

Enugwu-Agidi History - The Nri Connection

The town Enugwu-Agidi, as it is now called, is about 22 kilometer east of Onitsha. It belongs to the Umu-Nri (children of Nri) clan, made up of Nri, Enugwu-Ukwu, Nawfia, Enugwu-Agidi, and Oruora, which no longer exist. In other words these towns belong to the same ancestral root, the ancient divine kingship of Nri (Eze Nri).

The name and place of Nri in the development of Igbo culture and tradition are at times confused with those of Eri. Eri is said to be the original legendary cultural head of the Igbo people, just as ODUDUWA is to the Yoruba people. From oral and recorded accounts, he is said to have come down from the sky, having been sent by God'. Eri settled and established in the middle of Anambra river valley where he married two wives. The first of the wives bore him five children. The first was Agulu, the founder of Aguleri, the second was Nri Ifikuanim, the founder of Umu Nri, followed by Nri Onugu, the founder of Igbariam and Ogbodulu, the founder of Amanuke. The fifth one was a daughter called Iguedo, who was said to have born the founders of Nteje, and Awkuzu.

As one of the children of Eri, Nri Ifikuanim migrated from Aguleri, which was and still is, the ancestral temple of the people, in search of a place of settlement. He found such a place and settled near the present Enugwu-Ukwu. A version of the oral account mentioned Mkpume Onyilenyi as the spot of the original settlement at Enugwu-Ukwu. It has to be mentioned here that accounts given of developments from the period of this Enugwu-Ukwu settlement is conflicting. And one would suppose that this might be part of the reason why some people in Enugwu-Ukwu claim headship of Nri. One of the accounts by Professor M.A. Onwuejeogwu holds that it was during the period of Nri Ifikuanim's settlement at Enugwu-Ukwu area that he bore the progenitor or ancestor of the Enugwu-Ukwu, Nneofia and Enugwu-Agidi peoples. And that he later left that Enugwu-Ukwu site and came down the valley near the lake to establish the town of Agukwu. This account leaves one to deduce that the progenitor of Agukwu was born later at the new settlement or that he in fact, was born at the Enugwu-Ukwu site but moved with father to the new place of settlement.

The second account confirms this second deduction. It holds that the progenitor of Agukwu, called Ewelana, was not only born at the Enugwu-Ukwu site, but also was the first son of Nri Ifikuanim. And that he migrated to the new site with his father. It is difficult not to agree with this version of the story, since it is not in keeping with the Igbo tradition for a man to make such a migration without his first son. It is at this Agukwu site that Nri Ifikuanim established and became Eze Nri Ifikuanim, reigning till 1152 A.D. From written account, Nri Ifikuanim was not the first son of Eri, and one is inclined to believe this, since he did not inherit the father's temple at Aguleri. One is, because of this position, tempted to ask why is it then that Nri Ifikuanim was the most famous and influential of the children of Eri. Prof. Onwuejeogwu's written account supplied the answer by confirming that Nri Ifikuanim inherited a lot of qualities and powers from his father. The account further stated that Eri revealed to Nri Ifikuanim the secrets of the 'mystical world' and gave him two types of paraphernalia called NRI. One of them comprised of two staffs, OFO NRI and ALO NRI, and the other type comprised of objects of bronze, iron, and clay.

Since the reign of Nri Ifikuanim, which, according to written account, stretched from 1042 to 1152 A.D., many other kings had ascended the Eze Nri throne in an orderly succession. These range from Nri Namoke and Nribuife of the early period to the last of the three kings, Nri-Obalike 1889 - 1936, Nri-Jiofo II (Tabansi Udene) 1937-1987 and Nri-Enwelani II (Obidiegwu Onyeso) 1988-date.

It should be noted that lineages and control of Nri extended to major areas of Igbo land including Nsukka, Owerri, Asaba, Okigwe, and Agbor etc. The king successfully administered a great part of Igbo towns with ritual systems and codes of abomination. But when the British arrived in Igbo-land in the first decade of the twentieth century, they found this traditional administrative technique of Eze Nri very effective and a challenge to their authority.

The Christian missionaries who accompanied the British colonial authority also saw the existing ritual system of administration, based on traditional religious faith, as a barrier to the spread of their gospel. The result was that when the British took over the administration of Igbo-land in 1907, the combined forces of colonial authority and the Christian missionaries focused on the destruction of the Nri traditional authority. Among the acts designed to achieve this end was forcing Eze Nri Obalike, against a long-standing tradition, to leave Nri town to attend the native at Awka. The government anthropologist, Northcote Thomas, confirmed that when Nri Obalike appeared in the court, 'the whole assembly rose and prepared to flee'. This is because, that was the first time an Eze Nri was seen in person.

The final act of destruction of Nri influence was in 1911 after the British introduced the warrant Chief system and summoned all chiefs and community leaders and forced them to denounce Eze Nri. But before then, Eze Nri Obalike was forced to abrogate all codes of taboo and abomination still binding the towns to Nri. It was as the result of this hostility that the ritual influence of Nri got narrowed to the nearest relations of the kingship, made up of Nri (Agukwu, Akamkpisi and Diodo), Enugwu-Ukwu, Nawfia, Enugwu-Agidi and Oruora jointly referred to as Umu Nri. The position nevertheless, is fast changing now.

With political independence, growth of nationalism and cultural consciousness, there is a growing tendency among Igbo elites to re-establish their Nri cultural root and re-accord recognition to Eze Nri as the spiritual and cultural head of the Igbo people. Though the five towns mentioned above are said to belong to Umu-Nri Clan, they are not direct descendants of Nri Ifikuanim. Oral tradition has it that their father was **OKPALANAKA**. He was said to have three wives, one of whose name according to one version of the oral source, was Ariam. The other version holds that the name of that woman was Okpalariam.

Derived from these two versions, are two different compound names; OKPALANAKA NA ARIAM and OKPALANAKA NA OKPALARIAM. With this conflicting account, the more probable position is that the woman's name was 'Ariam' since in Igbo tradition the prefix 'Okpala' denotes masculine gender. Ariam was the first wife of Okpalanaka and the mother of the progenitor of Agukwu (Nri). The man's second wife begot the progenitors of Enugwu-Ukwu and Nawfia, while the third wife had the progenitors of Enugwu-Agidi and Oruora.

Of these five offspring of the children of Okpalanaka, only four can today be found at established positions. They are in order of seniority, Agukwu (Nri), Enugwu-Ukwu, Nawfia and Enugwu-Agidi. Oruora, the last of the five, no longer exists. Why? You will know in the later paragraph. It was said that the positions of the settlement of the towns as they are found today, were arranged in order of seniority: Agukwu as the eldest son occupying, as of right, the original domain and the temple of their father, and inheriting the ritual right and (Ofo na Alo). Next to Agukwu is Enugwu-Ukwu, followed by Nawfia, Enugwu-Agidi and lastly Oruora. With the extinction of Oruora, Enugwu-Agidi now occupies the last position.

Mention has to be made here of the sacred staff (Ofo) held by Normu village, the cultural head of Enugwu-Agidi. This is called Ofo 'Okpalanaka Na Ariam' or Ofo 'Okpalanaka Na Okpalariam', whichever is the correct version. One would wonder why the Ofo is so named since the Enugwu-Agidi is not the first son of Okpalanaka. The explanation from oral tradition is that Okpalanaka sent off all his sons each with a token gift, which included a sacred staff (Ofo). The gifts were distributed as follows: **Agukwu** - A long cane basket (Ukpa) and a sacred staff for traveling (Ofo ije) **Enugwu-Ukwu** - the same as Agukwu above. **Nawfia** - A clay dish for cocoyam (Oku Ifeijioku) and Ofo. **Enugwu-Agidi** - A clay dish for cocoyam (Oku-edede) and Ofo. It is this Ofo held by every member of the Umu Nri Clan that is called, in Enugwu-Agidi Ofo NNE NA NNA or Ofo Okpalanaka na Ariam after the names of great grand parents of the clan. This name has been contracted to 'Okpalariam' to serve as the official alias for a recognized traditional ruler of Enugwu-Agidi.

It was also learnt that until recently, there exists at Ora-Ofia Enugwu-Ukwu, a collective shrine or temple which served as a symbol that binds the towns of Umu Nri clan to a common ancestor. That shrine which was named after Okpalanaka na Ariam was in the form of a little square enclosing a big tree. It was confirmed that representatives of Umu Nri clan jointly performed certain rites and offered sacrifices at this shrine, which, owing to the disruptive influences of the Christian Culture, has been abandoned.

But, a recent account seems to conflict with the above holding that the said square at Enugwu-Ukwu was the spot of the town's original settlement (Isi-ani). Just as Enugwu-Agidi has at Normu village. It also exists at Nawfia. In the past, any member of Umu Nri clan taking Ozo title must visit all these Isi-ano spots in all the Umu Nri towns as part of the title-taking ceremony or ritual. Oruora, as stated earlier, is extinct. The people fled their town, northeast of Enugwu-Agidi as a result of a wicked cunning trick dramatically hatched by a two-man clique. The brain behind the trick was said to be one ANYAKORA from Iruobieli village in Enugwu-Agidi. His dubious companion called AGWUNENU from Isu assisted him.

As the aim of the trick was to drive the people of Oruora out of their town, it was said that Anyakora first tried to incite the peoples of Enugwu-Agidi and Isu to take-up arms against Oruora. When that plan failed, he went direct to Oruora people and told them that Enugwu-Agidi and Isu had completed plans to attack them. He told them that the attack would take the form of setting fire on their houses and looting their belongings. A day to the D-day, these notorious gangsters made up heads of dry yam sticks and twigs somewhere at the outskirts of Oruora town, and early the following morning, they set the heaps on fire, adding war song to complete the false scare. Thus frightened out of their wits, the people of Oruora deserted their

town abandoning most of their belongings. They took refuge in the neighboring towns. Some migrated to Isu, Ukwulu and Nawgwu, while others made for Enugwu-Agidi. It is said that there is today a village at Ukwulu bearing the name Oruora because it is made up of descendants of immigrants from the deserted town.

From today's changed position resulting from social and political advancement, one is tempted at this stage, to reflect on the justification of still regarding people who were forced out of their original domain during our unsettled past as strangers (Mbumbu) at their present place of abode. For example the government of Oruora fitted into the uncivilized and brutish pattern of life in that dark past when fratricidal war was the order of the day. Many more instances of migration resulting from such internecine conflict will be read in the later chapters. Indeed movement of population was so common a feature of our unsettled past that one can hardly find any Igbo rural community in which such movement cannot be traced. It is therefore becoming increasingly difficult, in the light of today's level of enlightenment, to agree with those who still regard brothers and sisters who are in their present positions as a result of such movement as strangers.