

The background of
ONUKELE'S FAMILY
IN UMUAGBOM, UMUKABIA

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P R E F A C E

THE AIM of this small pamphlet is to throw light on the history and background of the Onukele family, as well as enunciate some of their struggles for social and economic survival in spite of many odds and hardships. In this attempt, I have striven to explore and exploit all avenue and apply all relevant information available to me to realize this narrative.

I am grateful to Mr. F. D. Ogbuagu who, through his effort has brought the children and grand-children of Onukele closer. His realistic approach was rewarded and evidenced by his initiative which culminated in the first meeting of the children and grand-children of Onukele's family on March 26, 1967.

At the inaugural meeting of the Onukele family on March 26, 1967, the Chairman, Mr. F.D. Ogbuagu expressed the need for peace, unity and love towards one another. He maintained that the absence of peace, love and unity among us and towards one another would present with a recipe for an inability of the family to cope with the modern challenges ahead. He systematically and unequivocally reviewed the vicissitudes of life that the Onukele family has weathered from the onset of its founding to the present day. Contingent on this, he called on all present and absent to forget the past and face the future with a sense of understanding, oneness, realism and objectivity.

I am most grateful to F. D. Ogbuagu and Nwosu Ezenwah who proof read the manuscript and offered some suggestions and materials of vital interest which, together made the publication of this pamphlet a resounding success and reality. READ ON —

INTRODUCTION

UMUKABIA, as the name implies and stands today, has been in existence from the pre-modern, pre-industrialization era, despite the dearth of written history. Ukabia lived as one of the numerous sons of a great man, Okai, the son of Uga, one of the aborigines of what is today known as Umukabia village. He experienced a menagerie and stages of hardship, but remained a straightforward, reliable and strong man. He rose to fame in his activities during the onset of British imperialism and annexation of new territories for the British Empire, the latter who applied the famously and aptly named “gunboat diplomacy to instill fear and servitude. At this time also his exemplary prowess rose to its apogee in the presence of several and sometimes protracted tribal conflicts with some of the neighboring villages and beyond.

He grew up as a household name within and outside Umukabia and its environs, took and married many wives and begot many children as well. Some of his children in no particular order included Agbom, Omurumba, Ezeaguma, Nkpuru and many others. In the usual tradition, his children grew up, took and married wives and begot many children, grandchildren and great, great grandchildren. The family therefore, continued in this way to multiply in abundance. Agbom, whose case is under review, married and begot Nwafor and Ezeocha. Nwafor got married too, to many wives, including Obiakwa, who begot Onukele and others.

A COURAGEOUS AND AMBITIOUS MAN

I WILL PAUSE HERE to take up Onukele's case which is the fulcrum and raison d'être of this narrative and rendition into a pamphlet. Onukele, right from his childhood was oppressed, belittled and the subject of frequently unsolicited and unfair threats by his brothers. Being a courageous and ambitious young man, free from belligerence and animosity, decided to abandon and flee from his former residence and tormentors (currently known as Uhukwu) and seek alternative accommodation for himself and family. He therefore, came to reside where today is known as Uhu-Umu-Onukele with his children, Nwachukwu, Ogbuagu, **Lkuwa**????????, Ukelere, Ibeawuchi, Ogbuehi, Iroele and Agwu.

When they came of age, these men took wives and sired Ebubedike, Ekemekwe, Ucheaghuba and many others. The family's population increased rapidly and exponentially with the outcome that the compound was found insufficient to accommodate all these families. In view of this, they decided to seek and retained suitable and expansive accommodation for themselves elsewhere. Ibeawuebi, Ebiga, Ucheawuba, Ekemekwe, Ebubedike and a few others and their families relocated to Ngeleapu to reside, while Akwali (Ogbuagu) moved to where today is known as Akwali Ogbuagu's family.

It is indeed very sad to narrate here that all those who relocated to Ngeleapu to reside (Ibeawuchi, Ebiga, Ucheawuba, Ekemekwe and Ebubedike) suffered many human losses. Regrettably also, most, if not all of these Onukele sons died out prematurely as their family previously. In light of the deteriorating demographic state of these families, the few living decided to return to their ancestral home and find accommodation with their brothers, which concomitantly seemed to ameliorate their sufferings.

The rest of the surviving Onukele children and families continued to multiply exponentially and they begot many children namely but non linearly: Nwosu, Agomuo, Udegbu, Ibèleme, Onuoha, Ezenwah, Osuagwu, Dan, Isaac, Onwuneme, Agomuoh (2), Gabriel, Ogbonna, Enwerekowe, Anyalewechi, Daniel, Sampson, Paul, Onyegbule, Opara, Ihezukwu, Onokala and many others.

ARTS AND CULTURE

BEFORE THE ADVENT of the Europeans, the might and credit worthiness of a man depended upon the numerical strength of his family and his material acquisition and possession. Onukele was exceptionally blessed. He was blessed because he had the children, he had the slaves, barn of yams, goats and sheep, to mention a few, and his children had the might and were very skillful in hunting venison and in the arts. This skill and prowess was tested and substantiated when Ogbuagu shot and killed a tiger, which in those days was highly celebrated with pride, pomp and pageantry. The skeletal remains of this tiger, the symbol and heritage of the Ogbuagu and Onukele family is festooned and in the custody of the Ogbuagu homestead at the time of press and possibly for generations to come.

In the art of Music, it goes without saying that the Edere music originated from Umukabia. It was told how young girls from the neighboring villages came to watch the Edere music and go back to their respective homes vowing to be married in Umukabia. In some cases as was narrated, some of the highly fecund girls refused to return to their homes, leading to a hasty marriages. But a good music needs a good artist. In this, Ukelere was exceptional in his art of the Edere music and dance and till today, the remnants of the instrument could be seen in Ukelere's compound.

CHIEFTANCY

In the olden days, the requisite qualification attached to investiture as a Chief was one's material wealth and clout-money, slaves, wives, children, goats, sheep and other appurtenances accruing thereto. So long as you possess these trappings of wealth, you must, as a rite of passage, be regarded, called and addressed as a Chief or Eze by the citizens. Considering the above mentioned requisites, it would be an understatement to inform that Onukele was a Chief because he qualified for it as the narrative in this pamphlet speaks loudly to. After Onukele's passage to eternal life, Ogbuagu, his son, not necessarily in deference to the dictates of primogeniture took his office as a Chief because he also had the requisite qualifications as his father before him.

In an ideal and present day world, the requisite for Chieftaincy installation must be an exemplary life, devoid of selfish ends, of hate and jealousy, nepotism, favoritism and corruption. Succinctly, you must be endowed with empathy, appreciation for fellow human's suffering and tribulations, one who preaches and practices social justice and equality. All these qualifications you will find in the persons of Francis D. Ogbuagu, Ezenwa Ukelere and a host of others who, today have taken to themselves, the heavy responsibility of seeing that as far as this family is concerned, there is peace, unity and love towards one another.

THE ADVENT OF THE EUROPEANS AND THE EFFECTS

Following the partition of Africa by Europeans, there grew a rush by the Europeans into West Africa, in a bid to secure lands for their home governments. The White man engaged in expeditions which took them into the Federation of Nigeria in the year 1910. After sacking the neighboring villages, they stepped into Umukabia village and relentlessly waged war against its inhabitants. The British imperialists ravaged the village while it massacred the men, women and children and burnt down all the houses in the village including the public house called "Mgbala." In fact, what happened at that time would have repeated itself in 1966 when the trigger happy, blood-thirsty recalcitrant vandals of arid Northern Nigeria massacred our men, women and children in their Region and looted their properties. The only differentiating and thankfully mitigating factor was the fact that our people were in the home of the Hausa whom we had, to our own detriment, regarded as our brothers, sisters and friends.

The Europeans were able to exterminate the villagers because their munitions were more modern than the dane-guns [flintlocks] our fore-fathers used. But despite this, our forebears were brave enough to stand up against them and for this I pay them my highest gratitude. After the war, the Europeans [British] went away because they had successfully annexed our town and brought her under their command. When everything had cooled off somewhat, those who managed to escape came back and rebuild their houses.

In 1916, after six years had elapsed, the Europeans returned to our town, this time as friends and rather than enemies, which they previously were. Allaying all fears of further

assault, they forged a rapprochement with the villagers, which waxed very strongly over time and the two parties mingled freely as brothers and sisters.

It was during this period that some of the children of Onukele, Nwosu and Udegbu mentioned somewhere in this pamphlet were in their youths. Then, in 1924, many of them were absorbed in what rightly today belongs in the civil service nomenclature. They were among the first set employed to construct the roads and rail lines in what used to be Eastern Nigeria (now Democratic Republic of Biafra) and, in fact the then Federal Republic of Nigeria as a whole. Their first station was Amaeke-Ibeku. Nwosu Ogbuagu, due to his inherited luck, brilliance and patriotism, was made a head-man (known today as foreman) to supervise and control well over 500 laborers.

This headman (NWOSU) being a patron, took his younger brother (Udegbu) to be his servant at the expense of the Government. This, of course, was with the consent of the Imperial government. They were loved by all their colleagues due to their untiring efforts to maintain that old adage "Live and let live."

THREAT OF TRANSFER

ONE FINE AFTERNOON while Ogbuagu was relaxing in his hall (Obi), the news was broken to him that his children who are working at Amaeke-Ibeku have been threatened with transfer to Ngwo-Enugu. On hearing this shocking news, their father, Ogbuagu, for fear of their being killed at Ngwo, didn't hesitate to recall them home. These children, due to their loyalty to their father, relinquished their posts irrespective of the fact that they were being handsomely paid. Without questioning the validity and action of their father, they both returned home immediately.

NWOSU. the headman, gave his post to Mr. Emenandu Amadiogwu, who answered his name and earned his fat salary without asking for or receiving a mite. All the honors that were accorded to Nwosu were also accorded to his successor. The actions of these children should be

seen by reasonable people as an act of good faith, loyalty and practical demonstration of the axiom cited somewhere in this pamphlet.

CHRISTIANITY BROUGHT HOME

IT IS RELEVANT to mention here that when they were returning (Nwosu and his junior brother Udegbu), brought home with them a local church preacher who doubled as school teacher, Egbuta. Egbuta immediately on arrival was quartered at Ufomadu's house. He immediately initiated the preaching of the gospel to the benefit of the inhabitants of Umukabia Community and the surrounding villages. As time went on, the number of the participants increased and a section of the church was converted to a private school and was moved to Ama Uhukwu (the site where Anyaogu's Family now resides). Enrolment into the school was made voluntarily. Those considered weak and lazy went to school out of their own will.

Here (in the school), they learned many types of trade and subjects, e.g. carpentry, bricklaying, English language, Religion, math. and many other subjects and skills. Those people who were at school at this time were thought to have been relegated to the background. Little did anyone foresee that they will in future (as they are doing now) reap the good seeds they were sowing at that time.

It would be seen from the foregoing that the people of this family (Onukele) are, from time immemorial, Christians and patriots and must be proud of their remarkable achievements and practical demonstrations of good faith, loyalty and patriotism in their contribution to upliftment and dignity of humanity.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Since its existence, the Onukele family has achieved many feats in most walks of life. In the olden days, their activities were always paramount and achieved preeminence as the primus inter pares. They were the first, if I am not mistaken to hunt and slay a leopard, the strongest animal that people feared and dared not approach. They were among the first people to be employed in a White-man's job in this part of Africa. They were the people who brought and proselytized Christianity to Umukabia and the surrounding villages. They did not only bring Christianity, but they preached and practiced it, and they are still preaching and practicing it.

Today, in their midst, you will find Chiefs, as well as experienced Administrator/one time professional Journalist, Lawyer, Schoolmaster, Businessmen of all ranks, Sportsman of International renown, well qualified sailor and captain of ocean-going vessels, professional Drivers/Mechanics, nurse, Councillor, and numerous civil servants of various rank and file. From the fore-going chapters, one will agree with me that they are striving ceaselessly to hold their heads high with their counterparts in the world of achievement. However, they are still lacking in many essential professions such as: doctors, Economists, practicing Journalists, Architects, Accountants, Agriculturists, Statisticians and many other professional fields of endeavor.

In light of the above, I call on the children of Onukele to address themselves realistically and honestly to their various fields of education and professionalism for the purposes of realizing and enhancing our prosperity, social and economic well-being of the family and that of Biafra as a whole. Parents, guardians and those who are proudly accountable for helping these promising young children of ours should try to encourage them to study hard and help to enhance the future of those who are already in dire need of a helping hand. While in anticipation of a helping hand, I dare not encourage this set of Onukele children and grandchildren to fold their hands waiting for manna to fall from heaven, for heaven helps those who help themselves. I encourage them to strive hard on their own, show due diligence and mettle before a helping hand comes.

CONCLUSION

IN CONCLUSION, may I again emphasize on the importance of peace, unity, love to one another and good public relationship. Finally, I wish to reiterate and to remind you of the old adage "UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL." If we unite, no power can penetrate and route our solidarity. But if we fall even slightly apart, the most powerless being can easily subdue and subjugate us. We must maintain our integrity, by all means and at all costs. Come what may, the future holds good tidings for us. Almighty, help Thy children and grant us Thy grace, guidance, peace and wisdom.

THE END