

A Study of the Real Tribe of Olu People of South-East and South-South Zones of Nigeria

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Abstract: The aim of this research work was to investigate the real identify and origin of Olu people, and their locations in Southeast and Southsouth geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The research was conducted using qualitative research methods. One-on-one and phone call oral interviews were granted by elders, especially traditional rulers in some of the states in southeast and Southsouth Nigeria, with a view to getting their responses on who are Olu people, where are Olu people located in southeast and Southsouth Nigeria, and what is the real tribe and origin of the people called Olu people among the Olu N' Igbo people. From the results, it was discovered that Olu people are the people along the bank of River Niger and the creeks. They are said to be in Anambra, Delta and even in Imo State. Some of the communities stated by the respondents to be Olu towns are Nzam, Allah, Odekpe, Igbedor,... under the name of Olumbanasa; Ukwala, Odekpe/Idoke Kingdom in Ogbaru, Ossamala, Atani in Ogbaru Anambra State; Onya and Ogbeolu in Illah, Onuaboh, Umuolu, Onya Kingdom, Aika, Ebu, Oko, Umuolu, etc all in Delta State, Oguta in Imo State. The results revealed that these communities have established kingship system even in pre-colonial period unlike some Igbo areas who were given Warrant officers or chiefs to rule the communities and also act as their tax collector for the colonial masters. Moreso, most of the Olu people practice Egwu afia or Egwugwu cultural practice, which is peculiar to Igala people of Nigeria alone as the Egwu afia ancestral spirit (masquerade) speaks and understands Igala language only even till date in these Olu communities. It was concluded that almost all Olu people are Igala people from Idah Kogi State directly or indirectly, or on secondary or tertiary migration, though there are some in Oguta who are of Benin origin, and still practice Benin traditional institutions till date. And that, though Southeast people are called Igbo by many people today, they are originally made up of Olu (Igala) and Igbo people. It was recommended that the study of the cultural practices in addition to the Egwu afia culture of some Olu communities be carried out with a view to assessing the extent of the preservation of those cultures in relation to the similar ones done in Idah, Kogi State.

Keywords: Egwu afia, Igala, Igbo, Migration, Olu, River Niger

I. INTRODUCTION

The larger group of Oru-Igbo area made up of riverine Igbo who also have distinct culture slightly different from other Igbo at the hinter land of Igboland. For example, Ogbaru and Onitsha people in today's Anambra State are riverine Igbo who share this "Oru-Igboness" idea. Others are Igbo in today's Delta State, especially those domiciled around the River Niger of Nigeria (Onumonu, 2016). Although, people call these people Igbo, they do not agree that they are Igbo, and would want to be addressed as Oru or Olu people. According to Onumonu (2016), the people of Oru-Igbo pride themselves as

Oru-Igbo instead of strictly identifying themselves as Igbo without the "Oru or Oruness" appendage as they often do when the need arises or when it becomes necessary to accentuate their peculiar culture such as the kingship institution.

Eyisi (2010), recorded that the Oru people live close to their river with a very rich history. He added that, traditionally, their main two occupations are fishing and farming which take place all through the year. The Oru-Igbo in Imo State with common cultural affinity occupy seven communities in Oguta Local Government Area. The towns are: Eziorso, Oguta, Kalabari Beach/ Aro Quarter, Orsu Obodo, Nnebukwu, Nkwesi and Mgbale. The popular opinion of these Oguta Oru-Igbo is in support of Benin or Edo migration and some of them believe that they have Benin origin. Nevertheless, some of them insist that their origin has nothing to do with Edo or Benin but agree that they, at some points in history settled there and migrated back to Oguta area in the pre-colonial era (Onumonu, 2016).

Evidence of Oguta's migration from Benin can be traced to the fact that there are many words that are still being used as an integral part of the typical Oguta language. Moreover, there are certain traditional titles and common names similar in meanings and pronunciation in Benin, Onitsha, Aboh and other Ogbaru towns; examples of such titles are Iyasara, Ajie, Ogene, Umudei, Umuoga. During their migration, the people of Oguta sojourned in various places like Ilah, Inyi, Igara and Ogbanyi/beru, which is popularly known today as Obodo Akpuruekwe in Ubi Oshimiri (Chief Akeru, <https://igbocybershrine.files.wordpress.com>)

According to Oyali (2014), "there was no common name for the Igbo until fairly recently as individual village groups were identified by the names of their ancestral founders". Also, according to Obiechina in an interview which was reported by Oyali (2014), there is no way you will go and call someone in these areas an Igbo man and he will agree. Ogaugha (1992), stated that most Olu communities trace their origin to Igala and Benin, and their cultures reveal Igala and Benin influences. In other words, people originally recognise Olu and Igbo as two different people. In one of the songs by Goddy Ezike, as quoted by Oyali (2014), as;

Olu na Igbo onu m ekene unu

Igbo na Olu onu m ekene unu

(Olu and Igbo my voice salutes you)

(Igbo and Olu my voice salutes you)

In another description of the distinction between Olu and Igbo people, (Anthony, 2010) states that *oluna Igbo* simply means "riverine and heartland"

An Igala tradition recorded by Boston (1960) contradicts the tradition of Aboh origin which gives Benin identity to the Aboh

people. According to the tradition, the lower Niger towns of Aboh, Okpaiye, Umuolu, Onya, Ndoni, and Ossomala were of Igala origin. In particular, the tradition states that Aboh was founded through the migration of a family from Idah (the capital of the Igala kingdom). The kings of Aboh, the tradition maintains, were also subjects of the Ata (the Igala king), and each new chief of Aboh had to spend three months at Idah before investiture, performing traditional rituals and receiving instructions from the king's eunuchs in Idah palace.

Indeed, many riverine Igbo towns have a sizeable number of Igala elements in their midst, and some of them are also known to have been founded by Igala migrants such as Ebu, Oko and Nzam group of villages. Also, Igala is more of a water people than Benin. Seen from this. It can be argued that one of the earliest movements into the Aboh area would have come from Igala rather than Benin. Such a movement from the Igala country to Aboh could have occurred before Ezechima (the founder of Ezechima clan in Asaba Division) migration into Western Igbo land and the subsequent founding of what later became known as Aboh kingdom (Opone, 2021).

“...There is a distinction within the Igbo speaking people between ORU-na-Igbo. This distinction has also its implications in political organisations. The origin of these words is still problematic.... ORU referred to the “riverine or riverine-derived, kingdom associated peoples; Igbo meant upland, kingship-lacking populations.” The ORU has a well-defined kingship structure, which moves from the Obi, Ndi-Ichie down to the titleholders. The saying Igbo enweghieze (the Igbo lack kingship institutions) is accredited to the ORU, in contempt for the Igbo (Agu 1989).

Although, several works have been done on Igbo people, their cultures and others, there is a little or not much works done on Olu people of southeast or Southsouth Nigeria whose identity is today almost lost in Igbo being one of the three major tribes of Nigeria, hence the need for this work. The objectives of the work are to study the locations of Olu communities in South east and Southsouth Nigeria; to investigate the origins of Olu communities, and to determine the real tribe of Olu people across the southeast and Southsouth, Nigeria.

II. STUDY LOCATIONS

About Southeast and Southsouth Nigeria

A. South East

The South East is one of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. It comprises five states – Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo.

Abia state: It was created in 1991 from part of Imo. Its capital is Umuahia, and its major commercial city is Aba. It has 17 local government areas.

Anambra state: The name Anambra is the anglicised version of Oma Mbala, the native name of the Anambra River. It was created in 1976 from part of East Central State. Its capital is Awka, and it has 21 LGA.

Ebonyi state: Ebonyi was created from parts of both Enugu and Abia states in October 1, 1996. Ebonyi state has 13 LGA. Abakaliki is its capital.

Enugu state: Enugu is the 29th largest in area and 22nd most populous area in the country. Here are more fast facts about Enugu. Enugu was created in 1991 from part of the old Anambra State. Enugu is the capital. It consists of 17 local government areas

Imo state: Imo state was created in 1976, and Owerri is its capital and largest city. It has 27 LGA

B. South South

The South South is one of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria representing both a geographic and political region of the country's eastern coast. It comprises six states – Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers.

Edo State: Edo State was formed on August 27, 1991 when Bendel State was split into Edo and Delta States. The languages spoken in the state are Edo, Etsako, Igala Esan and Owan, Akoko Edo, Okpameri language and Ijaw. Edo State is home to several ethnicities, among them the Benin, Esan, Igala, Afemai, Emai, and Ijaw. Edo State consists of eighteen (18) Local Government Areas.

Delta State: Delta State was carved out of Bendel state on August 27, 1991. It has 25 local government areas. Asaba, located at the northern end of the state, is the capital. Delta state consists of some groups like Anioma which is mostly made up of Igala and Benin people, Ijaw, Isoko, Igala, Itsekiri, etc.

Bayelsa State: Bayelsa State was created out of Rivers State on October 1, 1996. Its name was derived from the first few letters of the names of the major local government areas from which it was formed: Brass LGA (BALGA), Yenagoa LGA (YELGA) and Sagbama LGA (SALGA). It has 8 local government areas.

Akwa Ibom: Akwa Ibom was split from Cross River State in 1987 with its capital as Uyo and 31 other local government areas.

Cross River State was created on May 27, 1967. The capital is Calabar and the State has 18 local government areas.

Rivers State was created on 27 May 1967. Rivers State has 23 Local Government Areas.

III. MATERIALS AND METHOD

The research made use of both primary and secondary data. The primary data was the data gotten through interview while the secondary data was gotten from library materials, text books and online sources. Interview and descriptive research methods were used for the research work.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research was to study the locations of Olu communities in south east and south south Nigeria, investigate the origins of Olu communities and to determine the real tribe or identity of Olu people across Nigeria southeast and Southsouth. From the interviews, the following responses were gotten.

According to HRH Igwe Dr Joseph Ajodo, the Egashi (Igwe) and traditional ruler of Ukwala Kingdom, Anambra State, Olu are people living at the bank of the river. This includes those in Anambra West, Ogburu and even Ayamelum LGA. Olu people are mostly people from Igala. In those days, the classification as Olu N Igbo was very popular, as the people in upland or far from water are called Igbo while those beside the waters or River Niger are the Olu people.

Obi of Onya, Illah, Delta state, HRH Obi Sunday Akazuesaid that Olu people are people of Igala origin, and that they were speaking Igala language in those days. He added that they are people who reside at the banks of river Niger in Delta State, Anambra State and even to Ogori in Enugu State as there was no state or demarcation in those days when colonialists have not come to the present-day Nigeria. He added that even

up till now, most of these people would not allow to be called Igbo but Olu people. Olu are Igala people, and have Igala culture, and had early kingship systems unlike the Igbo people.

HRH Igwe Pius Omachonu, the Ataojah of Olumbanasa, Anambra West, Anambra state, stated that Olu people are people beside the Niger River or generally, people living at the bank of the rivers. In Anambra State, there are some communities jointly called Olumbanasa. This means seven communities staying by the river side. These communities have their own name given by the Igala name. It is Egaoja, meaning the water area for all of them (Igala people in the seven communities). The seven Igala communities known as Olumbanasaa and located at Anambra West Local Government area of Anambra State include Ode, Igbedor, Odekpe, Alla, Onugwa, Odomagwu and Igboakaenyi. They are called Olumbanasa by Igbo people. Also, in Onitsha, there is Ogbeolu section. This Ogbeolu section is made of three Igala towns in Onitsha. They are also by the side of the river. After Asaba, there is also Umuolu town. In the same way, there is Ogbeolu quarter in Illah, Delta State. These in Delta State are Igala. So, although the Olu people are people who are by the side of the river, they are mostly people from Idah or Igala.

This is the same with the response of Mr Edekobi Eugene Obiora, of Obikporo village of Onitsha, Anambra State.



HRH Obi Sunday Akazue, Obi of Onya, Illah, Delta state



Hon Nwanwuna John Obi, Odogwu of Odekpeldeke Kingdom, Anambra State

In his words, Olu Na Igbo means the people who are living in riverine areas and those living in upland areas. That is, those living by the sides of rivers are called Olu, while those living far away from river are called Igbo. For instance, the people of

Onitsha, Ogbaru, Anam, Ayamelum, Oko, etc. are the Olus. Then the people living in the upland like Ogidi, Nkpor, Abateteto Awka etc. are the Igbos. That is why the greeting is always Olu n' Igbo kwenu, the answer is yah, meaning agreed. In terms of origin of the Olu people, it is clear that all Olu people are from Igala or people from Idah who came through the river from Idah Kogi State, he added.

In the words of Mr Amajije Godfrey, of Ossissa town, those who live along the river Niger coastal lands or forests/creeks are the Olu people. Ossissa in Ndokwa East Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria, is one of the towns that shares both Olu and Ukayi (dry land with loamy soil) landscapes/terrains in Delta state. In other words, Olu people are the people who are by the river Niger, and which extends from Kogi State or Lokoja where River Niger and river Benue meet or have their confluence. Ossissa is an Igala community or town in Delta State, and it is generally called Ossissa Igala Eto meaning Ossissa of three Igala, a name after the three sons of the founder, and Igala man called Ossissa which is called Echicha in Igala. Onitsha, Illah, Onya in Delta state, Anambra west, Ogbaru and many others are Olu people.

Olu in Olu na Igbo means people who travel on the river or water, this is as according to Hon Nwanwuna John Obi, the Odogwu of Odekpeldeke Kingdom in Ogbaru Anambra State. It is probably from the expression "Olu ne lunamili, meaning people who move or travel on water". It is used to describe the people or communities by the River from Anambra to Delta State. These people are fishermen, hunters and farmers and they use canoe to move from place to place on the water such as traveling, going to farm, going to market on the other side, etc. Olu people are people generally by the sides of river Niger. They also use canoe to do fishing as that was their major occupation then. The people by this side of the river from Anambra State to Delta State and even to Enugu State are all Igala people or majority of them are Igala from Idah Kogi State, from where they also migrated in their canoes to establish themselves along the river Niger.

According to Mr Omojo Dennis Iwezulu, Olu, generally in Delta North are regarded as people who came from across the river Niger which are mainly Igalas, either by first, second or third migration. Onyah in Illah is one of them. The Igala language is also called Olu. Yes, the Igala language is also described as Olu in my place, Onya in Illah. In some other states especially the Igbo states, they always describe the Igbos or southeast people as Olu Na Igbo which mean the Olu people and Igbos. The Olu people are usually people that stay along the river Niger which are predominantly Igala migrants. Apart from Illah, we also have Ossissa, Onuaboh, okpai, Aika Ezeolu, Onya kingdom, etc. This people are not just in Delta State but even in Anambra State. Ossamala and Odekpe in Ogbaru, Allah, Anam, Ukwala, Odekpe, Odomagwu, etc. who are all staying by the side of the river Niger are called Olu people. They are people who travelled on water from Igala, Idah in the present day Kogi State to these places.

To Ogbuanyi Clement Chukwudifuof Ogbeolu Illah, Delta state, Olu people are those who migrated and settled along the banks of River Niger and down the creeks of the Delta of the River. We regard those across the Niger that were not originally Igala as Igbos hence our people up to Onitsha and Osamala don't see themselves as Igbos. This is a sore point today those in Delta and some parts of Anambra today, though they speak Igbo but they claim that they are not Igbos. As for the origin of Olu people, most if not all Olu people are Igala by blood and they migrated and settled in the places they are

today. In terms of the tribe of Olu people, if tribe means language spoken by the people, they are Igbos. But if tribe is interpreted as the real ancestry of the people, they are Igala.

Pa Obi Okolo of Okpai, Delta state, revealed that Olu sounds same as Onu, an Igala word for king or chief, and that the Olu people could have been from Onu people, meaning people who practice kingship system as their Igbo counterpart were not known with kingship system before the colonial period. He added that Olu people the people by the side of river Niger, and are Igala people from Idah.

According to Eric Chukwuebuka of Allah in Anambra West, Olu means voice or language, a name gotten from the other people around because of the different language spoken by the Igala people. It was later founded that almost all those by the side of the river Niger were speaking the same language, thus making them all to be referred to as Olu people. Olu people now attributed to the people by the Rivers, and of course, who came from Idah. Ndi Olu means people of voice or language which is different from Igbo language. It was after many years that interaction, intermarriage and many other factors led to the dilution and loss of major parts of Igala language among some Olu people. This is in line with the response of Omojo Dennis Iwezulu from Onya in Illah Delta State who stated that the Igala language their people speak is also called Olu and not just the people. This is similar to Igala ethnic group generally. Igala is the tribe, Igala is the language. Names of tribe are in most cases given by other people around them. In Nigeria, it was reported that Yoruba got their name from Fulani or Hausa during the encounter of Oyo people with them. Jukun got their name from such situation. Even Igala got her name, Gala from ancient Egypt because of the way they moved about or traveling to settle in various places they liked without any barriers. They were called Gala, meaning Freeman, owners of land, etc. In Igala language, Hausa is called Akechi or Akichi. This means one who speaks language. This is because the language the Hausa people were speaking was strange to Igala people, and not knowing their tribe's name or identity, they decided to call them "one or people who speak language". Meanwhile, even Igala themselves speak language. This was how the encounter of Igala people with some Igbo groups led to "People of language" which is Olu used till date.

This is in conformity with the statement in the paper presented at Kogi State University on January 30, 2010 by the Obi of Onitsha, HRM Obi Achebe, that the locations or settlement of Igala people in Onitsha is called Ogbeolu. While Ogbe means settlement, Olu are Igala people. In other words, Ogbe Olu means Igala location. In his words "the founders of Onitsha Ado N' Idu (sons of Chima) were assisted in crossing the River Niger by Igala fishermen they met on the banks of the river. The descendants of these Igala fishermen (Ugbe and Ekeke) today comprise the Mgbelekeke village, who have retained ancestral land rights at the river front at Onitsha. Furthermore, Ogbe Otu village descended from two Igala traders, Okomanya and Ogbogodo, and the Obikporo village descended from Idoko, son of Usse. Usse was the daughter of King Aroli, who married the legendary Igala warrior, Onoja Oboni. These three villages of patrilineal Igala descent are grouped as the Ogbe Olu administrative clan in Onitsha"

CONCLUSION

This research work has been carried on Olu people of Nigeria with the aim of investigating the real identify and origin of Olu people, and their locations in Southeast and Southsouth zones of Nigeria. The research method adopted was qualitative

research methods, using One-on-one and phone call oral interviews.

The respondents or interviewees are elders, majority of whom are traditional rulers in some of the states in southeast and southsouth Nigeria, with a view to getting their responses on the research questions which are: who are Olu people? where are Olu people located in southeast and southsouth Nigeria? and what is the real tribe and origin of the people called Olu people among the Olu N' Igbo people?

From the results, it was found out that Olu people are the people along the bank of River Niger and the creeks. They are said to be in Anambra, Delta and even in Imo State. Some of the communities or towns which are said to be Olu towns are Nzam, Allah, Odekpe, Igbedor, ... under the name of Olumbanasa, Ukwala, OdekpeIdeke Kingdom in Ogbaru, Ossamala, Atani in Ogbaru Anambra State; Illah, Onuaboh, Umuolu, Onya Kingdom, Aika, etc all in Delta State, Oguta in Imo State. The results also revealed that these communities have established kingship system even in pre-colonial period unlike the Igbo areas who were given warrant officers or Chiefs by the colonial masters to rule them; collect tax for the colonial masters, as they were known to have had family heads and no King. It was from the structure that the statement "Igbo enweEze, Igbo have no King" stemmed from. These Igbo towns only began to have rulers when the Colonial Masters started appointing Warrant Chiefs for them or to rule them. The British administrator ruled the people through the warrant chiefs. The warrant chiefs were the judges, tax collectors, providers of conscripted labour for the colonial masters (Nwaubani, 1994) and the ruler of the people as he would be appointed from among them.

Moreso, most of the Olu people practice Egwu afia or Egwugwu cultural practice, which is peculiar to Igala people of Nigeria alone as this Egwu or ancestral spirit (masquerade) speaks and understands Igala language only even till date in some of these Olu communities in Anambra, and Delta where Olu people are found, though not all Olu communities are of Egwugwu clans. It was concluded that almost all Olu people are Igala people from Idah Kogi State directly or indirectly or on secondary or tertiary migrations to their present places of settlement very many years ago. It can, to some extent be concluded that the term Olu which means voice in Igbo language was used to describe the Igala people who were speaking other language (voice) which is different from Igbo language. In addition, the Egwu afia or Egwugwu cultural rite is being practiced in almost all these Olu communities till date. Egwu afia is an ancestral spirit, and it speaks and understands Igala language only. This is same in Igala land of Kogi State and among the Olu people. It is therefore worthy of note this settling of Olu or Igala people around the river sides made them easier targets for slave raiders, hence many of them were captured during slave trades. Some of the Igala fishermen or Olu people were the ones who were able to swim the ocean during the Igbo landing in 1803 at Dunbar Creek on St Simons Island, Georgia, USA. The enslaved "Igbo" people from Nigeria, "75 Igbo slaves took control of the ship, drowned their captors. Some drowned themselves in the water while some swam/marched to the land led by their High chief (www.blackpast.org). No one can control a ship on water or swim if not a people close to water or involved in fishing. The presence of a High chief which is a part of kingship structure makes it more of Olu group than Igbo as Igbo did not have chiefs or kingship systems in pre-colonial period unlike Olu Igala people (Agu, 1989) Some the descendants of this Olu people are Georgia presently.

RECOMMENDATION

I recommend that the studies of the cultural practices apart from the Egwu afia culture of some of the Olu people be carried out with a view to understanding the extent of their preservation in relation to the similar ones done in Idah, Kogi State.

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