

## Eteh in Pre-Colonial Nigeria: Origin and Social History

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### Abstract

This paper examines the pre-colonial history of the Eteh people of South-eastern Nigeria. The people have rich cultural similarities with the Igala of modern Kogi State. Such similarities include but are not limited to language, title system, marriage ceremony, festivals, masquerades, and so on. However, their pre-colonial history has remained elusive among scholars. More importantly, there had arisen a series of accounts attributing the origin of the people to elsewhere, such as Igbo east of the Niger, Idoma, and even to Bida. This paper, therefore, aims to interrogate the various accounts of the origin of Eteh to establish their ancestral origin. To do this, it resorted to primary sources comprising archival and oral testimonies and secondary sources available on the subject. The paper deployed narrative, descriptive, and analytical historical methods of research. It argues that the ongoing controversy is primarily due to the multi-ethnic nature of the clan over the years. But, the findings indicate that the Igala people are the locals of Eteh land. However, waves of migration brought the other groups into the area at different times. The paper concludes that the later immigrants from elsewhere were only assimilated into the already established society by the Igala aborigines, as ascertained by the emphatic political and socio-cultural similarities between Eteh and the Igala people.

**Keywords:** Eteh, Origin, Migration, Identity, Social History

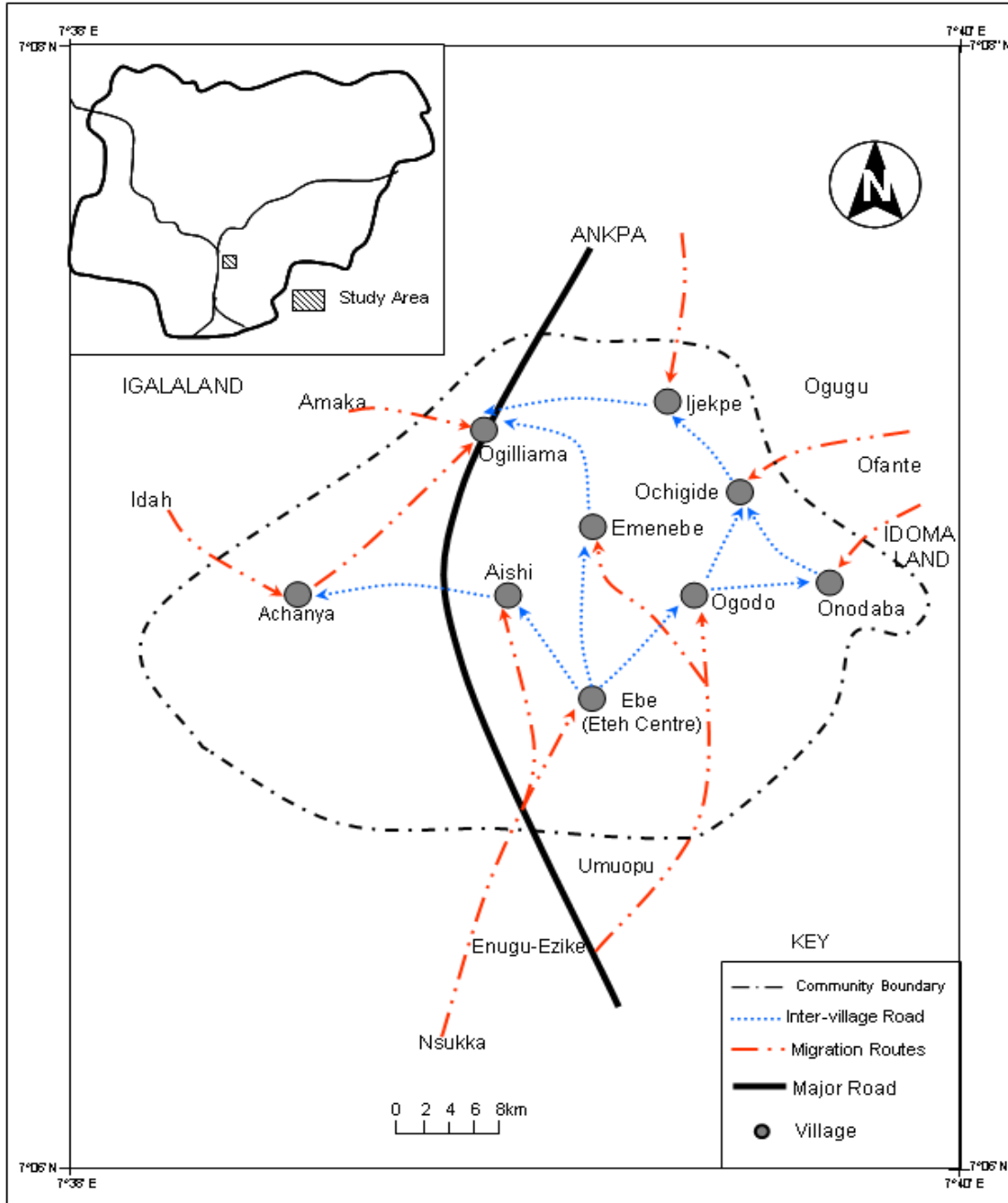
### Introduction

One of the most controversial aspects of African pre-colonial history is the origins and migration of groups. African historians, leveraging earlier studies by the Europeans, have delved into it to expand the body of knowledge on African historiography. What has been the case is that many African scholars could hardly detach from the conclusions reached by the Europeans, which has not helped to address the problem of origins among African groups. Very recently, attempts have begun to reconstruct and revise the European scholarly superstructure by interrogating the origins and identities of African groups (Opone, 2022). However, Eteh is yet to benefit from such studies. Eteh is a multi-ethnic border clan presently situated along a 90-kilometer stretch from Benue, cutting across Kogi and Enugu to Anambra, but mainly between Olamaboro Local Government Area of modern Kogi State and Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area of current Enugu State of Nigeria. The clan comprises nine villages: Achanya, Ochigide, Aishi, Ebe, Emenebe (Ayinebe), Ijekpe, Ogilliana, Ogodo and Onodaba.

It is located between longitude 7<sup>0</sup>E and Latitude 7<sup>0</sup>W. It is bound to the northwest by Ankpa and Amaka in the Ankpa and Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State, respectively. It is bounded to the northeast by Ogugu and Ofante in Olamaboro Local Government Area and Kogi. To the north, it is surrounded by the Ubelle River and stretches beyond Efeche to Okura in Kogi State, while to the West, it is bounded by Amara, Aguijebe, and Ikem, and to the South, Umuopu and Aji, all in Igboeze-North Local Government Area of Enugu State (Eteh Community Development Association, 2012). It has a population of about 39,000, according to the 1963 National Population Census (Egenti, 2015, p.2).

The clan is home to people from different ethnic groups, including Igala, Idoma, and Igbo. Although there are now a sizeable number of Igbo people in the area, the majority of the people claim Igala origin (Group Interview with Igwe Clement C., Alachi E., Eliugwu S. And Ogangwu S.; Ayinebe. 13/04/2023).

Geographically, the clan is situated in and around the Niger-Benue region. Anthropologists have determined that this common habitation area is the region surrounding the modern town of Lokoja. From there, people scattered to various locations, and the protracted period of isolation has now resulted in linguistic distinctions. Although the different peoples in the area claim to be autochthonous, that is, they are original to their location, it does not presuppose that the Eteh people have no origin. Interestingly, the clan comprises three distinct groups: Igala, Idoma and Igbo (Nwaezeigwe, 2007, pp.27-29).



Eteh clan

**Source:** Personal Fieldwork (13/04/2023)

However, Ohiri-Anichie (2007) explains that the people within the Niger-Benue Confluence speak the languages which belong to the proto-kwa sub-family of the Kwa language family which is a branch of the more extensive Niger-Congo language of Africa that gave birth to such languages as the Igala, Yoruba, Edo, Idoma, Igbara, Igbo, Nupe, Bassa, etc. Thus, Atanda (1980, p.2) stresses that

language is one of the primary determinants in considering an ethnic group's identity because it is the means of communication when it lacks corporate existence. The separate identity of such an ethnic group becomes impossible.

### **Literature Review**

Several studies on the pre-colonial ancestry of African populations have been published. Scholars have remained engaged in that aspect of African history to contribute to contemporary literature. Opone (2022) states that the identity of a people's ancestral or geographical homeland is implied by their origin, based on a historical and ethnological analysis of the Anioma people of the Western Niger Delta. The study identifies two popular traditions of the origins of the Anioma people: origin from the old Benin kingdom and heartland Igbo. The paper argued that Anioma's identity has been shifting due to certain occurrences in the area's history.

Chinagorom and Onuora (2018. p.58), in their contribution to the discourse about the origin of Ndi Igbo, briefly say that it is about a time in history when people should start writing their history to avoid distortion by scholars. As they argue, that is only when such people can build an ideological framework and image based on authentic and meaningful interpretations of their past and present and a realistic projection of the future. That is precisely why this study relies on oral testimonies from the Eteh people who are knowledgeable about the subject for better analysis.

According to Adojoh (2020), the origin of the Igala people has been linked to several groups, including the Jukun, Yoruba, Benin, and Igbo East of the Niger. He, however, has faulted these claims but, sadly, went ahead and committed a historical blunder by tracing the origin of the Igala people to Egypt. That he claims by citing some unfounded similarities in vocabulary. Meanwhile, innumerable vocabulary similarities exist between the Igbo and Yoruba, which belong to the same Kwa sub-language group of the Niger-Congo.

In an earlier study, Opone (2017) asked whether the Ukwuanis are Benin or Igbo, given their claims to the regions. The paper tries to answer that question by studying their origin and migration and concludes that such a Ukwuani claim to Benin is motivated by political reasons. This is more so that the realities on the ground do not suggest so. Those studies will aid the analysis of this current research because the Anioma and Ete are of the same historical strand, given their claims of origins to three different places. The only difference is that while the Anioma claim to originate from Benin, Igala and Igbo, Eteh claims Igala, Igbo and Idoma. In both areas, there is an identity issue.

### **Traditions of Origin**

Human beings as social groups have the inherent tendency of moving from one place to another. This is because there are necessities of life needed for survival that may not be available or, to be fair, are in short supply wherever they must have found themselves by default. As a result of this scarcity, there is this insatiable quest for more; hence, movement happens for this 'selfish' interest to be satisfied. Over time, the concepts of indigene, non-indigene, migrants, settlers and so on developed. Thus, the people who believe they are indigenes based on first arrival or longevity tend to deprive the perceived non-indigenes of specific resources.

Determining the Eteh people's origin has long been complex and controversial (Interview: Akpen, P., UniAbuja, 22/12/2022). It is even more difficult, especially as it touches the foundation of people's identities (Opone, 2017, p.132). According to Eko (1998) and Amed (2000), there is no documentation concerning the origin of Eteh. However, the colonial ethnographical report shows that the various villages have origins traceable to different groups and communities within the Niger-Benue Area. For instance, it suggests that Onodaba is from Edumoga, Obida is from Bida, Ayinebe and Aishi are from Nsukka. Achanya is from Idah (NAE, GR11/1/87/1668, (1930). An Ethnographic Report on the Peoples of the Nsukka Division, Onitsha Province, by Meek, C.K.) That has become

the norm because African societies, including Eteh, have been unfairly stratified in such a manner that one's socio-political and economic status has a lot to do with the group they are associated with by origin. In other words, who you are or where you come from determines, to a large extent, what you get from society. It should be borne in mind, however, that this movement from place to place does not portend that the migrants do not have their actual aborigine no matter the distance they have covered. Dike and Ajayi (1988, p.395) affirm this by noting that:

Each community – family, clan, village, town, or state – however large or small had (sic) an established tradition concerning its origins. The community might split up, migrate, and assimilate new elements or be conquered by others and absorbed by new immigrants ... and the latest community formulated a new tradition of origin. These traditions (over time) become the core of the community's view of history.

Sadly, the problem here remains that regardless of how long the 'migrants' or 'non-indigenes' have lived in their newfound land, they are being reminded of their migrations by the Aborigines when the sharing formula of scarce resources is to be implemented. The consequence of this has always been conflict of various degrees, especially when the perceived migrants refuse to comply with the indigenes' demands. Against this backdrop, this work investigates the possibility of the people's origin.

### **The Eteh-Igala Connection**

Some oral accounts have suggested that the origin of the Eteh people can be traced to Igala. Such a migration is connected to the military and commercial phase of Igala's expansion in the 17th century from the Idah area of the present Kogi State. As a result of that movement, Igala spread and settled in several communities and local government areas in Enugu. These include Eteh, Umuopu, Enugu-Ezike, Oguje, Okuto, Uzo-Uwani, Nsukka, Igbo-Eze South, Enugu-East, Igbo-Eze North, among others. They are quick to share their pride in their roots, although quite a good number of them have, sadly, lost what used to be their primary language (Igala). They have now stuck to Igbo as their general language.

In an oral interview (Uzo-Uwani, 21/12/2023), Ukuta gives an insight into the migration and existence of Igala in Enugu State. He says there is no Igala settlement in the study area of Nsukka and Enugu-Ezike, including Eteh. He firmly believes that the region's people, as mentioned above, are of Igala extraction, which is why the Nsukka and its environs are referred to as Nsukka-Asadu-Ideke-Alumona. Both Asadu-Ideke and Alumona are Igala people who came in earlier and set up the place. For him, it is not an issue of settlement because the entire Nsukka in Enugu North Senatorial Zone, except for Ukehe in Igbo-Etiti, have Igala elements. In particular, Eteh predominantly comprises the Igalas and Idomas. However, he did not present evidence to support his claims.

An area account gave a deeper explanation, adding credibility to the people's history. According to it, the Igala people migrated from Idah and settled in Eteh and other parts of the Enugu North Senatorial zone. The historical root of Idah made it compulsory for any king produced in Eteh to obtain his traditional staff of authority from the Attah of Igala (Oral interview, Rev. Canon Simon Okolo 21/12/2023). A few cultures and traditions have endured between the Igala man in Enugu and his brother in Kogi State. The Igala people of Enugu have preserved their masquerades, dances, foods, and folklore. Fortunately, this aspect of the peoples' lives contributed immensely to their peaceful co-existence over the years. A traditional ruler, Igwe Simon Osi Itodo, Ezeoba 1 of the Essodo community in Enugu-Ezike, notes the peace and harmony between the Igala people of Enugu-Ezike and their hosts. For him, "We enjoy peaceful co-existence with the Igala people here." He added that if you come to a given community, you will understand the community's culture and

follow them to practice it; after all, those people will also learn your own culture while you learn theirs at the same time and then life goes on."

On his part, Igwe Chukwu Debelu lends credence to the fact that the people of Eteh and Igala have shared cultural heritage. In his words, so many people from the Eteh clan marry from Idah; in the same manner, people from Idah come to Eteh to match. They are interwoven, and there has been no problem because their relationship is strained if one is hurt at either end. He also calls to mind the shared cultures. Two masquerades are known as Akatakpa and Egwugwu, which are common at both ends. Egwugwu is used as an instrument to discipline erring members of the clan.

More so, there are written works that corroborate the above oral accounts concerning the Eteh-Igala connection. For instance, in his public lecture delivered at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1974), Azikiwe said that "the Igala people who inhabit Eteh District of Eastern Region desire to be merged with their Igala kindred in Igala Division of the Northern Region. They were originally administered as part of the north until boundary adjustments were made in 1924 when they found themselves in the East". He, therefore, proposed the merger of the minority of Igala people in the Nsukka area, which encompasses the Eteh clan with their Igala kith and kin in the Ankpa Division of the Igala Native Authority.

### **The Eteh-Igbo Connection**

An oral source unequivocally says that:

The people speak multiple languages, including Igbo, Igala and Idoma. But generally, Igbo is the dominant language. So, Eteh is 100 percent Igbo. The fact is that nobody germinated from the ground. In any place one is, he is a visitor there, but it is left to you to dig and discover your roots.

The Ebe Palace Secretary, Ugbane John, supported this view as he noted: According to him. "Eteh people are Igbos, so it is a matter of understanding. The people are not strangers; they are not northerners. If somebody has lived in a place for over 2,000 years, you cannot say that person is a stranger. We are purely Igbo people.

In an interview with a local writer, Okopi, he argues that though the origin of the name Eteh and its meaning has remained elusive to him, local research has shown that Eteh is an Igbo clan by origin. He avers that the Idoma tribe has the highest number of ancestral migration routes and dispersal to Eteh during the disintegration of Apa/Wukari and allies with Idah centuries later. The land occupied by Eteh today originally belonged to the Ezike people of Igboland, harbouring the mass influx of Idoma and Igala as late as the Jihad war. However, it became a victim of internal colonisation by the Attah of Igala, as did other communities in the Niger-Benue area. These claims may only serve as a lead to a source because they are fraught with biased elements; hence, an in-depth analysis is needed.

### **Analysis of the Traditions of Origin**

The above explains the massive influence wielded by the Igala kingdom in the area in the distant past. Afigbo (1973, p.79) confirms the above explanation, noting that the Idah (Igala) kingdom rose between the 13th and 17th centuries. It was an overtly political and military state. Thus, in keeping with the intrinsic character and quest of the state for expansion, it became an issue of conquest and rule of the extensive area of the Niger-Benue region.

The rise of Idah led to a situation in which the presence of Igala adventurers became remarkable in the Niger valley. Some adventurers settled in their host communities, bringing Igala's cultural traits and symbols to bear on them. Some merely came for trading and returned home, leaving some of their artistic impressions behind primarily through marriage.

The Nsukka area, including Eteh, was not exempted from the prevailing happenings of the period. It instead took a more profound dimension in the study area such that it involved slave raids primarily, especially with the European presence that gave impetus to the slave trade in Africa. Those raids were attributed to a mythical personality known as Onoja Oboni. He was a descendant of the royal house at Idah (Igala Traditional Headquarters) who conquered and annexed to the Igala kingdom, the northern communities of old Nsukka, sometime in the 17th century (Abdukadir: 1990, p.87).

In that way, Onoja is said to have peopled *ogurugu* from where he launched raids into the Nsukka areas. That is to say that the Igala warlord and traders alike might have married the Nsukka women and settled on the land known as Eteh, consequent upon which their supposed cultural indices were left behind. Afigbo (1980, p.85) also affirms that the Nsukka people borrowed Igala titles to add to their earlier Nri system of *Ozo and Nze*. He also maintains that in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Igala influences would appear to have become the dominant factor in the cultural contact and interaction between the Igala and the Igbo. What obtains in the area, as many societies in Africa is, as Opone (2017, pp.132-133) avers, is that the rationality of the natural man presupposes that he becomes historically conscious of his existence by insistently demanding to know where he came from, to whatever location he must have found himself. This is especially so, considering that this identity awareness makes man relevant in his ever-competing political environment, which determines his socio-economic stature in his society. What one can or cannot do, considered achievable or unachievable, naturally becomes a function of where one comes from. As such, most African people have tended to erroneously attribute their origin to more pronounced or "bigger" groups to sustain this relevance.

### **Relationship Among the People in Pre-colonial Times**

The Eteh people had lived together and interacted with one another over a long period, so their different cultural heritages became interwoven. In other words, notwithstanding their differences due to socio-cultural background, they accepted one another and participated in these activities equally. There was a give and take, particularly in language, marriage, economy (occupation) and festivities. No wonder Afigbo (1987:40) points out that these groups enjoyed a robust interaction in many aspects of their co-existence. While maintaining that disputes, especially in the land area, might have arisen, it was not enough reason to create a permanent vendetta among the people as the conflicts were amicably resolved. The point to note is that the people of Eteh, by providence, have come to stay.

### **Political Organisation**

Eteh clan operated a chieftaincy stool under a chief titled *Onu-Oda Adogo?* as a vassal to the Attah of Igala. However, for convenience and efficiency in home governance, the Eteh clan was politically stratified in descending order, with a quasi-parliamentary system of government and a bicameral federalist legislature. This is where an incumbent first-class chief traditionally sits at the helm of all sovereign matters concerning the clan and has subordinates to reach the grassroots level.

### **Traditional Administrative Organisation of Eteh Clan**

The traditional administrative ladder of the Eteh clan flows in a descending order thus;

- Onu-Oda Adogo: The Head, Council of Chiefs (First-class chief)
- Aidokanya: Traditional Prime Minister.
- Gango: Council of Chiefs (Second-class chiefs)
- Abogijo: Council of Elders
- Madaki: Village Head (Third-class chiefs).

- Achi-Okobia: Youth Council

### **Onu-Oda Adogo**

This title, the holder of which is consistently recognised as the head of the clan, was first introduced by Enwenwowo, great-grandson of Ogbe Taku, who was the head of the clan at the time. It is said that Enwenwowo, remembering that his ancestor was a son of the Attah of Idah, wished to have his position recognised by the latter by being given a title. He went to Idah and after paying specific fees, the Attah handed him a staff and gave him the title of Onu-Oda. The Attah told him that this was the staff of OgbeTaku, his grandfather, and that the staff and the title Onu-Oda should always be held by the head of the town, who would sacrifice to Ogbe Taku (Oral Interview: Adejoh, Hezekiah, Ogilliam. 22/12/2022).

The ears of the Onu-oda were pierced by one of the Attah's female officials and the new chief was given a charm that is said to have consisted of a piece of sacred wood to which a cloth packet was attached containing some dust taken from the ground at Eteh. The reason for including the dust was that this represented *Aje*, the earth deity and that if anyone did wrong to the Onu-oda, Aje would take vengeance on the person as the Onuoda was regarded as the steward of Aje and the owner of the soil of Eteh. The Onu-oda used to make offerings of kola to this charm. The candidate obtains the position after paying dues of a fixed amount to all heads of kindreds and titled officials. He also had to give an enslaved person, goat, cloth, gown and fowl to the eldest brother of the late Onu-oda. These payments were regarded as a contribution towards the burial rites of the late Onu-oda or as a refund for the gift the late Onu-oda had himself been required to give at the election. Notably, when an Onu-oda dies, his eldest brother or son acts as regent until a successor is appointed.

Since then, every Onu-Oda has gone to Idah to have his title confirmed by the Attah; the title is not recognised as complete until the holder has done so. Onu-Oda Adogo, at any point in time, is the holder of the clan's symbol of peace, equity, justice and fairness, known as *Offo and Ule*. He is also the custodian of Eteh's cultural heritage.

### **Aidokanya**

The Aidokanya is saddled with deputising or representing the Onu-Oda Adogo. The administration of the clan automatically falls on his shoulders for any reason the Onu-Oda Adogo is not disposed of. He also serves as the spokesman for the Onu-OdaAdogo, the council of chiefs, elders, and all the people of the Eteh clan.

### **Gango**

Directly below the Onu-Oda Adogo and Aidokanya in the rung of the political ladder is the council of chiefs known as the *Gango*. This council comprises nine (9) second-class chiefs representing the clan's nine (9) villages. It represents the upper legislative chamber and serves as the traditional cabinet to the Onu-Oda Adogo, solely entrusted with decision-making and policy implementation. The members are usually appointed to assist the Onu-Oda Adogo in running the clan. Following their appointments, they become heads of their respective villages; they, in turn, appoint third-class chiefs who operate and deputise them at the village level, traditionally known as *Madaki*. One of these Gangos is usually designated as the traditional prime minister, the *Aidokanya*.

### **Abogijo**

The council of elders, the Abogijo, serves as the lower legislative chamber. It serves as the consultative assembly and the clan's highest policymaking body. The legislative body's two chambers (council of elders and council of chiefs) exist and function separately. However, they work hand in hand for the development of the clan.

### **Village-Level Administrative Structure**

At the village level, the administrative unit is built around *Abogijo* (the council of elders at that level), with the eldest man of the village as the traditional spokesman. The *Gango*, representing the village at the clan level, serves as the premier and the head of the cabinet to the *Abogijo*. Other cabinet members include all the eldest men representing the various families that make up the village, the appointed *Madaki* of the town and the *Achi-Okobia*.

### **Madaki**

These are the third-class chiefs at the village level as appointed by the various gangos (second-class chiefs at the clan level) who serve as deputies to the gangos.

### **Achi-Okobia**

This is the head of the Council of Youth, representing the interests of the village's young men and serving as the village's public relations officer. Still, at the village level, some pressure groups exist, including the age grade, masquerade, and so on, which usually emanate from the family and age group formations. Some of the functions of these pressure groups are to serve as checks on the abuse of power by the constituted authorities. The democratic element of this arrangement is reflected in the village assembly (Opone, 2017, p.58). The final implementation of the several policies and decisions made at the top would occur at this level.

### **Economic Activities**

It is said that as the environment goes, so do the people. Thus, the people's preoccupation from antiquity remains agriculture. The clan forms part of the rainforest region extending from the Anambra axis to the Lower Niger-Benue area. The dense trees harbour games and, as such, significantly encourage hunting as an occupation for the men. At the same time, the fertile soil brought about by adequate rainfall facilitates farming activities and bumper harvests by the women especially. Farm produce includes tubers and grains such as yam, cassava, maize, beans, and rice. More importantly, they have been acclaimed for producing the finest palm wine and best kola nut among other farm make in the region and, as such, became a flashpoint during the trade boom along the Niger. Thus, kola nut was an essential commodity during the period and that attracted the influence of the Attah of Igala in the area and on the Niger. The Igala traders usually made advances into Eteh to buy kola nut for onward trading with the people in the lower Niger area (Oral Interview: Idoko Owoicho, Onodaba.13/04/2023).

### **Socio-Cultural Organisations**

Eteh, like a typical African society, has its established socio-cultural institutions through which the people relate, firstly, among themselves and, secondly, with their neighbours. These institutions were traditional and rooted in the people's cultural heritage. Having been partly peopled by the Igala, the clan also assimilated other groups from different cultural backgrounds and at different times, which occasioned an admixture of cultures still prevalent within its borders. One such is the festival. Festivities are part and parcel of every society. They are platforms for reunions and celebrations of all manner. Several festivals are celebrated in Eteh, including the *Iwai* and *Onwuli*. A respondent, Ukuta (Uzo-Uwani, 21/12/2023), who spoke on their festivities, noted that the iwai festival is a season when they celebrate the harvest of the new yam. He also mentioned that the onwuli festival celebrates the general harvest and thanks the Almighty Creator for a productive planting season. He described the ceremonies as glamorous, stressing that in some of them, young male adults have to exhibit manhood by flogging each other with whips to prove endurance. Also, all masquerades use spiritual powers to test or prove themselves.



Two masquerades are known as Akatakpa and Egwugwu, which are common at both ends. Egwugwu is used as an instrument to discipline erring members of the clan. When the people are meant to contribute resources for a general project, for instance, and some people fail to contribute, it is the responsibility of the egwugwu masquerade as an instrument of discipline to enforce the contribution.

### **Marriage Ceremonies**

There are two forms of marriage in Eteh: marriage by agricultural services and marriage by a combination of bride price and exchange.

**Agricultural Services:** This marriage happens when the suitor cannot afford the necessary dowry. He has to go and live in his proposed father-in-law's house and work for him on his farm until he can pay the required dowry. If a female child results from the union, the father-in-law will take her instead of dowry for his daughter. Either party can dissolve the marriage before the dowry is paid. Upon such dissolution, the husband takes any male child born during the marriage.

**Bride Price and Exchange:** The suitor goes to the proposed bride's house and gives her two rods, asking her if she is willing to marry him. If so, he returns later and gives her father four rods. He then brings palm wine, kola, and two rods to the father for consent. He repeats this process with the bride's mother. Having obtained their consent, he collected 180 rods, 120 of which he paid the father and 60 to the mother to complete the dowry payment.

### **Burial Rites**

All middle-aged and older men are buried in their houses, except when they died an evil death or when they suffered from and died of a contagious disease. In the latter cases, they are buried on distant farmland. On the other hand, the young men and, women and children are buried on the home farmland. The body is wrapped in a cloth, and in the case of a man, it is placed with the head towards the West, and in the case of a woman, with the head to the east. The Uhu Bush, which is close to where the Onu-Oda make sacrifices known as Ani Juju, is where the Onu-Oda are typically buried. He is placed in a crude wooden coffin and buried wearing only his clothing. Four of his slaves were executed early in the institution and buried with him; he typically told his sons in advance whose slaves he wanted to be buried with him.

### **Religion**

Okumagba and Ogege (2009, p.53) define religion as how a man in a cultural area relates to the supernatural. Man attempts to manage his conscience through the realm of the spirit. Before the incursion of the Christian Missionaries into Eteh, as elsewhere in Nigeria, the people held tenaciously to their type of religion or system of worship known today as the African Traditional Religion (ATR). Before this intrusion, there was no such word as religion in the proper sense of it. This was because everything about the people of Africa, from birth to death, revolved around cultural practices and belief systems. Religion, as it were, was interwoven in the fabric of the people's everyday life and experience.

The people of Eteh believe in God Almighty as the Creator of the universe, whom they referred to as *Ojo* (Igala), *Agaba Idu* (Idoma) and *Chukwu Okike* (Igbo), respectively. However, they strongly believe in spiritual powers and deities, including *Okwute* and *Ibegwu*. Okwute was thought to be the idol initiated and worshipped by the supposed founder of Eteh himself before his son, Ogebe Attah-Akwu, inherited the ruling stool, which has transcended to his grandchildren today. Okwute is

usually kept under the custody of the living eldest man of the clan in the village where he is domiciled at the time. The god would only be relocated one year after the demise of its custodian.

The Ibegwu is known as the god of justice; the people believe it does not judge the sin of anyone who does not have Eteh blood running in his veins except those of their wives from outside the clan. For instance, Eteh sons and daughters must be punished by the ibegwu if they commit adultery; on the contrary, foreigners that live in Eteh, including wives of Eteh sons, cannot be punished for any taboo regardless of how long the person has existed in the clan. This, they believe, shows that the god of Eteh knows the people. As a result, they respect their tradition to the degree that an Eteh son or daughter would prefer to tell the whole truth and plead for pardon when he offends someone else or commits a taboo. Thus, they are always afraid to hurt one another for fear of the unknown from the god, which helps maintain peaceful co-existence among the clan's people.

## Conclusion

This paper examined the history of the people of Southeastern Nigeria in pre-colonial times, focusing on the origins. It submits, as their traditions suggest, that although aboriginal Igbo were inhabiting the area sparsely and later waves of migration brought the Idoma group, it was not until the arrival of the Igala immigrants in the 17th century that the clan became socio-politically united. This is as the paper clarifies: the Igala people wielded so much influence in the area through the Attah of Igala during the period. The paper pointed out that the people were predominantly farmers who specialised in several farm produce, including yam, cassava, maize, beans, etc. Still, more importantly, they were the finest palm wine in the area. As a people, they functioned and politically operated a chieftaincy stool that revolved around *Onu-Oda* (Eteh traditional ruler) as an appendage of the Attah of Igala. Such a relationship was sustained by the yearly tribute paid to the Attah from whom he obtained his staff of office. Finally, the paper observed several socio-cultural elements that had an affinity with the Igala and were geared towards directing the people's daily activities and guiding their relations among the various groups in the clan and their neighbours. Some of the social elements ensured the sanity and sanctity of the people. Be that as it may, the admixture of distinct immigrants in the land occasioned by different waves of migration has found expression in government politics, undermining the age-long cordial relationships among the Eteh inhabitants. That notwithstanding, the evidence provided by this paper has shown that Eteh people can sustain their unity in diversity to ensure peaceful co-existence, which is a prerequisite for attracting government attention for rapid development at all levels in modern times.

## References

### Primary Sources

#### Oral Interviews

Name	Age	Status/Occupation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
Adejoh, Hezekiah	66	Farmer	Ogillliama	22/12/2022
Akpen, Philip	59	Professor of History	UniAbuja	22/12/2022
Alachi, Emmanuel	70	Chief	Emenebe	22/12/2022
Eliugwu, Samson	55	Neighbourhood Watch	Ebe	13/04/2023
Idoko, Owoicho	56	Farmer	Onodaba	13/04/2023
IgweChukwudebelu	68	Ogodo Traditional Ruler	Ogodo	22/12/2022
Igwe Clement Ogwuche	69	Ayinebe Traditional Ruler	Ayinebe	13/04/2023
Itodo, Osisi	71	Traditional Ruler	Enugu-Ezike	22/12/2022
Ogangwu, Anthony	66	Retired Civil Servant	Abuja	5/8/2022

Ogangwu, Jonathan	46	Youth Secretary	Ayishi	12/04/2023
Okolo, Simon	100	Clergy	Ayishi	21/12/2022
Okopi, James	52	Local writer	Ebe	13/04/2023
Ukuta, Maximus	67	Chief/Politician	Uzo-Uwani	21/12/2022

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