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## IGBA-NDU: A CASE STUDY OF OHAIBE FAMILY UNION, 1960-2017 IKPORMBE

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**Abstract:** This work x-rayed Igba-ndu in Ohaibe Family Union, 1960-2017. Ohaibe Family Union, is a blood covenanted between four distinct clans; Amasiri, Igberere, Akaeze and Mpu. Over the years, this family union has been maintained and serviced by these clans. The union has brought great level of peaceful co-existence among these uniting clans. However, this union is not devoid of challenges as the present generation tends to ignore some of the rules guiding the union. Notwithstanding, the clans have demonstrated great resilience in maintaining and preserving the Ohaibe Family Union and these efforts have not been acknowledged and documented for posterity. The objectives of this work are to find out what led to the formation of Ohaibe family union and the roles of the uniting clans in maintaining the union, between 1960 and 2017. Data for this study was gathered from primary source, notably from oral interview. Moreso, data was accessed from available secondary materials like books and internet materials. The design adopted for this study was descriptive technique, while qualitative method was used as data analysis and the presentation was chronologically made. This study revealed that the uniting clans of Ohaibe Family Union abhorred shedding or letting of blood among the mselves. Consequently, the study concludes that, notwithstanding some challenges faced by the uniting clans of Ohaibe Family Union, they have strived to sustain the objectives of their forebears.

**Keywords:** Igba-ndu, Family, Union, Ohaibe Family

### INTRODUCTION

Igba-ndu is an integral part of traditional Igbo social and political system. It is a ritual alliance between two or more persons or group of individuals.<sup>1</sup> Regarded as the strongest and most meaningful bond that could exist. It is used on the group level to validate community contracts and on a personal level to create the ritual bond necessary for social and trade interaction or to effect a genuine reconciliation between people for whom regular interaction was imperative because of kin relationship or common residence in a

neighbourhood. It was also a means of establishing the confidence necessary for interaction between strangers who desired to establish a relationship that could not be easily ignored or broken. Igba-ndu was thus the most serious of the many non-violent coercive mechanisms for ensuring the stability of an Igbo group.<sup>2</sup>

In the bid to soft pedal the off-springs' beleaguered problems among our neighbours, our ancestors bequeathed a system which encapsulates peace and co-existence devoid of rancour, and bloodshed. It

is against this backdrop that the progenitors from Akaeze, Amasiri, Mpu and Igbere with a historical odyssey created a blood binding communal tie that has held the four uniting clans in a union called Umunna Cultural Union. Umunna Cultural Union, fondly called Ohaibe Family Union is a blood covenant (igba-ndu) union of four great and historically connected clans of Amasiri, Akaeze, Igbere and Mpu.<sup>3</sup> Literally, igba-ndu means to 'bond life'.<sup>4</sup> In this work, the names Umunna Cultural Union, Ohaibe family union and Umunna-anoare used interchangeably in referring to the uniting clans. Amasiri and Akaeze are located in Ebonyi State, Mpu in Enugu State while Igbere is situated in Abia State. The union was established by the forefathers of these clans in pre-colonial period, bearing in mind obvious endearing legacies and benefits such as inter-communal wars that characterized pre-colonial Igboland.<sup>5</sup> Hence, to ensure peace and harmony among the uniting clans, a union based on Igba-ndu (blood covenant) was imperative. However, the coming of colonial rule in Nigeria affected the activities of Ohaibe family union, but did not stop the brotherly and peaceful co-existence among these uniting clans.<sup>6</sup> After independence, the union's full activities were restored as a result of self-rule. And since then, the Ohaibe family has been growing from strength to strength as the new generation of these uniting clans have taken this union to a greater level, by encouraging and supporting each other on development through self-help approaches.

Since the founding of this union, members see one another as blood brothers and sisters, and have stood firm and consistently abhorred bloodshed among themselves. The implication is that every quarrel between or among members of the four uniting clans must be settled at round table, no matter how inflammatory the quarrel may be.<sup>7</sup> Apart from the fact that the members of the union see themselves as brothers and sisters, they also meet regularly to discuss their welfare and other matters of importance. The meeting is usually rotated among the four members for the purpose of personal involvement and sense of belonging.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike the old generation that only dwelled on abhorring of shedding of blood and being your brother's keeper, the new generation have added developmental spices to the union by supporting community developments efforts across the uniting

clans. They achieved these through the patrons of this family who happens to be prominent men of the uniting clans; like Ike Ekweremdu, Orji Uzor Kalu, among others. In most cases, these patrons sponsors the annual rotated meeting of the Family.<sup>9</sup> Despite states creation which scattered the Ohaibe clans into three different states in the federation, the union is still waxing strong due to the seriousness shown by the uniting clans towards achieving the goals behind the formation of the union. Thus, this research examined the benefits and challenges of Ohaibe Family Union.

### Membership of Umunna Cultural Union

Section 4, Article III of the Constitution of Umunna Cultural Union, notes in part that, membership is only open to indigenes of Amasiri, Akaeze, Igbere and Mpu and; citizenship of members must be traced to the ancestral fathers, at least three generations to avoid dual customary rite, diverse fraternal belief and worship.<sup>10</sup> In other word, the Ohaibe Family (Umunna Cultural Union) as fondly called was a union of four great and historically connected clans of Amasiri, Igbere, Akaeze and Mpu.

#### 1. Amasiri clan

Amasiri clan is one of the clans that made up Afikpo North Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. Amasiri is bounded by Okposi to the North, Edda to the South, Afikpo (Ehugbo) to the East, Akpoha to the North-East and Akaeze to the West> it is a road- junction town lying at about the mid-point or approximately 65 kilometers between Okigwe and Abakaliki. Amasiri Clan is traversed by the Ohaozara –Afikpo South road.<sup>11</sup> The town is a transitional zone of rolling plain between open grassland and tropical rain-forest with an annual rainfall of about 197cm.<sup>12</sup> Amasiri, which is regarded as a "land of hospitality", covers an approximately area of about 270 square kilometers.<sup>13</sup> As at 2006 census, Amasiri population is estimated at 23, 101, by the Nigerian population commission.<sup>14</sup>

Amasiri is made up of five villages namely: Ohaechara, Ezeke, Ndukwe, Ihie and Poperi. These villages are classified into three autonomous communities, namely, Ezeke Autonomous Community, Ndukwe Autonomous Community and Opi (Ohaechere, Poperi and Ihie) autonomous

Community. Amasiri is called “Ekuma Ubaghala”, meaning dexterity in the use of matchet both in battles and farm work. Amasiri means ability to subdue.<sup>15</sup> The original settlers migrated from the riverside known as Ikun Ugbagala (from water) to settle at the current location. The original settlers in Amasiri never planned to retain the present settlement as their permanent home. There were more or less mercenaries of war and were always ready to respond to invitations from people to fight a war in any village or community.

### 2. Igbere clan

Igbere is a suburban town in Bende Local Government Area of Abia State in South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria.<sup>16</sup> Also popularly known and referred to as the Igbere Eberi, The town is the core part of Old-Bende Division of the former Eastern Nigeria.<sup>17</sup> The people of Igbere or its inhabitants are called Igberian. Igbere consists of 13 autonomous communities, namely Amakpo, Amankalu, Amaiyi, Amaoji, Amaofufe, Amaukwu, Agbo, Eziana, Ibinanta, Ibinaukwu, Okafia, Ohumola and Umusi, these autonomous communities made up the great Igbere clan. Each community is governed by a king and the entire clan is governed traditionally by the Igbere Clan Council of Kings (Ndi Eze).<sup>18</sup>

Igbere is located 66 miles from Aba the Commercial City of Eastern Nigeria, approximately 106 miles from Port Harcourt Airport, 66 miles from Owerri, 26 Miles from Umuahia the Capital City of Abia State, 12 miles from Uzuakoli, 4 miles to Ariba and 18 miles to Ohafia.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Mpu clan

Mpu town is located in Aninri. Aninri is a Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria.<sup>20</sup> Its headquarters are in the town of Ndeabo. The local government is about 233,723 inhabitants according to the projected population from 2006 census.<sup>21</sup> Aninri is made up of five towns; Odume, Nenwe, Ndeabo, Mpu and Okpanku. Mpu town globally lies within latitude 05° 57' 0" and 06° 02' 0" N and longitude 007° 40' 0" and 007° 45' 0" E with area extent of 55.37 square km.<sup>22</sup>

Mpu town is made of eight villages; Amaechara, Amagu, Ime-uno, Agu-enyi, Ovum, Obu-agu, Ube-agu and Ukey, these villages are grouped into three autonomous communities; Amokofia Mpu

Autonomous Community, Anekeorji Mpu Autonomous Community and Achi Orié Mpu Autonomous Community.<sup>23</sup>

### 4. Akaeze clan

Akaeze is one of the two major clans that made up Ivo Local Government Area. Ivo is one of the local government areas in Ebonyi State of Nigeria with its administrative headquarters located in Isiaka town.<sup>24</sup> The local government is bounded to the north by Nkanu East Local Government area of Enugu state and Ohaozara local government area and to the east by Afikpo south local government area and to the south and west by Abia state.<sup>25</sup> Akaeze is made up of four villages; which are, Akaeze-ukwu, Iyi-oji, Umobor and Ihie-nta.

#### Reasons for the establishment of Ohaibe Family Union

Inter-communal wars which was one of the major characteristics of pre-colonial Igboland paved way for the establishment of Ohaibe Family Union.<sup>26</sup> Fear of attacks and hostilities made it possible for the uniting clans to come together. According to oral tradition, Amasiri clan was known as warlike clan.<sup>27</sup> During pre-colonial era, Amasiri clan served as mercenary soldiers to some Igbo clans who relied on mercenary soldiers in expanding their territories, as well as fighting off intruders.<sup>28</sup> It will interest you that traditionally, Amasiri and these uniting clans except Igbere share common boundaries, and to avoid attacks from any of them, the Ohaibe Family Union became necessary.<sup>29</sup> Igbere, Akaeze and Mpu were cautious of Amasiri being used by other clans in expanding their territories, called for Igba-ndu, which will stop attacks and hostilities among themselves. This will also, unite them against intruders who may want to attack any of them (Ohaibe Family Union).<sup>30</sup> Thus, wars and rumours of war in pre-colonial Igboland were the primary reasons why these clans of Igbere, Mpu, Amasiri and Akaeze chose to have a blood covenant union was known as Ohaibe Family Union also called Umunna Cultural Union or Umunna ano. This union still exist till date and has recently sort to assist one another in community developments.

#### Rules and Regulations of Umunna Cultural Union

To every union or association, there are rules and regulations that guilds them. Umunna Cultural

Union has rules and regulations that every member must adhere to. These rules and regulations have helped to sharpen and preserved the union till date. These regulations are listed below:

1. No member of the uniting clans shall give a harmful thing to another; ranging from burning fire, machet, blade, poison, etc.
2. On no account shall anyone among the uniting clans cause harm, bloodshed or bloodletting among themselves.
3. The members of the uniting clans must at all-time be ready and eager to save any member or members in a harmful situation.
4. No man is expected to marry a woman who was once married in any of the uniting clans.
5. In case of eventuality or accident, a person causes harm, bloodshed or bloodletting to another; sacrifice must be made to appease the ancestors of Umunna Ano.
6. In carrying-out the sacrifice, the uniting clans must be duly represented by elders drawn from each clan.

These are the governing rules and regulations of Umunna cultural union which was introduced by the forebears of the union, and they are still obeyed by the present generation.

In 2017, an important event happened, that tested the union's obedience to the above regulations. It was in late 2017, when a group of boys terrorizing Ezeke community in Amasiri were confronted by the youths of Ezeke, few were apprehended, while others fled to Mpu town which is a member of Umunna cultural union. On getting the information that the fleeing criminals were in Mpu town, the youths of Ezeke were mobilized to Mpu town. However, HRH Igwe David Ajah of Anekeorji Mpu Autonomous Community, refused to hand them over to the youth of Ezeke community, stating that one of the rules and regulations of Umunna cultural union was never to cause harm, bloodshed or bloodletting to a member and as such the Ezeke youths should go back to their community.<sup>31</sup>

Igwe David Ajah was careful not to default the rules governing the Ohaibe Union; he didn't want the harm or punishment of those criminals to come from him.<sup>32</sup> His action angered the youths of Ezeke community, who saw him as a king abating justice. However, after the intervention of elders from Amasiri clan, the raging youths of Ezeke were

pacified and asked to go home which they did.<sup>33</sup> Thereafter, the criminals left Mpu to Enugu town; it was in Enugu town that they were apprehended by youths of Ezeke community.<sup>34</sup> It will be imperative to note that, bloodletting or disputes within a member clan, is not a taboo, as long it does not transcend to disputes or war among the uniting clans<sup>35</sup>

### The Benefits of Member Clans

1. It is worthy to note that in every union and association, members expect benefits; which must have prompted them to join the union or association. The Umunna cultural union has its benefits accrued to member clans and her populace. At this juncture, it is imperative to note that the Umunna cultural union was formed during pre-colonial era when inter-communal wars characterized the relations among Igbo society.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, in order to guarantee peace within a locality, peace pact, blood covenant (igba-ndu), inter-marriage, among others, were encouraged. During the inter-communal wars, the four clans that make up the Umunna cultural union, deemed it fit to have a blood covenant among themselves; which will help bring peace and defence of their clans.<sup>37</sup> Other benefits of the union are as follows: In time of war the uniting clans rally round to protect one another.
2. When a member clan is in a war with other communities or clans, the four uniting clans must come to their defence.
3. If any member clan is having a court case with non-member clan, the uniting clans must rally round to support them.
4. Whenever a populace of a uniting clan is in a life threatening situation and runs to other member clans; he or she must be protected irrespective of the offence committed.
5. Stranded member or members, found in any of the uniting clans, must be helped after he or she must have been identified as an Ohaibe.
6. Outside or within the territories of the uniting clans, it's an obligation for members to help one another; ranging from financial, social, among others.

These are the benefits enjoyed by member clan of the Umunna cultural union. These benefits are

regarded as one of the important pillars that still makes the Ohaibe family relevant and active.<sup>38</sup>

It is pertinent to note that one of the new benefits enacted by the latter generation of Ohaibe family, was developmental help. Through this, some of the prominent and wealthy persons in the union, support developmental project initiated by a member clan in their community, by giving cash support. For instance, in 2017, Senator Ike Ekweremadu donated cash for the building of Amasiri Town Union Hall.<sup>39</sup>

The gesture exhibited by prominent members of the union gave the uniting members reasons to be more united. Cash gift received are kept in the union's account and used to support member clans when needs arise; like scholarship or having a court case with a non-member clan or community. For example, in 2012, Chief E.E. Ekeoma and Dr. Orji Uzor Kalu gave the sum of five hundred thousand naira (N500,000) and two hundred and fifty thousand naira (N250,000) respectively to the union in appreciation for their kith and kin coming together.<sup>40</sup>

### Challenges of Umunna Cultural Union

The Umunna Cultural Union that has been waxing strong and stronger from pre-colonial rule to date cannot be said to be devoid of challenges. These challenges have reduced the growth and pace of this union.

#### 1. Christianity

Christianity is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the world's largest and most widespread religion with roughly 2.38 billion followers representing one-third of the global population.<sup>41</sup> Its adherents, known as Christians, are estimated to make up a majority of the population in 157 countries and territories, and believed that Jesus is the Son of God, whose coming as the messiah was prophesied in the Hebrew Bible (called the Old Testament in Christianity) and chronicled in the New Testament.<sup>42</sup>

Christianity is one of the major challenges facing the Umunna Cultural Union. This is because Christians don't believe or carry out sacrifices outside what is biblical, and this has hindered the growth of many traditional institutions in our present society. Christians in these uniting clans

preach against the Umunna Cultural Union, saying that the foundation of the union is diabolic and as such must stop to exist.<sup>43</sup> They equally fault the annual renewal rituals of the union, and sacrifices for eventualities or accidents involving member clans; stating that it should be abolished as Christ has paid the price for us. These has made few to doubt the efficacy of the blood covenant (igba-ndu) between the uniting clans.

#### 2. Uninformed Elders

Some elders who grew up outside the Umunna Cultural Union communities, tend to be novice in the culture and traditions of their people. This is evidently seen in Amasiri clan, as some elders who lived majority of their years in Cameroon, upon returning to their community tend to be ignorant of the cultural event taking place.<sup>44</sup> When it is time for their age group to be in-charge of community affairs, they make decisions and policies that are not in tandem with the Umunna Cultural Union. This has also slowed down the growth of the Umunna Cultural Union, as these uninformed elders commit blunders when asked to represent the community in the annual meeting or rituals of the union.

#### 3. Uninformed Youths

Some youths who were born and raised outside their communities also poses challenge to the growth of Umunna Cultural Union. The parents of these young lads (youth?) failed to teach them about the culture and traditions of their people. In some cases, the parents calls their culture and traditions 'ancient practices', thereby making these children aloof in things patterning to their community.<sup>45</sup> These youths don't know the rules and regulations governing the Ohaibe family union, and as such ignore the brotherhood that binds these uniting clans.

The above points are the challenging factors faced by the Umunna Cultural Union today. However, notwithstanding these challenges, the union is still growing and active.

#### Prospect of Umunna Cultural Union

Though the Umunna Cultural Union faced some challenges ranging from Christianity, uninformed elders and youths, they are still some ways forward for the growth of this union. One of the ways forward for the Umunna Cultural Union is to reorient and inform the Christians that the Ohaibe

family union was not founded on demonic or faulty foundation neither was it barbaric as the rituals and sacrifices are done openly and does not require human sacrifice. They (Christians) should be taught the objectives and benefits of the Ohaibe family.

The other prospect of the Umunna Cultural Union was that the uniting clans, individually should organise a town hall meeting twice a year to sensitize and reorient their populace on the objectives, rules and regulations governing the Umunna Cultural Union. Through this, the youths and elders who lived most of the years outside their community, will be sensitized about the Ohaibe Family and other important aspect of their culture and traditions. With this, many will carry the torch of this union high and uphold the cultural value.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, one can say that the Umunna Cultural Union is one of the best things that have happened to these uniting clans, as the spirit of brotherhood is upheld among them.<sup>46</sup> Notwithstanding the challenges faced by these uniting clans, they still strive to achieve the objectives of the union. This has only but made them stronger in servicing and sustaining the aims of their forebears.

Apart from the fact that the members of Ohaibe family see themselves as brothers and sisters, they also meet regularly to discuss their welfare and other matters of importance.<sup>47</sup> The meeting is usually rotated among the member clans for the aim of personal involvement and sense of belonging. In all, Umunna Cultural Union has offices occupied by appointees for the administrative purpose of the union. Presently, some of the appointees are; HRH, Eze Joseph Onu from Akaeze as Chairman, HRH, Igwe Cyprian Udemefuna from Mpu as Vice Chairman, while Omezue Chief Hilary Nzagha of Amasiri as secretary, among others.<sup>48</sup> The Ohaibe family also have top stakeholders in persons of Dr. Orji Uzor Kalu from Igbere, Ike Ekweremadu from Mpu, Enyim Ude from Akaeze and Dr. kingsley Oko Nkuma from Amasiri.<sup>49</sup> These noble men have on different occasions donated to the growth of the Umunna family Union.

### Endnotes

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4. Idika Samuel
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6. Akpu Joseph.
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**THE END**