

Origin and Migrations of the Ogori People of The Niger/Benue Confluence Area

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Abstract

Origin and migrations are of topical interest in historical reconstruction. From ancient times, migration has permeated the existence of the various people that populated the world. In Nigeria, different ethnic groups have maintained different traditions of origins with migration history from as far as the Middle East. The attempt in this paper is to look into the early origin of the people of Ogori alongside their migratory history as contained in their tradition of origin. Amongst other things, the paper presented the various versions of the tradition of origins of the people of Ogori, their migratory routes as well as the shifting settlement around the present Ogoriland. The causative factor of their movement and settlements in the present location with particular emphasis on the geography of the area is also of interest to the paper.

KeyTerms: Origin and Migration, Middle East, Ogoriland.

Introduction

Major ethnic nationalities in Nigeria such as Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo have their traditions of origin. A popular tradition of origin among the Yoruba linked the origin of the people to Oduduwa who descended from heaven and mystically populated the Yoruba world. The Hausa on their own through the Bayajjida legend linked their origin to the Middle East. Some scholars of Igbo extraction on the other hand claimed that the Igbo come from Israel to their present location. The people of Ogori are equally not exempted from the migratory experiences of the major groups. The people of Ogori, although a sub ethnic group and minority group, has a tradition of origin that suggests that the people have not always been settled where they are presently.

Ogori people are a sub ethnic group today found in the North central part of Kogi State with a projected population of about sixty-thousand (60,000).



FIG. 1: MAP OF NIGERIA SHOWING KOGI STATE
SOURCE: YENI, Yakubu, 2008

Origin and Migration Routes of the Ogori

Ogori is said to have a history that span up to about 700 hundred years. However, little is known of the real origin of the people. But, the primary source for the reconstruction of the history of Ogori is oral tradition most of which have now been documented in written sources (Holgate 1950, Kraft 1950, Akerejola 1970 and Osheidu 1990). Like most history, "the history of Ogori is firmly hemmed into the cultural melee of other ethnic groups, particularly the Yoruba" (Osheidu 1980). The origin of the people of Ogori is thus tied to the waves of migration of the Yoruba. The people traced their origin to Ile-Ife, the Yoruba ancestral home. According to oral tradition, the people of Ogori arrived their present location through series of migration from Ile-Ife having settled intermittently in places like Ilesha, owo, Benin, Idoma land and Ajaokuta before their present location (Akerejola 1970).

The causes and routes of migration from Ile-Ife are many and varied. The first version of the cause of migration was attributed to the irreconcilable differences in Ife Royal court which forced one of the princes to migrate (Osheidu 1980). Another version says that it was a Band of hunters who missed their way in a hunting expedition that wandered to this area (Akerejola 1970). Yet, another version has it that, it was an age group who could not bring home alive the traditionally prescribed 'hare' or 'partridge' for a certain festival that founded Ogori (Oyedele 1982).

According to the first version, Akinbiyi, a prince in Ile-Ife who was said to have been disgusted about the order of things in Ife Royal court, revolted against the administration and left Ile-Ife. Taking along with him some regalia, which gave him the authority to establish his own kingdom, Prince Akinbiyi moved with his followers to Ilesha where he sojourned for a while and married an Ilesha Princess named Oni (Akerejola 1970). Oni was said to have had many children, among whom were Adeloju, Akinbo, Osho and Eni who later joined together to establish Ogori. It was said that as Akinbiyi community grew larger, he left Ilesha and travelled east ward through Ekiti and Owo. They were said to have continued in their migration for decades until they arrived Benin (Ado) region (Osheidu 1980). The movement from Ilesha to Benin was said to have lasted for more than 200 years in the course of which inter-marriages and cultural cross-fertilization were said to have taken place with various groups they came across from time to time.

Documented tradition has it that (Akerejola 1970), the River Niger formed a major barrier which kept them shuttling between Benin territories and the River Niger for generations until they crossed to the East of the Niger now known as Benue State. They were said to have settled there for a while with the present Idoma of Benue State. Agatu is said to be one of the towns ancient Ogori claimed to have settled before moving further across the River Niger.

The people of Ogori haven settled in Idomaland were said to have proceeded in their migration passing through Igalaland into Aboko (Ajaokuta) and Egori districts to Igbirra Pete, Ipesi Ate and Okejebu till their final arrival in the present area where they are now found. A section of Ogori was said to have separated in Ajaokuta (Aboko) and proceeded to Gobbo, Mozun and Toto areas of Nassarawa via Niger and Benue confluence and later to Kakanda where another Ogori settlement exists till this day (Osheidu 1980).

According to oral tradition and written sources, Ogori in their migratory era consisted of many clans, many of which have been consumed by the larger ones. These clans are said to be Adu'bane, Oso'bane, Okibo, Arigo, Ogbegbe, Oturu, Egewu, Okpowo and Eni. Some of these clans later separated to establish their own settlements in different places. The Okpoowo, Oturu and Ogbegbe clans are now found in Magongo, about 3 kilometres to Ogori. Some others separated to settle with their counterparts from Ile-Ife, in places like the present Makeke, Bekuma, Oja and Ososo all in present Edo State (Holgate 1950). Infact, Ogori shares some cultural practices like Ovia Osese festival with these people and have some similar vocabularies such as 'Enidede' (foreigners), Daminana (roaming), Mubale (trade) in their languages.

How possible is it to assess migration archaeologically? This is a major challenge in studies in origins and migrations. Nevertheless, in the case of the people of Ogori as vague as their tradition of origin may be and as obscure as their claimed routes of migration appears, the migration history of Ogori can be ascertained using cultural trait identity as revealed in their immaterial and material culture side by side those of the ethnic groups in places mentioned in the tradition of Origin of the people of Ogori). It is notable that groups that share cultural affinity (cultural traits and trait complexes) have been classified by scholars as belonging to the same culture area.

Based on their legend of origin and migration history, the Ogori people see themselves as a descendant of Oduduwa from Ile-Ife who had contact with many other groups in their migrations. They justify this claim in many ways. For instance, in Ogori, the farewell song when a bride is being accompanied to the groom's home depicts an Ile-Ife origin "Osimire Memek'Ado O Osimire" meaning Oh! Osimire, having bidden farewell to you, home to which there is no return, I am now in Ado (Benin). Osimire is said to be a river at Ile-Ife which the ancestors of Ogori were said to have crossed during their migration from Ile-Ife.

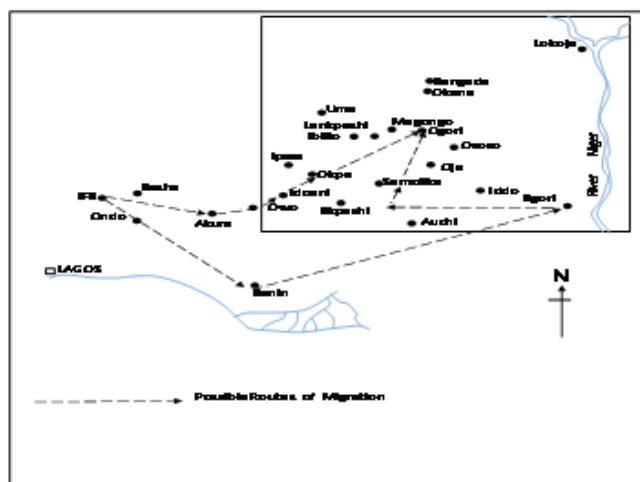
Equally, the observance of some festivals in Ogori are identical with those of some parts of Yoruba and Benin. For example, the coronation ceremony of an 'Oya' title in Ogori corresponds with that of Benin. The

Ogori Ovia-Osese festival is also similar with a festival called Igogo in Owo and Evieme festival in Ozalla, Edo State. Ogori type tribal marks are also similar to those of Yoruba and the Benin variety. Oduro (waiters) in Yoruba palaces also correspond with waiters in Ogori palace (Osheidu, 1980).

Furthermore, in Ogori Royal palace are kept beaded crowns, the Ogoloko swords and other regalia dating to the seventh century which correspond with those found in Yoruba land (Oyedele 1982). In fact, the Oni of Ife, Oba Adesoji Aderemi in 1979 confirmed that the Ogori crown is of Ife Origin but of the Benin pattern.

Another evidence of the claim of Yoruba origin is the easy adoption of Yoruba names, customs and language by Ogori people. The Ogori speak Yoruba as a second language. Also the name Oduduwa “the father of all Yoruba” has a native name in Ogori known as Odudurudu. As such the people like the Yoruba, regard Oduduwa as their ancestor.

Notwithstanding the similarities between some aspects of Ogori culture and that of the Yoruba, instead of claiming Yoruba origin, it is more plausible to infer a cultural contact between the people and the Yoruba in the past. According to Edahson (1981), the more plausible explanation for the cultural similarity between Ogori and Yoruba, is that Ogori, Ife and Edo could have had some political, social and cultural relationships in the past. And as such the myth that Ile-Ife is the centre of creation permeated Ogori, hence, like other groups, claim Ile-Ife as their home of origin. It should also be noted that the generally accepted notion that all mankind originated from the Middle East and spread westward, made most African states to build for themselves bridges and links with the East for the sake of prestige. It is possible that the Ogori like most African people decided to claim descent from Ile-Ife in their bid to give themselves a more prestigious identity and recognition.



FILE # : A SKETCH MAP OF THE IMMIGRATION POLICIES OF CHINA PEOPLE
 Reference: Chinalia 2, 1980.

Conclusion

Ogoriland is presently made up of a group of people who speak *Oko* language (Akerejola 1970, Osheidu 1980). Ogori is a confederation of Adu'bane, Osho'bane, Okibo and Eni clans. The Adu'bane, Osho'bane and Okibo are collectively known as ONU. The Onus were said to be the earliest arrival to the present Ogoriland, and they first settled in a place called Onu-moba (Imoru, Pers. Comm. 2003). The Eni clan was said to be a later arrival to the area in search of their claimed lost brothers (the ONUS) who were said to have missed their way home in a hunting expedition (Akerejola 1970).

The geography of the area must have influenced the choice of the area for settlement by the people of Ogori given the security situation at the time of their movement around the Niger/Benue confluence. Ogoriland is located in a valley enclosed by hills, these hills provided protection against external invasion; including invaders from Nupe who constantly raided the area for slaves in the past. As such the people were always migrating from one place to another in search of security. This reason was said to have informed their settlements on the hills in the area.

Judging from the early history of Ogori, Ogori as a settlement became established through several waves of migration of people to the area. The different groups in the course of migrations settled in various places such as Ilesha, Owo, Idomaland and Ajaokuta area before their final arrival to the present location. They settled in different locations in search of security and better life ways particularly farming. This is evident in the presence of abandoned settlements that dot the area. Such past settlement areas now serve as the peoples farmland. This very fact poses a serious threat to archaeological research in the area, as most of the evidences of human activities in the area have been altered or destroyed by farming activities.

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