

Research Article

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Origins and Migrations of Ukwuani and Ndosumili sub-ethnic group in Southern Nigeria revisited: Accounts and critique

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Abstract: The popular narrative about the origins and migrations of the Ukwuani and Ndosumili, also called the Ukwuani/Ndosumili sub-ethnic group of Southern Nigeria, accentuates Benin (Bini or Edo) links while downplaying Igbo connections. This paper aims to ascertain whether Ukwuani/Ndosumili is Edoid or Igboid in origin. Data used for the study came from both secondary and primary sources. Namely, archival documents, published works, and oral testimonies obtained from the field were used for analysis. A combination of research methods, including critical

historical analysis, critical literature review, and personal interviews, was utilised to interrogate the origins and migrations of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people. Findings from the endeavour highlighted the role of colonial administration in Nigeria in forging a concocted origin for the people. Thus, the historicity of the archived tale of the people's past is questioned. Historical evidence from differing sources utilised for this study suggests that the pre-eminent migrations to Ukwuani/Ndosumili land came from the Igbo heartland despite the efforts of Ukwuani/Ndosumili elites, i.e., royal houses and other commentators, including the British colonial administration to favour the speculative Benin origins. This study also highlights accounts of migrations and ancestry from Ukwuani/Ndosumili's neighbouring ethnic groups, such as Ika, Enuani, Ijaw, Isoko, Urhobo, Igala, and Benin. The study concludes that the prominent cultural artifacts of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people, as exemplified by their language, oral histories, customs, traditions, and local administration, point to the east, to the Igbo heartland, and not westward to Benin to disavow the fabricated accounts of the people's Benin origins.

Keywords – Benin, History, Igbo, Migrations, Ndosumili, Nigeria, Origins, Ukwuani

1. INTRODUCTION

The origin issue is central to peoples' history (Afigbo, 1998); its narratives often unify a people around a shared identity (Atanda, 1980). The historical accounts of the origins of the Ukwuani and Ndosumili people of the Niger Delta region of Southern Nigeria have received scant attention in the literature. Okpevra (2021: 536) aptly noted that "people could live in their habitat for as long as possible, but until they are showcased on the pages of History, it would seem they never existed." Previous researchers have written about the origins of some Ukwuani and Ndosumili towns and clans, for example, Aboh (Ogedengbe, 1971), Utagba Uno (Izuegbu, 2003), Azagba (Izuogu, 2019) and Ogume (Ekele, 2004). Opone (2017a) also focused on the origin of only a few communities in Ukwuani

land. This current work aims to provide comprehensive information on the origins and migrations of a wider number of communities and clans in Ukwuani and Ndosumili land (hereafter referred to as Ukwuani/Ndosumili) and, at the same time, revisit and critique espoused beliefs propagated about the people's origin. This paper complements the work of Okolugbo (2004), who provided helpful information on the origins and migrations of many clans in Ukwuani/Ndosumili land but did not primarily set out to verify or debunk the recorded historical accounts of the people and the ensuing origins views held by the people themselves, which appear to have been influenced by Nigeria's political exigencies (Afigbo, 1987; Igwara, 1993; Oluka-Nwaeze, 2009), socio-cultural challenges, and resource allocation issues in an economically less endowed nation (Igwara, 1993; Ifinedo, 2007; Odishika et al., 2022). This study also uses new data to complement previous endeavours on the discourse.

Much of what is recorded about the origins and migrations of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people is sometimes believable and, in other cases, speculative. Consistent with many peoples of the region, their traditions of origins and migrations are not written; instead, they rely on information passed down over generations. Memory may fail, or accounts could be fabricated or remolded (Ogunkoya, 1956; Afigbo, 1981; Opone, 2022). Okpevra (2021: 539), in citing Ikime (2006), writes that "if there is any aspect of the history of the various peoples of Nigeria about which no one can speak with any exactitude, it is that which deals with the origins of our peoples." To the extent that a colonial administrator, G. B. Williams (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931: 5), who produced one of the Intelligence Reports on the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people in the 1930s, concluded that "their history must be largely the result of guess work."

The main issue is not whether the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people could accurately recount or reconnect with events in antiquity. The baleful role played by lay colonial administrators who, while recording the oral history of the people, promoted their agendas deserves more attention. It appears such colonial agents outrightly altered and misrepresented traditions of origin for the Ukwuani/Ndosumili and others (Ogedengbe, 1971; Ozah, 2010; Okpevra, 2021). We cannot confidently ascertain whether the colonial administrators' efforts at archiving the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people's history were purposely designed to mislead. What is clear, according to the views of some historians (Ikime, 2006; Okpevra, 2021), is that their effort is "decisively simplistic." One could quickly notice that their accounts of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people's origin are replete with personal opinions and biases that have become beacons of truth for those unwilling to challenge such narratives. For instance, G. B. Williams wrote, "*their [Ukwuani/Ndosumili people] customs and relationships it seems probable that all the Western [Ukwuani] and Southern [south Ndosumili] clans were formed as the result of successive migrations from Benin and that the migrants after settling in their new territory adopted the language and some of the customs of their Eastern neighbours, the Ibos*" (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931: 5).

The preceding proclamation presented as a conclusive fact distorts reality and serves no purpose but to create a confusing milieu, which continues to bedevil the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people. In the report of another colonial officer, R.S. Mallinson, who copiously copied the earlier report of Williams and others, wrote,

"the people [Ukwuani/Ndosumili] in general were of Edo extraction and had entered the country in successive migrations from the North (Benin)... the remainder of the area had been populated by prior or subsequent migrations of a less organised nature and by rebels from the Aboh Kingdom" (N.A.I. File No. 29300, 1939: 1).

While writing about Ebedei, a Ukwuani clan, the same colonial agent asserted, "*Actually they must have come from Benin ...*" (18). For another clan, Umukwata, this colonial agent wrote, "*The clan... must have been one of the early settlements from Benin.*" Writings based on personal conjectures presented as facts in colonial gazettes should be reconsidered and assessed carefully. In other cases, these colonial agents-cum-ethnographers relied upon political organisations, such as the existing Obishop and Eze or Igwe (King) in some Ndosumili communities (for example, Aboh, Ase) and the presence of bronze and brass artifacts used by the people to suggest Benin (Bini or Edo) origin for the people. Basing a people's origin on limited socio-cultural and political artifacts is undoubtedly simplistic.

It is somewhat startling that such foreign entities, who probably had not resided long in Ukwuani/Ndosumili land, could suddenly assume the authoritative mantle of knowing precisely where the people migrated from based

on some weak socio-cultural and political similarities, relationships, and objects. As previously alluded, the unsubstantiated narrative of Edo origin pushed for most parts of Ukwuani/Ndosumili land could have been designed to serve a purpose for the then British colonial administration—it facilitated easy governance when the people were organised under some existing native authority or influence. Mallison’s report noted that colonial agents were instructed to investigate the Ibo-speaking people of the Kwale Division (Ukwuani/Ndosumili area) “with a view to the re-organisation of the area and the establishment of a Native Administration” (N.A.I. File No. 29300, 1939: 1). Given the British colonial administration's penchant for the Indirect Rule system, it is possible that regrouping communities and creating or forging an identity for subdued communities met some administrative objectives.

The effect of the venture to concoct and misrepresent a people’s identity still lingers. To the extent that it has created somewhat of an identity crisis among most Ukwuani/Ndosumili people, who would readily flaunt their Benin origin or ancestry and vehemently spurn any links to the Igbo heartland. Placing all the blame on colonial administrative reports and ethnological reviews would seem unjust. The Nigerian Civil War of the 1960s and its aftermath are other significant reasons the Benin origin narrative has gained traction (Mordi & Opone, 2009). The lack of generally agreed-upon facts has led to considerable gaps in the evidence of Ukwuani/Ndosumili origins that historians and anthropologists must grapple with. Cultural history and archaeology disciplines may shed more convincing light on the origins of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people. However, archaeological excavations have only just begun in the Igbo heartland, and no part of the west bank of the River Niger, including the Ukwuani/Ndosumili area, has yet been touched. With such research resources lacking, other intellectual weapons should be marshaled to tackle the seemingly intractable problem of articulating the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people’s past. This work is motivated by the need to add to this discourse.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The main objective of this paper is to interrogate and address the contentious issues of who the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people are by revisiting facts in the accounts of their origins and migrations that have yet to be addressed by earlier writers. While many historians and writers have not challenged the archived accounts of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili’s people origins and migrations (Okolugbo, 2004; Ekele, 2004), others have done so albeit with some limitations (Ozah, 2010; Opone, 2017a). Notably, the focus tends to be on a select few communities in the area. This effort is the most comprehensive attempt to detail the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people's origins and migrations. This study adds to the discourse by critiquing what is known about their past using diverse sources, both new and old. It also contributes to the literature by suggesting why the traditions of Bini origin might be favoured over the Igbo ones.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a combination of research methods, including a critical historical analysis (von Ranke, 2010), a critical literature review (Chukwuere, 2023), and personal interviews (Isichei, 1977). The critical historical analysis method allows historians to determine the value of evidence presented in the primary sources. The critical literature review process permits researchers to explore what has been done in research to identify gaps in knowledge. Personal interviews are conducted in historical studies to capture or preserve the memories, voices, and views of people whose accounts have not been recorded. Thus, this study’s data came from both secondary and primary sources. Notably, archival documents are assessed carefully, insights from past studies are examined, and personal interviews are employed to help contribute to the debate on the origins of a small sub-ethnic group like the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people of Southern Nigeria.

4. THE UKWUANI/NDOSUMILI PEOPLE

Ukwuani (*lowland dwellers*) and Ndosumili (*riverine dwellers*) are closely related ethnolinguistic groups that live in three local government areas (LGA): Ukwuani LGA, Ndokwa West LGA, and Ndokwa East LGA in Delta State, Nigeria. Ukwuani/Ndosumili land is surrounded by the Ika South, Aniocha South, Oshimili South, Isoko North, and Ughelli North LGAs of Delta State and four Nigerian states: Anambra, Edo, Rivers, and Bayelsa.

The Ukwuani/Ndosumili land is low-lying, generally flat with a gentle slope, no more than 380 meters above sea level (Weatherspark.com, 2024); the area is covered by freshwater and swamps (Ozah, 2010; Nzei, 1997). Their land occupies approximately between latitudes 5°40' and 6°31' North and longitudes 6°14' and 6°53' East (DB-city.com, 2024). Their total population for 2023 is 510,200 (Citypopulation.de, 2024). Figure 1 shows a map of Ukwuani/Ndosumili land with a demarcating line between the two sub-units and their towns/villages; the locations of neighbouring subgroups and ethnic groups are also shown.

Ndokwa nation (Okolugbo, 2004: 1), a coinage from *Ndosumili* and *Ukwuani* proposed in the mid-1970s, has been used to refer to both groups. This paper did not use Ndokwa as there is no consensus on its usage for the people (Ozah, 2021). Linguistically, some have vehemently argued that the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people's language/dialect is a language isolate (a language that has no demonstrable genetic relationship with another language) (see Okafor, 2006). This, however, is incorrect. Their language, Ukwuani-Aboh-Ndoni, with the code *ukw* (Ethnologue.com, 2024), is Igboid, given that it has several cognates to Igbo (Nwaozuzu, 2008). Thus, "*ukw*" is mutually intelligible amidst the larger "Igboid" cluster (Forde & Jones, 1950; Onwuejeogwu, 1975). Indeed, some consider it a dialect of the Igbo language (Onwuejeogwu, 1975; Nwaozuzu, 2008), while others differ (Williamson, 1973). Economically, they earn their living from farming, fishing, hunting, trading, and weaving (Okolugbo, 2004).

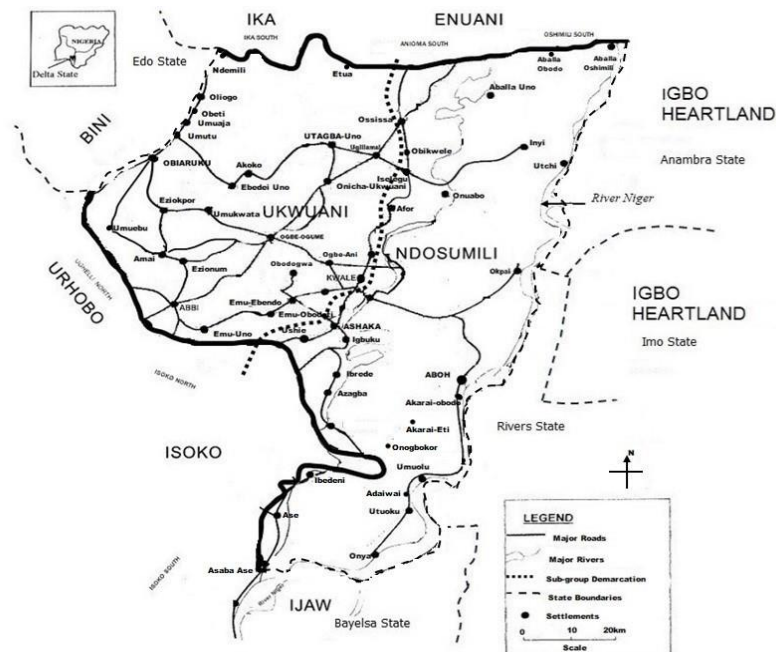


Figure 1: Map of Ukwuani/Ndosumili land with a demarcating line between the two subgroups

Source: Produced by the Authors

5. CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS, AND LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

The culture of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people is homogeneous. Although their customs share similarities with Isoko, Urhobo, Ijaw, and Benin (Bini), the most noticeable comparisons are with the mainland or heartland Igbos. This study

used “heartland Igbos” to refer to Igbos across the Niger, consistent with the usage by Afigbo (1987: 16). The various British Intelligence Reports of the 1930s correctly underscore the similarity in custom between the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people and the heartland Igbos (for example, N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931: 5). Notwithstanding, there are differences between Ukwuani/Ndosumili and heartland Igbo customs (Ejiofor, 2015; Nzei, 1997). For example, unlike the heartland Igbo, which exercises patrilineal heritage, Ukwuani/Ndosumili practices patrilineal and matrilineal heritages (Nzei, 1997; Ejiofor, 2015). Ukwuani/Ndosumili people are exogamous (Nzei, 1997). Ukwuani/Ndosumili and the heartland Igbos value family, community, respect for elders, and life (Nzei, 1997; Onwuegbuchunam, 2022).

For the heartland Igbos, authority in the village group is vested in a council of lineage heads and wealthy influential men. The Ukwuani/Ndosumili practices gerontocracy, where the community's oldest man (*Okpala-Uku*) is installed as the traditional ruler (Okolugbo, 2004; Ejiofor, 2015) except for the six clans of Aballa, Aboh, Ase, Ibedeni, Okpai, and Onya, where the monarchy is combined with gerontocracy (Nzei, 1997). All Ukwuani/Ndosumili clans use the system of age grades (*Otu*) to administer their communities (N.A.I. File No. 29300, 1939; Okolugbo, 2004), as do the heartland Igbos (Forde & Jones, 1950). The traditional market days, i.e., *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afo*, and *Nkwo*, of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili and heartland Igbos, are the same. Ukwuani/Ndosumili do not use Bini's market days of *Ekioba*, *Ekenaka*, *Agbado*, and *Eken*.

According to Nzei (1997: 108), the Ukwuani/Ndosumili “people believe in the laws of retribution; they emphasize reciprocity in their social relations.”. Kolanut presentation is central to Ukwuani/Ndosumili custom as it is to the heartland Igbos; for the Ukwuani/Ndosumili, it symbolizes the host's *prima facie* welcome and acceptance of deserving guests (Nzei, 1997). Religious paraphernalia found in the heartland Igbo are common among the Ukwuani/Ndosumili. The prominent emblems are the *Ofo* (the supreme ancestral symbol of authority) and *Ikenge* or *Ikenge* (a symbol of one's personality and one's ancestors) (Ojieh, 2003; Opone, 2022).

Nzei (1997: 109) notes that Ukwuani/Ndosumili “people believe that the ancestors/ancestresses roles never cease, and the inheritance of their Ikenge means that the lineage is endowed with their prosperity when they are alive.” These beliefs are shared in the heartland Igbos' cosmology as well. In traditional settings, the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people are generally polytheistic with some shades of animism (Nzei, 1997). They believe in a creator god (*Chukwu*), an earth goddess (*Ani*), a personal god/destiny (*Chi*), and other deities such as the god of yam (*Ifejioku*), as do the heartland Igbos. As in parts of the Igbo heartland, the *Nze* cult or ritual symbol is present in some Ukwuani/Ndosumili clans (Okolugbo, 2004). The Ukwuani/Ndosumili people believe in witchcraft and reincarnation (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931; Nzei, 1997); however, many Ukwuani/Ndosumili are now Christians (Okolugbo, 2004; Odili, 2018).

6. TRADITIONS OF ORIGINS OF THE PEOPLE

Often, researchers capture people's oral histories, beginning with the story of the migration of a founding or eponymous progenitor (Isichei, 1976). The traditions of origin could focus on clans, which are socio-political units comprising people claiming descent from a common ancestor who is the clan's founder and sometimes gives his name to it (Okpevra, 2021: 538). This paper starts with information on the origins and migrations of Ndosumili clans, towns, and villages. Figure 2 illustrates possible migratory paths. The authors do not claim to know the exact routes taken by these early migrants. What is important is/are the **source(s)** of their movements and **destination(s)**. For clans claiming origin from Benin, their migratory routes depicted in Figure 2 did not start from Benin; instead, they began from locations near Ndosumili/Ukwuani land, where they claimed to have sojourned before reaching their present sites.

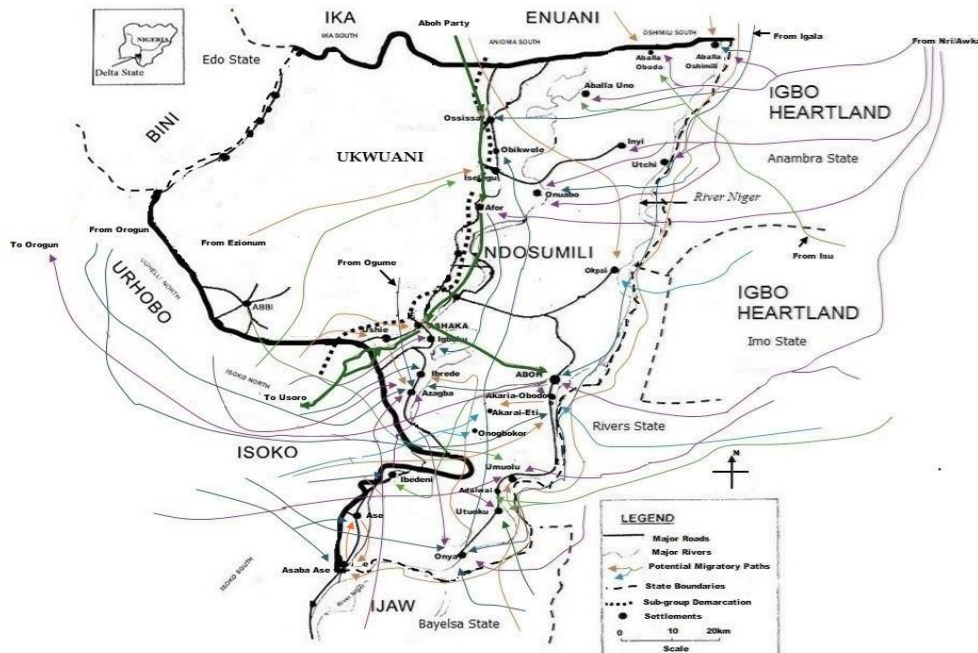


Figure 2: Migratory paths of Ndosumili communities

Source: Produced by the Authors

6.1. Ndosumili communities and clans

Aboh – Several historians claim the founding fathers of Aboh came from Benin (Talbot, 1926; Egharevba, 1934; Hubbard, 1948; Forde & Jones, 1950; Ogedengbe, 1971; Okolugbo, 2004; Ajie, 2011). There are contradictions about who led the Aboh party out of Benin; some accounts attributed leadership to Ogwezi, Ekensu, and Esume (Esumai-Ukwu) (Okolugbo, 2004: 13). Various reasons for the departure from Benin were postulated; these include overcrowding, revolt, persecution, and war. Okolugbo indicated that Ekensu came from Eastern Nigeria. This viewpoint is supported by Hubbard (1948: 198-201), who commented that the Aboh group were the offspring of those who travelled from Arochukwu to Benin as “Long Ju-ju” agents and never returned. Okolugbo (2004: 12), in citing Basden (1938), linked the founding of Aboh to the Ezechima movement that settled in Onitsha. Under the leadership of Ogwezi, a group left Onitsha and moved southward through the Ase Creek until they arrived at Aboh.

Okolugbo (2004: 5), citing Prof. K.O. Dike, the erudite historian, notes that it was the rush for the Atlantic trade that brought peoples of the hinterland, including Benin princes and Arochukwu oracle priests and agents, to the Niger Valley in the 16th. and 17th. Centuries. Ogedengbe (1971) supported this viewpoint as well. According to a tradition collected during fieldwork linked to this study, the Aboh group comprised some migrant families of Aro origins who left Abo town in the Awgu area in Eastern Igboland with the *Nze* ritual symbol common among the Aro and Nri (Opone, 2017b). An intelligence report on the Ishiagu clan in the Afikpo division corroborates this version of the Aboh tradition of origin (N.A.I. File No. 28384, 1933). Ikwuazom (1993) suggests that Igbos from the Nri or Awka areas founded Aboh. It is worth noting that Aboh was not founded in an uninhabited region or a barren wasteland (Ikime, 2006; Opone, 2017b). The Akarais were on the land before the Aboh party arrived in about 1650 and 1700 (Ogedengbe, 1971: 201). On the other hand, Boston (1960) believes Aboh has Igala origin. Ajie (2011: 5) notes that one section of Aboh, i.e., the Umuti community, was founded by an immigrant - Uti Nzei - from Erohwa (Ekewu) in Isoko land.

Akarai—The clan comprises five villages: Akarai-Obodo, Akarai-Eti, Umuti, Iyowu, and Afiankwo. As previously noted, the original settlement of the Akarai people (an Igbo group) was the present site of Aboh town

(Baikie, 1856; Ogendegbe, 1971; Okolugbo, 2004). After a dispute with the Aboh, the Akarai were disposed of their land (Okolugbo, 2004), and two quarters went up the Niger to found Akarai-Ogidi and Akarai-Atani in Anambra State. Two other quarters, Igbwetti and Etiti, who fled, returned to settle on the sites of Akarai-Aboh and Akarai-Etiti (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931). Ogbagwu and Ogbe-Uzu went to Ogume and Ebedei, respectively (Okolugbo, 2004).

Other versions of the early history of the Akarai people claim that Akara was a prince of the Benin kingdom who left because of a dispute with his younger brother. The account recorded by Hubbard (1948: 202) stated that when the Akarai dispersed, one Ajie led the section that founded the Akarai clan. Hubbard's account also indicates that Uti migrated from Igala land to join Ajie. According to an intelligence report on the area (N.A.I. 28903, 1932), Uguna and Isika left Ofagbe in Isoko land to settle at Umuti. The recorded tradition claims that one Uge from Okpe in Isoko Division founded Iyowu, the anglicized form of Iyi-ove, meaning "one quarter."

Ossissa – According to Forde and Jones (1950: 50), the founder of Ossissa came from Benin as part of the Aboh party's Edo migration account. The group's leader was Osumili-Ukwu (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931). However, an Ossissa tradition says the settlement's founders migrated from Idah in Igala land (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1932). Other groups migrated somewhat later from neighbouring communities such, for example, Ejeme and along the western bank of the lower Niger Valley (Uwechue, 2013). There is the belief that a section of Ossissa migrated from Aboh. It seems, therefore, that Ossissa was founded in waves of migrations. The dominant and perhaps one of the earliest migrants from Idah, Igala, established three-quarters of Ossissa, namely, Umuosumili, Umueleke, and Umueze. Hook suggests this movement could have occurred during the 15th. Century (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1932: 14). The Igala origin of these quarters has survived in the saying, "*Ossissa Igala Eto*" (Oral Interview: Akachili, E., 04/07/2023; Izuegbu, 2011: 4). However, Izuegbu (2011) claims certain parts of the town were founded during the Oba Ewuare (Benin monarch) wars of the 15th. Century.

New insights on the origin of Ossissa have surfaced. The oral tradition recorded in the Umueleke quarters of Ossissa by Izuegbu (2011) identifies Dike, his son Ewa, and their followers as the earliest Igala migrants to arrive there. He notes that Dike and his son Ewa came to the area before Osumili, who was also from Igala, and other family groups from Western Igbo land later joined them. They all settled at Ogbetiti. In time, the off-shoot villages of Oloa, Umu-Uno, and Onuiyi were founded. Nevertheless, the existence of Igbo names for all Ossissa quarters indicates that the Igbo group was already settled in the area before any Igala group arrived. A similar view in terms of which group preceded the other and from where was expressed around 1930 by "senior Okpara (Nwaiku) of Umueleke quarters, stating that Umueleke kindred originated from Aboh led by one Dike and that his son, Ewa, founded the quarter" (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1932: 14). In this case, Dike and his son were originally Igbo, not Igala. However, if they were Igala, it suggests that there were Igala elements in the Aboh migrant party.

Afor – Accounts indicate that Etim-Ukwu, in the Aboh party from Benin, was the founder of Afor. Mr. G.W Williams notes that part of the Benin migratory party went to the hamlet of Obodigbo, where they met a former emigrant from Benin named Ezekpichi (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931). However, Afor traditions differ by suggesting that Ezekpeshi (same as Ezekpichi) migrated from Akamkpisi-Nri, from the Igbo heartland, to found Ogbedigbo (an old settlement) or Obodoigbo (an Igbo settlement) 'before the 13th century' (Alagoa, 2004). According to Opone (2022: 4), "Further migrations happened into the area, and the best known were the groups led separately by Ifite and his brothers, Achi, Okpala, and Okolori from the Awka area, east of the Niger." Afor later expanded to other settlements, including Obetim, Umuachi, Umuokpala, Ogbetiti, Okolori, Umuachi-Ogo, and Iselegu.

Ashaka – Not much detail of Ashaka's early history is available. Forde and Jones (1950: 50) indicate that the town was founded by members of the Aboh party from Benin who were dropped off at their present. Okolugbo (2004: 13) notes that the leader who founded Ashaka is known as Ozoma-Ukwu. Our fieldwork found some Ashaka people claiming Benin ancestry, while others traced their origins to Isoko land.

Ushie – A few versions of the origin of Ushie exist. Okolugbo (2004: 13) writes that the founding of Ushie resulted from a secondary migration of people led by Oputa, part of the Aboh group, who founded the town of Ozoro (now in Isoko North LGA). Another popular tradition traces the founding of Ushie to Aboh. According to it, after

establishing Aboh, several settlements sprang up as off-shoots of Aboh migration, collectively called Umu-Nze (Descendant of Nze); Ushie was one such off-shoot. Oral sources at Ejeketa in Ushie stated that their community was among the Umu-Nze villages and a beneficiary of the Aboh Nze royal cult (Felix-Obianu, 2015: 17). However, another oral tradition claims that one Oduga, who migrated with his followers from Okpe-Isoko, founded Ushie in the 17th Century (Felix-Obianu, 2015). These insights suggest that the Ushie population comprised Igbo and Isoko elements.

Aballa – The clan comprised Aballa-Oshimili, Aballa-Uno, and Aballa-Obodo communities. Various waves of migration influenced the clan's composition. The Aika quarter from Idah was the first to settle at Aballa-Oshimili (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931). Forde and Jones (1950) note that migrants to Aballa came from east of the Niger, i.e., Nri, Onitsha, and Isu. Groups from the Nri, Anambra State, and Isu in the Nkwere area of Imo State founded the Diakparo [Diakpullu] quarter. Families from Umuosere [Umu-Oshelle] quarter came from Ogwashi-Ukwu and Nri. The Ishubom quarter came from Ogwashi Ukwu, and Dukwuenze quarter originated from Nri (Oral Interview: Nwadiador, R., 24/5/2024). The Abalagada people used to belong to the Aballa clan but moved to the Aboh area after a dispute (Okolugbo, 2004; Uwechue, 2013).

Okpai – The traditions of the origin of Okpai indicate that the community was founded shortly after the founding of Aboh. The founding of Okpai occurred when a man called Okpai, accompanied by a number of his followers, left Benin and settled at the present site of Okpai Ashaka. Okpai's two sons, Umun and Orishi [Oluchi], gave their names to their settlements: Okpai Umun and Okpai Orishi [Oluchi] (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931). Another settlement, Okpai Obeze split from Okpai Umun (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931; Okolugbo, 2004). Boston (1960) notes that Okpai has Igala origin. Many believe Okpai might have been part of the Igbo migration from the Benin kingdom that characterised the Aboh movement (Opone, 2022).

Utchi – The Umubarautchi clan comprised related communities of Inyi, Onuabo, and Utchi. According to oral traditions, they are the children of Barautchi who came from Nri, Anambra State, to settle in Utchi. Further movements occurred in Utchi, culminating in the founding of Inyi and Onuabo by men of those names (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931). At Owelle Okumedo, Utchi, tradition says the eponymous founder of Owelle Okumedo left Agukwu, Nri together with his brothers, including Odaigbo, the founder of Ogwashi-Ukwu, Asaba (who founded Asaba Utchi), Ogboli (who founded Ogboli Igbozo) (Omenuwa, 2010: 13).

Inyi – The villages of Inyi include Umuyagbo, Umuagwuyam, Obeche, and Isiolu. Inyi and Utchi have similar origins. Inyi people were among the Nri migrants who left Asaba with Barautchi to find new settlements (Opone, 2022). Oral traditions from the town claimed that their ancestor, Inyi, left Umuochi because Utchi oppressed himself and Onuabo (Opone, 2022). Isiolu is said to be the eldest son of Inyi (Oral Interview: Ebinim, O.S., 28/11/2024). The Obeche people migrated from Ossissa to settle on land provided by the descendants of Umuyagbo (Oral Interview: Omekenyi E., 27/11/2024).

Onuabo – As noted, Onuabo is part of the Umubarautchi clan and was founded by a man named Onuabo as a part of the group that came from Nri (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931). Onuabo was the youngest of Barautchi's children (Oral Interview: Omekenyi E., 27/11/2024). However, this study found that an Igala village (Onuabo) currently exists in Ibaji LGA of Kogi State. One could argue that there are links between Igala and the Onuabo settlement in Ndosumili land. Affirming this view, Nwaokocha (2015: 21) indicates that oral traditions among the Onuabo people "believe that the people are of Igala origin." Another source of the origin of the people was interrogated. According to the oral history obtained, Oche was the first to arrive on the land from Igbo land; he is the progenitor of Umu-Oche. He came with Azu, the founder of the Umu-Azu quarter of the town; both came from the Osuche (Ochuche) and Ogbakuba areas of Anambra State. Later, another Igala immigrant named Ugwo came to join them and founded the Umu-Ugwo quarter of the town (Oral Interview: Chief Emegwali, G., 6/5/2023). Another piece of information indicates that Onuabo's location is a secondary settlement site, as hostilities with neighbouring Ossissa might have caused them to relocate to their present abode (Oral Interview with Akachili, E., 04/08/2023).

Obikwele – The clan comprised four villages: Umukiagbor, Umuebo, Umuezekwele, and Umuanukwu. Okwerri from Onya visited the son of Ezekpichi, the founder of Effoh [Afor] (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931). Finding the place

suitable for his liking, he invited others from Onya to join him at the new settlement, Obikwele, which means '*my mind agrees to settle here.*' According to another oral tradition, five fishermen, Agbo, Nzekwele, Ebo, Anukwu, and one other from the Oburuese quarter, left Onya for a better fishing ground. After a long and fruitless search, they became ravenous with hunger, and just when the hunger had become unbearable, they saw food at a point along the river (they call the point Abibi). The food was prepared by a juju that inhabited that part of the river. Four of them ate the food, survived, and settled near the spot, calling their settlement Obikwele. The fifth man who refused to eat the food died (Oral Interview: Onyebuolise, C., 01/07/2024).

Igbuku- The clan comprises five villages: Igbuku, Ughelli, Ogu Ologbo, Ovara and Oko. According to oral traditions, some emigrants from Ogbedigbo village (also known as Obodoigbo) of the Effor [Afor] clan led by Akkego, were the first to settle in Igbuku. They were later joined by a migrant Ijaws group from Ndoni led by one Anyaka, and later, one Olubeko brought a large party of Isoko immigrants from the Uruode quarter of Illu [Ellu] to join the Afor and Ijaw settlers (N.A.I. File 28903, 1931).

Ase— A version of origins reported by Williams noted that the expedition that founded Ase left Benin for Onitsha, and the group's leaders were Obi Chime and Onicha (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931). According to Ase traditions captured by Hubbard, Ase, with his children Ozuem, Ebeneze, Azaga, and Omuku, left the Benin Kingdom in the second half of the 17th Century due to wars, oppression, and persecution. They went to Asaba, Onitsha, and Atani (Anambra State), from where they headed for Aboh. Upon finding the conditions at Aboh unsuitable, they moved to Ndoni (Rivers State), where they founded Ase Monite [Imonite] in Rivers State. They lived there for a while, and when their father died, Ozuem and Ebeneze moved their settlement back to the banks of Ekregbesi Creek, where they founded Ase Ukwu (Ase Ebeneze) from which Asaba Ase came (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931). Ozuem moved further inland and founded Aviara in Isoko North LGA (Okolugbo, 2004). Ase Azaga said they came from Ase about when Aboh was founded (Hubbard, 1948). Ase Imonite said Ase was originally at Abetaw [Abuato] before splitting into three, i.e., Ase Azaga, Ase Imonite and Ase Ebeneze (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931). Later, other settlers from Isoko land joined the original Ase people (Welch, 1934; Forde & Jones, 1950).

Umuolu - The community comprises three quarters: Ogbe-Aboh, Ugbama, and Egedebili. The clan tradition indicates that the inhabitants migrated from different places even though their language is Aboh-Igbo. However, two main tribal groupings are identified: the Ukwuanis, who occupy Ogbe-Aboh, the largest Umuolu quarter, and the Ijaws, who occupy the Ugbama and Egedebili quarters. According to Hubbard (1948), Ogbe-Aboh was founded in the latter part of the 16th Century by one Okonta [whom Okolugbo called Okorocho], who came from the Echalla quarter of Abbi with his two sons, Enaro [Inalu] and Ejoro. One Ugbamaowi joined Okorocho from Odi in the Ijaw country [Bayelsa State] to establish the Ugbama quarter. The Egedebili group, comprising migrants from Ekpetiama [Bayelsa State], later moved to Umuolu (Okolugbo (2004: 20). A third tribal group comprising the Isoko tribe arrived in the town much later than the Ukwuani and Ijaw groups. It is also worth noting that Boston (1960) notes that Umuolu has Igala origin.

Onya – According to information gathered by G. W. Williams (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931), Uwa, who led an expedition from Benin, founded Onya. Later, two quarters from Amogu [Possibly Imogu in Emuoha, Rivers State or Umuagu in Imo State] and Iboni (Ijaw), one from Iyede (Isoko), and one from Ipie (Ijaw) joined the settlement. Other groups from Okpe-Isoko and Ibedeni also moved to Onya (Uwechue, 2013). According to the Onya tradition Okolugbo (2004: 10) narrated, Uwa, the progenitor of Onya, was said to have migrated from Emegu [Imogu] in Eastern Deta. Two sons of one Etebuozo, one of whom is named Obruese, later joined Uwa in Onya. Other migrants, including Ubunem from Ebeni [Iboni] in Ijaw land and Umugaga from Iyede in Isoko land, moved to Onya. Boston (1960) notes that Onya has Igala origin. Thus, Onya is of mixed origin. At first, all the various groups spoke their languages, but over time, they merged into a composite whole and adopted Ukwuani as their tongue.

Adaiwai (Adiai) – The clan comprises four villages: Obi-Ofu, Utu, Utuechi, and Adaiwai. Not much is known about their history. It is suggested that the clan came from East of the Niger (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931: 6). They moved to their present sites after protracted wars with their powerful neighbour, Aboh (Hubbard, 1948). The Inam

quarter of the clan moved to its present site in Onitsha, and the Ogbe-Ani quarter moved to join the Utagbas at Utagba Ogbe (Kwale). Williams asserts that the move occurred between 1840 and 1860 (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931).

Onogbokor—The oral tradition maintains that Edo, the town's founder, and his followers migrated from Okpe-Isoko to Umuolu and Akarai lands in about 1880 (Uwechue, 2013). The town is Isoko-speaking, with migrants from neighboring Ndosumili/Ukwani and Ijaw communities.

Ibrede—The clan's constituent villages include Ibrede, Iyedeama, Awa, Lagos-Iyede, Okah, Ogege, Anyama, and Okoroafor, also called Iselegu Iyadeama. According to tradition, the town's founding began with the migration of one Ugbo from Onya accompanied by his followers. They are called UruAboh and probably arrived in about 1780 (Uwechue, 2013). They own the Ani (land) and Uloho (water) deities or fetishes (N.A.I. File No. 28903, 1932; Uwechue, 2013). Later, Onuboku, Ugbo's son (probably the succeeding senior elder), permitted a migrant party from Iyede, led by one Egbeju, to settle with them. This migrant party is said to have come from Ovie's quarters in Iyede due to the cruelty of their king (Ovie) (N.A.I. File No. 28903, 1932; Oral Interview: Ojobo, S., 02/07/2024). They founded the Etevie section with their leadership under the Odionlogbo (Uwechue, 2013). Due to the large number of the Isokos in the clan, their language has supplanted the Aboh/Onya language.

Azagba – The town, also known as Azagba-Ubieni, comprises several family groups (*Imusu*) with origins in different ethnic groups, for example, Ijaw, Urhobo, Ukwuani/Ndosumili, and Isoko, each arriving at Azagba at different times (Izuogu, 2019). The researcher, who recorded 21 *Imusus* in Azagba, provided helpful information about the town's origins using historical linguistics, archival documents, and cultural history. According to Izuogu (2019), Onyah was the first to come to Azagba in the late 1780s from Biseni, Yenagoa area of Bayelsa State. Other early settlers to the community in the 1860s include the Umu-Opia and Umu-Ozegbe families, whose forebears came from Orogun. Other families who came to Azagba from the late 1880s to early 1900s and their sources of origin (in brackets) are shown as follows: Umu-Obogbuem/Aninta (Ushie), Umu-Alumekpe (Ogume), Umu Owrodu (Ada Irri), Umu-Onah (Aboh), Umu-Egivri (Okpe-Isoko), and Umu-Atano (Owhe). The mentioned towns where these migrations originated are all in Delta State, Nigeria. Another version of their origin narrated by Okolugbo (2004) indicates that the founders of Azagba migrated from the family of Oborobiri at Ibedeni and were joined later by other settlers from Ushie and Okpe in Isoko land.

Ibedeni – The clan's villages include Ibedeni, Ekpe and Osafo. There are several versions of their origin. According to the account captured by Miller, Ibedeni claims to have been from Benin by one Onowu-Ozegbe (N.A.I. File No. 28903, 1932). The writer dismissed this account because they had given the name of their eponymous founder as Obode. The version of origin suggested by Hubbard (1948: 204) indicates that Ibedeni is likely to be among the Aboh party. He notes that Ibedeni descended from offshoots of the southern migration of the Aboh under Ogwezi. Another source of origin provided by Okolugbo (2004: 22) notes that Ibedeni people believe “Edeni and Ibe from whose names the word Ibedeni originated migrated from Benin with Ebiridue, Etebu, Teme, and Oborobiri.” Before moving to their present location, they moved through Akoku, Aboh, Enwu, and near Aviara.

Utuoku—It comprised two villages, namely Utuoku and Warri Utuoku. Aboh-Igbo and Isoko languages heavily influenced the clan. Hubbard (1948) traced the origin of the Utuoku clan to a movement of one family from the village of Amegu [Possibly Imogu in Emuoha, Rivers State or Umuagu in Imo State] in the old Owerri Province. It is noted that the movement took place before the founding of Aboh. Later, some emigrants moved and founded Warri Utuoku, which is still regarded as part of Utuoku (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931: 20). The same report notes, “The people of Utuoku are of Ijaw extraction” (75).

6.2. Ukwuani communities and clans

This section presents information on the origins and migrations of Ukwuani communities and clans. Figure 3 shows the possible migratory paths of their communities and clans.

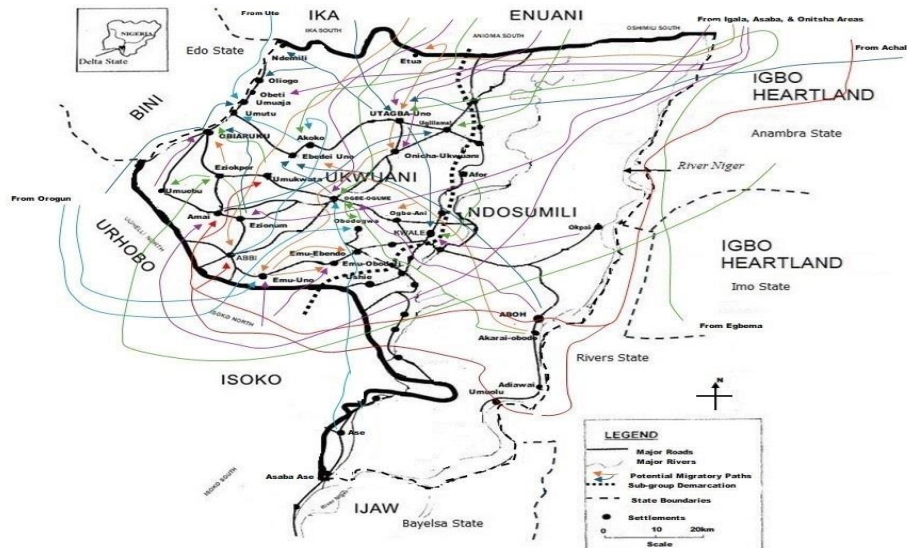


Figure 3: Migratory paths of Ukwuani communities

Source: Produced by the Authors

Utagba – The Utagba clan, the largest Ukwuani community by population, consists of seven semi-autonomous quarters (Fordes & Jones, 1950, p. 49). Some of the units include Ikilibi, Umu-Onicha, and Umu-Nsukwa. Four sections of the clan came from Onitsha, and three from the Nsukwa area (Fordes & Jones, 1950). In acquiescence, Okolugbo (2004: 19) comments, “Most of these [Utagba] settlements were of mixed Eastern and Western Igbo origin”. According to Izuegbu (2003: 3-4), the Ikilibi quarter was the first to arrive, founded by a migrant band led by one Eziza (Ezizanweani) from Akumazi in Ika land on the 15th Century. Nzei (1997: 121) notes that the oral tradition of Ikilibi also claims autochthony.

A section of the Etua quarter was also said to have come from Akumazi-Umuocha, while the others came from Atuma-Iga in the Aniocha area. A section of Isumpe and Umuseti quarters came from Onitsha (Okolugbo, 2004). The researcher added that Umusadege, Umusam, and Umusadeli came from Nsukwa in Oshimili South LGA. A version of the Umu-Onicha group popular among the Umuseti section claims that a group led by Adamgbodongbo and his four children, Ezeti, Ezeodu, Ezemu, and Isulumani, fled Benin to sojourn first at Onicha-Olona en route to their present site in Utagba-Uno (Izuegbu, 2003). However, another version of their origins from the Umu-Onicha tradition collected from Isumpe quarters denies the existence of Adamgbodongbo as their leader from Benin. Instead, the tradition traces its origin to Epumegede, who originally migrated from Egbema in Imo State to Onitsha, where he lived for some time. Later, he crossed the Niger with his group to their site in Utagba-Uno. The Isumpe tradition appears credible. There is also an Awka element (Awamaka or Umu-Oka) among the Isumpe people. They are believed to be Awka blacksmiths who arrived in the area around the 16th Century (Opone, 2017a).

Many villages were established by immigrants from the seven quarters of Utagba-Uno. These include Ndemili (bordering Alidima, an Ika community), established from the Umusadege quarter; Oliogo founders came from the Umuseti quarters. Utagba Ogbe (also known as Kwale) has settlers from Umusam, Umusadege, Umusadeli, Umuseti, and Isumpe villages. Other settlements around Kwale include Ogbe-ani, whose founders came from Adiawai (Okolugbo, 2004: 10) and the Igbo heartland; Obetim, with settlers from Afor (Fordes & Jones, 1950: 49), and Beneku has migrants from Odekpe in Anambra State (Uwechue, 2013).

Onicha Ukwuani - Willimas writes, "The people of Ukwuani claim to be autochthonous," he also notes an indirect link to Benin (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931: 16). Other views of their origin also exist. According to Fordes and Jones (1950), Onicha Ukwuani was founded by immigrants from Utagba Uno and Onitsha in Anambra State. Nzei (1997)

reports that oral traditions collected from settlements in the area also claim Benin ancestry. The version of tradition accepted claims that Eze-Odu and Eze-Emu moved away from Utagba-Uno with their followers, and Eze-Odu founded the Eweshi village of Onicha-Ukwuani. Other migrants founded other sections of the Onicha-Ukwuani community, such as the Amoji-Ubulu, founded by migrants from Ubulu, Aniocha South LGA. Ike-Onicha and Ibabu-Onicha sections were founded by settlers from Nsukwa (Opone, 2017a). Ugiliamai was founded in two processions by early settlers from Amai in Ukwuani LGA and Ashama in Aniocha South LGA (Blank NEWS Online, 2014).

Emu – The Emu clan is closely associated with Onicha Ukwuani (Fordes & Jones, 1950; Okolugbo, 2004). Different versions of the origin of Emu exist. One version of the story suggests that the forebears of Emu, alongside the Amoji people, migrated from Benin to Onicha Ukwuani, from where they moved to Emu Uno. Still part of this version, Emu was said to be the son of Ezemu, who founded Emu Uno from Onicha-Ukwuani. Another version is that Eze-Emu from Onicha Ukwuani founded Emu-Uno, and his brother's son, Olor, joined him (Opone, 2017b).

The oral traditions published by Okolugbo (2004: 20) note that Olo [Olor] and his wife Emu migrated from Onicha-Ukwuani to found Emu Uno. This version is consistent with evidence gathered from our fieldwork indicating that Emu and his wife Olor came from Benin through Onicha Olona to Onitsha, from where they moved to Onicha Ukwuani (the Eweshi quarter) before founding Emu Uno (Oral interviews: Chiefs Ogwezzy, G.C. and Wayer, W., 6/5/2023). The common themes in the origin of the Emu clan are the association with Onicha Ukwuani and "*Olor ni Emu*" (Olor and Emu), a common saying among the clan. Other offshoots of the Emu clan include Emu-Ebendo, Emu-Obodeti, Emu-Anioma, and Emu-Iyasele. Other evidence uncovered relates to the presence of Emu families with ties to Owhe in Isoko North LGA and Orogun in Ughelli North LGA. Williams notes strong ties between the Emu people and their Sobo [Isoko and Urhobo] neighbours (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931: 145).

Ogume – According to Igwara (1993: 243), "within the Ogume sub-group, some sections migrated from Nnewi in the Igbo area to the east, whereas others came from Benin". Nzei (1997: 121) notes that some settlements of the Ogume clan lay claim to Igala ancestry. However, the Benin ancestral claim seems the most popular (Forde & Jones, 1950; Okolugbo, 2004). Ekele (2000) traces the earliest settlers of Ogume to the Ogbe quarter of the Benin Kingdom. According to their oral tradition, Ezedogume, with his four brothers, Chime, Odumegwu, Agbulu, and Ogwezi Olodu left Benin after a dispute to join the Aboh party moving eastward. They settled at Obi-Aka, where they dispersed to other settlements. The Obodo Etitu group in Ogbagu-Ogume was founded by hunters, including Ossai Ojugbeli, Ogwezi Omai, Mokobia, and others; collectively, they are known as Umu-Ishiomu. The Umu-Iyana group was led by Okpala Olodu and his brother, Ogwezi Olodu. Immigrants from Ase, Akarai, and Umu-Iwele also settled in Ogbagu-Ogume (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931).

Agbulu Akah, Chime, Odumegwu, and Ugwua founded Ogbole-Ogume, Umuchime-Ogume, Utue-Ogume, and Obodo-Ugwua, respectively (Okolugbo, 2004; Opia, 2023). Two brothers, Ezede and Ifeloji [Ifuloji], were the first to settle in Ogbe-Ogume (Okolugbo, 2004; Opia, 2023). Other settlers in Ogbole-Ogume include the Amanta-led Ogwashi-Ukwu group, the Umu Ojeh family, and their fellow Onya group (Opia, 2023).

Ebedei - The Ebedei tradition claims autochthonous origin (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931), insisting that God had three sons who were the founders of Benin, Aboh, and Ebedei, and these were the first inhabitants of the earth. Another tradition notes that Ebedei moved from a site near Ogume to their present location in a tertiary migration or because of hostilities (Ekele, 2000; Okolugbo, 2004). Nevertheless, another tradition says Udei was the ancestor of Ebedei, who had left Benin to settle in Aboh, where he had two children: Okpu and Ezie-Ogoli (Okolugbo, 2004). Udei's children first lived together in Umunyalum; later, Ezie-Ogoli moved to Ogbe Ata, and his descendants settled at Umuezie-Ogoli. Other immigrants later joined the children of Udei; these include people from the Ogbe-Uzu quarter who came from Akarai, Isumelu, and Ukwu-ole quarters from Ogume, and Umu-Osele, who came from Benin (Okolugbo, 2004). The original inhabitants of Adonishaka came from the Ogbe-Uzu.

Akoku – The clan comprises Umutu, Umuaja, Ugulu, and Obeti. The tradition of Akoku's origin is traceable to four different waves of migration. According to the tradition recorded by Williams (N.A.I. File No. 26769: 18), the Umuaja quarter was the first to arrive, having moved from Ute in the Ika North LGA. The Obeti quarter from Igala

land followed. The next arrivals were from the Umutu quarter from Abbi, and the Ugulu quarter came from Ogwashi-Ukwu. The Umutu quarter moved to their present sites near the bank of river Ethiope from Akoku in about 1860 (Uti, 2006: 82), probably to ward off Benin encroachment through Urhonigbe. However, Williams (N.A.I. File No. 26769: 19) reported that the relocation resulted from a dispute between Umutu and Obeti.

Umutu – Oral tradition gathered at the town indicates that early settlers of the town descended from Utu, whose ancestors migrated from east of the Niger to Akarai in Ndokwa East LGA (Opone, 2017a). The tradition points to Igiri around Achalla, from where Amacha, the founder of Abbi, migrated to Aboh (Oral Interview: Diokpa Aswuai T., 15/09/2023). This explains the secondary migration of Umutu people to Abbi, where they lived for many years before moving to Akoku and then to their present location. At present, Umutu no longer claims any relationship with Abbi.

Amai – There are several versions of the origin of the Amai clan. One version, as told by the Aboh people (N.A.I. File No. 26769: 14), says the first Obi “settled people at Amai to keep him informed of the state of the country there.” The community’s name, Amai, is derived from “amma,” meaning a wartime warning scouts gave. Amai’s neighbours agree with this version of the story; however, a caveat must be provided – Williams noted he collected information from Amai’s neighbours during a land dispute. Another tradition links Amai’s ancestors to those of Abbi and Umukwata. This tradition says the Amai, Abbi, and Umukwata people left Achalla in Eastern Nigeria and settled in Aboh for some years before moving to their current locations. Thus, they are collectively known as Umu-Nze. Forde and Jones (1950: 49) reported another claim that a man called Effe from Benin settled near Aboh. He had a dispute with the Obi of Aboh, so he left to found Effe near Orogun. Later, he married a Ughelli (Urhobo) woman who gave birth to the founders of Orogun, Abbi, and Amai.

Another Amai tradition, according to Okolugbo (2004: 18), claims that the founder of the Amai clan was an elephant hunter called Amai from Igala land. Upon finding the country pleasant, he returned home to invite his family and friends to settle there. Amai had four sons (in order of seniority) Ekwum, Nge, Aguma, and Osele, who later founded the Umu-Ekwum, Amai-Nge, Ishikaguma, and Umuosele quarters of Amai.

Abbi - According to the information provided by some elders from Umia and Elovie quarters of Abbi, an Igbo hunter named Ammatcha [Amacha] migrated from Achalla in Awka, Anambra State, to found Abbi (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931; Opone, 2017b). Amacha left Achalla in the company of his brother, Ukwata, and settled first among the Akarai Igbo people at the present site of Aboh town. He was said to have lived and fathered many children, including Aninta, Okolo and Ogwazi. After some time, he left with his family to settle at Umuolu, in Ndokwa East LGA. From Umuolu, he migrated to Ashaka, leaving part of his shrine (the present Ndiche Abbi) with some of his people there. According to the tradition, he moved with his children to Ushie.

In one of his hunting expeditions, he founded a settlement he considered very fertile for cultivation (Oral Interview: Chief Enuenwosu, J.A., 27/08/2012). He named his new settlement “*Kanyi bili nebeni*” (Let us settle here), later shortened to Abbi (Oral Interview: Chief Ezulu J., 27/08/2023). Another version says Amacha’s hunting nickname was Abbi. Later, two other migrant groups led by Ewolokpo and Okpara Ogwezi joined them. The latter groups were said to have settled at Abbi at different times. The three families lived in what came to be known as the Elovie quarter of Abbi. After some time, Owolukpo, Udu, and Okpala Ogwezi (of Ubulu Ukwu origin) and his followers moved further to form the second quarter of Abbi known as Umia. A section from Umia established another settlement, Owa-Abbi, close to the Ethiope River (Okolugbo, 2004). The third quarter, Okwele is believed to have been founded by a group of hunters who strayed on their journey southward from Benin (Okolugbo, 2004: 16). Earlier, we noted another version of the origin linking Abbi, Orogun, and Amai (Forde and Jones (1950: 49); Mallison reported the same story in N.A.I. File No. 29300 (1939: 15).

Umukwata – Mallison’s version of origin in N.A.I. File No. 29300 (1939: 18) differs from what is presented above. He notes that the Umukwata must have been one of the early settlements from Benin. According to the story, a man named Ezike was the first to come to the land. He had two sons: Akwata and Ugbome. On one of Akwata’s hunting trips, he found a “very powerful juju,” which he gave to his father. To honour his son, Ezike decreed that their town

should be known as Umukwata. Ugbome married an Eziokpor woman, Unguru [Uguru], whom Akashiada fathered. Today, the town comprises three quarters, i.e., the descendants of Ezike, Ugbome, and Akwata.

Umu-Akashiada – The clan comprises Eziokpor, Ezionum, Obiaruku and Umuebu communities. These communities have common traditions of origin centred on Akashiada, their eponymous ancestor. According to the intelligence report on the area by Millers (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931), the early inhabitants of this clan descended from an ancestor, Akashiada, whom they believe fell from heaven near the present site of Umuoshi quarters of Eziokpor. He brought a small elephant tusk, which is now in the possession of the Okpala-Ukwu of Eziokpor. Akashiada is said to have married two wives. By the first, he had three sons and one daughter, and by the second, a son. The first wife's three sons (for example, Okpor, Ezhie, and Ebu) founded Eziokpor, Ezionum, and Umuebu communities (Okolugbo, 2004). The daughter, Uguru, married a man named Obia of Umukwata and established the Umungurobia quarters of Umukwata. Another tradition of the origin of Umu-Akashiada claims that Akashiada and his followers arrived in the area in a wave of migration from Benin during the 15th Century and are the first settlers to Ukwuani/Ndosumili land (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931; Okolugbo, 2004). Scholars have, however, contested this claim (Ohadike, 1994; Opono, 2017a, 2017b).

A version of the clan's oral history presented by Umukoro and Oweniwe (2022) notes that a party left Asaba for Ejeme, where one Onumgbunum was born. He moved to Eziokpor around 1700 AD, where he met Akashiede [Akashiada]. In this account, Ezhie is the daughter of Akashiede, with whom Onumgbunum had three children: Ossai, Odumegwu, and Anie. Furthermore, Umukoro and Oweniwe (2022) offered another version of this clan's origins. These commentators noted that Onuma was the founder of Ezionum [Ezionum], and his brothers were Okpor and Ebu. According to this account, Ossai, the first son of Onuma and Ezhie, had three children: Odumegwu, Osele, and Ine [Anie]. Later, Ine [Anie] gave birth to Osumili, Ughomeh, and Ezeogbu.

A recent tradition collected claims that Akashiada and his followers migrated to their present location from Eastern Nigeria in waves and settled first at the Umuoshi quarters of Eziokpor (Opono, 2017b). Likewise, oral traditions collected in Eziokpor by Prof. D. Nwoga and his group indicated that the town's founders came from the "eastern part of Igbo land" (Nzei, 1997: 121). Another tradition notes that some Umuebu people believe their ancestors came from Ebu, an Igala speaking community in Oshimili North LGA (Ohadike, 1994: 26). Umuebu and Abraka [In Urhobo land] bonded in times of war (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931). Some quarters in Ezionum claim they migrated from the Ugboma clan of Asaba, likely passing through Utchi and Afor (Uwechue, 2013; Azikiwe, 2015; Ohadike, 1994, p. 26; Opono, 2017a; 2017b). The saying among the Ezionum people, "*Ezionum Asaba Utchi*," lends some credence to this claim.

7. UKWUANI/NDOSUMILI ORIGINS: OBSERVATIONS AND CRITIQUE

The archived accounts of the origins and migrations of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people contain information gathered by colonial agents (example, Mr. Williams) and some clergymen (example, Rev. Basden). Some of these individuals were not trained historians or ethnographers who knew precisely what they were doing. At best, their efforts to provide evidence about the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people's past were mainly motivated by administrative imperatives, as previously noted. The rigour seen in academic studies was absent in their archival works. Thus, the historicity of their accounts of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people's past leaves too much to be desired. It can be noticed from the archival documents that some of the towns (for example, Akoku, Abraka, Ibedeni) sometimes whimsically changed stories of their origins. This study opines that some towns perhaps provided answers to suit what the "interrogator" wanted to hear.

One major problem with the colonial agents' accounts of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people's origins was the overreliance on the information provided by one town, Aboh, and its prominent monarch, the Obi of Aboh of the era, who was regarded as *primus inter pares*, as such was relied upon to narrate the history of neighbouring communities (N.A.I. File No. 26769: 7). Accordingly, one town's/clan's account of the history of such communities as Afor, Ashaka, Ossissa, Amai, Ase, Ashaka, and others was taken as the final word. It is disingenuous when the

archives writers commented, “According to Aboh or its monarch, community X came from Benin.” A better way to present such facts is to allow each town to tell its story. It is not suggested that communities had no chance to do so; many did.

It is also critical to moot reasons why the account of Aboh and its monarch might have featured prominently in their accounts. Recall that the British colonial government favoured an easy and efficient way to rule the conquered land. According to Ogedengbe (1971: 170-171), the British colonial administration was interested in “the status of the Obi of Aboh” in the heyday of their rule in Nigeria. In response, Oba Eweka II (1914-1933) proffered a prestigious testimony for the Obi of Aboh, noting that the latter descended from the Benin royal family. However, Ogedengbe raised concerns regarding the veracity of that claim. Perhaps in obeisance to the Oba of Benin or to meet the needs of the coloniser, it might be expedient for the Obi to extend Benin connections to neighbouring communities as the Aboh’s accounts of their neighbours’ origins did.

In other parts of the archives, the writers claim to know precisely when and where the Ukwuani/Ndosumili communities originated. For example, Williams writes, “*it seems likely that the earliest settlers—the Umuakashiada, Abbi, Emu, and Umukwata clans—arrived during the early part of the 15th century*” from Benin (N.A.I. File No. 26769: 6). Some people from the area may believe such proclamations because the White man said so even when links to Benin had not been suggested, at least for Abbi and Umukwata, as highlighted in this study. Furthermore, our analyses of the archives found that the writers of these documents also relied on fetishes, many made of brass and bronze (N.A.I. CSO/26/3/28903: 9), that locals present as proofs of links to Benin. It is worth noting that when these archival documents were being compiled, Benin was about the only known source of bronze work in the area. The Igbo Ukwu bronze art excavations had not gained prominence (Field, 1940). Perhaps that knowledge could have tempered their writings; it is difficult to know.

The colonial archival documents also suggested that the Akashiada group were the first settlers in the Ukwuani/Ndosumili area in the 15th. Century. This is far from the truth. Evidence suggests migrations to the Ukwuani/Ndosumili area occurred earlier. Alagoa (2004) identified Afor as one of the first settlers to the area in the 13th. Century. Opone (2017a: 137) argues that the Akashiada group came to the area in the 17th. Century, and their “final movement took place in the closing decades of the nineteenth century (1880)” with the founding of Obiaruku (Ohadike, 1994; Azikiwe, 2015). Indeed, Utchi and Afor in Ukwuani/Ndosumili land are known as towns from which larger towns elsewhere, for example, Okpanan and Ubulu Ukwu in Enuani, have sprung (Opone, 2022). Additionally, population demographics and demographic history related to growth rates (Preston et al., 2001) cannot support the claim that the Akashiada group is the area’s oldest settlers in the Ukwuani land. For instance, when the British visited their towns in 1904 (Isichei, 1977), their population was approximately a few thousand. About thirty years later, during the 1931 census, the Akashiada group’s population - excluding Abraka - of around 5,000 males and females was too small to suggest a more prolonged occupation (N.A.I. File No. 29300, 1939; Ogedengbe, 1971). This fact does not support the claim that the clan occupied their location since the 15th. Century. The colonial agents erroneously concluded that the Akashiada group was the oldest in the area because of their proximity to Benin. Evidence provided by Opone (2017a; 2022) indicates that they are indeed the newest settlers in the Ukwuani/Ndosumili area.

Regarding autochthony, which few clans/towns in Ukwuani land claim, caution must be exercised. A clan or clan’s leader claiming autochthony to impress neighbours is one thing, but for indigenes and local historians to accept such boasting as a fact without interrogating such proclamations is, at best, off-putting. Sadly, some Ukwuani/Ndosumili commentators are beginning to claim autochthony for the whole area (Ozah, 2010); there is a grave danger in embarking on this path as the people’s history may be distorted and suffer thereafter. It may interest such proponents to know that “The earliest known example of a fossil skeleton with negroid features, perhaps 10,000 years old, was found at Iii Ileru in Western Nigeria” (Metz, 1991). If man had originated from the Ukwuani/Ndosumili area, science would have said so.

The information about the origins of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people highlights the prevalence of several Igbo names or identities, even when the eponymous founders of Ukwuani/Ndosumili clans are said to be Bini settlers emigrating from Benin. One would have expected these founders to bear Bini names or give some of their new settlements Bini names. This raises doubts about the veracity of these accounts, as Ozah (2010) and Opone (2017a) showed. Let us present a fact from history. The account of Aboh party migration provided by Ogedengbe (1971) noted a series of mythical arrows shot by the group as they wandered toward the final destinations in Ukwuani/Ndosumili land. Interestingly, one of the first towns where these mythical arrows landed, as they moved out of Benin, was Ogwashi Ukwu, not Sapoba or Siluko in the Benin territory. It is worth noting that there is a community called *Aboh-Ogwashi Ukwu* between Ogwashi Ukwu main town and Onitsha, Anambra State. A migratory path tale referencing a community like that might be more convincing and believable. The account of the Aboh party migratory path might have been fabricated to accommodate the prestige of the old Benin Kingdom. As noted herein, Basden (1938) attributed the founding of Aboh to Ogwezi and his party, who began their journey from Onitsha. They could not have gone to Benin City to begin that journey to Aboh.

Another point worth showcasing is that there are differing versions of the origins of clans and towns, with several founding fathers reported as founders of a single clan or town. With such confusion, ascertaining which account to believe becomes daunting. Certain aspects of their history appear to be favoured than others. For example, Okolugbo (2004: 20) writes that “Utagba-Ogbe tradition maintains that the founder of the clan [town] was a hunter from Benin who after discovering the settlement went to Utagba-Unor to bring others to join him.” It is befuddling to know that a Bini man goes to a community that is not his to ask people to join him in settling a new territory. Nevertheless, this is the sort of trumped-up story told.

It is challenging to accept arguments put forward by the colonial administrators and some local historians that these migrants from Benin, upon “settling in their new territory adopted the language and some of the customs of their eastern neighbours, the Igbo” (Okolugbo, 2004: 23) The assertion is likely flawed given history has shown that when elements from dominant cultures or civilizations like the Benin move elsewhere, they tend to retain elements of their customs, including language in their new lands. For example, Britain has retained linguistic imprints from the Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Norsemen (Vikings), and French (Normans). In Delta State, the Olukumi, a bilingual Anioma group of the Aniocha North LGA who originated from Yoruba land, have retained cultural and linguistic affinity to the Yoruba. The same applies to the Ebu and Orogun peoples of Delta State, Nigeria, who retained traces of their cultural past. The Igbo Akiri (Igbanke) clan remains culturally Igbo to date, even though it is in Edo State. In Ukwuani/Ndosumili land, towns (for example, Ibredeni, Azagba, Onya) with immigrants from the Isoko, Urhobo, and Ijaw tribes did not wholly forget their customs or languages. The case of the purported Edo-speakers who migrated and founded settlements in Ukwuani/Ndosumili land is perplexing.

The Benin immigrants did not only fail to bring any of their customs (besides the institutionalised Obishop among the Aboh and leadership terms like *Iyasele*) to Ukwuani/Ndosumili land, but they also forgot to sustain any portion of the Bini language on the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people (Ozah, 2010). There may be similarities between the Bini and Ukwuani/Ndosumili languages; if any exist, they are marginal (Afigbo, 1981). The language spoken by any social group clearly “provides a useful guide in terms of territorial search for origins” (Atanda, 1980: 65-67). The contradicting issue, however, is that all Ukwuani/Ndosumili clans who claim Benin as their place of origin speak an Igboid language/dialect rather than Bini. African scholars have used linguistic evidence or common language as clues to people’s territorial origin. For example, Lewis (1966) employed linguistic evidence to provide a more logical answer to the problems of Gala and Somali origins. Ukwuani/Ndosumili clans do not speak Bini. Ogedengbe (1971: 60) highlighted the steep language change existing between Ukwuani/Ndosumili land and Benin (Edo) areas in contrast to realities among the Ukwuani/Ndosumili and their Ijaw or Isoko/Urhobo neighbours.

The preceding issue could have arisen from a poorly constructed premise. Historians (Nwaokocha, 2015; Opone, 2017a; Ogedengbe, 1971; Ijomah, 2010) have argued that there was a primary Igbo migration from across the Niger (Nri kingdom and perhaps Isu as well) to the boundary of the old Benin kingdom. These migrants might have

included fortune seekers, medicine men, etc. After living in the Benin territory for some time, hostilities broke out between these Igbo settlers and Benin sometime in the 15th. and 16th. centuries, which resulted in these people's secondary migration back to the Enuani territory, Onitsha, and Ukwuani/Ndosumili land (recall the Aboh party) (Opone, 2017a; Nwaokocha, 2015). The fable Eze Chima migration exemplifies this returned migration; there may be many more. As Nwaokocha (2015: 25) notes, these retreating people are not Bini, but Igbos. Others (Afigbo, 1981; Opone, 2017a; Ogedengbe, 1971; Ohadike, 1994; Ijomah, 2010) acquiesce. Okolugbo and others who have ascribed these returnees as Benin founders/settlers on Ukwuani/Ndosumili land might have done so incorrectly. Afigbo (1981: 11-12) is of the view that the Igbo-speaking people west of the Niger, including Ukwuani/Ndosumili are bona fide Igbo people. A Ukwuani academic, Oluka-Nwaeze (2009: 123), agrees that "many Ukwuani communities are off migrants from Igboland."

7.2. The Appeal for Benin origin

The prominence of the Oba of Benin in the heyday of the Benin kingdom could be one justification for why groups like the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people and others desiring prestige would reconstruct their origin to connect with mighty Benin to boost their stature (Afigbo, 1981; Opone, 2017a; Nwaokocha, 2015). Afigbo (1981: 18-19) elucidates that it is a common habit for humankind to "identify with the great and successful as a result of which people generally like to trace their pedigrees to great families and great empires."

Tied to the preceding is Bini oral traditions' desire to project influence on areas where such may be minimal or non-existent. For example, Egharevba (1931) notes, "The early people of ... the Eka and Ibo-speaking peoples of the west bank of the Niger, Aboh and the peoples of Onitsha are emigrants from Benin." Similarly, Okolugbo (2004, p. 14) writes that "Oba Eweka II believed that the Obi of Aboh was sent by Oba Ozolua to rule from Adofi River down to the Niger River." There are no accounts of any Ukwuani/Ndosumili clans, including Aboh, paying tributes to the Benin Kingdom as their overlord. However, accounts of wars between Benin and some Ukwuani/Ndosumili clans and those fought alongside neighbouring towns like Ejeme in Enuani abound (Okolugbo, 2004; Onyekpe, 2012). Furthermore, the Bini say "*Edo ore Isi Agbon*," meaning "Edo is the candle of the world," yet refer to their neighbours like the Ukwuani/Ndosumili, whom they claim emigrated from their land as Owi Oru [Owiru] (Edolites, 2024), an appellation with two conceivable connotations, one undoubtedly derogatory (the people of servitude) and the other, geographical (the people of the Niger delta). Be that as it may, the Bini's view of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people is capricious.

According to Nwaokocha (2015: 26), another reason why the Benin myth gained popularity could be attributed to historians like Prof. K. O. Dike, who "had opined that though the Anioma [including Ukwuani/Ndosumili] are Igbo-speaking, they were not originally Igbo."

Another point relates to events at the outset of the Nigerian Civil War when Aniomans, including Ukwuani/Ndosumili people living in other parts of Nigeria, had to amplify their Benin origin to save their lives and those of loved ones (Nwaokocha, 2015; Oral Interview: Wayer, P., 6/5/2023). Almost all the neighboring Igbo sub-groups in Delta State adopted the same strategy to survive the war (Opone, 2022).

To some Ukwuani/Ndosumili, they see river Niger as an enormous geographic obstacle separating them from the Igbos and thereby making them *bona fide* Binis or whatever (and more recently, other appellations such as South-South have been used). The fact remains that the Niger is a natural artery, regardless of size, connecting many parts and branches of the Igbo family. Some Ndosumili communities, for example, Akarai, Ase, and Aboh have ancestral and family ties on both sides of the river. Aboh oral traditions indicate that some wives and mothers of past Aboh kings came from towns, for example, Ossomari and Atani, across the Niger. Ties exist along the banks of the Niger and across. For example, Williams wrote, "Osai Obi of the section of Umuobi was brought from Oko-Amakom, (a town opposite Obotshi [Obosi, Anambra State]) ... to become King of Aboh" (N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931: 11). Just as people were crossing the Niger in antiquity to settle in Ukwuani/Ndosumili lands (Basden, 1938; Hubbard, 1948; Ohadike, 1994; Alagoa, 2004), people from the western bank of the Niger, including parts of Ukwuani/Ndosumili

land were also crossing to settle in the Igbo heartlands in the mid-19th Century (Hubbard, 1948; N.A.I. File No. 26769, 1931). Some Atani, Ndoni, Ochuche, and Onitsha families can link their forebears to communities in Ukwuani/Ndosumili lands (Ajie, 2011; Oral Interview: Chief Wayer, W., 6/5/2023). The Niger is, therefore, not a separator but a connector or bond between societies of the Igbo heartland and sub-groups on its western bank.

7.2. The Disdain for Igbo origin

So, what is wrong with claiming Igbo origin? There are several reasons why many Ukwuani/Ndosumili people would want to avoid claiming Igbo ancestry. Given that Ukwuani/Ndosumili people are admixtures of different ethnic groups, someone who knows his or her ethnic origin will not accept Igbo ancestry willingly if the person knows his or her roots. For instance, a Ukwuani/Ndosumili person of Isoko or Ijaw origin would not be happy to be linked with Igbo ancestry. Interestingly, some political leaders of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people in the 1950s and 1960s have surnames originating from neighbouring tribes—for instance, Chief D.O.I. Dafe and Honourable J.A.E. Oki are among past Ukwuani/Ndosumili leaders with Urhobo and Ijaw surnames. Such leaders may not warm up to Igbo's origin for the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people they represent, knowing their own non-association to Igbo land.

Forde and Jones (1950: 9) note that the term Igbo has a pejorative meaning to the Oru people, including the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people, who used it to describe the Igbo people in the hinterland. Nzei (1997: 94) notes, "Calling an Ukwuani/Ndosumili free-born *"Onye Igbo"* (Igbo person) is derogatory to him/her, because [slaves and their descendants in area] are called Igbo (*onye or ndi Igbo*), as most of the slaves in [the area] were procured from the Igbo area east of the Niger river." This viewpoint is not localised to Ukwuani/Ndosumili land; other towns in Igbo land, for example, Onitsha, Oguta, and Asaba, share a similar perspective (Nwaokocho, 2015).

Izuegbu (2003: 16) notes that Igbo origin may not be appealing because certain practices, such as the *Osu* caste and cannibalism in the Igbo country in pre-colonial times, may have forced groups of people to migrate out of the region to other places considered safe and peaceful. Thus, when settled in their new lands, they may want to avoid being associated with their dreary history. As Mordi and Opono (2009) note, their non-Igbo status became a revered custom as time passed.

Events during the Nigerian Civil War did not help matters. Due to their ethnic and cultural ties with the Igbo people, many Western Igbos, including the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people, were killed by Federal troops during the Nigerian Civil War (Mordi & Opono, 2009). To create a new identity and protect themselves from what appears to have been an ethnic cleansing campaign by the army during the war, "Many of them relinquished their cultures that have Igbo similitude in order to disassociate themselves from (being identified as) Igbo communities" (Oluka-Nwaeze, 2009: 122).

At the end of the Nigerian Civil War, the Igbo area became marginalized economically and politically. As Afigbo (1987: 16) writes, "Those who had the eyes to see that too close an identification with the so-called Igbo heartland would be, at best, heroic suicide." To that end, ties with the main Igbo group became a stigma. Closely related sub-groups, including the Ikwerre, Ika, and Ogba, took every step to distance themselves from this endangered group. Political instincts to survive and thrive in the hostile political climate of Nigeria at the time and the present gave impetus to publications like "Ndokwa is not Igbo" (Okafor, 2006).

Ukwuani/Ndosumili people may not want to identify with the heartland's Igbo worldview, i.e., the conscious and unconscious ideas and assumptions that inform and influence the lenses through which reality is viewed (Onwuegbuchunam, 2022). An average Ukwuani/Ndosumili man is not overtly aggressive and almost non-assertive. Under certain conditions (for example, politicking), he would wait for coconuts to fall for him to pick rather than climb up the tree to get one himself (Okecha, 1995). Onwuegbuchunam cites Chinua Achebe by noting that Nigerians of all other ethnic groups or sub-groups will achieve consensus in describing the heartland Igbos as aggressive, arrogant, clannish, and greedy; he stressed that such a belief may be an overgeneralization. Whether such beliefs are true or not, an average Ukwuani/Ndosumili man's worldview may differ from those of their cousins from the heartland Igbo. For that, he would not desire to be classified as Igbo.

Stemming from the preceding is the knowledge that some commentators from the area cannot separate the issues of norms or values, historical origins, and regional or national politics. To such individuals, these concepts are conflated. This study shows that most - not all - Ukwuani/Ndosumili clans and settlements have historical roots in the Igbo heartland. This study concurs with proclamations indicating that these two branches of the larger Igbo grouping do not necessarily subscribe to the same social ideologies and norms. Boise (2024) espouses a similar viewpoint by noting that while the origin of the Igbo communities in the Delta State of Nigeria is not in doubt, they are sociologically different from those in the Igbo heartland. Regarding politics, Oluka-Nwaeze (2009: 121) notes, "groups compete for allocation of economic resources, occupation of positions of power in government, for siting of development projects, and many more, and these are issues that ethnic sentiments are played." As such, distancing oneself from a group that is seen as marginalised, unfortunately, makes much sense (Afigbo, 1987). Notwithstanding, any ethnic group or sub-group can create its own political realities and clamour for what suits it the best; however, this study cautions against erasing recent historical facts to suit today's politics. It is worth noting that Joshi et al. (2023) demonstrate that Yoruba, Ibibio, Bini, Igbo, and Izon [Ijaw], and logically, in that mix, the Ukwuani/Ndosumili are all genetically similar. Politics is superficial and divisive, oftentimes employed to pit one group against another, at least in Southern Nigeria.

8. CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has contributed to research in the following ways:

- This study brings to the fore the historical origins of a people most often obfuscated in contemporary literature. Namely, it critically analyses the origins of a small ethnic sub-group, the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people in Nigeria, which not many historians have paid attention to. In doing so, it adds to the growing body of work showcasing the origins of small ethnic groupings in the area (Mordi & Opone, 2009; Nwaokocha, 2015) to enrich knowledge.
- This study draws attention to the role played by the then-British colonial administration in presenting a subjective, speculative origin for Ukwuani/Ndosumili clans and communities. Like others (Ikime, 2006; Ozah, 2010; Okpevra, 2021), this work disputes the historicity of their records of the origins of some ethnic groups (and sub-groups) in Southern Nigeria.
- It deposes the false narrative that Benin is the primary source of origin of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people. In that regard, this study acquiesces with others (Afigbo, 1981; Ohadike, 1994; Nwaokocha, 2015; Opone, 2017a; Ogedengbe, 1971; Ijomah, 2010) who argue that the settlers of Ukwuani/Ndosumili and the neighboring Enuani areas are not Bini, but Igbo. To justify the fabricated Bini connection stories, many of these accounts, for some reason, always begin in Benin and are later anchored on towns near the Niger (for example, Asaba and Onitsha) before ending in Ukwuani/Ndosumili land.
- Past historical sources reassessed and present insights uncovered indicate that many communities in Ukwuani/Ndosumili land have the origins of their apical ancestors in the Igbo heartland. This fact has often been shelved for various reasons.
- This study highlights the impact of unfavourable political, social, cultural, and economic factors in Nigeria (Afigbo, 1980; Igwara, 1993; Mordi & Opone, 2009; Oluka-Nwaeze, 2009) on small ethnic sub-groups that could visibly be classified as belonging to the pro-Igbo language group to deny links to that grouping ostensibly.
- A work of this sort can serve as a compass to guide the Ukwuani/Ndosumili youth as they navigate their ethnic identity maze.

Future research using emerging techniques in anthropology, archeology, and genetic ancestry (DNA) testing could be commissioned to shed more light on the origins of the Ukwuani/Ndosumili people.

9. CONCLUSION

This paper presents a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the origins and migrations of several Ukwuani/Ndosumili clans and communities in Southern Nigeria. Most of what is known or promoted about the people's origins and migrations is skewed toward Benin (Edoid) ancestry, with much denial of Igbo origins. Attention is drawn to the sinister role of the British colonial administration in forging a less-than-true account of the people's origin, perhaps due to administrative convenience. The Ukwuani/Ndosumili people also pushed - and are pushing - the untruth about their origins, perhaps due to socio-economic and political exigencies in Nigerian nation space. This study opines that political needs in an impoverished nation should not be used to distort historical accounts of a people's origin.

This study's historical analysis presents evidence suggesting that among the Ukwuani/Ndosumili are undeniably folks with roots in neighbouring ethnic groups and sub-groups, including the Igbo, Urhobo, Isoko, Ika, Enuani, Ijaw, Benin, and Igala. Nevertheless, going by historical accounts, the most pre-eminent source of movement to Ukwuani/Ndosumili land appears to be from around the River Niger region and beyond, namely, the Igbo heartland. Artifacts of this reality are manifested in Ukwuani/Ndosumili's people culture, such as ancestral worship, cosmology, language spoken, local administration practiced, and traditions upheld. This distinctive socio-cultural evidence makes it easy for Ukwuani/Ndosumili to be classified as an Igboid sub-group. Nevertheless, this study also indicates that sociological differences exist between the Ukwuani/Ndosumili and their cousins in the Igbo heartland. That noted significant Benin (Edoid) origins and autochthony claims made by some clans are make-believe tales advanced by the then British colonial administration and Ukwuani/Ndosumili elites; academic evidence supporting such proclamations is yet to be advanced.

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Oral interviews

The authors conducted all interviews.

Akachili Edwin, 65 years, Ossissa, 04 July 2023
Diokpa Timothy Aswuai, 79 years, Umutu, 15 September 2023
Chief James A. Enuenwosu, 83 years, Abbi, 27 August 2012
Chief Godwin C. Ogwezzy, 90 years, Emu-Obodeti, 3 May 2024
Omekenyi Edmund, 57 years, Jos, 27 November 2024
Chief Jibueze Ezulu, 76 years, Abbi, 27 August 2023
Nwadiakor, Reuben, 55 years, Ashaka, 24 May 2024
Chief Willian Wayer, 86 years, Emu-Obodeti, 4 May 2024
Ebinim Onyekweli Stephen, 63 years, Lagos, 28 November 2024
Peter A. Wayer, 88 years, Emu-Obodeti, 5 May 2024
Chief Godwin Emegwali, 77 years, Kwale, 6 May 2023