

Traditions of Origin and Migrations

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Abstract

Migration generally constitutes movement of a group of people from their natural habitat to another place of abode. A group of people, therefore, would want to emigrate while another group of people would be immigrants into a particular area hitherto deserted. Several factors are responsible for migrations. While emigration connotes a person or a group of persons leaving a particular place to settle in another where they are known as immigrants. These movements are usually as a result of push and pull factor. These push factors could be socio-economic and political determinants. This paper attempts to look at the Iyala people of present day Northern Cross Rivers who were originally Idoma of present day Benue State and seek to analyse factors responsible for their migration

Introduction

The concept "migration" has become an issue of interest among scholars in diverse disciplines including demographers; inter group relations analysts, geographers and historians etc. The reasons for the historian in particular are that there is a connection between migration and the history of a people. Okpeh (2007) once argued that the subject matter of migration is central to the history of a people. This perhaps explains why in an attempt to understand the history of a people, there is a subtle inquest into their past with a view to unravelling their yesteryear, present and future. This situation presents unavoidable questions to which answers must be provided; the attempt at finding answer to the above questions throws one into the field of migration studies. Migration studies on the

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other hand provide the dynamics of inter-group relation which in the long-run seeks to provide a platform for peaceful and purposeful co-existence. Peaceful and purposeful co-existence by extension aids the progress of mankind.

In this paper we shall examine the migration of the Iyala people in the in the Northern area of present Cross-River State of Eastern Nigeria.

Conceptual/theoretical framework

Migration simply put is the movement of people from one place to another. According to Akande (1990), migration constitutes the movement of a group of people from their former abode to another; for instance, group 'A' migrated from town 'Y' and settled in town 'Z'; also group 'B' might be immigrants to town 'X'.

Going by the above argument, it can, therefore, be inferred that, while a group of people would want to emigrate, another group of people would be immigrants into the particular area they deserted. Emigration connotes a person or a group of persons living in a particular area, and in the area which they settle upon leaving a particular area, they are known as immigrants. Migration can therefore be said to consist of two forms thus "emigration" and "immigration". There is however a distinguished form of migration-the forceful removal of a group, for instance, the forceful removal of Africans out of their continent to America through slave trade (Inikori, 1982). This situation is also referred to as a Diaspora, removal of a group of people from their natural habitat usually forcefully.

Outside forced migration, migration is generally characterized with push and pulls factors. Push factors are the social, economic and political determinants that may compel an individual or group of people to migrate from a given geographical area while the pull factors refer to the same determinants mentioned in the push factors but here are rather inviting factors for people to come and settle in an area. It is instructive therefore to note that people would want to emigrate from areas (of push factors) because of better prospect in other places (where pull factors exist). Okpeh (2007) summarized the intricate pattern of migrations when he aptly captured that; such movement is often underpinned by the inter-

play of socio-economic and political variables operating in the source and destination of the movement⁵. Migration thus can be understood to be evolving from the responses to the process of development.

Another characteristic of migration is that it exists at two levels. These include internal migration and external or international migration. While internal migration involves the movement of people from one community or settlement area to another within the territorial limits of a geo-polity, external or international migration involves the movement of people across the limits of geopolitics. All the above discussions are important for understanding of migration of the Iyala people. Most importantly this work is hinged on the following; Iyala migration is internal, not forced, and was a historically conditioned social process.

Iyala migration

The Iyala people are presently found in the Northern area Cross-River State in Eastern Nigeria. They are found principally in three local government areas of Cross-River State thus; Ogoja, Ikom and Obubura. Erim writing in the 70's explained the geographical location of the Iyala people thus; The Ogoja Iyala lies north-west of Ogoja town, its location is roughly delaminated by latitude 6° .25' – 6° .50' north and longitude 8° .24' – 8° .55' east, it covers an area of approximately 287s.q.miles (Erim, 1974). Iyala Ogoja is surrounded by the following neighbours-Ukelle in the west, Igede in the North, Yatye and Bekwarra in the North-East, Nkimin te East, and Nkum and Ekajuk in the South. While the Iyala in Obubra local government lie some twelve miles East of Obubra town and roughly between latitude 8° .30' – 8° .50' North and longitude 6° .25' – 6° East and are surrounded on all sides by the Mbembe speaking people, the Ikom local government Yala people are situated on the latitude 6° .25' North and longitude 8° .40' – 8° .55' East. This group of Yala is surrounded by the following people; Akparabong in the North, Ikom on the East, Nde in the West and Ekpokpa in the South. Just as much as the different ethnic groups cut across the different parts of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular have their traditions of origin and traditions of migration so too do the Iyala people. According to Idoma oral tradition of origin the Iyala

people are a group of Idoma speaking people. Erim confirming this position argued that "there were some Idoma groups which today live outside core Idomaland and yet maintain close genealogical ties with members of the "core" in Idomaland. Oral tradition has it that the Iyala people who are amongst other "core" Idoma groups outside the core Idomaland known as "ai-Ode" are the descendants of a putative ancestor called "Ode". Erim traces the genealogy of Iyala people thus to Ode.

Idu is the father of all Idoma.

He also begot the following children:

Ananawoogene who beget the people of Igumale;

Olinaogwu who begot the people of Ugboju;

Idum who begot the people of Adoka;

Agabi who begot the people of Otukpo;

Eje who begot the people of Oglewu;

Ebeibi who begot the people of Umogidi in Adoka and Ode

Who begot the people of Yala ...

Erim argued there that the Iyala are a group of Idoma when he categorically stated that 'there are other sections which belong to the core but are either outside modern Idomaland or lie within the greater Idoma. These include the Ogewu, and the Yala of Cross River State.

The Iyala believe that they are the descendants of Ode. (An Idoma) who founded a mother settlement at Akpada from where his "Sons" moved out to find their settlements known as Ipuogra in Ogoja. According to Odey Ipoule, (cited in Erim) Ode came from Idoma to Akpada because of sharp misunderstanding between him and his Idoma brothers. He brought with him two wives gave who birth to the following children for Ode: Oko, Ochoga, Adga, Omaha and Okoakobi. It was these sons after the death of their father (Ode) who left Akpada to find other Iyala settlements as we find them today (National Archives).

In a similar argument, Riley recorded that: The head of the clan was one Oshemode who brought with him from Idoma two principal wives: Onyehiole and Onyabata. The respective offspring from these wives when old enough to fend for themselves scattered and founded the two sub-

clans of Okpoma and Ibeku (cf. Erim, op cit).

From the above arguments it can be inferred that the Iyala people descended from Ode who was an Idoma who left the core Idomaland to search perhaps for a better way of life or as a result of family feud or sibling rivalry. It can also be inferred that from the new settlement founded by Ode sprang many other Iyala districts as found today. The question that readily comes to one's mind is that what actually made the offspring's of Ode to desert the mother settlement to other parts of Cross River as found today. First and foremost the Iyala were (and are) farmers, it could probably be that their population exploded Yala groups' dispersed from the Ode's mother settlement to Ogoja, Ikom and Obubra.

Ode the progenitor of the Iyalas was a foremost Idoma hunter who has gone in search of his lost brothers whom oral history has it that in went in direction of Northern Cross River, enroute of this quest the encountered the Ito's of Igede in Benue in ruthless warfare which left the Ito's overwhelmed giving credence to the popular saying in Idoma:

Ode mi Ito, li Ito me edo

Which translate in English to mean that Ode almost exterminated the Ito people. He carried this warfare to other areas including Ekpokpa also known as Ofutop, and the Mbembe speaking people who appeared to have long settled in that area before the Yala arrived.

Totemic theory of Iyala migrations

Amongst the Idoma people totemic symbols have played very significant role in determining place of various groups in early emigrational period. The Idoma like most colonial African groups believe in several spirit transformation or recantations however they are in total agreement that there is one Supreme God, i. e. Owoicho. Equally like most African Traditional Religion and their way of worships this God has to be approached through lesser gods or mediums. In this light when my ancestral great-grandfathers knell in the early hours of the morning with a white cockerel pouring liberations and chatting incantations using *aje* as his earth medium he will say that may god allow his sacrifice to find favour with God ,at this point believing that there is a higher force than himself. These basically

are his dead ancestors which are commonly referred to as *alekwu*.

The *alekwu* is now generally represented by *ekwuafia* which now becomes the binding totem of the Idoma particularly the *ai ode* which the Iyala's belong. Where ever there is an Idoma group that practice the *ekwuafia* festival there is bound to be a genealogical relationship like the case of the Iyala's of Cross River. They share a totemic symbol of the *ekwuafia* with their erstwhile brothers of Idoma in Benue State.

Conclusion

In this paper we have established that the Iyala are a group of Idoma who severed from their Idoma brother some 400 years ago and settled in the present Cross River State in Eastern Nigeria. The Iyala groups in Ogoja, Ikom and Obubra local governments of Cross River state still have genealogical affiliations to the Idomas in Otukpo, Ogoku amongst others. The migration of the Iyala into their present places of abode in the Cross River was not without warfare.

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