacksmiths who made him a knife according to his specifications. Thence he came to a town whose people were deprived of water from a well by a sacred snake called Sarki (the Hausa worked for King). Bayajidda killed the snake, and in gratitude and admiration Daura, the queen of the place, married him and also gave him a Gwari concubine.

This eastern theory of traditions of origins is also popular among the people of Hausa states, Bornu Empire, the Yoruba and Igbo, all in modern Nigeria. It is generally believed that a legendary Bayayida (Abuyazida), a refugee from Baghdad (now in the Middle East) played an emancipatory role in the

historical revolution of Hausa states. Ajayi and Espie (1965 ,p. 91) record that:

The tradition points out that from the Queen of Daura, Bayajidda had Bawo who later produced seven sons: Biram, Daura, Katsina, Zaria, Kano, Rano and Gobir which became the Hausa Bakwai or pure Hausa states. The eponymous forefather of the pure Hausa states also had seven sons from a Gwari slave or concubine. They were Zamfara, Kebbi, Gwari, Yauri, Nupe Yoruba and Kwarafa. They are referred to as *Banza Bakwai* or the impure Hausa states. Buttressing how the Kisra legend fostered relations between the Borgu (Hausa) and Yoruba kingdoms.

Dioka (1997, p. 56) explains:

It (Kisra legend) claims that they were descendants of a culture hero, Kisra, who came from Baghdad, settled for some time in the Lake Chad area and then travelled westward across northern Nigeria to found the Borgu and Yoruba kingdoms. The story mentions that a python helped him to trace his journey and wherever it stopped, Kisra founded a kingdom. Infact, as late as the 1960s, the Emir of Bussa regarded the Ooni of Ife as his brother on account of the Kisra legend.

On the basis of new data, the Bayayidda/Abuyazidu/Daura Legend is obviously a doubtful, contradictory and misleading account, it did show beyond all reasonable doubt that the immigrants had contact with the people of Hausa leading to a change in leadership through his selfless service to the community (Orugbani, 2005, Nwaokocha, 2011). Onwuzurike (2005, p. 12) concisely notes:

On the whole, therefore, even though the Bayajidda legend could not give an authentic information about the origin of the Hausa, it has thrown some light on some probable explanation of events of a historical nature that took place in Hausaland in remote times.

Regarding the formation of Yoruba, the oral traditions of the people has it that they were the descendants of prince Oduduwa, son of Lamurudu who was the reigning king of probably Baghda, Yemen or Saudi Arabia. He was said to have journeyed from the east with his followers as a result of the dispute he had with his father and settled in Ile-Ife, the acclaimed

cradle of the Yoruba civilization. Some variants of the Oduduwa legends explain that the children of Oduduwa migrated out of Yorubaland to find settlements at Ketu in modern Benin Republic and Benin Empire. It has been accepted by the Edo that Oranmiyan, a son of Oduduwa, was the ancestor of Edo kings and Ile-Ife as their ancestral home (Dioka, 1997).It could be gleamed from the foregoing discourse that even though the true origin of Oduduwa remain unsettled, the legend concerning Oduduwa as a historical figure of Yoruba history and ancestry is not in doubt. Nwaokocha (2011 P. 51) vouches:

In the oduduwa legend, it appears that the origin of Ife is much older than his creation act. In both the creation and migration stories, Oduduwa is remembered and mentioned as a leader. Thus we might take Obatala's getting drunk in the creation story to mean a time when Obatala (as the head of the existing state) got weak as a ruler and was thus overthrown by Oduduwa who might have invaded the area as a conquering hero at the head of an invading army. It is said that Ife tradition remembers the names of such kings as Kutukwulu, Oba Igbo and Osangangan Obamikin who ante-dated the coming of Oduduwa.

The Igbo mythology also points to the east as their cradle. The east as established above could be Mecca, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. Some also believed in the Jewish ancestry. Expounders of this legend argue that the Igbo must have originated from the Middle-East due to the striking and apparent similarities of the cultural traits that the Igbo mutually share with the Egyptians and the Jews. They noted that their religious observances, works of art and craft, burial rites, circumcision and customs of these ancient people were not altogether dissimilar some ardent believers suggest that the name 'Igbo' is a corruption of the name 'Hebrews'. Arising from fresh investigations, this mythical account has been found wanting, revealing that these shared characteristics may be a mere coincidence since people of different races who never knew one another invent similar things and practised identical cultures. Linguistically and culturally, too, the Igbo and the Egyptians and peoples of Middle East share no-remarkable similarities to derive them from either ancient Egypt or Middle East.

Apart from the above tradition of origin which tries to link the Igbo without other communities, there are fascinating oral literatures linking the Igbo communities west of the Niger with the Edo kingdom. According to Dioka (1997 ,p. 57) “the legendary Ezechima, the ancestor of these Igbo communities Agbor, Issele Ukwu, Asaba, Onitsha and others – is believed to have been a Bini Prince”. There are stimulating traditions of origins that Igala war lords founded territories in Igboland while some Igbo communities claim Igala origins. It is told that “a legendary Igala leader, Onoja Ogoni, carried out many exploits in the Nsukka area and established his capital at Ogurugu on the Igala-Nsukka border” (Dioka, 1997 ,p. 63). It is also recorded that the clans of Umeri and Agulaeri claimed that their epic heroes and founders migrated from Igalaland.

A critical peep into these traditions of origins revealed the substantial links that existed between the African communities with the Middle East and both intra and inter-interactions among the various Nigerian groups. The implication is that no African community in the past lived in splendid isolation.

3. **Traditions of Origins and Inter-group Relations between Ogoni and her Neighbours**

The Ogoni people are one of the earliest ethnic groups in today’s River State, South-South Geographical Zone of Nigeria that occupies the Eastern Niger Delta mainland. The Ogoni ethnic nationality could be found between the Bonny and Andoni Rivers and the southern bend of the Imo River (Naanen & N-ue, 2016, Gbenenye & N-ue, 2016). In Geographical terms speaking, the culture group could be located between 4^o 31’ 4040’ North of the Equator and longitude 7^o 10’ East and 7^o 32’ East of the Greenwich Meridian (Anokari, 1986). The Ogoni neighbours of the north are the Asa/Ndoki, the Annang/Ibibio in the east, the Okrika in the south and in the west by Ikwerre.

The traditions of origins of Ogoni like most, if not all, of the prehistoric ethnic nationalities in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general are surrounded in myth and mysteries given their late embrace of written history. Fundamental, what is common are traditions origin mere conjectural works of scholars without deep archaeological and anthropological finds (N-ue, 2018). Nevertheless, in the light of the available evidence at our disposal, we will interrogate the traditions of origins which try to throw more illuminating light on how the Ogoni and their neighbours are linked together overtime.

(i) **Ogoni and Her Ibibio/Annang Neighbours**

A more probable tradition of origin which tries to explain the origin of the Ogoni is the eastern school hypothesis. the central crux of the tradition is that the Ogoni along with their neighbours of Ibibio, Efik, Yako, Okoyond, Bohomo, Annag, Ododop and Obolo (Andoni), might have migrated from the east, possibly from the Cameroon-Nigeria border in the vicinity of the Oban forest or the foot of the Cameroon mountains in about 500 B.C. The Cameroon mountains is acclaimed to be “the original home of the Bantu” (Naanem, 1983/84, p. 6). Though it is pretty difficult to difficult to accurately pin down a major reason behind this migratory propulsion, Naanen (1983/84, p. 6) attributes it to adverse circumstances such as over-population or warfare “while Igbara and Keenam (2013, p. 39) speculate to be “successive volcanic eruptions in that region”. The famous Bantu migration to different parts of Africa was not unconnected with the push-pull factors. The push-pull school of thought argues that inhustible nature of an original environment which is sufficiently unacceptable forced the forebears to move to other places with favourable features. The wave of migration in prehistoric era was mainly propelled by ecological necessity, natural disasters or harsh circumstances such as flooding, famine, earthquakes, drought, fire out-break, and exhausted waterless land.

Arising from the above, the Ogoni could have been one of these ethnic groups of the Bantu stocks believed to have migrated from the Nigeria/Cameroon border to the south and central Africa where they constituted a significant majority group (Ari, 1991 P. 776 as cited by Igbara & Keenam, 2013 P. 38). Along with the ethnic groups which currently occupy the Cross-River Basin, especially the Efik-Ibibio culture groups, the Ogoni arrived at the bank of the Imo River. As it was typical with the early migrants and settlers, disputes arising from population expulsion, fierce competition over the available resources like farming land, fishing grounds, political rivalry and adventurism forced the Ogoni forebears to cross the Imo River in search of a relative peaceful land. By this means, they found an unoccupied land known and identified as later corrupted by the Ibami immigrations to be Opuoko). From Opuoko, there were significant dispersals, leading to the founding of many settlements in both Northern and Southern Khana of Ogoni. There were secondary waves of migration from Kpong to Sogho, Tai, Gokana and much later from Lewe (Gokana) to Eleme. Naanen (1983/84 P. 7) maintains strongly that:

Having left their original home somewhere in the East, the Ogoni migrated to the eastern shores of the Imo River. Here the numerically dominant-Efik-Ibibio could have pressurized the migrating Ogoni hence, they had to cross to the eastern side of the Imo by fording or Canoe to occupy what was obviously a virgin land. The first settlements could have been somewhere around Opuoko (Ko) area from where subsequent groups fanned out to occupy the rest (parts of the Ogoni area).

Igbara and Keenam (2013,p. 41) strengthen that:

It is possible that from their eastern origin with unpleasant circumstances, the Ogoni migrated westwards probably by canoe along waterways into the Cross River basin and southward unto the shores of the Atlantic Ocean and at the point where the Imo River currently empties into the Atlantic Ocean, between the Ibibio and the Andoni.

The examination of the available documentary evidence and abundant oral traditions in these areas also claim that the ancestors of Wiisue (known to the Annang as Warife), Utetuk and Itogo-nkwo migrated from Ko (corrupted by the Ibani settlers to Opuoko). Anokari (1986) avers that the preponderant weight of the migration rested squarely on over-population and bitter land dispute which were on the increase among the northern Khana coastal communities, especially Ko, Boon, Ka-Bangha. These settlements founded by the Ogoni migrants have since been administered as part of Ukanafun Local Government Area and now Oru-Anam Local Government Area in Akwa-Ibom State of Nigeria (Oral communication with Mary Naenwii on 10th June, 2011 and Kelekele Friday on 28th May, 2016). Speaking of Warife, Gibbons (1932, p. 29) affirms, 'Warife is an Ogoni settlement in Annang country on the left side of the Imo River. It consists of three *pya jongo* and appears to have been formed by migration from Opuoko (Ko) Khana'. Abasiattai (1991 P. 445) instructively notes that "the Ogoni established several settlements like Warife on the east bank of the Imo Annang".

What is pertinent is that despite the adoption of the Annang culture, traditions and customs, these Ogoni communities which reside on the (east) other side of the Imo River pay customary annual visit to their ancestral settlement of Ko during August occasions like the *Zua* (*Dua*) festival, marriage ceremonies, chieftaincy

installation/coronation ceremonies and important masquerade plays and other cultural dance displays. Also, they are bilingual, meaning that they speak both Khana and Annang languages/dialects fluently as their knowledge of commerce in *Dudeh* (known to the Annang elements as Uruankwo (oral interview with Basi Akpan and Unyima Udvidung on 15th June, 2011). Edwards (1978-1981, p. 18) was absolutely correct which he remarks that "there are links between the Khana and Ibibio languages". On the strength of the above, Williamson (1988) classifies the Ogoni languages as belonging to the Delta cross sub-branch of the Cross River branch in the new Benue-Congo family of the Niger-Congo phylum. Indeed this linguistic affiliation is a strong indicator of age-long contact and close kingship ties with the Ibibio/Annang.

This root and origin of the Ogoni may be largely accountable for the huge manifestations of cultural integration, acculturation and assimilation between Ogoni and her Annang/Ibibio neighbours as evident in cultural borrowings, linguistic interflow, naming and inter-group marriages, and so on. It is on record that the Ogoni ancestors made an oral law that forbid any inter-group marriage with their neighbours except with the Ibibio/Annang nationalities (Gibbons, 1932, Saro-Wiwa, 2012, N-ue, 2011; 2018). As N-ue (2018, p. 222) contends:

The Ogoni are closely related to the Annang/Ibibio than any of their neighbouring communities in today's Niger Delta. Perhaps, it was against the backdrop of this uninterrupted affinity that the British political officers jam-packed the Ogoni and Annang into the Opobo Administrative Division of the Calabar Province and the Odod Ndon Nwong Native Court Judicial District when they invaded these territories.

ii. **Ogoni and Her Ibani Neighbours**

Similarly, the traditions of origins of the Ibani (Bonny and Opobo) link them with the Ogoni. The legendary Alagbariye, the ancestors of Bonny is believed to have been the leader of the waves of the eastwards migration that took the Ibani migratory band through the Ogoni community of Ko when the Imo River was a little stream which could be crossed on foot (Afigbo, 1974, Alagoa & Fombo, 1972, Alagoa, 2005). Oral tradition of the people maintains that on their arrival at Ko, they found the Ogoni to be uncompromising. They, therefore, relocated to an opposite town called Boon where they traded with the Ogoni people at the waterside. Alagoa and Fombo

(1972) claim that the hostility of their Ogoni host drove the Ibani migrants to the present settlement. According to them:

The Ogoni of Opuoko (Ko) town are however, said to have murdered some of the migrants. Prince Edimini was to have avenged this outrage, but had only a short reign. It fell to the lot of the only woman ruler of the Ibani, Queen Kambasa, to take the field against the Opuoko (Ko). The place was taken, and an Ibani force was placed at a site now known as *Kaloko*. According to Fombo, these Ibani have now been assimilated by the local Ogoni, but still refer to themselves as “one mother one father” with the Ibani.

To contain and reduce the conflictual relations, the primogenitors of Ogoni and her Ibani ancestors entered into “a ritual blood pact” (Kpone-Tonwe & Gbenenye, 2009, p. 606). This pragmatic and result-oriented diplomatic mechanism which was developed and taken by the mid-wifed the perpetual peaceful cooperation that prevailed between the Ogoni-Ibani. As Fombo (quoted in Ejituwu & Okoroafor, 2009 p. 45-46) “of wars with Kalabari, Ogoni, the hinterland and other peoples, the Ibani man will talk lightly”. Also, their relatively short stay at Ko led to intense interdependence, diplomatic ties, military, economic, socio-cultural relations. In point of fact, the Ibani interaction led to the naming of Ko, “Ko” and the addition of the prefix like “Opu”, meaning bigger and “Kala”, meaning small to Oko. Thus place names like Kalaoko and Opuoko now exist side by side with the Ogoni local names of Ko and Boon. Infact, there is a clique in Bonny which says “Ibani na Ogoni gbera furo”, meaning that “the Bonny people and the Ogoni are of the same womb” (Loolo, 1981, p. 2).

Similarly the migration and settlement of the Opobo to their present abode in 1870 also relate them with the Ogoni. While in the service of King Opubo Annie Pepple of Bonny, Jaja, as shrewd strategist, made vigorous contacts and agreements with Ogoni, Nkoro and Andoni among whom he traded and settled his representatives. Oral traditions collected from the areas attest to the fact that Jaja who often visited these areas obtained permission from them to settle his men along the major trade routes which dotted the Imo River so as to secure them for himself. This confirms Crowder (173, p. 180) position that “Jaja has been planning this manoeuvre even before he succeeded to leadership of the Anna People House”.

When the time came, Jaja again relied heavily on them for support and safety. Abundant oral evidence claim that Jaja himself consulted the *Gbenebeka* deity, the national goddess of Ogoni, for supernatural assistance in the commercial rivalry with the Oko Jumbo led Manilla Pepple House in Bonny in 1868 (oral interview with Love Kak” and NuBari Kadam, 14th May, 2011). Ejituwu (1976, p. 13) concurs:

With the civil war imminent in Bonny, Jaja at the head of the Annang Pepple group, in 1868, sent messages to these Eastern neighbours asking them to offer refuge in case of a defeat in the civil war. When these had agreed to offer him asylum, he accepted the challenge of the opponent, the Manilla Pepple group led by Oko Jumbo.

Consequently, Jaja established his rival state of Opobo (named after the king Opubo Annie Pepple their ancestor) on 25th December, 1870 (Alagoa, 2005 Jaja, 1991). The foundation of Opobo again brought about intense relationships between Jaja and the Ogoni. For example, Jaja through diplomatic handshake”, secured permission from the Ogoni chiefs, leaders and elders to get building materials like sticks and thatches with which he built both permanent and temporal structures in his newly found kingdom – Opobo Cookey (1974, p. 50) has this to say:

Jaja also undertook a prolonged tour of the neighbouring communities, such as those of Andoni, Ogoni and Ibibio, who lived along the route to the oil markets. Ostensibly, his aim was to secure permission for his people to cut sticks with which to rebuild the houses of Annie Pepple; but in reality he wished to establish a special relationship with these people through lavish presents to their chiefs.

Buttressing this, Saro-Wiwa (1989 P. 154) points out that “an interesting sideline to Jaja’s settlement in the new town of Opobo is that he had to obtain permission and buy peace from his new neighbours, the Andoni and Ogoni, the owners of the land on which he settled”. Again, Jaja, as an impressive diplomat, entered into a pact of perpetual friendship with the Ogoni through blood oath, promising not to harm or hurt each other. Kpone-Tonwe and Gbenenye (2009, p.603-604) further clarify that:

Two villages had blood pact of long historic ancestry known as *Buekobie* (in Khana parlance). This was ritual brotherhood which forbade fighting, wounding or killing of fellow village

groups bound by a covenant of ritual brotherhood. The brotherhood was extended to the Ibani Opobo.

Perhaps, this explains the absence of inter-group hostility between the Ogoni and Ibani of Opobo even when Jaja's men pounced on Kwa Iboe people of Ibeno on 10th April, 1881, the Ogoni were not attacked. For attempting to trade directly with the European merchants, Jaja War Canoe House killed both women and children, capturing some as war booties. Those captured were sadistically and brutally massacred by Jaja's direct children to enable them to put on the much coveted "eagle plume", a mark of distinction exclusively meant for those who have assassinated a foe (Talbot, 1926, Crowder, 1973, Orugbani, 2005). This tradition of origins of the Opobo which paved the way for substantial cultural intermingling has evidently promoted peace and mutual co-existence. There is ample evidence of Ogoni culture traits in Opobo and *vice versa*.

iii. **Ogoni and Her Obolu (Andoni) Neighbours**

The Ogoni and their Obolu (Andoni) neighbours had age-long close ties and the major underpinning factor was the traditions of origins and migratory history. Modern historical researches carried out recently on both culture groups thus far reveal that they do not only make oblivion references to each other but also derived them to common settlement, pointing out common historical ancestry and stock as well as relations of great antiquity. Oral traditions of origins of Andoni relate them to the Ogoni. It is believed that the progenitors of the present-day (New) Egeden was originally situated very close to the Ogoni community of Kaa. There are remains of consumed sea foods by the Andoni early settlers at Kaa which are quite different from the smaller shells of today's sea foods. Following bitter disputes that ensued between the Ogoni and these early settlers, there were waves of southward migrations to found places of safety. Some of the Andoni migrated to found new Egeden close to new Ugeada (oral interview with Silas Eneyo, 24th September, 2016).

Another variant of the Andoni oral traditions holds that Unyeada village was first situated at Ebon-Isebeke and Isi-Agba at the southern end of today's Gwara farmlands, Gwara is an Ogoni community. It is claimed that at Old Unyeada, there were historical relics showing the early contact of the Unyeada with the Portuguese traders. These included old drink bottles, broken pieces of clay pots and the remains of other European exotic goods, including Unyeada

ancestral shrine (oral interview with Silas Eneyo on 24th September, 2016). The southwards movement of the coastal Ogoni dwellers from Gure to Gwara forced the Unyeada "to move down the creek to a small island known as Ebon-Akpon" (Eneyo, 1991, p. 11). Meanwhile, the Ogoni communities of Gwara, Sii and Gure had a secret alliance with Bonny in December 1826 when Bonny and Andoni were engaged in an economic war. On account of the treaty, the Ogoni launched an attack against women and children kept at the back of the forest while their men were fighting Bonny warriors from the front. With the combined forces against Old Unyeada, the community was completely destroyed. Hence, the evacuation of men and materials to a new place where new Unyeada now stands (Ejituru, 1977, Eneyo, 1991). The supportive role of the Ogoni in the Bonny-Andoni War of 1826 was a critical one leading to the defeat of Old Unyeada by Bonny. To Ejituru (1977, p 317) "Bonny could not have defeated Unyeada if the Ogoni had not attacked from behind and this weakened the fortification of the Unyeada".

The Ogoni ancient tradition of ostracizing women who gave birth to twins also tries to explain the relations between the Ogoni and the Andoni. The ancestors of the Ogoni people believed that women who gave birth to twins were cursed by the gods and the offspring were regarded as cursed children they were called (*Nwitaah in Khana mother-tongue*) from the spirit world, claiming that men and husbands who had sexual affairs with mothers who gave birth to twins were said to have lost their spiritual power as the sexual intercourse would lessen the potency of their personal protective charms. Dewhurst (1937, p. 4), a British political administrator in the area who recorded accounts of historical and anthropological nature about the Ogoni people confirms that in Ogoni culture "sexual intercourse with a twin mother is (was) morally worse than culpable homicide". It was also argued that allowing them to live in the community would inflict other women with the twin's syndrome. Besides, husbands, mid-wives, in-laws and friends associated with the twin phenomenon were burnished for life. Though, they were free to pay occasional visits to their ancestral homes in Ogoni villages but they have no privilege or right of inheritance.

For these reasons and many more, the twin-mother and those concerned were ex-communicated from Ogoniland to the suburb which existed as dotted islands and forest which spanned the boundaries between these two groups. Basing on the premonition

and revelation that their daughters, wives, and friends would give birth to twins, relations, friends, mid-wives, mothers, husbands and a host of others secretly arranged and sent suspected would-be-twin-mothers away before delivering. At these places make-shift shelters were erected for twin-mothers and their babies. The sex-starved Andoni migrant fishermen satisfied their sexual urges by having sexual intercourse with these women and later settled with them on the islands. The British colonial record seems to verify this claim of the migratory nature of the Andoni fisherfolk. According to Shute (1933, p. 8) "they (Obolo) live(d) for months at a time at their fishing sites, either in large canoes which they turn(ed) into rough and ready house boats by a superstructure constructed of palm mats in palm, mat shelters built on the sea-shore and estuaries". Ogoni oral tradition suggests that was the island of Atuba (now called Ataba) came into being (N-ue, 2018, Komi, 1993).

Since then, there has been considerable reciprocal exchanged of ideas, cultural items and loan words. Their rich and cherished culture has nevertheless been seriously influenced by each other's contacts rather than warfares. For example:

To stay on the islands with the women and children (of twin's birth), the migrant fishermen (of Andoni extraction) sought the permission and reversed Ogoni deity in the area – Gbenebeka deity. All sanctions in the area were carried out in its name and its directives were obeyed without question. It granted them permission but with the injunction that they should always participate in the annual Gbenebeka festival. This, they did, contributing fish and performing cultural displays each time at Gwara which the seat of Gbenebeka (Komi, 1993 p. 66-67).

Interestingly, too, the Unyeada (Obolo) tradition mentions an epic legendary figure called Egbereyo which means Gbeneyor in Ogoni oral tradition. It literally means "mighty deity". He is known to the Bonny as Breye, the second recorded monarch to King Otuo Ogbonlakon of Obolo in the Bonny-Andoni treaty

of 1846. Jeffery (1932) posits that Egbereyo (Gbeneyor) was an Ogoni witch doctor who married Asakala and founded Oyetile lineage of Old Unyeada (as quoted in Eneyo, 1991). He is one of the four principal chiefs of Unyeada on the king lists. Eneyo (1991) understands that Gbereyo (Gbeneyor) was a witch doctor who perhaps was captured during one of the Andoni occasional wars with the Ogoni. It is also most likely that Egbereyo (Gbeneyor), that is, mighty deity is Gbenebeka, the supreme Ogoni national goddess. As it was the common practice to name human beings after deities, Gbeneyor could have been a namesake to the most powerful "juju"-Gbenebeka. Komi (1993 p. 68) argues that Gbeneyo(r) could have been one of these whose mothers were ostracised from Ogoni at the time". The understanding of Gbereyo (Gbeneyor) in Andoni oral tradition is that there were huge relations between Ogoni and Andoni in the early times.

iv. **Ogoni and Her Nkoro Neighbours**

Nkoro, which is a distinct ethnic group of the Ijaw nationality in the Eastern Fringe of the Niger Delta Region, established deep meshes of historic ties with the Ogoni through oral traditions of origins. Documentary evidence tells us how the patriarch Kirika and his migrant group migrated from their ancestral home in Ijaw heartland to Okrika (Wakirise) which is the "last point of departure" from their main Ijaw enclave (Alagoa, 2005, Oke-Sona, 2006, Akins, 2008). While on their epic journey, they stopped at Iyoba and waged an expansionist war of conquest on the original dwellers namely: Ogoni and Obolo (Andoni). The reactions of these groups made Iyoba to be uncondusive. Hence, their upward movement to a place on Ogoni mainland called Ibiangafurantie (meaning seize a point of vantage). Realising that "they are surrounded by enemies on all sides – the Ogoni, Andoni, and Bonny" (Alagoa, 2005 P. 167), the Nkoro people kept "constant vigilance" on their territorial integrity. This is aptly captured in their drum language thus: "ofunguru toru manu Beri munu na", literally translated "the rat's eyes sleep but not his ear" (Alagoa, 2005 p. 167). In the words of Alagoa (2005, p.67) "having seized what belonged to others, they (Nkoro) were constrained to vigilance, keeping the ear cocked even when the eyes were shut in sleep".

Most importantly, as the Ogoni and Nkoro cannot continue to live like the proverbial cat and dog, Yaakara and Opui-in Yaba, representing Ogoni and Nkoro respectively had a covenant of ritual brotherhood in about 1641 (Alagoa, 2005, Akins, 2008, Okesona, 2006). As Ejituwu, Jaja & Enemngwem (2009, p. 538)

remark, “the Nkoro were desirous of a peaceful co-existence; and informs the entering into beneficial relations with the Andoni, Ogoni and Opobo”. Consequent upon this blood oath, the Ogoni-Nkoro conflictual relations gave way for healthy relations which prevailed throughout the history of Ogoni-Nkoro relations from pre-colonial to the present. It is on record that during the recently concluded Ogoni-Andoni War of 1993-1994 the Nkoro sent a delegation to the people of Ken-Khana of Ogoni, declaring their neutrality. A route was therefore opened for them to travel to Port Harcourt and elsewhere through Bori (oral interview with Bob Agbozi and Tor Deeyaa, 19th September, 2015).

Another important factor responsible for the deep co-operation between Ogoni and Nkoro, leading to great cross-culture links was the Ogoni tradition of ostracizing twins and their mothers to Nkoro, believing that they were sent by the evil spirits. It was the habit of the Ogoni, especially those of the coastal communities of Khana, Tai and Gokana to secretly send their wives, daughters and relations to Nkoro if they realised that they were expectant twin-mothers. In Ogoniland, the prevalence of the concept of twin-mother was so serious that most influential and powerful Ogoni men, no matter the level of education, achievement and civilization do not make sexual intercourse with women who gave birth to twins. The evidence provided by Gibson Irimiagha (interviewed 20 Sept, 2015 and recorded by N-ue (2018 P. 318) will help us a great deal:

Some Nkoro families have Ogoni ancestry. My father’s family called Eremia is related to Guredam’s family of Bane (Ogoni). The mother of my fore-father called pyagbara gave birth to twins. To avoid been killed, he was taken to Nkoro for safety (while there) one Otu of Nkoro fell in love with the women and married her. They got children and named one of them Guredam in memory of his father. Guredam rose to become a head-chief of Otuoni in Nkoro. When he died, chief Gureredam instead of Guredam was engraved on his tomb.

Strikingly, the Phenomenon of banishing twin-mothers promoted cultural intermingling between Ogoni and Nkoro. At present, there are huge traffic of culture between Ogoni people of Bane, Taabaa, Duburo, Kpean, Baen, Kono and so on and Nkoro community of Olom, Iwoma and Opu-Nkoro, and *vice-versa*.

v. **Ogoni and Her Asa/Ndoki Neighbours**

Available oral traditions indicate that the relations between Ogoni and her northern neighbours of Asa/Ndoku were not forged. Traditions of origins and migratory story of the Asa/Ndoki are sharp pointers to this affinity in great antiquity. Recent scientific investigations by historians have settled the matter that the progenitors of Asa/Ndoki were parts of the outward migration from Central Delta in search of fertile and peaceful land towards the coast. Together with their Ibani elements, they crossed the Imo River and came into contact with the ancestors of today’s Ogoni (Ennals, 1933, Alagoa & Fombo, 1972, Alagoa 2005, Afigbo, 1974).

Both oral and documentary evidence at our disposal revealed that the forebears of these culture groups were brought into close affinity due to the advent of the slave trade and the staple trade which replaced it. The influx of the Igbo ex-slave dealers, ex-slaves and Bonny/Opobo plantation planters into Ndokiland, especially during the decline of Bonny, Opobo and Egwanga brought intense pressure on the available land. The testimony of Nwankwo Ntagbu, an ex-warrant chief is very helpful here our fore-fathers crossed the Imo River at a time when it was shallow enough to be forded, and we (Igbo migrants) decided to settle at Oyigbo. The name Obete came as a result of us, killing an Eti-stranger who climbed our palm trees” (Wilkinson, 1937 as cited by N-ue, 2018, p.100). Their ancestors, who were basically traders and manufacturers of palm wine and local spirits, approached the great grandfathers of Ogoni, especially the northern communities of the Eleme, Ban-ogoi, Nyo-Khana and Tai Kingdoms of Ogoni for land to settle temporally and later permanently. The large-hearted Ogoni ancestors were said to have consented and obliged their request because the existence of zones of vast groves stretching up to the Imo River. As Gibbons, (1932, p. 14) puts it “on approaching Ogoni village, the visitor passes through a wide stretch of... a ring of tall forest trees and unclear growth”. The Ogoni ancestors kept this unnatural boundary to show their distinctiveness from their Asa/Ndoki neighbours. Gibbons (1934, p. 18) who served as a District Officer in the Ogoni area, concurs that “the provincial boundary follows an almost unhabited strip of country separating the Ogoni from Ibo” (Ndoki/Asa).

According to the Oral traditions of the people of Ogoni, their fore-fathers gave the Asa/Ndoki immigrants land to settle. It is, however, claimed that Gberele of Bunu gave land to Egberu community whose great-grand father was alleged to have been

banished from Asa for indulging in witchcraft practice, Luukue Kua, an Okwali community doled out a parcel of land to the fore-fathers of Afamnta and Umuagbai and Nyorgbor, the son of Gua Menegu who was the first to settle in Ka-Lorre generously gave land to Okpon (Okpo). This was also true of the people of Baan-Lorre and Marihu as well as the Yae, Baan-Lueku and the Obete people. It was gathered that this benevolence practice which started during their settlement history continued up to the Atlantic trade era to as recent as the periods of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). The Ogoni ancestors (landlords) demanded yearly tributes from their Ndoki/Asa tenants. Our investigations revealed that these customarily tributes which were paid both in kind and cash ranged from a basketful of yams, cocoyams, a big fish, one calabash of oil palm, pepper, a keg of palm wine, a caske of *kai-kai* (local spirit) two cones of salt. They were also to pay obeisance to Ogoni deities located at their shrines in Ogoniland. Like in Umuagbai and Afam Nta, the Okwali elders and chiefs performed the “rite of passage” for their dead ones before they were interred (N-ue, 2011, 2012). Generally, the Ogoni landlords offered sacrifice, libations and incantations to the gods and goddess of the land before the commencement of a new farming season and the formal opening of market stalls. Traditionally, these were token payments to remind the immigrants of their tenancy and restricted rights to land (N-ue, 2018). Commenting on the founding of Okpontonu, Augustine M-mea (personal communication, 10th June, 2012) discloses:

The founding of Okpontonu village in about 1868 is traceable to one Okpo (alias Okpontonu) who is said to be the son of Jite’s slave. Okpo lived in Umuagbai along the Imo River where Umuagbai traders wanted to exercise supremacy. Okpo and Umuagbai fell apart and was divided along parallel lines due to their different stance on the Bonny commercial rivalry in 1869. In that year, a rift developed between Jaja, the leader of the Anna Pepple House and Oko Jumbo, the leader of Manilla Pepple House. Umuagbai supported Bonny headed by Oko Jumbo while Okpo lent his weight behind Opobo’s Jaja.

Okpo’s support for Opobo was observed as betrayal of trust and confidence by the Umuagbai traders. Hence, they plotted to kill him in order to

stophis ambition of trade monopoly on the Imo River waterways. When the plot was revealed to Okpo, he craved the indulgence of Nyorgbor for a parcel of land to settle. The later obliged and gave him a place where he named after himself, Okpontonu. It is established that Okpo in Ndoki tradition is the same as Okpon in Ogoni oral tradition and the name Okpontonu is derived from the name Okpo or Okpon-the hero-founder.

Regarding the origins of traditions of Obete community, the Ogoni oral tradition has it that the founder of Baa-Lueku gave the Obete people the land on which they presently occupy. The Obete people were said to have migrated from Azumini Obowu and settled on the banks of Imo River where they were taping palm wine and making earthen pots. As the contact deepened and population increased, the migrant Obete fore-fathers demanded for a place to settle from the hospitable and generous Baa-Lueku (Ogoni). They agreed and gave them some parcels of land since there were plenty of lands and the population was optimum. The memo presented to the Boundary Adjustment Committee on 6th June, 1997 states, among other things, that:

History has it that the Obete indigenous supposedly migrated from Imo State (now Abia Stat) and settled for trade in produce. This was long ago. With time, they approached the elders of Sime-Lueku to allocate them some areas of farmlands.... The elders of Sime-Lueku obliged them at a point called *Ke-a-Ngbara*. Henceforth, *Ke-a-Ngbara* became the mutual boundary between both communities. After the donation of the said portion of land, no money was charged at all. The people of Obete were expected to pay obeisance to the juju whose shrine is situated in Baa-Lueku (Memo, 1997,p.1).

In a useful contribution, the memorandum (2012 Pp. 1-2) declares:

Obete are trouble looking people who have suddenly forgotten how they came to dwell on Ogoniland as strangers who came from Azumini Obowu.... The truth is that Obete as a community does not own any land which they are claiming, even the place where they reside now were given to them by the founders of Baa-Lueku and they are aware of that.... They are trespassers from Iboland.... If our fore-fathers had made what we now call “a mistake” of allowing

them to tap palmwine and plant on adjoining lands to their huts where they rest after climbing the raffia palms, why will they now want to claim the whole farmlands of Ogoni people because they (Obete people) are rich and powerful?

The Ndoki informants strongly and vigorously repudiated the Ogoni claim of land ownership, stressing that their fore-fathers who migrated from Central Delta along with Ibani people crossed the Imo River and met unoccupied vast land at Ogolomakari where they dwell. They emphatically claim that they are not Igbo but Ijaw (Ijo) who separated from their Ibani brothers and called themselves Ndoki. They, however, accepted the fact that the influx of the Igbo during the Atlantic trade era led to a considerable sharing and adoption of Igbo culture traits, like language, dance, ideology, world view, and so on (Isaac Uluta, Israel Chizon, Martin Ephraim and Gilbert Ezurike, personal interviews, October 11, 2015).

These claims and counter-claims notwithstanding, it is obvious that the Ogoni and their Ndoki/Asa neighbours are closely related through oral traditions of origins and migratory histories which predated the British incursion in these territories. It was based on this age-long affinity between these groups that parts of Asa and Ndoki were administered as part of Ogoni during the colonial era. The Eleme Court was attended by the Asa litigant and their elders appointed as sitting court members from 1923 to 1939. Likewise, the Obete villages of Owhoabu and Umu-Nkeator satisfied their judicial needs at the Sogho Native Court from April 1912 to December 1932 and Taabaa Clan Court from 1st January, 1933 to 1st April, 1940 when they were officially transferred from Opobo Division to Aba Division. During this period, warrant chiefs were appointed from these communities to sit in these courts as judges. Indeed, traditions of origins of the Asa/Ndoki link them to their Ogoni neighbours and produced significant affinity and mutual reciprocity whereby cultural elements were borrowed, exchanged and imbibed.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that traditions of origins are significant factors linking people from diverse cultures and historical backgrounds together. It has clearly demonstrated that the early histories and root of migrations of Ogoni and her neighbours, especially its northern neighbours of Asa/Ndoki, eastern neighbours of Annang/Ibibio, and southern neighbours of Nkoro, Andoni (Obolo) and Bonny. Our analysis has

demonstrated a good deal of contacts between them and their neighbours through migrations before the forceful imposition of colonial rule. Through the knowledge of these inter-ethnic connectives fostered by traditions of origins and histories of migrations, this study believes that it will continue to forge more intricate linkages and serve as a novel prism to contain, curtail and manage inter-group conflicts in contemporary Nigerian state.

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