MIGRATIONS IN AFRICA: A FOCUS ON MBANO OF IGBOLAND, SOUTHEAST NIGERIA UP TO 190

Chinedu N. Mbalisi & Chiemela Adaku Okeke*
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Abstract
Issues of origin, migration and settlement occupy a central place in the history of any human society. People understand their history by first understanding their roots, and the trajectories of their migration and settlements. Some preliterate societies in Africa suffer the historical problematic of struggling to reconstruct their history from the real origin. The history of the Igbo of southeast Nigeria is an example of such a society. The history of the Igbo is shrouded with the problem regarding their origin. The grim issues concerning the origin of the Igbo create a big question on the original identity of the Igbo race. Hence, over the years, scholars have made attempts at reconstructing the history of micro societies with a view to finding the missing historical links in their various societies. This work on the narratives surrounding the origins, migrations and settlements of the Mbano peoples of Igboland, southeast Nigeria is an attempt in that direction. This study interrogates the issues of internal and external migrations that shape the historical antecedents of the people and their proximate neighbours. It argues that the source of the people and migration to their present abode explains the common cultural affiliations between the people of the area.

Key Words: Migrations, Origins, Dispersal, Settlements and Igboland

Introduction
It is worthy of note that migration and mobility appear to have always occupied the central themes in major discourses on Africa especially since the continent began to be studied by the expanding genre of modern sciences and humanities since the 19th century. What seems to have happened in migration in Africa is largely a hypothetical historical wave of migration drawn upon to explain the seemingly radical composition of African peoples and the

distribution of language families across Africa. There were notable migrations of note such as the Bantu migration or "Bantu expanding" and the north south migration. Far from being merely of historical significance, some of these narratives of migration would appear to have strong resonance up to the present time and have over time and context become part of ethnic identities and of mythico-historical narratives of migration in Africa. These narratives seem to apply to the Mbanasa people are part of Igboland and larger Africa.

Consequently, they do not seem to have escaped the consequences of the absence of alphabetic literacy. This stems from the fact that, like other African peoples and indeed, Igbo people, much of their traditions of origin have not been committed to detailed historical research over time. The histories of their origin, migration, dispersal and settlement exist mainly in oral forms. Therefore, reconstructing the history of Mbanasa and even its neighbours depends largely on oral tradition and suffers from defects usually encountered in using oral traditions as a source of history. However, certain factor account for the migration of people from one geographical location to another, especially in the pre-colonial era. Many Africans moved in search of greener pastures, others moved in search of for security reasons. Some others moved in search of open land for settlement and space. There were those that moved away because of persecution from one traditional challenge or the other. The nature of mobility appeared to have depended on much in response to the need to satisfy insatiable human wants and to bridge the gap nature created in the unequal distribution of natural resources. This work explores the migration accounts of the Mbasaa people of Igboland, southeast Nigeria. It considers how these legends have help form the structure and ethnic identity to these communities in their settlements. This study was carried out in different micro communities that make up the area of study and the many historical challenges confronting them.

The most pressing of these challenges is the near absence of a documented reliable chronology. Though the knowledge gap about the people's past persists, there are extant versions of the legends of origin. At least, the different clans within the area still retain to some degree, their claims of origin and migration stories and beliefs. In most of these surviving legends, there appear to be large measures of

agreement in terms of inter-group relationship in the traditions of Mbano and its proximate neigbhours. This expose explores extant narratives and legends regarding the origins, migrations and settlements of Mbano and her proximate neighbours and are discussed herein.

Legends of Origin, Migration and Settlements:
On the Orlu Factor of Origin

Among the Mbano people are found existing traditionsof origin. These traditions are traced to the Awka-Orlu migration in Igbo history. However, among the Mbano, the most popular version of oral tradition, traces their origin to a certain AbbaUruogu, who reportedly migrated from Abba in the Isu in Orlu area. Abba had led his people, the Osu, and first settled at a place called "Oboh" (Umuezeala) presently occupied by the parts Osu clan -Isiala Oboh. He married and had three sons named in their order of seniority: Osu-Ama, Osu-Owerre and Osu-Achara,[1] as narrated by Ebere Nwaeme. In the same vein, Cyriacus Ukeachu told the author that,

> These three sons with their descendants founded the various villages in Osu. The villages founded by Osu-Ama (meaning Osu in the streets) are Oboh, the first settlement, Eziama, Anara, Ezumoha and Umunachi. Osu-Owerre and his descendants founded Okohia, Mbeke, Ezihe, Umuokpukpara, Umuelemai, Umuekebi and Umuaro. The third son, Osu-Achara founded Umuduru, Obiohuru, Isiebu, Orji, Umuluwe, Umuegbe and Ugwuala.[2]

These villages form part of the communities within Mbano (now Isiala Mbano) area that also spread further into other areas, founding more communities as they multiplied. Ukeachu has also noted that the villages of Nneato Ugwumeze, Umunumo, Nzerem

[1] Ebere Nwaeme, Eze of Osu-Owerre 89 years, farmer, interviewed at Osu, 30 /9/2010.
[2] Cyriacus, Ukeachu, 91 years, farmer, interviewed Umuezeala Ama, 30/9/ 2010.

and Ikpem are branches of Osu.[3] However, Michael Echerue said Umunumo claim to have migrated directly from Abba and settled in their present location.[4] Irrespective of the claims, it could be suggested that all these groups may have migrated from the same Isu in Orlu area. Probably, due to socio-economic and political reasons, communities tend to claim direct migration status to avoid being ruled by others, and also to affirm authority over their area of settlement.

Nwaneri Nduka avers that Ehime are related to Osu. They are said to be an off-shoot of the same wave of migration from Abba in Orlu area. Ehime tradition claims relationship with Osu, particularly the Umuekebi village of Osu-Owerre. They were led by a man called Ehim, the son of Elele, their progenitor. Elele was said to have died on the way around Osu area during their movement from Abba. Consequently, Ehim's son led his people further and settled near Afo-Umueze square. Ehim had installed the *IguEhim* (black stone) used as an ancestral ground by the Ehime people for socio-cultural, and other ritual ceremonies. This area is today located close to the present site of Mbano Join Hospital.[5]

On arrival they settled and formed the village of Umueze I, while others continued and spread further forming the villages where they are presently located. Ehim's direct descendants founded the group of villages called *Umu-Ehime*. Ehim had six sons who founded the towns named after them. Thus, Eze, the first son, founded Umueze which later split into two; Umueze I and Umueze II. Ezeala, the second son founded Umuezeala; Agbaje founded Agbaja; Akanu founded Umunakanu; Kabia founded Umukabia, while Nsu, the last son founded Nsu community. These villages were named after their ancestors-Ehim. Hence, the Ehime Mbano of the present day as referred to as *Umu-Ehime*.

[3]Cyriacus, Ukeachu interview cited

[4]Michael, Echeruo, Ogunum I of Umunumo, c.90 years, interview cited in Cecilia, U. Duru, "Inter-Group Relations in Mbano from Earliest Times," Unpublished and International Studies, U.N.N 1984, p.10

[5]Nwaneri Nduka, traditional ruler of Umualumaku Umuihim 70 years, interviewed 3 /10/2010.

These traditions claiming Orlu origin would appear to have gained some support from notable scholars of Igbo history. For instance, Prof. A.E. Afigbo's study of Igbo origins, migration and dispersal suggests that the Awka-Orlu upland was one of the areas first settled by the Igbo group. He opin.es that Isu-Ama Igbo, (meaning the Isu who had gone abroad), which includes, amongst other groups, Mbama, Mbieri, Osu, Ehime, Uboma, migrated east wards from general area of Orlu.[6] The migration claims by Osu and Ehime people from Abba in the general area of Orlu fall in line with Afigbo's suggestion. Hence they belong to the group described as Isu-Ama Igbo.

The Okwelle Narrative

The tradition of origin of the Okwelle-Onuimo points to the same Isu in Orlu upland area migration account. Marcel Ibe, the community local and oral historian, said from their legend,

> Okwelle is called "Okwelle-Ekweghiariri," Abba is the father of Osu in Mbano as Isu in Nwangele is the father of Okwelle. So Okwelle migrated from Isu ancient kingdom. The man who founded Okwelle was called "Ekweghiariri." The date of this migration is not known to us. It is as old as every other migration account in Igboland from the earliest times[7].

Ibe was emphatic about the origin and migration of Okwelle from Isu in Orlu area. He, however, opined that "the speculation that Okwelle has some Aro influence in their origin is not part of their history."[8] Hence, he attributed the Aro influence to the era of Aro traders who conducted trade in most parts of Igboland. Aro traders passed through Okwelle to Arondizogu and Ndikelionwu. Ibe had maintained that, "historically, Okwelle people came from Isu area

[6]A.E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand Studies in Igbo History and Culture, Ibadan*: University Press Ltd, 1981, pp.12-13

[7]Marcel Ibe, Cabinet Secretary/village historian, c. 65 years, Pensioner, interviewed at Umuduruodu, Okwelle, 24/0/ 2010.

[8] Marcel Ibe interview cited.

and settled in their present location. Okwelle though shares common boundary with Osu community in Mbano. Okwelle do not share the same progenitor. The brothers of Okwelle are Isiekensi, Umuduruegbeaguru, and Ihube in Okigwe. These are our closest brothers, we share the same legend of origin from the same Isu area"[9], he concluded. Despite the claim by Okwelle of not being of the same historical progenitor with Mbano, there is a common observation in the legends, that is, both claim migration from the same Orlu geographic and culture area.

The Eziama/Inyishi Ikeduru Narrative

Again, the Eziama, Ihiteafoukwu, Amaimo and Inyishi Ikeduru neighbours of Mbano also claim close relations through common ancestry and historical ties. Their origin and migration accounts point to the same Orlu legend. The legends are almost all linked to Mbano which also points to the Awka-Orlu upland mentioned by Afigbo in his study. For instance, what appears to be the most acceptable legend of origin of the Inyishi neighbours of Mbano, forms part of their oral tradition. Chidi Onwubuariri informs that

> "Authentic" history has it that some of Inyishi-Ikeduru migrated from Amuzari in Mbano, to meet the originator of this area now called Inyishi. In those days, many vast areas were unoccupied, when some Amuzari people arrived. They met the Amaugo people, the original inhabitants of the land now-Inyishi. When Mbro the forefather of Inyishi arrived from Amuzari to join his people, he came with his brother called Eziama. They met the earlier settlers in a part of the village called Amaugo. Amaugo is the oldest community in Inyishi. When Mbro Arrived from Amuzari Mbano, he settled and got married. He had four sons. His first son was called OZIRI; the second was named IKE (*ikemkerenambara*). The third was Amaeke, and the last son was OTI. The four sons of MBRO founded the four main villages as

[9] Marcel Ibe interview cited.

> follows; Umuoziri, Ikembara, Amaeke and Umuoti respectively as we have them today. So the four villages in Inyishi are the off-shoot of the sons of MBRO who migrated from Amuzari in Mbano[10].

This extract suggests that Inyishi neighbours of Mbano today, historically, claim to be brothers of Mbano. Probably, colonial boundary adjustments and administrative re-organization of the area may have resulted in Inyishi becoming part of Ikeduru in Old Owerri Division, while Amuzari are still part of Mbano in Old Okigwe Division.

On Amaimo-Ikeduru Origin

Regarding the origin of Amaimo in Ikeduru, Mazi Cyril Agbugbaegbu gave an interesting narrative. He states, "Amaimo is divided into two, known as *ibeama*. One of the *ibeama* is made up of *Umu-uri*, Egbelu, and Amachara. The other *ibeama* is made up of Umuofo, Umueze and Obodo. These *ibeama* comprising Umu-uri, Amachara, and Egbelu migrated from Ehime Mbano area. Umuofo, Obodo and Umueze migrated from Amuzari in the present Isiala Mbano area. Inyishi too migrated from Amuzari. That is how the villages in Amaimo came to inhabit their present abode. *Irehioma* was the fore-father of Umu-uri and Amachara. Till today, we boast as descendants of *Irehioma* saying; *anyi bu umu Irehioma jiri opere nkwu maa ji.Irehioma* used palm sticks to stake his yam, this culture is still practiced here till today. Umu-uri did not migrate from Nri in present Anambra area as speculated in some quarters. In the earliest times, it was said that inter-communal disputes occurred during their migration. *Irehioma* came with his children. Some lived at Egbelu and Amachara those who settled at Umu-uri were pushed up and down by other neighbouring villages. As they resisted the push-pull forces from their neighbours, they claimed they were like the *uri*, the strong tree *-uriosisiike*. The Umu-uri people still boast of their resistance exploits thus: *anyibuumu-urioshishiike* (we are strong

[10]. Chidi Onwubuariri, c.76 years, pensioner, interviewed at Amakpaka Umuoti Inyishi Ikeduru, 24-08-2010

people or we are of a strong origin, you cannot push us out). Some parts of Amaimo are said to have migrated from Mbano. One *ibeama* came from Ehime and the other Mbaa and Mbama in Isi-ala Mbano, in fact from Amuzari area precisely. The fact is that it is in their history that Umu-uri people migrated into their present location from Mbano. Uzoagba in Ikeduru are said to have no relationship with Amaimo. Rather, Avuvu has relationship with Amaimo. In their tradition, Avuvu migrated to their present location from Amaimo. Besides, some parts of Orogwe near Irete and Ohi, near Ubomiri in Mbaitolu, are also said to have migrated away from Amaimo. They are our brothers living in faraway lands. They moved because in those days like we have now, some elderly sons of a family could be very selfish and would want to occupy all their lands, alone. This caused many younger ones to move away in search of empty lands in other areas. This is why those our brothers are living in Mbaitolu area today."[11] According to Iwuamadi Nwaigwe, "in Umudioma Obodo, there is Umuoparaozurumba. They are descendants of one man. Umuoparaozurumba comprises Umuopara, Umuoka, Umunjoku, Umuchukwuocha, Umuchukwukere and Nwaigwe. They formed what is known as Umuoparaozurumba kindred. Outside his kindred, Oparaozurumba has another son Ezealazuruike, who had many wives that gave birth to Umuduruji and Umuadaka, Amanwoke, and Umuoparaehihe. From Umudimoma we got Obodo, all of who form Amaimo. It is good to note that Amachara in Amaimo claim they are related historically and culturally with Amachara near Umuahia. Both of them eat *achara* stem used in cooking soup. This is one thing we have in common. Our fathers said, Amachara during that early migration, some people moved away towards Mbaise and present Obowo. Some were said to have crossed the Imo River to settle at their present location at Amachara". However, this claim is yet to be investigated as this is a bit beyond the scope of this study and focus.

[11]Sir Cyril Agbugbaegbu, 78years pensioner Obodo Amaimo, 26/8/2010

On Ihiteafoukwu Mbaise Narrative

The origin of Ihiteafoukwu appears to have different versions. This stems from the fact that some of the indigenes of Ihiteafoukwu claim that the town did not migrate from anywhere and that it has been there since history. This view expresses the autochthony or *mpu-na-ala* theory of Igbo history. A similar view expressed by an Mbaise elder was quoted in Elizabeth Isichei's book thus, "we did not come from anywhere and anyone who tells you we came from anywhere is a liar. Write it down."[12] Presently, Ihiteafoukwu is a town in Ahiazu Mbaise and some elders may have been influenced by the above assertion emanating from an Mbaise elder. Hence, some believe that Ihiteafoukwu did not migrate from anywhere. Nevertheless, other views about the origin of Ihiteafoukwu exist. These views tend to link the people to the Awka-Orlu upland migration account which appears to be popular. These accounts did not only provide a traceable origin, movement and settlement of the progenitor of the town, but provided how the present villages in the town were founded through the sons of the progenitor- Ihitte.

Nzewuba Ugwu in his book: *Ihiteafoukwu*: *The Echo of Igbo Culture* presents an account linking the origin and migration of Ihiteafoukwu from Ikeduru. The account states that, Mazi Ekwereazu migrated from Ugiri-ike in Ikeduru into the region today called Ekwereazu. Ihitte's first son was later called Ihiteafoukwu by his offspring to distinguish the town from other Ihitte bordering his domain such as Ihitte Uboma, Ihitte Ubi etc. The name Ihiteafoukwu is a combination of two words, Ihitte, the progenitor, and the Afoukwu, the big market, the centre of commerce and trade among his children. It is said that Mazi Ihite migrated and settled in his region during the early 1400 or 1450 AD. Before Ihitte migrated into what later became Ihiteafoukwu region, the settlement at Oparanadim was crowded and over-stretched for him, Mpam, Okirika and Obohia, his brothers. It was most likely that majority of his brothers, with their respective families, had migrated to other

[12] Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Igbo People*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976, p.3

territories and the instinct of survival and personal acquisition had prevailed on him to find another and better territory. Ihitte with his family migrated into the area inhabited today by Umuezeariam community. It is certain that Ihitte had married at least, three wives and had four surviving male children. He called the children Ogbor, Eze, Nomo and Chieze. There are indications that suggest that the first son, Ogbor was not from the first wife. It was also believed that the third and fourth sons- (Nomo and Chieze), were from one and the same wife/mother. Eze the second son of Ihitte is believed to have come from a separate mother- Ihitte's first wife.[13]

From the fore-going, it is generally accepted by Ihiteafoukwu people that this progenitor, Ihitte, had migrated from Ugiri-ike area in Ikeduru. The issue bordering on his children presents another concern about the relationship between Ihitte and his wives. A number of views have been expressed in this regard. In a document obtained during the research, Eze Emeagwara alleged that,

> Ogbor was not, after all, the first son of Ihitte. Ogbor was able to give a cow demanded by Ihitte, and as a result, Ogbor received *Ofo*-Ihite. Some people from both Umuezeariam and Umuediabali communities did not even agree that Ogbor was the son of Ihitte; rather, they alleged that Ogbor migrated from Etiti area. They were however, unable to agree or explain how *Ofo*-Ihitte came into Ogbor's domain. The two communities of Umuezeariam and Umuediabali have consistently mounted strong opposition, that Ezeariam is the first son, and later claim he is the ancestral father.[14]

[13] Nzewuba, C. Ugwuh, *Ihiteafoukwu: The Echo of Igbo Culture*, Ibadan: Cypress, 2004, pp.1-3

[14] Eze Emeagwara, G.A. "Memorandum on Ihiteafoukwu Peace Meeting: The Remote and Immediate Causes of the Crisis in the Town" November 3rd 1987, p.7

However, there is the view that suggests that Umuchieze had migrated from Obowo. Also, a prominent Umuemesie son, in an unpublished documentary had alleged that Umuonyeoka migrated from Umudioka in Okigwe area.[15]

Nzewuba Ugwuh had concluded on the account of origin and migration from Ikeduru in a somewhat elaborate form, that the Ihiteafoukwu people were sired by Ihite. Before his death, Ihitte had four sons namely, Ogbor, Eze, Nomo, and Chieze in this order. He avows that "at the time Ihitte and his children migrated from their family shanty at Oparanadim, they settled near the area, today occupied by Umuezeariam community. It was a small family community of Pa Ihite, his wives and children. From their Umuezeariam home, the family wandered across the open but lonely stretch of land, hunting, fishing, gathering food, vegetables and fruits. The rivers and streams became their regular fishing grounds, and in addition, their major source and supply of good water. Thus, Nneke and Duruoyide streams, plus the Egbeleruru Lake were their regular fishing spots. In fact, it was alleged that the presence and the location of these streams and a lake, were the major factors in the early migration of Ogbor, Eze, and Nomo away from the general family shanty at Umuezeariam. It was also shown that the three family members lived closely together during their early movements, as evidenced in various ancient structures of Ogbor and Eze still littered across, and near the present Umunomo borders. It was from this process that Ihiteafoukwu expanded to its present level and size".[16]

Finally on Ihiteafoukwu, is the account that traces their origin and migration to Mbano. Jonathan Abanobi in an unpublished project presented what he dubbed the most accepted legend of origin in Ihiteafoukwu. His account shares some similarities with the account presented by Ugwuh, but differs in the aspect of the place of origin. In his account, Abanobi states,

> …Majority of the people of Ihiteafoukwu believe strongly that the town has a definite

[15]Emeagwara, "Memorandum…," p.7.
[16] Ugwuh, *Ihiteafoukwu*…, p.3

> origin. They support their assertion with Ihiteafoukwu tradition of origin from Mbano area. [17]

However, from his writing, Abanobi is emphatic about the acceptability and validity of this account. Even in an interview conducted recently in the course of this research, he maintained the tenacity and authoritative position of the account in the people's history. This legend, as narrated, essays that

> The people of Ihiteafoukwu migrated from Mbano area to the present location of the town. This migration probably took place in the first half of the 15th century or thereabout, and was occasioned by a severe drought that affected farmers so much that a man Ihite- (afo-ukwu), who was a farmer, left Mbano and moved Southwards to search for water. When he reached the present site of Ihiteafoukwu town, he found water and thus settled there. Ihiteafoukwu married several wives who gave birth to seven sons from whom the four major villages in Ihiteafoukwu town took their names. The first son of Ihite was Ogbor, followed by two sets of twins by his two wives. The first sets of twins were named Umu-oni and Umu-onyioka. Since they were from the same mother, they were called Umulolo (Children of the first wife). The other set of twins were named Umu-ezeariam and Umu-ediabali, and their common name was Umuemesie. Both Umulolo and Umuemesie were together called Umueze (name for the two sets of twins of Ihite-afoukwu). They were grouped as one because they were born at the same period. The sixth son was Umu-nomo, while Umu-chieze became the seventh and the last son. Thus Ogbor,

[17] Jonathan .I. Abanobi, "The Socio-Cultural History and Tradition of Ihiteafoukwu", Unpublished Master's Degree Project Submitted to the Department of Library Studies, University of Ibadan, 1985, p.4-5

> Umueze, Umunomo and Umuchieze became the four principal villages of Ihiteafoukwu.[18]

Abanobi refuted the idea or the claim that Ihiteafoukwu migrated from nowhere. He stated that this argument is baseless, as there is no evidence raised in support of this account. Rather, he contends that the oral tradition which gives plausible explanation of the origin of Ihiteafoukwu is supported with some evidence. These as he posited, derived from the facts gathered from the Ihiteafoukwu tradition of origin. First, the northern most part of Ihiteafoukwu is only a few poles from the southern parts of Mbano. Second, there exists linguistic evidence. Ihiteafoukwu has the same Igbo dialect and ascent with Mbano. Third, socio-cultural activities in the two areas are similar. It is interesting to note that Ihiteafoukwu shares the same festivals with the nearest Mbano villages, whereas the same does not apply in other neighbouring Mbaise towns of which Ihiteafoukwu is one. Some of these cultural festivals, *interalia*, include *Iwaakwa*, *MbomUzo*, *Ekweji or aruru*, the same *Aja-ala* deity or *Onugotu* shrine, Iroko as a communication and warning signal among families. There are a number of cultural dances *egwuonwa* and *ekeremgba* which the people of Ehime Mbano and Ihiteafoukwu perform jointly because the people see themselves as one and of the same origin.[19]

Without much contention, it is germane to aver that from the available evidence at the disposal of the writer, Ihiteafoukwu origin is traceable to the Orlu area migration account. Hence, they share the same ancestry with Mbano both as brothers and neighbours. They are geographically and politically grouped under Mbaise through the accident of colonial boundary delineation.

The Ugiri, Mbama Narratives

In a related vein, Mbano towns of Ugiri and Mbama claim to have migrated away from the Osu clan in search of space and have settled in their present location. Oral tradition on the people suggests that

[18] Abanobi, p.4
[19] Abanobi, p.5

Dimolushi is the *Agbara* of the Osu-Owerre group of towns. Durumburu his brother also came from Umuokpukpara town of Osu-Owerre. Mbaa the son of Dimolushi settled at Nkwo Mbaa and founded Ugiri clan. Durumburu moved towards Amuzari and founded the Mbama group of towns. Therefore, Mbama towns naturally, are 'cousins' to Ugiri towns.[20] Ugiri and Mbama clans are thus related in history. Ugiri claims that in the distant past, their ancestors migrated from Osu area and settled in their present locations in the Mbano.

Bones Ojiah writes that "the Ugiri are an off-shoot of Osu-Owerre village, their father Mbaa had five sons namely, Ugiri (now Ugirinna), Obollo, Ogbor, Oka and Umuneke. These sons founded the villages named after them in Ugiri today"[21]. However, the Ibeme town presently in Ugiri is an off-shoot of the Ezihe town in Osu-Owerre, who were driven away by their brothers for not skinning a ram killed in the traditional way before cutting it into pieces. It was due to the quarrel that ensued that led to their migration into Ugiri where they resettled to avoid punishment. Here they were shown some portion of land on which they settled by Ogbor town. The people of Ogbor had allowed Ibeme to settle after they had been rejected by all other towns in Ugiri. Hence, Ogbor in a derogatory way were referred to as "Ogbor *na-eri-Udele*"- "Ogbor that eats the vulture". What Ogbor did to the writer's mind was simply a show of brotherly love to troubled Ibeme people. Ibeme had since been integrated into Ugiri clan.[22]

The Mbama towns of Amaraku, Amuzari, and Umunkwo are said to be off-shoots of Ugiri that migrated away from their Ugiri brother into the area they occupy presently. The towns of Ugiri and Mbama have a common *Agbara*-deity called *Mbaa*, and a common clan feast to the *Agbara* is known as the '*Nta*'. This feast is also observed in the Mbama town of Amaraku. When the Mbaa cult was introduced into Amaraku town, Umuokpoba compound of Amaraku

[20]C.O. Bones Ojiah, *The History of Ugiri Clan from the Earliest Times to 1950*, p.100

[21] Bones Ojiah, p.101

[22] Joseph Ezebuike, interview cited in Cecilia, U. Duru, Inter-Group Relations in Mbano from the Earliest Times," B.A project, Department of History University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1984, p.12.

claimed to be original descendants from Abba. Hence, the head of the cult resided in the hands of one Iwunwunne Nwosu who was said to be the sole survivor at the time. As Ojiah recorded, "the kindred of Umuokpoba in Umuorsu village of Amaraku town was responsible for announcing the feast of *Nta* from 1880 to about1910 before a sort of epidemic struck the village and cleared almost the whole inhabitants."[23] Amuzari and Umunkwo did not observe the feast because the towns denied relationship with Ugiri. It was said that like Amaraku, *Nta* feast was introduced into Amuzari from Ugiri. However, Inyishi town in Ikeduru observed the *Nta* feast. As noted elsewhere, oral tradition on Inyishi alleges that, like Ibeme in Ugiri, Inyishi suffered similar fate. Inyishi was said to have slaughtered a sacred ram by the throat and was ostracised from Amuzari. Hence, they had settled in their present location in Ikeduru.

Despite the denial by Umunkwo and Amuzari of a relationship with Ugiri, most of the traditions of origin and cultural festivals appear strong evidence of a common ancestry. Mbama elder, Mazi Zephaniah Uzoeji, states "our fathers told us that we are related to Ugiri and that we are descendants of *Mbaa*."[24] In the same vein, Mr. C.T.C Annals reported that "the Ugiri are an off-shoot of the Osu-Owerre group of towns of Osu and possess a common *Agbara* calledas *Mbaa*. They also hold the same feast known as *Nta* in common, every August during the celebration of the yam festival. Thus, the Mbama villages are related to the Ugiri town.[25]

However, two reasons exist why the Mbama towns are so called. The first, as the writer gathered, is in accordance with the oral tradition regarding the Mbaa River which at one time was said to have flowed through Amaraku. The river had demanded the sacrifice of a 'white male and black female' fowl symbolical of a fair and black complexioned woman and man. The sacrificial demand was not done and in anger the river as alleged, either changed its direction away from Amaraku or dried up. The surrounding clans

[23] Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri*…p.101
[24]Zephaniah Uzoeji, 93years, farmers, Amaraku, Interviewed 20 /09/2003
[25]C.T.C Annals, "Intelligence Report on Ugiri Clan," Okigwe Division Owerri Province, File no., Ep9394A CSE 1/85/4850, 1932, p.3, NAE.

therefore gave these towns the name of Mba-ama, corresponding to *Mbaa di-anya* or *Mbaa-otii* (far-away town in the people's dialect). The second and more probable reason is that these towns before the 'government' came were located along the route through which people passed travelling from Umuduru to Owerri. A person who dwells by the road described as an *obi-na-ama,* and the towns were called Mbama (Mbaa *binaama* or community which live along the road).[26]

There is even a version of the tradition which claims that Amaraku migrated from Amandugba into their present location in Mbano.[27] But the tradition is scarcely mentioned among the elders. Mr. Fox-Strangeways, while reporting on Mbama clan, noted that the Mbama denied relationship with Ugiri, an Osu extraction, but that trade and marriage have to a great extent, broken down the barrier.[28] But Major Stevenson's further enquires on the relationship between the Mbama and the Ugiri appear to have made a fair attempt to show that the five Mbama towns of Amuzari, Umunkwo and Amaraku with Inyishi and Umudim in Owerri Division were originally in no way related to Ugiri. Stevenson stated that Mbama are definitely of Isu extraction and came from near Isu-Njaba in Orlu. The Mbama said they have not heard of Durumburu and that it is alleged by Isu-Njaba that the Mbama deity, Duruemezuru, is an off-shoot of Njaba of the Isu of Orlu.

The *nta* feast is not particularly good evidence of relationship, as it also common to many of the Ikeduru towns in Owerri. Further investigation, according available traditions in the area and among the Isu of Orlu, tried to hold onto the view that the towns of Isu and Agbaja-Isu are related to Mbama and originally came from the area of which Isu-Njaba is the senior town- Isu-Agbaja- Isu and Amuzari were known in the old days as Isu-Ofeiyi - thatis, Isu that lives across the river. They are in no way related to

[26] Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri*…, p.102

[27] Christopher Azubuike, Arutumibe 1 of Oka, 60 years former, interviewed 30th, September, 1983, in Cecilia Duru. Inter-Group Relations in Mbano.." p.12

[28] V. Fox Strangeways, "Intelligence Report on the Mbama Clan," Okigwe Division and Owerri Province, File No. 9833A/Minloc, 6/1/183, 1952, N.A.E

the Ugiri and in spite of some inter-marriages in more recent time, their sympathies are bound up with those of the Isu rather than those of the Ugiri.[29]

Contrary to the above view, some Mbama claimed that they descended from Duruemezuru and the Njaba title of Ugiri has no connection with Njaba at Isu-Njaba. In support of this, Nwihim of Umunkwo said "any one may take a name which pleases him. There are other Umunkwo besides myself, there is an Iwuala Ajoku at Umunkwo (Ugiri) which is in no way related to our Umunkwo Njaba and has nothing to do with the river of Njaba of Isu, and our Njaba feast comes first".[30] Mr. V. Fox-Strangeways, the writer of intelligence report on Mbama clan said that it has not been possible to verify Nwihim's statement, but even if it was true, care should be taken not to attach undue weight to the fact for Isu-Njaba say, "they (Mbama) took *Duruemezuru* for themselves when they left us and the clan has for years been covered woefully and sympathetically from the Isu of Orlu"[31].

Continuing with the enquiry into the relations of Mbama to other clans, one Ibezim, an influential figure in Mbama said "we are not Isu, nor are we Osu, we are just Mbama and in the olden days, we used to plunder the Isu and all others who came near us".[32] This statement did not at any rate represent the view of the clan, when compared with the statement of Nwihim. It is worthwhile having a recount of the statement by Ibezim. When it was pointed out to Nwihim that some of his information on the origin of the clan did not tally with that given by Ibezim, he quickly retorted "O Ibezim! Of course he stammers and gets excited too and would rather tell a lie quickly than stammer away the truth". This was said apparently in all seriousness and was not challenged by Ibezim who was present.

Against this backdrop, it would appear reasonable to consider the views of Mr. V Fox-Strangeways which states, "in the

[29] Major. Stevenson Commented on Intelligence Report on Ugiri Clan, 1932, in Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri*.., p.101-102.
[30] Bones Ojiah, p. 103
[31] Fox-Strange ways. p.27
[32]Fox Strangeways, p ..27

early times Mbama were isolated from Ugiri who are said to be of Osu extraction. In years that followed, of course, trade and inter-marriage have to a great extent broken down the clan barriers. But the Okigwe-Mbama has never lost their solidarity and clan sense and this fact is probably at the back of the authentic denial mentioned above in the report."[33] In this connection, the following extracts from one of the Okigwe Intelligence Reports, Amaraku 7:10, 26, "they say they belong to the Amuzari sub-tribe together with Umunkwo and Amuzari"[34]. Njaba-Isu claims that it is not Isu, but Osu, and therefore belongs to Ugiri clan. Nonetheless, as Ojiah enthused, it has been suggested that the desire on the part of both Mbama towns and Njaba-Isu to "break away" from Isu arises from their fear and dislike of the influence of the neighbouring town (not clan) of Isu, with its powerful head called Akano.[35]

Arising from the fore-going, the present writer thinks the denial by Mbama of relations with Ugiri may be in order for Mbama to avoid leadership and domination by Ugiri. Hence, denying relations with Ugiri, would enable them maintain independence and group solidarity. Moreover, available evidence from traditions suggests that the clans possess the same *Mbaa* deity which in the two clans appear to be the most important and revered of all minor deities among the people. The deity was carved in the image of *Mbaa* and allegedly brought into Mbama during their migration away from Ugiri.[36] These deities in most parts were factors of common identity and provided avenues for group interactions.G. I Jones observes

> Though the Igbo are dispersed over a number of relatively small and virtually independent local communities, some of these villages cherish identity with adjoining units by claiming a

[33]Fox-Strangeways, p.30-35

[34]P.M. Riley, "Okigwe Intelligence Reports on Amaraku," 7.10.26. N.A.E

[35]Ojiah *EarlyHistory of Ugiri Clan...* p.104

[36]Joseph Ezebuike Interview cited

> common origin and common religious cult.[37]

For instance, in spite of how the people are dispersed in the area, the *nta* feast, MbaadeityandMbaa stream served as factors of interactions between the two clans. What would appear a reasonable suggestion is that the Osu-Owerre section of Osu clan was the secondary dispersal centre for the Ugiri, Mbama and Ehime before they migrated either in search of land for human habitation or as a result of quarrels with their kinsmen which is in tandem with the stages in the process of migration and inter-group relations in human society. They Ibeme and Inyishi appear to be two good examples.

There appears to be a re-occurring decimal in many places that most member villages were founded by a common ancestor, usually an off-spring of a famed founder of the clan. Such villages and communities share common boundaries, rivers, streams and markets that are so closely arranged, and often each has a major road (*okporoama*) linking it with a market road (*uzoahia*). There are ties of brotherhood based on common possession of shrines of Ala, Urashi, Mbaa, Ebummiri, Ezeala, Uzzi, Onugotu and other smaller gods. These gods and shrines served as a unifying factor and formed one of the strongest socio-cultural and religious integrative forces in the course of their relationship. Some of these villages claim relations with other neighbouring towns. However, there were other off-shoots which are related to Ugiri. For instance, there are claims of relationship with Atta, Amaimo, Umudim and Mbieri in Owerri Division. [38] Nsu villages also claim to be related to Uboma in Etiti. Among the Mbama, there are claims of relation with Inyishi, Eziama, and Amaimo- Ikeduru in Owerri Division. It does appear to confine one into a bit of difficult situation to conclude whether these groups are off-shoots of the clans in Mbano or vice-versa. However, one thing is certain, oral tradition and oral evidence, replete in the many cultural festivals in the area, suggest, for instance, that Inyishi

[37] G.I. Jones, *Trading States of Oil Rivers*, London: O.U.P., p.16
[38] Christopher Azubuike interview cited.

migrated from Amuzari and all the villages are linked to the Osu-Owerre secondary dispersal account after initial migration from Abba/Isu in Orlu area.

Conclusion

From what may appear an interesting and long expose on the issues of origin, migration, dispersal and settlement of Mbama, Ugiri, Osu and Ehime, (that make up Mbano) and part of Mbaise – Ihiteafoukwu, it is reasonably safe to say that Mbama is related to Ugiri and Osu. This is because evidence from Ugiri tradition suggests they moved from Osu to their present location. Mbama, according to their tradition claim they are of Isu extraction near Isu-Njaba. Incidentally, Osu the father of Ugiri, is of Isu origin. Therefore, Ugiri and Mbama appear to have a common ancestry-Isu. Fortunately, too, the Mbaa stream and the Durumburu and Duruemezuru deities share common origin since their source is from Njaba River, according to ancient belief. Durumburu came to Amuzari first but when Inyishi, the senior town of Amuzari committed an abomination by cutting the throat of a ram, Durumburu was said to have left Amuzari just as Inyishi left Amuzari.

Mbaa River in Ugiri clan is said to have derived from Dimolushi of Osu, so did Durumburu in Inyishi derive from Njaba of Isu-Njaba. This presents a different line of relationship between Ugiri and Mbaa. Therefore, Amuzari and Mbama towns cannot deny any knowledge of association with Durumburu deity. The reason is that the first and most senior village or quarter in Amuzari still goes by the name - Duru. What is more, they claim Durumburu as their father as exemplified in their communal name, Umu-Durumburu, even at the time of this research. What seems sure is the fact that the search for more land, water, space and disagreement arising from tradition, religious beliefs and leadership and so on, may have caused complex internal migrations and settlement within Mbano and its proximate neighbourhood.

In the foregoing accounts, attempt has been made to trace the origin of the various clans and villages in Mbano and their neighbours. Several factors of necessity have caused the migration and settlement of the various groups. One of the most important of

these factors was the search for more land both for farming and settlement purposes. Professor C. C. Ifemesia observes that the general expansion outward from Igbo heartland in many cases was due to population pressure, or of people fleeing from justice and subjugation and left to settle elsewhere after quarreling with their kinsmen.[39]

In the case of Nsu, for instance, the villages of Agbaghara, Ezeoke, Umunumu, Umuopara, Umuezeala, Umuduru, Umuanunu and Umuakagu when they migrated away from their Ehime bloc and brothers, first settled at a place called Umuota near Uboma. The land there was muddy and water logged.[40] It was the search for a more suitable environment that led the Nsu to settle at their present location. The same factors played out at Osu-Owerre where Ugiri and Mbama group of towns claim to have migrated from to settle at their present location. The now neighbouring Inyishi in Ikeduru, Eziama and Ihiteafoukwu in Mbaise also moved in the search for land. On the other hand, mention could be made of the fact that not all groups or sections of the clans that migrated away found sufficient land to sustain and provide all their needs. In later years, it became a source of conflict between some of the villages where peaceful negotiations failed as was the case between Ugiri and Mbama.

Also, the Mbano as a people, have their dialect, a version of Igbo language, though they varied in ascent slightly from one community to the other. Their dialect fostered peace, unity and understanding among them and their immediate neighbouring towns. Yet, it could be stated that despite these integrative forces, there existed areas of conflict as the people may not have enjoyed complete relative peace throughout the period before colonial rule, without some skirmishes. Further relations in the area were largely influenced along the lines of their common claim to the same ancestry. They are all linked to Orlu area which scholars like Afigbo

[39] C.C. Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane living Among the Igbo: An Historical Perspective*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980.p.22
[40] M.O. Ijere (ed.), *Nsu Past and Present* , Nsukka: 1965, p.10

suggested to be or is regarded as one of the core areas or centre of secondary Igbo dispersal into other areas.

***Chinedu N. Mbalisi, Ph.D,**
Department of History and International Studies,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Anambra state, Nigeria.
Email: chinedumbalisi@gmail.com

***Chiemela Adaku Okeke**
Department of History and Strategic Studies, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu Alike, Ikwo**,**
Ebonyi State, Nigeria.
Email: okekechiemelaa@yahoo.com