

RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF OSUMENYI TOWN (NNEWI SOUTH LGA, ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA)

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ABSTRACT

This paper enumerates the sequential historic origin of osumenyi village and its cultural, religious and economic practices. In otherwords, the paper will help to clarify some of the socio-political changes, ethno-cultural changes and economic changes that has taken place in osumenyi's history. The paper recommends the state and federal

government to exploit the important economic crops found at osumenyi while providing essential infrastructures to the people.

KEYWORDS: OSUMENYI, AMAKOM, NNEWI, ANAMBRA, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, CUSTOMS, RELIGION, AGRICULTURE, TRADE

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INTRODUCTION

The rational behind this research paper is to trace the economic history of Osumenyi as far back as possible. It is designed to give an insight into the history of the town. It is hoped that the paper will help to clarify some of the socio-political changes, ethno-cultural changes and economic changes that has taken place in Osumenyi's history over a long period of time. And again, it will stimulate further research and thus bring about a more comprehensive knowledge of Osumenyi history. For a systematic approach and in view of restrictions imposed by space, I was limited to four sections. The first section discusses concisely the 'origin of Osumenyi', the second section looks at the customs and religion, the third section looks at socio-political organization, and the fourth section looks at economic activities.

1.0 ORIGIN OF OSUMENYI

One of the towns in Nnewi Local Government Area of Anambra State of Nigeria is Osumenyi which is located at south west of the local Government Area. Osumenyi formally occupies the large area east of Eke-Osumarket' sharing common boundaries with Ekwulummili, unubi and the area presently called Ogbodi. On the southern end, the boundaries are with Akwaihedi and Ezinifite, while she is bordered to the west by ebenator and Utuh. To the north is Amichi. Osumenyi is accessible from all corners, it is some thirty two kilometers to Awka through Igboukwu, about eight kilometer to Uga in Aguata Local Government Area.

Osumenyi is a flat land that is slightly devoted at the center. The eastern and south-eastern part have a kind of low lands that have springs which are Ochi, Ngwuaja, Nwota, Aham-miri and iyinwoku spring, all of which flow into ugwa stream, connecting ulasi river, Ezinifite town. Osumenyi town is beautified with natural green trees that shad the quiet village life from the blazing effect of the sun. Among the common trees are palm oil trees, rubber trees, iroko trees and many other fruits yielding trees. Osumenyi has two major seasons, the wet and dry season. The dry season is from November to April, and harmattan from December to February' while rainy season is from may to October. Geographically therefore, the climatic condition of the town is conducive to both animals and plants for their growth. Also human habitation assured.

All stories about the origin of osumenyi point in the same direction, to the okotu legend. Okotu was credited with having many children, some of who were named as ogbodi, Ami, Agbosu, Khida, Adazi, Obeledu, etc. The order of seniority however is not clear. These okotu descendants later founded the towns that were named after themselves. A child of Agbosu, Ezeabom migrated from Eke Umokwa - around Amichi to the area now called soumenyi.1

For osumenyi, one school of thought had it that the word osu is nobody's name but literally means a land that is fertile and productive. It is also believed that the other part of the name umenyi was added as a mark of honor to a hero believed to have fought for the land. This same hero was said to have introduced the Ozo title to the town and helped in overseeing the construction of the town during his time. This hero was no other

than umeojilienyi. Another version had it that Ojilienyi was a famous hunter called "okonkwo nta" who added to his fame and ability by identifying with an elephant. Whether this elephant was killed by him alone or was previously shot elsewhere; since it was Ojilienyi the famous hunter who summoned the kinsmen to bring the home, he rightly deserved and was honored with the title, Umenyi for short or Umeojilienyi in full. The meaning clearly indicates that he took to Ozo title with an elephant, the biggest of big animals.

The number of wives married by Okotu were not accurately known but as far as our own interests are concerned it was clear that Amo, Agbosu, Ogbodi and Ichida were siblings - that is attached to the same mother. This could explain the cordial relationship existing all the time between the emerging sister towns.²

At this juncture, different schools also emerge about Osumenyi villages. One indicated that Ezeabom migrated to the land called Osu from somewhere ekeumu Okwa or around amichi. On arrival with his entourage he settled down around Ngoakpu on the Eastern side of the town now eke Osu market. Part of the land, Osu was already occupied by some residents who were already settled and organized. These separate residents were the descendants of Agu and Odima. Descendants of Agu formed the nucleus of the latter day Amichie. It was from this Agu line-age that Ezeabom married his wife otuoghuru. Ezeabom and his wife Otuogburu begot Omam, Obie, Aluche and Ojilienyi (Okonkwonta). The order of seniority is not clear but is generally agreed that Okonkwonta was the last child. This last child however excelled in hunting such that he was identified with an elephant with which he took the Ozo title to become Ume Ojilienyi. He appeared to have outshone his brothers to become generally very famous. Ojilienyi begot Okwologu, Ojiaku, Ocho and Enubio. The descendants of Odima form the core of odikpi village today. The establishment of the market today known as Eke Osu was an agreement between Agu of the present day Amichie, Odima of today's Odikpi, and Ezeabom, with Ezeabom steering. The town formed as a result of amalgamation of the three nobilities was called Osu-Eke. Before then some people referred to the place or part of it as Osu-Odima mmili.

Another school of thought emphasized on the Ojilienyi fame. Here again the story was that Ezeabom migrated from Eke Umu Okwa or thereabout named Otuoghuru who begot Ojilienyi. One thing stands out very clear, which is that Ezeabom moved to a place called Osu steered the teaming up of every one to form Osu-Eke which later translated to Osumenyi. The third school of thought projecting the idea that Eze-abom and Ojilienyi were brothers appear unsubstantiated. Therefore from the foregoing a few deductions can be made:

- (a) that Osumenyi was from the beginning formed by a combination of heterogeneous people who have lived together peacefully and are governed by consensus from the onset.
- (b) That the work Osu is not identified with any human being but refers to the land, a fertile and productive land for that matter.
- (c) That the names of Amihie, akabo, Odafia, Obiuno etc. are just names of the land and not necessary villages in Osumenyi. That is to say that the inhabitants of these areas belong to different family lines.
- (d) Osumenyi today encompasses about twelve villages namely: Amakom, Amihie, Ebenator, Enubio Obiohis, Ocho, Odikpi and Ikofia.

2.0 CUSTOMS AND RELIGION

It follows that norms are almost automatically usually set wherever two or three families live in an environment over a period of years. These norms are subsequently translated into what comes to be known as customs of the people. Customs abound in Osumenyi which have been handed down from our great grand parents. They also abound in every aspect of our social life in the town, and my discussion is limited to the following: feast of the town, and marriage arrangements. Others are death and burial ceremonies, the ofo staff, crime etc.

The yearly feasts include okpensi which coincides almost with the approach of new

yam Festivals. At okpensi, oral invitation from grannies and relations get registered in advance to ensure a full house - the children and grandchildren will be expected. The feast is two days, the main one which must be an Eke market day followed by Oye which is the second day. The traditionalists usually state preparation for this feast by making an altar out of mud onto which some wooden stumps are planted. These stumps are "ogilisi" shrub species. The alter with the décor represents the Ndichie on which the practicing traditionalists make their offerings. A woman offers a fowl and a man too. The highlight of the festival is that the wives of those man who happen to have died long after the wives openly confessed to committing adultery - 'ISA IHI" - vacate the husband premises very early in the morning of the okpensi day to stay at Eke market square. This flight is known as "IGBA OSO OKPENSI", and the women will return home when the quent than okpensi include "AGUGUEKE" and ASARA.

Marriage in Osumenyi is often arranged by those concerned or by those related to them. Sometimes by parents. It brings two families together and the process of bringing these families together is what we know as the traditional marriage ceremony. The first visit to the girl's abode involves a few people selected from the immediate kinsmen including "Onye Aka Ebe". Assuming the suitors were successful, then the "IMA NGO" ceremony takes place it. Fixing the pride price. After this is the "IME EGO" ceremony. The payment of bride price ceremony is rather brief but adorned with merriment's reflecting the air of the occasion. The suitors family agree with their potential in-laws on whether they want a quiet bride price payment ceremony or a fabulous one with fan far. Choosing a quiet one shifts the fanfare to "Igba NKWU" ceremony which is a major part of marriage in Osumenyi because it is at this time that all and sundry get to know that marriage has been contracted between the parties. With the church wedding, in whichever church that the husband attends, the marriage ceremonies are complete; and the couple thus become full fledged married people in the eyes of the society.

Before the advent of the "Nidocha", invaders Osumenyi community practiced a form of traditional religion common to other areas throughout Igboland. This religion recognizes the existence of the Almighty god though worshipped through many in-termediary Gods this ran contrary to the expectations of the invaders and as such got tagged with different kinds of names. Some called it paganism. Some heathen and some just traditional religion. To Osumenyians, the new religion has not fully been assimilated in its entirety. The evidence being that much as people profess the new religion and actively participate in the daily affairs, it is not uncommon that majority still identify with traditional beliefs whenever it is convenient. Again as custom and traditional religion share common grounds, the professed followers of the new religion always live with conflicts when it comes to such unavoidable points of intersection.

In Osumenyi some of the most wall-know intermediary gods include: Aniosu, uduagu, Ulasie and Eke. Others are Ochi, Mkpukepa, UduaguAchala, Ogwugwudara Esike, Nwunyeala, Oguwugu okpu, Agwuakpu, Ulasieke, Okeala. Followers of each god become members by initiation. They have chief priest who as occasioned man, officiate during worship or at their ceremonies. The modus operandi is that each individual or family performs some of the required rites from their houses or from pre-determined places after which they proceed to the shrines of their god at appointed time collectively or individually to make the required sacrifices. Sometimes slaughtering of some live animals, the meat which forms part of the menu at the festivities. However, with the advent of the modern Christianity, the worship of these false gods are reducing drastically.

3.0 SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANISATION

Traditionally, the largest effective unit of social control in Igboland is the village group which has a population ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand. This fact is further buttressed by professor Insichie who said that, "the basic count of life in Igbo had with the village group".⁴ The people of Osumenyi, though not entirely different from other people, are somehow unique and peculiar in their own way. They are very peace loving, very hardworking and very out-going. For socials, different mmanwu groups periodically perform and present a forum for entertainment and get together. The masquerades have their stadia within which they perform unless duty takes them out. Apart from mmanwu, other societies abound where Osumenyians meet regularly for both serious matters pertaining to their society and for social events. For sports, Osumenyians are known to enjoy wrestling contests used to be organized in the past and there are people today who are living witnesses of the days when men were as slippery as the cat and whose backs rarely touch the ground. Osumenyi people have fared well both in trade and education. Its merchants has proved this in their various activities towards its development. In education, Osumenyi have teachers, historians, economists, medical doctors, lawyers, engineers etc. Again, Osumenyi had been and still is a unique community that radiates a special appeal whose citizens have taken their rightful place among townsmen in this God's given country we know as Nigeria. The organization of people according to acceptable hierarchy in their various communities has been as old as the first man Adam. Ifemesia contends that monarchy cannot become dear to a people who accept seniority. Therefore if democracy and aristocracy could co-exist among the Igbo's so could monarchy.⁵ On this Isichie contend that "many Igbo states went through a political evolution whereby the rule of a single national ruler gave way to a situation where political portige and authority were showed by those who acquired it by purchase." ⁶

Osumenyi, before the white people came, had their own modes of government. It was a government that was close to the grass-roots. It is linked to the people that almost the day to day activities were affected. The elders of families in each villages maintained an assembly from which representative is were drawn to meet other villages in matters affecting the whole town. At the village level, each family head represented the interests of his group. Any decisions reached at any of the meetings of elders remained binding on every one and was as good as law. Thus, a web was spread throughout the town regulating and welding together everyone. It should be noted that the application of this family leadership type of government only operated to a certain extent and then met with resistance and so it was with Osumenyi. The governing of the town was difficult. The community had norms and taboos so that any one deviating from the norms or committing any of the taboos is easily noticed and picked up because of the closeness of the society. The efforts of the Ancestral masquerades to maintain law and order were supplemented by the activities of some groups in the town that helped to foster orderliness. One such group was the 'OUT Ochonma'. Out ochonma started like any other social organization drawing membership from all over the town. They existed as a social group, but spotting the vacuum in the administration of the town, they stepped into many valuable activities. They acted as market overseers, judges of very minor crimes, and as sanitary inspectors. Internal squabbles within the out ochonma led to their downfall. Osumenyi improvement union (O. I. U) made its debut about this time. Achievements credited to the union included the abolition of the tribal make carving "IGBU ICHI" in the year 1945. They launched a semi-free primary education scheme that cut across religious beliefs, villages ad all other differences. The organization like others before it did not last long before disunity and discord set in. In 1952, yet another organization was formed in the candid attempt to set up a workable government for the town. This organization was no other than Osumenyi Youths Congress which became the administrative nucleus and focal point for some years. Then came in 1954 a development committee of Osumenyi Youths Congress embarked on the task of putting direction signs at strategic points indicating to visitors the route to the town Osumenyi. But before the O. Y. C. group, the Osumenyi Rising Society came up and stormed the town with development ideas, the most paramount being the idea of building a modern maternity home. Osumenyi Youth Congress and the Rising Society eventually became the spring board and the forerunner to the Osumenyi Town Assembly (O. T. A).

Osumenyi Town Assembly which has inaugurated in August 1956 is a general assembly to which all Osumenyi adults are expected to belong. To this end, the organizational structure created a central Executive Council with base at Osumenyi and branches in most major cities throughout Nigeria. The O. T. A. can be said to be the main democratic

central body that governs the town of Osumenyi today. Though at village and family levels the traditional leadership style still persists in modern form, the final arbiter has always been the O. T. A. caucus. In the final analysis, credit must go to ancestral masquerade, out ochonma and other organs for the ground breaking in ushering in a democratic system of government into Osumenyi.⁷ A careful look at the town will confirm that apart from private and individual developments Osumenyi is experiencing a fast development revolution. This revolution came to head when in the early seventies the youths of the town accepted to flock together and form social clubs. Some of their projects were: Social Civic Center Omaigwe Osumenyi, Visitation Hospital Osumenyi, Boys High School Osumenyi, Girls High School Osumenyi and a Post Office. Indeed, it is obvious that the clubs opened the way to the development of the town.

4.0 ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

"Our concept of history is that it should be concerned primarily with those events which mattered most to most people in the past because what mattered most to people in the past is casually connected with what matters most to most people today. One of the issues which mattered most to people throughout history is their economic well being".⁸ For our purpose, we shall subdivide this chapter into three sections namely: Agriculture, Banking and Trade.

Economic activities of the people can never be clearly separated from farming. Though the land is not exceedingly fertile compared to some other areas of the country the farmers in their tireless efforts work round the clock round the year. The yam barns at the end of the year clear evidence of this ... From the various crops they produce they have enough to feed and some surplus for sell. Economic trees that supplement income from farming abound.

Palm trees yields fruit from which palm oil is extracted and the kernel after further processing, used for other things. The palm trees, therefore, provide regular source of vegetable oil for cooking. People who have many palm trees can always have enough oil to spare and sell. Oil produced are stored in drums and formed part of the general palm produce which the marketing boards buy up for the use of manufacturing industries. Another economic tree is the coconut tree. Their number may not be as many as that of palm trees but coconuts are sold in the markets. The mighty Iroko tree can be seen here and their towering above all other trees. When fully matured and felled it provides timber in commercial quantity for various uses. While still standing, it attracts a lot of bats during the time when its seeds are in season. Because some people eat the bat meat, some had to specialize in the art of climbing the big and tall Iroko trees casting netty traps with which the bats were caught. Some other economic trees, important because of their fruits, include the bread fruit trees (Ukwa), the kolanut tree, the ugoro tree, the oil bean tree (Ukpaka) Udala tree and so on.

Osumenyians live in a compound type of houses. Because of this, keeping all livestock is indeed part of every family's daily routines. The financial transactions take the form of thrift contributions initially, a sort of sayings in which regular payments are made by members according to their capabilities. At the end of year the total sum realized are shared out to the owners accordingly. Included in this native banking system is the approval of loans to member applicants. The meeting holds weekly, monthly, or as arranged and at such meetings the money collected are shared out to members for safe keeping. It is at each meeting that any one requesting for loans is seen and settled. An outsider requesting for a loan will need a guarantor who must be a member. The interesting aspect of this native banking is its interest rate on loans. It is remarkable that this financial intricacy existed before the so called oyibo civilization. When money is borrowed, it is required to be paid back at a specific time. Normal interest rate "NTURAS" is imposed on the amount borrowed payable monthly or weekly as agreed. The rate of interest is definitely much higher than that of commercial bank, and arranged in such a way that any default in payment when due doubles the original amount borrowed within a very short time. This is when all the troubles start for the borrower, who for any reason, is unable to pay, risks having his properties seized and auctioned.¹⁰

Our economic activities (trading) revolved around the Eke market. The Market holds once in four days and the items changed are mostly foodstuff. People in Osumenyi for long have been buying and selling. Although the people are subsistence, they often

have a small surplus with which they purchase need items like salt and tobacco. Some of them travel out to buy these commodities. However local trade seems to have been dominated by women while long distance commerce is for men. The long distance trade serve among others to supply lacking needs of a small group who has more wealth and status from agriculture. Local trade refers to transactions which take place with a radius of up to ten miles of the areas of production while long distance trade involves transactions that took place beyond a convenient days journey.¹¹ In the absence of barter system, cowry was used to facilitate exchange during this period.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The context enumerated the sequential historic origin of Osumenyi village and its cultural religious and economic practices. However, the institution of kinship and the like appear not to have existed in the town except for warrant Chieftancy. It should be noted that the people of Osumenyi have always maintained the spirit of oneness, cordiality and brotherliness because apart from being collectively known as a people there are other interests and associations binding them together. Examples being churches, clubs and traditional organizations notably ozo title taking. Their role towards the economic development of the state and the country in General has been positive. This is evident by the taxes and levies they pay.

I am therefore calling through this avenue, on both the state and federal government to come and develop and exploit the important economic crops found at Osumenyi. While doing so, they would provide essential infrastructures such as water scheme, good roads, and so on to the people.

Finally, there should be system of documentation to preserve our history especially this time the foreign culture is trying to dominate our own culture (that is cultural imperialism). The government should take positive actions, and the people should be committed to that.

NOTES

- 1 Obiekezie Vic. Nwosu, OUR ROOTS (Lagos: Markson, 1986) p. 11
- 2 Oral Interview, Chief Ezike Obioma Obi (Elder), Osumenyi Town, 30/12/86
- 3 Oral Interview, Mr. Joseph Nwaobi, (Business Man), Osumenyi town, 27/12/86.
- 4 Elizabeth Isichei, A history of the Igbo People (London: Macmillian, 1976), p.28
- 5 Chieka Ifemesia, Traditional Humans Living among the Igbos: an historical perspective (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1980), p. 22.
- 6 Elizabeth Isichei, The Igbo people and the Europeans (Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 56
- 7 Oral Interview, Nze V. N. Nwaobi, Aba, 4/1/87
- 8 O. N. Njoku, "Economic culture and History of Ndigbo before the twentieth century", in (ed) Edith Ihekazu, Readings in African Humanities (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publisher, 1985), p.15.
- 9 Oral interview, Chief Nwakulie, (farmer), Ezinifite town, 22/12/86
- 10 Oral Interview, Mr. Cyprian Onwuatu (Member of Osumenyi town Assembly), Osumenyi town, 2/1/87
- 11 A. G. Hopkins, History of West Africa of West Africa (United Kingdon: Longman, 1975), p. 58

GLOSSARY

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|-----|----------------|----------------------------------|
| (1) | Igba Nkwu | Traditional presentation of wine |
| (2) | Ima ngo | fixing of bride price |
| (3) | Ime ego Nwanyi | payment of bride price |

(4)	Isa ihi	Confession of wrong doings
(5)	Ndiocha	White men
(6)	Nmanwu	Masquerade
(7)	Nturas	Interest rate
(8)	Ofo	State of Office
(9)	Ukpaka	Oil bean
(10)	Ukwa	Bread fruit

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Oral Interview:

Name of Informant	Place of Interview	Date
Chief Nwakule	Ezinifite	22/12/86
Mr. Joseph Nwaobi	Osumenyi	27/12/86
Chief Ezike Obioma Obi	Osumenyi	30/12/86
Mr. Cyprian Onwuatu	Osumenyi	2/1/87
Nze V. N. Nwaobi	Aba	4/1/87