

# **THE IDOMA ETHNIC GROUP: A HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING**

**By**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

It is difficult to ascertain for how long the Idoma have been in their present location. Evidence in the oral traditions (of the people)...indicate that the Idoma have lived within the Benue Valley from the earliest period of which we have any inkling<sup>1</sup>.

An appraisal of the historical and cultural background of the Idoma is critical to our understanding of the people and society. In this paper, a broad based and circumspective examination of the evolution and development of Idoma ethnicity is attempted. Also discussed are the economic activities of the people and their socio-political organisation.

## **ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY**

What is today designated Idomaland lies south of the river Benue. With a population that has been estimated at slightly over one million by the 1991 census figures,<sup>2</sup> it is the area of land located within the broad valley of the Benue river and the Cross River basin. The main thrust of the land is a contiguous belt of territory which stretches from the Southern banks of the river Benue to the Northern fringes of Igboland. This territory lies within Latitude 60° 30' North and Longitude 80° East and covers a total land area of approximately 5,955 square kilometres<sup>3</sup>. The Idoma are bounded by the river Benue to the North, by parts of Igbo and Ogoja lands to the South, by the Tiv and Igede lands to the East and by Igalaland to the West<sup>4</sup>. It should be noted that the

geographical contours of this region had been clearly established by the mid nineteenth century; consequently, regardless of the administrative and political changes introduced during and after the colonial era, the Idoma ethnic label and territory has, by and large, remained virtually unchanged.

The physical features of Idomaland have been classified into three distinct types.<sup>5</sup> The first of these is the Benue floodplains which covers the Northernmost escarpment of Agatu district extending further South to six and ten kilometres south of the Benue river which has a narrow strip latitudinally passing through Agatu territory some seventy-two kilometres East of Lokoja and the Niger-Benue confluence area. The plains are usually flooded during the months of August, September and October. The second one is to the South of the floodplains and it is an area, which is gently undulating. This covers most of Owukpa, Orokam, Otukpa and Western parts of Onyagede, Ugboju, Adoka, Ochekwu and parts of Agatu districts. The monotony of the landscape here is broken into a number of flat-topped, steep-sided ridges with an average height of between 1000 and 1,500 metres above sea level <sup>6</sup>. The third is to the East of this region and it covers approximately 1/3 of Idomaland. This is a fairly hilly terrain with a height that averages not less than 500 metres above sea level.

The rivers and streams of the districts from the North flow into the Benue, while those from the South flow into the larger tributaries of the Cross River. In the Southern and Southwestern districts of Oju, Igumale and Agila, they flow into river Onwu, which is a tributary of the Cross River further South. In the Western parts of Idomaland, particularly in Otukpo and Orokam, surface water supply becomes scarce during some months in the dry season and palm

wine is sometimes substituted for water for some domestic purposes<sup>7</sup>. The land is generally nurtured by a number of perennial streams that unite to form large rivers like Ogbadibo, Ogengen, Okpokwu, Onyongo, Ombi, Ogoli and Ogaji. Most of these rivers are characterised by strong seasonal flow and sometimes overflow their banks during the rainy season.

Idomaland is primarily made up of sedimentary rocks, which comprise of shales and sandstone of the cretaceous period<sup>8</sup>. While the sand stones that are the major rocks in the Benue floodplains are coal bearing, the shales on their part contain different types and qualities of limestone. With the exception of the Benue floodplains where hydromorphic and alluvial soils abound, the remaining part of Idomaland consist predominantly of red, deep and sand loam soil. In other parts of the land like Utonkon, the sub-soil is mixed with a greyish clay soil with resultant thick cover that makes it very fertile. Towards the Southeastern districts of Otukpa, Owukpa and Orokam, the soil is very red and deep sand loam and less fertile. However, in areas of little vegetational cover, the clayed conditions of the deep sub-soil has been thoroughly weathered and extensively laterized.

As it is the case with other parts of Nigeria, Idomaland has two seasons, namely, the wet season and the dry season. Controlled by the West maritime and Southwesternly monsoon wind from the Atlantic Ocean, the wet season usually starts from the end of April, breaks briefly in August and stops by mid October. At the beginning of this season, conventional rainfall is frequent and it is usually accompanied by thunder. The heaviest rains are recorded in July and September. The mean annual rainfall has been approximated at between 1016

and 1524 mm <sup>9</sup>. The dry season is characterised by the harmattan wind, which is a Northeasterly wind from the Sahara desert. This season normally starts from late November and lasts till the end of March. During this period, the daily temperature of the land drops to between 25° and 35°C and an average relative humidity of between 60% and 90%, that makes many parts of Idomaland very hot.

Generally, Idomaland is richly endowed with a lot of mineral resources. Some of these include Limestone, gypsum, kaolin, coal, bauxite, common salt, clay, building mud and stones, etc<sup>10</sup>. In fact some of these minerals were mined during and shortly after colonialism. This is particularly true of coal and limestone found in present day Ogbadibo and Ado local government areas, respectively. Similarly, geological surveys of the land have provided useful information regarding the possible availability of fossil oil in Apa local government area<sup>11</sup>.

The Idoma territory extends over two 'biotopes', namely the forest and the savannah, which F. Neyt observes has usually been the most favourable environment for the development of original and refined iconophile cultures<sup>12</sup>. In its original state, it is possible the area was heavily forested. This must have been depleted by human factors leading consequently to the preponderance of savannah woodland in the area. It should be added however that while nearly all the land is today covered by orchard bush, towards the Southern marches of the region, rain forest, which is the predominant vegetational feature of Southern Nigeria, is to be found. This again changes to grassland as one approaches the Ogoja heartland to the Southeast. Idomaland is also squarely situated within the palm belt, although oil and coconut palm trees are more abundant in the South

and the West. In the open savannah lands, locust bean and shea butter and West iroko, mahogany, tropical bamboo, counter wood, cyprian oak, shingo and iron wood trees are prevalent.

If we agree that the essence of development is man in a dynamic relationship with his environment, then it occasions no surprise that largely arising from the moderate fertility of the soil of Idomaland, agriculture was (and still is) the most important economic activity of the people, both from the point of view of the number of those engaged in it either on a full or part time basis, the prestige accorded the occupation and the extent of its antiquity as an integral part of the people's culture. Several leading scholars have attested to this. For example, among the Idoma, V. G. O'Kwu asserts: 'Farming was the universal and single most important means of earning livelihood. The limits of farmlands determined the extent of a clan's territory'<sup>13</sup>.

Similarly, underscoring the significance of agriculture in Idoma socio-economic milieu, Y. A. Ochefu observes that:

The measure of a man's success was neither the size of his compound nor the number of his wives and children, but more importantly, the size of his farm and his yam and grain barns.<sup>14</sup>

Then too, as we observed elsewhere,

In pre-colonial times, the economy of Idoma hinged primarily on agriculture. Trade and a variety of local crafts supplemented this. Of these, it should be noted, agriculture was the most advanced and therefore remained the matrix in which the other economic activities were set.<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, following an annual cycle, farmers cultivate yam which was, and is still, the staple food crop,<sup>16</sup> coco-yam, water-yam, sweet potatoes, guinea corn, millet, groundnut, beans, bambara nuts, sorghum, cowpeas,

benniseed and melon, and so on. Cassava and rice, two important cash crops planted by the people today, are essentially late arrivals, most probably nineteenth century crops that infiltrated into the land following contact with Europe. The point should be made that although an essentially agrarian society, agricultural knowledge among the people in the past was notably rudimentary and was based on the traditional back-breaking hoe cultivation and bush fallowing as the main agricultural system.

Besides agriculture, commerce and trade were also important features of the economy of the land in the past and even at present. Studies have shown that these economic activities predated the people's departure from their Apa cradle land in the legendary Kwararafa confederacy. Indeed the act of the exchange of goods and services amongst themselves on the one hand, and between them and their neighbours on the other, arose as a consequence of differences in location and physical environment and variations in the nature and degree of resource endowments. One obvious result of this is the preponderance of markets in the land. Markets of all sizes were distributed throughout Idomaland and were generally held at four-day intervals. Trade in the land was largely based on the exchange of local products, mainly food crops and a considerable amount of manufactured metal and wood works. The Idoma also participated in the regional trading and commercial activities in the Niger-Benue confluence area<sup>17</sup>. It is important to observe here that trade and commerce were important and functional channels through which the people interacted among themselves and between them and other ethnic groups in Nigeria before (and even after) the advent of the British. We shall come back to this point in

due course, but for now it suffices here to demonstrate the diversity of their economic activities and level of contact with other groups.

The Idoma also manufactured a wide range of items not the least of which were agricultural tools, weapons of war, various kinds of baskets, cloths, earthen jars, household wares and so on. The crafts that produced these items, were relatively evenly dispersed throughout the land. The knowledge of iron amongst the Idoma predated their migration from Apa. However, the development of the technology over time was greatly enhanced by contact and interactions with the Igbo and the Igalala. Evidences exist to show that smiths from Igalala and Igbo lands frequented most parts of Idomaland.<sup>18</sup> Blacksmiths, *Ai-Onowa* were such highly respected people in traditional Idoma society that they are mentioned in the *Alekwu* chants and in other songs. One example of such songs is given as follows:

*Onowa nenu*  
*enu oma nebile bog'onowaa*  
(The Blacksmith makes the hoe; it is  
that hoe they use in digging  
his grave)<sup>19</sup>.

Idoma smiths manufactured many items ranging from hoes, machetes, axes, knives, spears, anklets, to mention just a few.

Cloth weaving was also an important economic activity that engaged the keen interest of the Idoma. Cloths from the textile industry scattered in most part of the Northern districts (like Agatu and Ochekwu) and parts of central Idomaland (i.e. Onyagede) were exported as far as Igalaland and Ikom. The Idoma were also great wood carvers, leatherworkers, sculptors, and basket weavers etc. it should be added that though the knowledge of these crafts is still

widespread amongst the Idoma, most of them are fast declining or already moribund.<sup>20</sup>

The preceding survey of the Idoma environment and economy translates into a number of significant facts that should be immediately noted. The first of this is that the ecology of the land has always been a major determinant of the economy activities of its people. Thus, arising particularly from its location in the transition belt between the tropical rain forest zone and the savannah land, the natural environment of the land enabled the Idoma to engage in diverse economic activities. Similarly, by its location, the land, like the others in the geographical Middle Belt region, has been a melting pot between peoples of the North and South. As we hope to demonstrate in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, this made contacts and interactions between them and other groups inevitable.

## **IDOMA ORIGINS AND ETHNICITY**

Idoma is the name by which the people of Idoma ethnic group designate themselves, and are addressed as such by their neighbours. Idoma is also the name of the language of the group as well as their land<sup>21</sup>.

The history of Idoma origins and ethnicity is perhaps the most complex aspect of the people's pre-colonial history. This explains why it has consistently engaged the critical attention of scholars over the years. In one dimension, it has been observed that the early history of the people indicates that Idoma ethnicity is a contemporary phenomenon. What this implies is simply that the heterogeneous groups that today answer to the name 'Idoma' did not have a common ethnic sense of identity before the advent of the British into the land<sup>22</sup>.

This may have certainly accounted for the controversy, confusion, ambiguity and ambivalence the legends of origin and ethnicity of the people generated during the early days of colonial administration at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the subsequent analysis, we shall attempt to review some of these perspectives with the ultimate goal of clarifying critical issues regarding the ethnic identity of the people.

The earliest attempt to study the Idoma anchors their origins and ethnicity on the Akpoto (or Okpoto). This is an ethnic group that is presently extinct. According to this view that was made popular by S. Crowther in 1854, an ethnic group designated the Akpoto once occupied most part of the land now inhabited by the Igala, Idoma and Igbira<sup>23</sup>. Although the identification of this group and the actual nature of their relationship with the Igala, Idoma and Ebira is still being studied by researchers, evidence exists to support their antiquity in the Niger-Benue confluence area. For example, Armstrong argues that largely arising from the relatively wide application of the Akpoto nomenclature in this general area, it is possible that a kingdom and/or people known by that name once existed. This view is further reinforced by J. N. Ukwedeh's argument that the Akpoto should be perceived as an autochthonous group, which gave birth to or played a fundamental role in the formation of modern Igala, Ebira and Idoma societies<sup>25</sup>. Then too, the evidence gleaned from the oral traditions of the Igala, Ebira and Idoma ethnic groups showed undoubtedly that the Akpoto were the earliest inhabitants of the present locations of these peoples.

What however, is particularly important to note is the Idoma reaction to this name. The people reject the nomenclature as derogatory, insisting that it

was the Igala of the Ankpa region that were known as the Akpoto and refer to themselves, their language and land as Idoma. It should be emphasised that while what is particularly derogatory about the term Akpoto still remains unclear, it would appear to have stuck to the people in the Eastern marches of Igalaland in the region of Ankpa. This is in addition to the fact that among those sections of the Idoma who sometimes trace their origins to places in Igalaland (those Erim refers to as the 'Western migrants'), the use of the term Akpoto to describe them and their language appears to have persisted until comparatively recent times.

On the basis of the above analyses and in the context of the evidence that is presently available, whatever may be said about the Akpoto phenomenon, its place in the legend of origins of the people and the evolution of their ethnicity generally may well be conjectural. One certainty can however be risked and that is: the term 'Akpoto' may well be of a geographical application describing a kingdom of that name. This kingdom must have covered the entire area presently occupied by the various ethnic groups in the Benue valley region. The people of this kingdom must have also been known and referred to as Akpoto. But that this name persists till date between the Idoma and the Igala could well be an alternative explanation of the depth of wide-ranging contacts and intermingling between them. For, as Erim has sufficiently demonstrated, in the course of their migrations into their present location, some Idoma kindred groups sojourned and cohabited with the Igala in Igalaland. This point also finds support in Ochefu's conclusions that the greater part of present Idoma homeland was originally occupied by the Akpoto who over the ages were assimilated by other

groups including the ancestors of the Igala, Idoma and Ebira migrants. What follows from all these suggest that it is possible the Akpoto were either a proto-ethnic group which gave birth to the Igala-Idoma-Ebira ethno-cultural complex or in fact played an important role in the development of these polities.

Another perspective associates the ancestral homeland of the Idoma with the Sahara region. Expressed by P. E. Okwoli, this view claims that the Idoma, Igala and Ebira ethnic groups once occupied an area somewhere in the Sahara region. He further maintains that these ethnic groups were compelled to vacate the Sahara region for the Savannah sub-region following the desiccation of the Sahara <sup>26</sup> This perspective on Idoma origins and ethnicity has been attacked for its obvious weaknesses. In the first place, it appears to be an isolated view on the origin of the Idoma because it has not found acceptance with scholars on the subject. Furthermore, in addition to its failure to suggest any specific geographical area in the Sahara region which the Idoma occupied, it has not been corroborated by the oral traditions of the people regarding their traditions of origin. Moreover, the exponent of this view did not cite his sources for possible assessment nor did he give any hint as to how he reached his conclusions. This makes it very difficult to test the veracity and authenticity of his propositions. This suggests that he is merely trying to link the origins of the Idoma, Igala and Ebira to those Nigerian ethnic groups who claim they migrated from Yemen or Mecca in the Middle East. This theory of Middle Eastern origin has however not been able to stand up to the tests of linguistic, ethnographical and archaeological investigations of scholars in recent times. Some of these are revisited in the subsequent analysis.

Idoma origins and ethnic identity have also been related to the Igala. This view sees the Idoma as being of Igala extraction, itself believed to be a sub-group of the Yoruba and therefore distinct from the Okpoto. According to this thesis which was made popular by W. B. Baikie, before 1500 A D, both the Okpoto and the Igara (Igala?) occupied separate territories around the Niger, the former on the East and the latter in the West of the Niger. However, by about the first decade of fifteenth century, the Igaras were driven East of the Niger where they settled among the Okpoto. The Idoma, according to this view, are a hybrid of the Igara and Okpoto fusion<sup>27</sup>. This view appears to suggest that the Okpoto and the Igala were originally Yoruba speaking and the present Idoma ethnic group is a synthesis of the two. This view gets reinforcement from lexicostatistical evidence, which grouped the Idoma, Igala and Yoruba under the Kwa sub-unit of the Niger-Congo family of African languages. It must have been on this basis that Erim concluded that the Yoruba factor in both Igala and Idoma cultures cannot be completely ignored<sup>28</sup>.

A variant of this perspective holds that the Idoma, Igala and Yoruba formed the same social complex within the upper Benue region until about 6000 years ago when this group disintegrated<sup>29</sup>. According to this hypothesis developed by R. G. Armstrong and based largely on glottochronology and lexicostatistical data, this proto-society had the same conception of time, worshipped a host of local gods as well as observed similar taboos and totems. What follows from this is that the proto-group spoke a common language but with the split, its members dispersed into different regions where today they speak dialects of the

proto-language. Thus, the spatial distribution of the people concerned would appear to correspond to the length of the period of separate developments.

Scholars of Idoma history have identified some pitfalls in this conception of Idoma ethnicity. Erim, for example, reasons that it is not entirely correct to synthesise fragmentary evidence as pertains enormously complex historical developments with respect to Idoma origins, society and culture <sup>30</sup>. He points out that available evidence does not support the linguistic argument espoused for the Idoma, for on the contrary, indications are that the ancestors of these groups have come from various sources and directions. This makes it analytically and historically impossible to lump every ethnic group as deriving from the 'Idoma tribe'. On his part, Ochefu points at the methodological defects inherent in lexico-statistical data and the degree of valid inferences that can be drawn from anthropological linguistics <sup>31</sup>. Notwithstanding these criticisms, Armstrong's contention that a proto-Yoruba-Igala-Idoma society gave birth to the Idoma still remains, by and large, valid.

So far, what we have been trying to do is to acquaint ourselves with the variegated perspectives on Idoma origins. It is clear from the above analysis that scholars are generally not agreed on the origins of the people. However, on the basis of these divergent views a number of conclusions can be drawn from which a clearer perception about the origins of the people could emerge. The first of these is that available linguistic and archaeological data have shown the antiquity of man in the Benue valley. Archaeological evidence for example, indicates that iron-working peoples inhabited the Middle and Lower Benue valley some 2,500 years ago <sup>32</sup>. Similarly, ethnographical and anthropological surveys have proved

that the entire Benue valley was a great cultural watershed for a multiple African peoples <sup>33</sup>. Indeed its rich natural endowments coupled with its accessibility attracted many peoples, with the implications of the preponderance of multi-ethnic social formations in the area. Available anthropological, ethnographical records as well as oral traditions of the peoples have attested to the fact that the Yoruba, Igala, Epira and Idoma ethnic groups were the earliest inhabitants of the Middle and Lower Benue valley. But as Ochefu rightly argues, we cannot say whether these four distinct groups were hitherto a proto culture group, as Armstrong would have us believe. What is however probable is that intensive cultural, social, political and economic interactions between these groups tended to blur true ethnic and/or linguistic identities <sup>34</sup>. Given the recent advances in historical genetics, perhaps a genetic mapping and analysis of the peoples of the middle and lower Benue areas will help clarify the extent of their relationships and differences.<sup>35</sup>

Arising from the above is a second point, namely, until comparatively recent times, the word 'Idoma' was only a *linguistic* and not an *ethnic* appellation. While various speakers of this language had before the thirteenth century consolidated themselves on the Northern banks of the Benue and were recognized by both the Arab and European worlds, others were scattered on various locations in the Middle Benue, an area identified and referred to as Apa. The point therefore is that, the evolution of an Idoma ethnicity began only in the sixteenth century when a configuration of both centri-fugal and centri-petal forces compelled the people to vacate their Apa ancestral homeland to various

places within the lower Benue. How this happened is what we now turn to in the analysis that follows.

The Idoma unanimously trace their traditions of origin to Apa (Beipi), tentatively associated with a one-time capital of the legendary Kwararafa confederacy, which before the fifteenth century was under the Abakpawariga. That a confederacy known and referred to as Kwararafa once existed within the Benue valley area has been asserted by several leading scholars<sup>36</sup>. Similarly, that the Idoma were one among the many ethnic groups of the confederacy is a fact that is not disputed<sup>37</sup>. All Idoma traditions of origin agree that they left Apa because of the growing state of insecurity arising from constant warfare both from within and without the kingdom. It has been suggested by some scholars that following her defeat in the hands of Ali Ghaji (1476-1503), Kwararafa could no longer give a good account of herself. Indeed the era of decline had set in, and this coupled with the dynastic tussles associated with ascendancy of the Jukun on the corridors of power, aggravated the already confused situation. The result of these processes was the disintegration of the Apa society and therefore the beginning of the mass migrations of the Idoma and other ethnic group like the Igala and the Ebira, etc.<sup>38</sup>

From evidences gleaned from the oral traditions of the people and supported by available documentary sources, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Idoma had begun to spread out over large areas of the Lower Benue, mainly South of that river. The result of this pattern of migration was that, over time, they became thinly dispersed over much of the territory now inhabited by the Tiv, the Igala and the Ebira as well as the Idoma. Erim dated

this first wave of Idoma migrations to between c.1535-1625. According to him, the Ugboju, Adoka and Otukpo constituted this category of Idoma migrants. These migrations continued until the late eighteenth century when the Tiv began their vigorous push into the Benue valley. The arrival of the Tiv impacted tremendously on the Idoma during this period. For example, it disrupted the peace and tranquility that was gradually evolving. According to Erim, the consequence of this was the collapse of the evolving 'new' Apa (or what he calls Apa I)<sup>39</sup>

That Tiv migrants easily displaced the Idoma is a fact that could be attributed to a number of factors. In the first place, the people were politically fragmented compared to their Tiv neighbours. Furthermore, they were numerically smaller than the Tiv. This is in addition to the nature and character of the migration process itself, for as O'kwu correctly observes, the Idoma were thinly spread over fairly extensive territory<sup>40</sup>. The result of all these is that the people put up a feeble resistance to Tiv encroachment, hence their displacement from 'Apa I'. The pressure of Tiv migrations was such that they entrapped an Idoma-speaking group, the Etulo, who did not move quickly enough. Isolated from the main body of their Idoma kinsmen today, they form a coterie of non-Tiv people in Katsina-Ala, the heart of modern Tivland. On their part, Doma and Keana also lost much of their territory and were progressively pushed further North from the river Benue.

Another wave of migrations from Igalaland moved Westwards into modern Idomaland. These migrants identify Apa as the home of their ancestors, but nevertheless argue that after their departure from Apa at an earlier date,

they migrated to parts of Igalaland. They were however soon compelled to leave that place for parts of Western modern Idomaland because of the political upheaval and confusion that resulted from the increased influx of migrants into the area and the rather explosive political situation of the time. Erim has contended that the bitter struggle which characterised political ascendancy in the Igala State with headquarters at Idah sent numerous migrants fleeing Eastward toward Idomaland between c1685-1715<sup>41</sup>. Today these migrants form the core of Western Idoma districts such as Otukpa, Orokam, Ichama and Edumoga. O'kwu reasons that these constitute the second category of Idoma migration, for among the people, it is this second migration that is remembered giving the impression that they are Igala by origin<sup>42</sup>

By about the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the process of the consolidation of new territories in which they found themselves had been completed. This consolidation was however at the expense of other numerically smaller ethnic groups like the Igede, Akweya and Ufia on whose territories the Idoma settled. While the Igede were pushed towards the Eastern fringes of the Idoma territory, the Ufia and Akweya were encircled by the Idoma and today constitute bilingual micro-nationalities in the heart of Idomaland. The point we are trying to put across here is that by the end of the eighteenth century, the Idoma ethnic group had firmly established themselves on their present location. Ochefu aptly puts it this way:

By the end of the eighteenth century, the process of incorporating social, political, religious and economic ideas that had been transmitted from their ancestral homeland with those that they had acquired during their (several decades of) migrations, and the adaptation of these ideas to their new environment, had by and large been completed<sup>43</sup>.

As we shall subsequently see, this process was most thorough in religion and politics as reflected in the norms and values of the people, as well as their world view generally.

On the basis of the above analyses we make the following conclusions on the origins and development of Idoma ethnicity. Our first observation is that the people have been involved in migrations from the Apa cradle land, which brought them to their present location. These migrations were quite a complex affair and stretched over nearly two hundred years. This makes migrations an important aspect of their pre-colonial history. It is important to note here that both the historicity and location of Apa have evolved in the context of the people's belief as real. Thus this makes Apa, in A. M. Adejo's view, '... a place (that is) larger than life, real but also invested with myth' <sup>44</sup>. The second observation is that, the people moved out of Apa in the legendary Kwararafa kingdom after its collapse not as a cohesive body under a single leadership. The migrations had been in waves under separate leaders. In the legends, these leaders are referred to as both the founders of the various clans and their chiefs. This meant at least two things: (i) these clans, for the most part, were independent of each other, and (ii), judging from their contemporary populations, the clans must have been very small in size during the period of their migrations. This scenario must have accounted for the relative ease with which the Tiv displaced the people from 'Apa I'. Similarly, it must have accounted for the thinly dispersed nature and character of the people's settlement pattern throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries within the Benue valley.

Our last observation is that, the people did not arrive their present location at the same time. In fact, the settlement process continued until the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The implication of all these is that the people made contacts and interacted extensively with several Nigerian ethnic groups during the period of their tortuous migrations from Apa to their present location and when they finally settled. These historical considerations perhaps explain the fact that the contemporary Idoma society consists of a heterogeneous number of populations, mysteriously speaking the same language.

## **LANGUAGE**

In determining and ascertaining the general extent of linguistic diversity of a locality in any given socio-linguistic survey, one is often confronted with the methodological problem of accurate identification, isolation, classification and enumeration of the various languages, dialects and sublets concerned. This difficulty is compounded by the lack of clear distinction between the concepts of 'language' and 'ethnicity'. Over the years, linguists have increasingly reasoned with P. K. Bleambo's position that language and ethnicity 'are neither coincidental nor coterminous'<sup>46</sup>. This suggests in essence that some ethnic groups and their indigenes should be considered more as dialect clusters of the language of some larger ethno-cultural groups. The case of the Idoma is evident enough in this regard.

Studies in historical and comparative linguistics have empirically shown that Idoma for all intents and purposes is a linguistic and not an ethnic appellation<sup>47</sup>. Armstrong's study of this language identifies eight speakers of this

language, namely: Afu, Alago, Akweya, Etulo, Igede, Yatche, Yalla and Idoma within the Idoma sub-unit of the language. O'Kwu, following Armstrong, identifies four major dialectal divides which he classifies geographically as Northern, Central, Western and Southern Idoma. The administrative breakdown of the districts are shown in the table below:

**Table 1: The Major Dialects of the Idoma Language**

<b>GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION</b>	<b>DIALECTS</b>
Northern	Agatu and Ochekwu
Central	Adoka, Oglewu, Onyagede, Otukpo and Ugboju
Western	Edumoga, Ichama, Okpokwu, Otukpa and Owukpa
Southern	Agila, Igumale, Ijigbam and Ulayi

**Source:** Adopted and modified from V. G. O'kwu, 'Idomaland Under Colonial Rule, 1900-1950', Niger-Benue Conference, 1974, p.5.

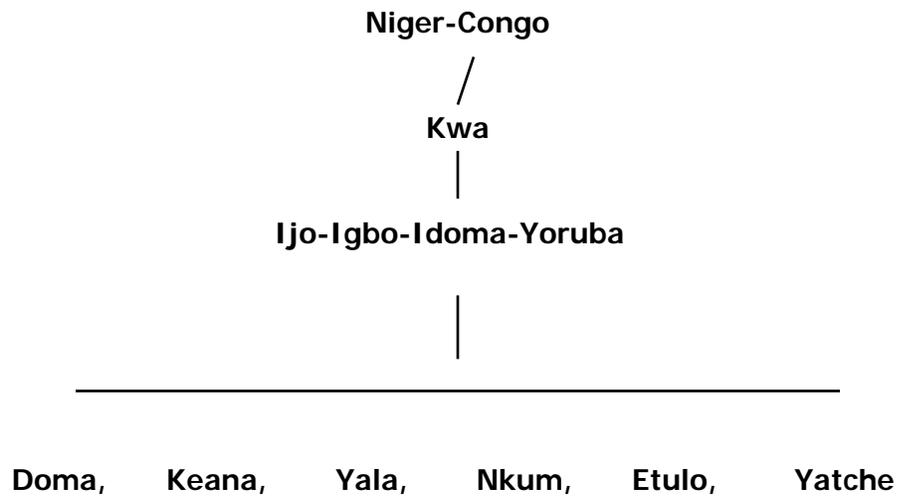
Of the remaining five districts, two are Igede speaking, i.e. Ito and Oju. The small district of Akpa is Akweya-speaking. It has been argued that these two groups can be regarded as Idoma-speaking only in a very loose sense of the word <sup>48</sup>. Both the Igede and Akweya like the Idoma, however, belong to the Kwa group of African languages.

Utonkon speaks Ufia, which is associated with semi-Bantu language, although it is more closely related to the Kwa language family than hitherto been presumed. O'Kwu contends that Ulayi district is largely Igbo speaking, although available evidence suggests the contrary <sup>49</sup>. The people of the district claim a common origin from Apa with the rest Idoma, having migrated from there with such Idoma groups like Agila and Ijigbam. It seems from the records that they

passed through Igalaland before reaching their present location in Idomaland. One fact though cannot be contested and that is that, arising from their location on the Idoma/Igbo borders, they are evidently bilingual.

Ethno-linguistic studies have also shown that the Idoma language belongs to a larger family group, the Niger-Congo language family <sup>50</sup>. The same source further shows that within this language family, some languages including Idoma, Igala, Yoruba and Igbo belong to another sub-group, the Kwa language family (see fig 2.1.). As the diagram above demonstrates, the Idoma, Igala and Yoruba, and so on are related languages. It should be added however, that the rate at which these languages differ, phonetically and structurally, is not uniform. For example, while the Idoma language is closely related to the Igala, the Igala language is closer to the Yoruba than the Idoma. Similarly, the Idoma linguistic unit is much more complex and diverse than that of the Igala and the Yoruba. An interesting but difficult and controversial issue that arises from this is how to explain the Idoma linguistic unity in spite of its geographical diversity. The concern here is not with the utopian concept of a pure 'tribe' in which over a million people would be deemed to have originated from one putative ancestor, for this is historically impossible <sup>51</sup>. We want to propose here that this unity, like the cultural unity is premised on a complex and dynamic inter-relationship of several groups in the course of their over two hundred years of migrations from Apa in the Kwararafa Kingdom and after they had settled in their present locations.

**The Placement of the Idoma Language within the Kwa Sub-Group of  
the Niger-Congo Language Family**



**Figure 2. 1.**

## **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

We begin by observing that the Idoma have had social and political institutions that were the product of the historical experience of the people. Although not structured strictly in terms of the Montesquiean model of the separation of power between the organs of government, the Idoma social and political system possessed the law-giving tradition that provided the broad framework within which various units of society performed different functions in the context of the development process of the people.

The basic building block of Idoma social and political organisation was the patrilineage or *Ipoopu*<sup>65</sup>. In its biological and territorial setting, the *Ipoopu* is made up of one or more lineage, *Ipooma* who trace their origin to a common ancestor. The importance of the *Ipoopu* in the traditional Idoma socio-political milieu has been emphasised by other writers. According to Ochefu:

Besides being the basis of individual's identity and forum for political and social rights, the patrilineage is primarily responsible for land holding and land allocation and defence of members<sup>66</sup>

He also adds that the charter for the association of the component patrilineages and settlements, vary from shared ancestry or kinship to voluntary associations between lineages of diverse origins. It should be added however that distinctions exist between aborigines and immigrants and/or strangers.

In the context of political organisation, the family or *Ole* may be seen as the smallest unit in traditional Idoma society. Usually under the leadership of the family head, *Adoole*, this autonomous structure settles disputes amongst its members. Transcending the household however, power and authority is diffused

within the community creating many foci of authority and influence, all of which are essentially related and integrated.

It has been observed that the highest organ of government and ultimate authority in traditional Idoma political system was the *Ojila* or *Ojira* <sup>67</sup>. This is the mass meeting of all adult males and the supreme congress of the community. It should be noted that though it is true that all adult males are members of the *Ojila*, it is also a fact that in practice, the elders, *Ai-Onyakwuoche Ole* and other persons of influence monitored the conduct of the *Ojila*. Young men although represented were only observers and could not speak except through their elders.

It is important to mention here that a consensual democratic principle governed the decision making process of the *Ojila*, making it extremely difficult for an individual or faction to control the assembly. For example, while the titled land spokesmen, *Ai-Igabo* and the 'owners' of the ancestral cult and the earth cult, *Ai-Obialekwu*, formed a gerontocratic class in the *Ojila*, they were never able in the slightest sense to convert that organ into a select council of elders. Thus, although ostensibly dominated by the elders as regards deliberations and formation of consensus, the *Ojila* also integrated the views and interests of the youths. Further more, instances existed where young men also had their say in the *Ojila*, for as Elaigwu aptly contends: 'Quite often young men of acclaimed bravery, intelligence and reputation were allowed to speak...' <sup>68</sup>. This would appear to be the intrusion of achievement into the rigid division of labour on the ascriptive basis of age. To this may be added the fact that while the concept of gerontocracy, which was a fundamental feature of the political organisation of

the people entailed that elders had a monopoly of deliberative and policy-making prerogative, the actual execution of such policies depended entirely on the youth who were the backbone of the village constabulary.

Consequently, similar to R. A. Dahl's concept of 'referendum democracy' was a system where by issues to be deliberated upon at the central or land *Ojila* were first subjected to thorough discussions at the *Ipooma* and *Ipoopu* levels. These smaller *Ojilas* would as far as possible settle their own affairs without reference to the central *Ojila*. But where such issues were brought to the central *Ojila* due to their urgency and topicality, the spokesmen of each lineage was expected to tell the audience the consensus of his group concerning the particular issue under discussion.

From its inception therefore, the *Ojila* was essentially a democratic institution of government. To solve crucial problems affecting the community, the elders of the various lineages within the community engaged in discussions, debates and negotiations in the *Ojila* at the end of which decisions were arrived at by consensus. Magid's observation in this regard is instructive. In his view:

The procedure tended to register prevailing opinion, to crystallise the sense of meeting, to avoid conflict and to find a compromise<sup>69</sup>

In a society that attaches enormous significance to public opinion, the *Ojila* was no doubt a very powerful organ in pre-colonial Idoma and like the Tiv *Ijir*,<sup>70</sup> all the rest organs of government revolved round it.

The origin of the *Ojila* in the political organisation of the Idoma has not been sufficiently explained. However, available evidence underscores the fact that it has a history that goes as far back as the Kwararafa phase of the people's history. In this connection, the *Ojila* is viewed as the earliest form of political

organisation among the people <sup>71</sup>. It is possible the concept of *Ojila* may have evolved from the basic assumption among several African groups who do not have a centrally accepted 'tribal' authority that government was changeless and custom sovereign and that it was the elders, largely because of their age and timeless wisdom, that were the 'true' and natural custodians of these institutions. This explains why the *Ojila* in the Idoma socio-political setting, retained both legislative and judicial functions while at the same time it controlled the executive organ of government. Evidence abounds to show that the *Ojila* in the past made laws for the community <sup>72</sup>. It also adjudicated in outstanding disputes between one social group or lineage and another. It exercised appellate jurisdiction placing the weight of public opinion behind the injured party. The *Ojila* also selected the *Oche* (King), the *Ai-Igabo* (graded title holders) and the *Ai-Uta* or *Ai-Oga* constabulary and arbitrated in misunderstanding arising from intra and inter-group relations, etc.

The point therefore is that the *Ojila* was the most powerful political institution in Idomaland on the eve of colonial conquest and occupation. As the supreme council of the people, it controlled judicial and administrative authorities. As the nucleus of traditional administration, all the other organs of government (which will be examined shortly) derived their authority from it. Besides, during the period of extreme political fragmentation that prevailed most parts of Idomaland shortly before the advent of the British, the *Ojila* remained the most influential political institution among the people. We hope to return to this point in due course, but it suffices here to demonstrate the significance of

the *Ojila* institution in the political superstructure of the Idoma society before the advent of the British.

However, the *Ojila* was only one form of political organisation among the Idoma, another one was the *Oche* or King. Like the *Ojila*, the office of the *Oche* demonstrates every sign of being ancient in Idoma and despite years of cultural weathering, still persists. The origins of this organ in the political configurations of the Idoma is not clear, for it does seem curious that in a clearly segmented and what appears to be an egalitarian society such as the Idoma, there should emerge an institutionalised leadership. In a critical appraisal of the antiquity of this institution in Idoma society, Erim has theorised that it reflects a natural phenomenon, which was built up over the years upon family, lineage and kindred ties, and emerged from the general structure of the society. He also argues that the office existed prior to Idoma migrations from Apa and that it only concretised during their many years of migrations and final settlement<sup>73</sup>. Ochefu agrees with Erim's position but adds that the 'natural phenomenon' Erim refers to should be anchored on specific social and economic developments that took place in Idoma society over successive epochs. As he succinctly puts it:

...the various socio-political structures and institutions that were created are in actual terms, a manifestation of efforts aimed at controlling, mobilizing, appropriating and distributing surpluses, and the co-ordination and resolution of conflicts that may arise there from. The origins of an *Ocheship* in the political organisation of the Idoma represents the concentration of authority in the hands of a group of titled elders in their efforts at managing the growing complexities of their societies.<sup>74</sup>

Among the Idoma, the *Oche* institution further shows that that office is rooted in religion, for the *Oche* is both the king and the religious head of the community. From the oral evidence available, it is clear that the *Oche* in

traditional Idoma got his power largely from the religious aspects of the society. Indications are that the *Oche* was the priest-chief and presided over virtually all the cults in the community, the most significant of which were the *Aje* (earth) and *Alekwu-Afia* (ancestral) cults. <sup>75</sup> These spiritual responsibilities of the *Oche* made the people regard him as their chief mediator between the kindred groups and their ancestors, the focus of all traditions that binds them together.

The *Oche* in the past was not a clan head nor was he usually even a lineage head <sup>76</sup>. Although chosen by the lineage, he stands between them and his responsibility is general and to the land. It is in this regard that the *Oche* was seen as the highest officer within the land and although the senior lineage elders within the *Ojila* were (and still are) collectively higher than him, yet they were not so individually <sup>77</sup>. It should be added however, that among the Idoma, the *Oche* was more a *leader* than a *ruler*. He was at the most only *primus inter pares* among the senior lineage elders in the land. His influence and authority derived from his spiritual responsibilities, his generosity and hospitality, in addition to his reputation for wisdom and courage and particularly the size of his personal following, for as the Idoma put it: '*Ewa Oche-a'* i.e. large following makes the king. The significance of the last criteria is vividly brought out in the following passages from a famous Idoma ancient song:

*Owo je loloce Oce*  
*Owo je loloce ee*  
*Owo je loloce, Oo gbede oo*  
*Owo je loloce cee*  
(God gives kingship to  
one who has followers.  
God blesses the one who has people  
God blesses one who has people, such  
one, this is a source of joy  
God blesses the one who has  
people) <sup>78</sup>.

In order to prevent the possible emergence of an autocratic *Oche*, the Idoma worked out an elaborate formula to limit the authority of this organ of government. At least three basic constitutional devices regulated the authority of the *Oche* in pre-colonial Idoma society: (i) the supreme authority of the *Ojila*; (ii) the rituals of the office; and (iii) the principles of rotation and seniority which governs succession to the office. Largely because of their explanatory significance, we would attempt to look at each of these elaborately.

The power of the *Oche* was circumscribed by public opinion articulated in the central *Ojila*. At the land level, as we noted before, the senior lineage elders took precedence over the *Oche* who had to abide by the decision of the *Ojila* in all important matters of war, religious festivals, inter-territorial relations general hunts and judicial matters. On formal occasions, such as, for example, the annual sacrifice at the land shrine, the senior lineage elders remind the *Oche* that he is *Oche* because it is they who have made him so <sup>79</sup>. Furthermore, while the *Oche* could appoint the *Ai-Igabo* (titled elders), his choice had to be ratified by the *Ojila*. This way the *Oche* was made accountable to the *Ojila* and through that, the people.

Limitations were also placed on the power of the *Oche* by ritually reinforcing the majesty of his office. The new *Oche* was subjected to elaborate installation rites, which included symbolic death and burial ceremonies. Afterwards, he became subject to a plethora of stringent taboos. The installation rites exposed him to grave sanctions of the departed ancestors should he plot or commit evil against a child of the land. In Igumale for example, the installation prayers of the *Och'Apa* include: 'Land of my father hear what I say. If I do wrong

to my people, may I die, if I rule them fairly, may I live'. Among the people of Ugboju, Otukpo and Ochobo, the *Oche's* installation rites included symbolic death and burial ceremonies. Afterwards, the *Oche* among the Akpa and Otukpo was forbidden from travelling outside his kingdom. In some places like Onyagede and Otukpo, the *Oche* has the freedom to travel out of his domain, but was prohibited from entering the secular world of the market place. Also the *Oche* is not expected to see a corpse; nor must he see the Western rainbows, *Onaji* or *Owo'hogwa*, which symbolises the death of a great (native) doctor, *Obochi*. The point here is that, already considered 'dead', it was abominable for the *Oche* to see a corpse.

The principle of lineage rotation checked the concentration of political power and authority in a single unit. In a community of say seven patrilineages, each would according to the principle of rotation, take its turn in nominating a candidate from among its group to the office of *Oche* in that community. This would ensure that each lineage participated in supplying the *Oche* in an ascending order of seniority. It would seem therefore, that the principle of lineage rotation evolved out of the people's concept of constitutionalism, which entailed participation by all lineage groups. Elaigwu has compared this institutionalised method with the rules guiding succession to the British monarchy<sup>80</sup>.

On the other hand, the principle of seniority ensured that while succession rotated among the constituent lineages, by proceeding from the most senior to the most junior (that is, the lineage whose founding ancestor was the last to emerge), political power and authority would never become the monopoly

of one lineage. Above all, the seniority principle ensured that the *Oche* would be too old and in some cases infirm to participate actively in political affairs or even threaten dictatorship. This invariably meant the delegation of authority to the young men who in fact were the crux of gerontocracy in traditional Idoma. This would then enable the *Oche* to focus more attentively on his duty as the priest-chief and president of the cults.

In addition to all these, the *Oche's* status was marked by certain traditional regalia, the most important of which were the bracelet of coral beads, *Oka* which was strapped round his wrist; the royal stool, *Akpa*, the staff, *Okwute* and the red cap, *Ofula*. Similarly, he is surrounded by elaborate etiquette and is addressed by a traditional title that varies from community to community and can be translated as simply 'Your Majesty'. As a further mark of status, the *Oche* also received tributes which consisted of trophies of fierce game animals and other symbols of war and brave exploits: elephant tusks, lion and leopard skins, python skins, feathers of the Senegal coucal, *Uloko*, and captured slaves<sup>81</sup>

J. S. Boston has suggested a strong Igala influence in the evolution of the *Oche* institution in the pre-colonial Idoma society<sup>82</sup>. Up till date, the extent of this influence has not been fully determined. Available evidence however indicates that at a point, the *Oches* of central Idoma polities travelled to Idah for their investiture ceremonies<sup>83</sup>. Again, there is little evidence to show that these *Oches* were tributary to the *Attah* of Igalaland, rather, such royal visits has been associated with the overwhelming influence of the *Attah* at that time, for as Armstrong observes:

Idah came to have great prestige, and lands which certainly never paid tax to Idah would send their chiefs there for proper installation<sup>84</sup>.

In another context, this development has been associated with a phase in the early history of the people, namely the period of their migrations from Apa, which took some Idoma groups to Igalaland. Agbo, for example, notes that Idah was the ancestral home of some Idoma groups, so that the people still believed that Idah was the abode of their ancestors, hence their installation was sanctified at Idah <sup>85</sup>. Citing A. P. Anyebe who sees these royal trips as merely *spiritual* and not *political* <sup>86</sup>, Agbo however, concludes that it would be incorrect to completely rule out any form of Igala political influence over pre-colonial Idomaland. Whatever was the real situation, it should be noted that this political relationship was facilitated by certain variables that were then operating in both societies. As we shall eventually see in the next chapter, the scope and dynamics of this relationship was such that involved a two-way flow of influences from both the Igala and the Idoma ethnic groups.

A critical look at the evolution of the *Oche* institution among the Idoma also indicates that between the mid seventeenth and late nineteenth centuries, the office had declined to a point that made the institution moribund in most parts of the land. In fact, on the eve of colonial rule in Idomaland, this office was for all intents and purposes in abeyance. Analysts have propounded a number of theories about this development. The first of these theories situates the ebbing of the *Oche* institution within the context of the political violence that occasioned Idoma migrations and settlement. According to this view, the disintegration of their Apa homeland on the one hand, and their subsequent displacement by the Tiv on the other, left the Idoma in utter political disarray <sup>87</sup>. Consequently, by the time they arrived at their present habitat, their status was no better than political

refugees. In this situation, matters pertaining chieftaincy were quickly overtaken by the exigencies of their new homeland.

The second theory suggests the corroding influence of the rather protracted process of the Idoma migrations from the legendary Apa. According to O'kwu, largely because of the long period of time spent on their migrations and due to the fact that the Idoma were dispersed over an extensive territory stretching from the upper and middle Cross River basin, the lower Benue and the Niger-Benue confluence region, the Idoma must have lost the tradition of central chieftaincy which they claim they had during the Apa period of their history<sup>88</sup>.

The third and for now the last theory suggests that while wars and migrations were critical to the emergence of leadership and centralised authority among the Idoma, the reduction of these as from the mid 1850s encouraged centri-fugal tendencies in the Idoma political structure. In consequence, not only did political unity behind an *Oche* disappear, but in fact:

...jealousy between lineage, always present became relatively more significant and while the ideology of chieftaincy remained strong, the lineage could never agree on the succession. In this situation chieftaincy as an operating social reality evaporated<sup>89</sup>

The decline of the *Oche* institution in Idoma society during this period was however modified by a number of other important political institutions that ensured the much-needed balance between the units in the society. Of these, the *Ojila* (already examined), the *Och'olihi* (market chief) the *Ai-Uta* or *Ai-Oga* constabulary and the *Ai-Ekwu* (secret Societies) were the most significant. In the pre-colonial Idoma political set up, the most important recipient of delegated authority were the *Och'Olihi* (saluted *Ukpooju*) and his assistants, the *Ai-Uta* constabulary. Appointed by the *Ojila*, the *Och'Olihi* was in charge of the

administration of the market place, he collected dues and adjudicated disputes within the precinct of the market in accordance with customary laws. It was in this respect that he is aptly described as the 'president of the market courts' <sup>90</sup>

The *Ai-Uta* constabulary whose membership was drawn from able-bodied young men and heads of small

social units assisted the *Och'Olihi*. It is instructive to note that as the executive organ of the land *Ojila*, the *Ai-Uta* had no authority of its own but would be given ad hoc power for specific purpose by the mass meeting. For example, members were usually detailed to carry out the wishes of the mass meeting and sent on diplomatic missions to other land.

The *Ai-Uta* constabularies were in turn assisted by a number of secret societies. Some of these include *Onyonkpo*, *Achukwu* and *Okpantla*, and others, found in almost every Idoma community. The origin of this organ of government is still shrouded in mystery. A source claims that the idea of secret societies got into Idomaland through Utonkon <sup>91</sup>. Another source however, linked the history of secret cults in Idoma society to one *Anube* <sup>92</sup>. What ever their origin, one thing is most probable, and that is that the concept of secret society may have evolved among the Idoma out of the continuous search for ways by which the efforts of the *Ojila* and the various social and political institutions could be supplemented and perfected in the over all interest of society. The secret societies were secret to the extent that they were limited to official members alone and exclusively to adult males of the community. Among their many functions was ensuring that members of the community conformed with the norms and values of the society. It was in this regard that they were responsible

for carrying out punitive expeditions against social deviants and dissenters. In this sense, it can be argued that the secret societies together with the *Ai-Uta* constabulary constituted the instruments of coercion at the disposal of the elders who were regarded as the custodians of the norms and values of the society.

The gerontocratic structure of pre-colonial Idoma society was enhanced by the preponderance of age-groups and age-sets which were also critical organs of government. As a system of grouping all members of the community into classes on the ascriptive basis of age, age-group associations helped in fostering unity and harmonious living while at the same time encouraging socio-political growth. This is because they emphasise the gerontocratic structure of pre-colonial Idoma society. Age-group associations provided auxiliary services such as the clearing of paths, construction and repairs of bridges, digging of graves for the burial of dead members of the community, etc. In all these, the point should be made, contributions by individual groups depended on their maturity and ability.

The point therefore is that the decline of the *Oche* institution in most parts of Idomaland on the eve of colonial conquest and occupation did not degenerate into chaos and anarchy as often portrayed by colonial writers. This was the case because, as we have demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs, many institutions of government modified the ebbing of the chieftaincy institution which, working together with the *Ojila*, preserved social and political equilibrium. It should be added that this does not rule out instances of discord. On the contrary, political discords mostly between generational groups did occur, but because these were subsumed in the Idoma constitutional system, they were

never allowed to develop into serious crisis such as to threaten the peace. Indeed through the mechanism of dialogue and consensus, such challenges were usually quickly resolved in the interest of the harmonious existence of groups.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has attempted to establish the political, social and cultural background necessary for the understanding of the Idoma ethnic group on the one hand, and the relationship between it and its neighbours on the other. From our analysis of the origins and development of Idoma ethnicity, it is evident that the people have been involved in migrations from the Apa cradleland to their present location. It is not clear when the people actually arrived at their present habitat although from the oral, secondary and ethnographical sources available, it is clear that the people have occupied their present location from the earliest period of which we have any knowledge.

Similarly, our appraisal of the people's social and political institutions has shown that traditionally, there are many loci of authority in Idoma and not only was kingship institutionalised, but indeed there were other organs of government which acted in tandem with each other to ensure the social and political order necessary for meaningful growth and development. Therefore, if the purpose of government is the promotion of the welfare of the populace, the Idoma, despite their supposed backwardness, had political institutions that had all the attributes of government. Indeed, among the people before the advent of *Pax Britannica* had emerged a system of social and political organisation in which elders who were the custodians of the norms and values of the rich Idoma civilisation largely

controlled government. The preponderance of institutionalised organs of government such as the *Ojila*, the *Oche*, the *Ai-Igabo* and the *Ai-Uta*, do not merit R. Horton's concept of 'stateless' societies.

In the traditional Idoma political system there was balance between power and authority on the hand, and service and accountability on the other. Leaders were never given ultimate power for that lay with the people and office holding was predicated, by and large, on proven merit. The problem with this type of social and political structure was that all the organs of government were fused together in a manner that to subtract one of the organs from the total network is to destroy the whole system. The dynamics of this system clearly eluded the colonial authorities who were obviously fascinated by the 'Emirate System' in the far North and were not patient enough to critically study and understand it. Therefore, it was in the attempt to impose the indirect rule system of administration on the Idoma, that the people's social and political system was altered in ways that affected the society and its people on the one hand, and their relations with their neighbours on the other.

## END NOTES

1. See V. G. O'kwu, 'Early history of Idomaland' Ahmadu Bello University (hereafter ABU) Zaria, Postgraduate Seminar, 1974, P.1.
2. This is based on a projected annual growth rate of 2.5% of the 1963 census figures of the land. For more on this see 'Certified True Copy, 1963 Population Census Projected 1990 and 1991 Population of Benue State by Local Government Areas and Districts,' prepared by the department of statistics, ministry of finance and economic development, Makurdi, Benue state, October 1991, PP.1-18. Perhaps, it should be added that this figures have since been contested and defeated in the court by the people who feel (and quite correctly too) that they are more than the official figures released. Validating the people's claim in one such legal debate, the Honourable Justice Titilola Mabogunje of the First Census Tribunal sitting at Garki, Abuja on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1993, ruled in favour of Okpokwu local government area of Idomaland, declaring the census figures released for the area null and void. For more details on this see Suit. No. GT/BN/6/L.G10.
3. In miles this has been put at about 90 miles from north to south and slightly over 20 miles from east to West. For more details consult R. K. Udo, *Geographical Regions of Nigeria*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970, PP.138-147. Also see V. G. O'kwu, 'The Establishment of colonial Administration in Idomaland, *Savannah*, Vol. 5 No.1, 1976, P.29; and Y. A. Ochefu, *The Economic Foundations of Idomaland 1860-1980*, Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, Makurdi, 2002, P.1.
4. The realities of this location make the Doma and Keana of present day Nasarawa state, the Nsukka and Ezza as well as Ngbo Igbo of Anambra and Ebonyi states, the Nkum, Ikom, Yache, Iyala and Bekworra of Cross River State, the Tiv and Igede of Benue State and the Igala and Bassa of Kogi State, the immediate and distant neighbours of the Idoma people.
5. We are greatly indebted to Y. A. Ochefu for this information. For more see his *The Economic Foundations of Idoma Society...* PP. 35-39
6. *Ibid.* Also see V. G. O'kwu, 'Idomaland Under Colonial Rule, 1900 - 1950', a paper presented at the Niger-Benue Confluence Seminar held in Jos, Plateau State, April 26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>, 1974. PP.2-3.
7. *Ibid.* It should be noted however, that both the state and federal government in collaboration with the UNDP through its rural development scheme have sunk wells to supplement these natural sources of water.
8. Y. A. Ochefu, *The Economic Foundation of Idoma Society...*, P.37. It should be added that, though archaeological investigations in the land is by and large at its incipient stage, this is a further proof of the antiquity of man in this area.

9. See V. G. O'kwu, 'Idomaland Under Colonial Rule, 1900 – 1950...' The availability of these resources demonstrate evidently that the contemporary problems of poverty and underdevelopment which confronts the land and its people can be partly explained by the neglect they have continued to suffer in the hands of the Nigeria State. This is in spite of their immense contributions to the development of the nation. This neglect has recently featured in the people's struggle for self-determination within the corporate existence of the Nigerian nation See 'The Apa State Movement: the Economic Blue Print of the Proposed Apa State', memo submitted to the Committee for the Creation of States, Local Governments and Boundary Adjustments, Makurdi, 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1996.
10. The details of this are available in 'the Idoma National Forum, Request for the creation of Apa State out of the present Benue state a memo presented to the National Constitutional Conference, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1994. Also see, 'The Apa State Movement: The Economic Blue Print of the proposed Apa state', a memo submitted to the committee for the creation of states, local Governments and Boundary Adjustments, Makurdi, 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1996.
11. Y. A. Ochefu, *The Economic Foundation of Idoma Society...* P.37. This is contrary to V.G, O'kwu's 1974 claim that the average rainfall in Idomaland per year is above 60 inches. For details see this 'Idomaland under colonial Rule, 1900-1950...' P. 3.
12. See F. Neyt, *Traditional Arts and History from Zaire*, Oxford: University Press, 1978, PP.11-14.
13. V.G. O'kwu, 'Idomaland under colonial Rule, 1900-1950...', P.3.
14. Y. A. Ochefu's, *The Economic Foundations Idoma Society...*, P. 49. It should be seen that pre-colonial Idoma attached much significance to agriculture from at least two perspectives: (I) from agriculture's close affinity with the people's cosmology; and (ii) in the close relationship between the calendar and year. This makes the Idoma society a completely agrarian one.
15. O. O. Okpeh, 'The Historical Evolution of the Ochobo clan community in the Oglewu District of Otukpo Local Government: 1800 - 1860', *B. A. Thesis*, University of Jos, 1991, p.22.
16. In fact so important is yam to the people that one's yam plot was an important index of his wealth and prestige. Furthermore, his crop takes the largest land area a farmer cultivates in every farming season. This perhaps explains why the notion that 'the Idoma sleeps on an empty stomach unless he has had pounded yam or yam flour for supper', is a fact which is very hard to controvert.
17. Evidences of this are available in the following works. A. E. Afigbo, *The Igbo and their Neighbours*, 1842-1872, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952; Y. A. Ochefu, *The Economic Foundations of Idoma Society...*, (see in particular, chapter two); O. O. Okpeh, Jr. 'Idomaland and Her Southern Neighbours: A study of Inter-group Relations during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries' in *Benue Valley Journal of Humanity* (hereafter BVJH), Vol. 3, No. 1, 2000, pp.76-86; T. Tseror, *Tiv and Their Neighbours*, Jos: PLHA Printing Press, 1992 (See particularly chapter five); O. N. Njoku, 'Traces of Technology Diffusion in Pre- colonial Nigeria: The Igbo and their Northern Neighbours', *Nigerian Heritage*, Vol. I., 1992, PP. 49-61; and A. E. Afigbo, ' Pre-colonial Links Between South Eastern

Nigeria and the Benue Valley', *Journal of African Studies* (hereafter *JAS*), Vol.4. No.2, 1977, pp. 127-139.

18. For example see N. A. Agbo, *Idoma Politics and History*, Lagos: Parade Communications Ltd, 1991, P.7; Y.A. Ochefu, *The Economic Foundations of Idoma Society*, and O. N. Njoku, 'Traces of Technology Diffusion in pre-colonial Nigeria....'
19. *Ibid.* The skilful blacksmith is acknowledged with the title of *Abije*
20. This state of affairs of the traditional Idoma arts and crafts has been associated with the process of modernisation unleashed on society by colonial imperialism. Indeed, the process of the establishment of the colonial economy had the implication of disarticulating the socio-economic and political organisation of Idomaland. For a comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon and how it impinged on the development of the people and their society see E. G. Ode, 'The impact of British colonialism on the peoples of Idoma Division, 1908-1950', *M. A. Thesis*, ABU, Zaria, 1981; A. Okau, 'External influences on the Traditional life of the Ochekwu people of Idomaland: A Historical Survey' *B. A. Thesis*, University of Calabar, 1980; Y. A. Ochefu, 'The Lower Benue Valley and the International Economy', *M. A. Thesis*, Birmingham, 1985; and *The Economic Foundations of Idoma Society*, A. G. Okpeke, Orokam ' Economy from the Pre-colonial Era 1960' *B. A. Thesis* University of Jos, 1981; and A. M. Adejo. 'The History of Political Development Idomaland, 1900-160', *B. A. Thesis* University of Maiduguri, 1984.
21. R. G. Armstrong first expressed this view. Other scholars who hold the same opinion include V. G. O'kwu, E. O. Erim and Y. A. Ochefu. For details see R. G. Armstrong, 'The Idoma-Speaking Peoples' in D. Forde, *et al* (eds.), *Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence, Ethnographical Survey of Africa, West Africa Part x*, London: Institute of African Studies, 1951, PP. 100; E. O. Erim, *The Idoma Nationality...*; and Y. A. Ochefu, *The Economic Foundations of Idoma Society...*
22. E. O. Erim, *Idoma Nationality...* P. 4.
23. See S. Crowther and J. F. Schon, *Journal of an Expedition up to the Niger and Tsadda Rivers... 1954*, Church Mission House, 1855, P.66. Also See R. G. Armstrong, 'The Idoma Speaking Peoples'... PP. 91-93.
24. *Ibid.* Similarly, See N. O. Agbo, *Idoma Politics and History...*, particularly chapter one.
25. J. N. Ukwedeh, 'The "Akpoto" phenomenon in the History of the Niger-Benue Confluence area: A Review of Evidence' a paper presented at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Seminar, ABU. Zaria, 1986, P. 22. What is left, as a relic of this mysterious people and/or society is a small village to the West of modern Ankpa called Akpoto. This village borders Idomaland and its citizens are bilingual, speaking the Igala and Idoma languages.
26. See P. E. Okwoli, *A short History of Igala*, Ilorin: Matanmi Press, 1973.
27. For more see W. B. Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring voyage up the Rivers Niger and Benue in 1854*, London: John Murray, 1856, PP 286-7. Also see S. Crowther, *et al*, *The Journey of Expedition up the Niger and Tsadda Rivers*, PP.176-180; and T. S. Hutchinson, *Narrative of the Niger Tsadda and the Benue Explorations*, London: Frank Cass, 1966, P. 55.

28. E. O. Erim, *Idoma Nationality...* PP.6-8.
29. For details on this view see R. G. Armstrong, 'The Idoma-Speaking Peoples...' P.79. Also see  
 Y. A. Ochefu *The Economic Foundations of Idoma Society*, P.3.
30. E. O. Erim, *The Idoma Nationality...*, PP. 6-7. This scholar reinforced his major claim in the  
 book by arguing that Idoma ethnicity is a recent phenomenon that did not predate the  
 advent of the British.
31. Y. A. Ochefu, *The Economic Foundations of Idoma Society...*, P. 4.
32. Some of them were probably the offshoots of the NOK/Taruga culture and might well have  
 been the autochthonous of a river based trading and fishing communities that flourished  
 the region between c. 500. A. D. and 1000 A D For more on this see Z. A. Gundu, 'The  
 peopling of the Niger-Benue Confluence: A Review of Evidence', a paper presented at the  
 conference on Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence Region, Lokoja, 1987. Similarly  
 see, K. O. Ologe, 'The Environmental Background of Man, History and Culture in the  
 Niger-Benue Confluence region, a presented at *Ibid.* ; B. E. B. 'The Nok Culture in Pre-  
 history, *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria* (hereafter, *JHSN.*) Vol. No.4 1959, PP.193-  
 288; T. Shaw, 'prehistory' in O. Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan:  
 Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, PP.25-56; and F. Neyt, *Traditional Arts and History  
 from Zaire...*; and by the same author, *The Arts of the Benue to the Roots of Tradition*,  
 Belgium: Lannoo, Tielt, 1985.
33. For details of this consult the following works: C. K. Meek *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria: An  
 Ethnographical Account of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria*, London: 1925, 2 Vols. ; R.  
 G. Armstrong, D. Forde and P. Brown (eds.), *Peoples of Niger-Benue Confluence...*  
 J. A. Ballard, 'Historical inferences from the linguistic Geography of the Nigerian Middle  
 Belt' *Africa*, Vol. XLI, No.4, 1971, PP.296-305; A. Obafemi, 'States and Peoples of the  
 Niger-Benue Confluence Area', PP.144-164, and S. Abubakar, 'Peoples of the Upper  
 Benue Basin and the Bauchi Plateau Before 1800', PP.165-186, both in O. Ikime (ed.),  
*Groundwork of Nigerian History*; and T. N. Tamuno, 'Peoples of the Niger-Benue  
 Confluence in J. F. Ade Ajayi and I. Espie (ed.), *A Thousand Years of West African  
 History*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1965, PP.206-216.
34. Ochefu adds that this is probably how an aboriginal group like the Akpoto became extinct.  
 For details see his *The Economic Foundations of Idoma Society...*, P8.
35. See Y.A. Ochefu "Historical Genetics and Archaeogenetics": How useful a methodology in the  
 re-examination of some existing assumptions on Intergroup Relations in the Benue  
 Valley?" unpublished paper, 2009.
36. For example see H. R. Palmer, 'The Kano Chronicle' *Journal of Royal the Anthropological  
 Institute* (hereafter *JRAI*), Vol.38, 1928; C.K. Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom: An  
 Ethnographical Study of the Jukun-speaking peoples of Nigeria*, London, Kegan Paul,  
 1931; M. Raid, 'The Jukun: An example of an African Migrations in the Sixteenth  
 Century', *Bulletin de I.F.A.N.*, T. XXII, Ser. B. Nos. 3-4, 1960, PP. 476-485; E. O. Erim,  
*The Idoma Nationality...* S. Abubakar People of the Upper Benue Basin and the Bauchi

- Plateau before 1800'...; A Obayemi, 'States and people of Niger-Benue confluence...; and E. O. Erim, 'The Early Foundations of the Kwararafan Confederacy 1331-1902 A.D., in *Nigerian Magazine*, Vol.55, No.3, July - September, 1987, PP.35-41.
37. E. O. Erim's pioneering work has simply demonstrated that Kwararafa Kingdom was a multi-ethnic society, although today the name of that Kingdom has been principally associated with the Jukum. H. R. Palmer has suggested that the ancestors of the Idoma were part of this multi-ethnic society. For more details see H. R. Palmer in C. K. Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom...*; E. O. Erim, *The Idoma Nationality...*; and (by the same author), 'The Early Foundations of the Kwararafa Confederacy'.... Similarly see V. G. O'kwu, *Early History of Idomaland'...*; R. G. Armstrong, 'The Idoma-Speaking people...'; and F. Neyt, *The Arts of Benue to the Roots of Tradition...*
  38. See E. O. Erim, *The Idoma Nationality...*, particularly chapters two and three. Also see O. O. Okpeh, Jr., 'The Idoma and Minority Group Politics in Northern Nigeria; 1944-1960: A Study in An Aspect of the National Question', *M. A. Thesis*, University of Jos, Jos, 1994, PP.63 - 70.
  39. *Ibid.* For vivid illustrations of the actual location of this settlement see migratory chart adopted and modified from Erim on P. 13.Z spread over a vast territory that covered most parts of contemporary Tivland, Igalaland, the Northern fringes of Igbo land as well as Idomaland. For details see his 'Idomaland under colonial rule 1900-1950... P.6.
  40. According to O' kwu, the Idoma migrated in waves from the second half of the fifteenth century and were thinly spread over a vast territory that covered most parts of contemporary Tivland, Igalaland, the Northern fringes of Igboland as well as Idomaland. For details see his 'Idomaland Under colonial rule 1900-1950...p. 6.
  41. E. O. Erim, *The Idoma Nationality...*, P.33. O'kwu however attributes Idoma emigration from Igalaland to the colonising activities of the Attah dynasty which soured the hitherto peaceful relationship between the Igala and the Idoma. For details of the nature and character of this see V. G. O'kwu 'Early History of Idomaland'.... PP. 4-7.
  42. *Ibid.*, P.4 Erim calls these Idoma migrants ' the Western migrants'.
  43. See Y. A. Ochefu, *The Economics Foundations of Idoma Society...*, P. 13.
  44. A. M. Adejo, 'The Political Evolution of the Idoma' in *New Nigeria*, Saturday April 19,1997, P.13.
  45. For details of the polemics on this concepts see P. K. Bleambo, *Plura-Lingualism in Gongola State* in, E. N. Emenajo (ed.), *Multi-lingualism, Minority Languages and Language Policy in Nigeria*, Agbor Central Books Ltd, 1991; D. Osaji, *Language survey in Nigeria*, Quebec: Quebec International Centre for Research in Bilingualism, 1979; and R. Wentelukas, *A Hand book of Ethnic Units in Nigeria*, Stangart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden G M Bit, 1968.
  46. See P. K. Bleambo, 'Pluri-Lingualism in Gongola State'..., P. 187.
  47. See for example, R. G. Armstrong, 'The Idoma-speaking peoples...'; A Magid, *Men in the Middle: Leadership and Rule conflict in a Nigerian Society*, New York: Manchester University Press, 1976; and E. O. Erim, *The Idoma Nationality...*,

48. See R. G. Armstrong, 'The Idoma-Speaking Peoples...', P.100.
49. V. G. O'kwu, 'Idomaland Under Colonial Rule...',P.5.
50. See for example J. H. 'Greenberg, Languages of Africa' in *International Journal of American Linguistics* (here after *IJA*), Vol. XXIX, No.1, PP.6-33, 1963; R. G. Armstrong, 'The Use of Linguistic and Ethnographic data in the Study of Idoma and Yoruba History' in J. Vansina, (ed.), *Historian in Tropical Africa*, (London, Longman Publishers, 1964, and D. Forde (ed.), *People of the Niger-Benue Confluence...*
51. For an incisive critique of the pure tribe thesis see E. O. Erim, *The Idoma Nationality...*; and J. Iyo, 'Tiv Origins: A Critique of the Pure Tribe Theory', in *Benue Valley Journal of Humanities*, Vol. .I, No. 2, 1997, PP. 25-32.
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65. It should be added that the smallest social unit in pre-colonial Idoma society is the household (*Inu*) and not the family as Armstrong and Magid would have us believe. The *Inu* is indicative of the polygamous nature of African family life. In a typical polygamous family, each wife and her children constitute an *Inu*. On the other hand, a man's family does not only includes his conjugal family but those of his brothers and in some cases cousins - extended family. Where these lived in a large compound (which is usually the case), the family becomes coterminous with the compound as a geopolitical concept, *Ole* (literally meaning 'home'). Other social units include the *Ipooma*, or the sub-lineage, the *Ipoopu* or the patri-lineage and the *Aje* or clan. For details of these entire see the following works: R. G. Armstrong, 'The Idoma-Speaking People...'; A. Magid, *Men in the Middle...*; and (by the same author), 'British Rule and Indigenous Organisations in Nigeria: A Case Study of Normative Institutional Change', in *JAH*, Vol. ix., No. 2, 1968; V. G. O'kwu, 'Idomaland under colonial Administration...'; and 'The Establishment of Colonial Administration in Idomaland, 1921-1930, *Savannah*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1976.
66. See Y. A. Ochefu, *The Economic Foundations of Idoma Society...*; P. 19.
67. O. O. Okpeh, Jr., 'Government in Stateless Societies: A case Study of Pre-colonial Idoma of central Nigeria', in A. A. Idrees and Y. A. Ochefu, (eds.), *Studies in Central Nigeria History*, Lagos: CSS Books, 2002, pp. 145-166.
68. See J. I. Elaigwu, 'Self-Regulation in a Traditional Society...'; P. 18.
69. A. Magid cited in *ibid.*, P. 20.
70. The *Ijir* institution has been described as providing the fundamental framework for the effective social and political participation of everybody/individual or group of families hence enabling collective decisions to be much more easily acceptable to all. For details of the social and political organisation of the Tiv consult J. I. Tseyayo, *Conflict and Incorporation in Niger: The Integration of the Tiv*, Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation Ltd, 1975; and T. Makar, 'A History of Political Change among the Tiv in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries', *Ph.D. Thesis*, ABU, Zaria, 1975.
71. See for example, E. O. Erim, *The Idoma Nationality...*; pp. 954-5. Also see N. O. Agbo, *Idoma Politics and History...*, pp. 19-45.

72. For details of this see *Ibid.* Also V. G. O'kwu, 'Idomaland under Colonial Administration...'; J. I. Elaigwu, 'Self regulation in a traditional society...'; A. Magid, 'Political Traditionalism in Nigeria: A Case Sstudy of Secret Societies and Dance Groups in Local Government', *Africa*, Vol. xiii, No. 4, 1972 and (by the same author), 'British Rule and Indigenous Organisationsin Nigeria...'
73. For details see E.O. Erim, *The Idoma Nationality...*, pp. 97-8. Also see R. G. Armstrong 'The Development of Kingdoms in Negro Africa...' pp. 27-28; and by the same author, 'The Dynamics and Symbolism of Idoma Kingship.' In B. K. Swarts and R. A. Dumett (eds.), *West African Cultural Dynamics*, The Hague: Mouton Press, 1979, pp.396-397.
74. For details see Y. A. Ochefu, *The Economic Foundations of Idoma Society...*, pp.21-23. Others who hold the same view include, N. O. Agbo, *Idoma Politics and History...*; and O. O. Okpeh, Jr., 'The Idoma and Minority Group Politics in Northern Nigeria, 1944-1960...' pp. 110-123.
75. See *Ibid.* For details. This is supported by secondary evidence derived from the works of R. G. Armstrong, A. Magid, V. G. O'kwu, J. I. Elaigwu, E. O. Erim, A. Magid, V. G. O'kwu, J. I. Elaigwu, E. O. Erim, Y. A. Ochefu, N. O. Agbo and the host of others on the Idoma ethnic group. For details see their works already cited.
76. See O. O. Okpeh, Jr., 'Government in Stateless Societies'..., p. 68.
77. See R. G. Armstrong, 'The Dynamics and Symbolism of Idoma Kingship...' , p. 397.
78. See J. I. Elaigwu, 'Self-regulation in a Traditional Society...' ,p.14.
79. R. G. Armstrong, 'The Dynamics and Symbolism of Idoma Kingship...' , p.337. Also see E. O Erim, *The Idoma Nationality...*, p. 100; and Y. A. Ochefu, *The Economic Foundations of Idoma Society...*,pp. 23-24.
80. For details see J. I. Elaigwu, 'Self-regulation in a Traditional Society...' , p.22.
81. See R. G. Armstrong, 'The Dynamics and Symbolism of Idoma Kingship...' p.337.
82. See J. S. Boston, 'Notes on the Origin of the Igala kingdom...', *JHSM*, Vol.: 2, 1962.
83. At least that has been alluded to by R. G. Armstrong 'The Idoma - Speaking peoples...'; A. P. Anyebe 'The Idoma Chieftaincy', unpublished paper, 1975; E. O. Erim, *The Idoma Nationality...*; also by the same author, 'Crisis in the Institution of Chieftaincy among the Idoma...'
84. R.G. Armstrong cited in E.O. Erim, *The Idoma Nationality...*, pp. 111-112.
85. For more see, A. P. Anyebe, *The Idoma Chieftaincy...* pp. 9-15.
86. See N.O. Agbo, *Idoma Politics and History...*, pp.54-55.
87. Y. A. Ochefu, 'Idoma and Igala State Systems', in J. I. Elaigwu and E. O. Erim (eds.), *Foundations of Nigerian Federalism: Pre-colonial Antecedents*, Abuja: National Council on Intergovernmental Relations, Abuja, 1996, pp. 258-275. Also see E. O. Erim, *The Idoma Nationality...*, pp. 89-120.

88. V. G. O'kwu, 'Idomaland Under Colonial Rule...', pp.6-8. It should be added that the Idoma migratory patterns made it practically impossible for them to muster a enough persons and/or contiguous territory that is a critical variable for the consolidation of centralised chieftaincy.
89. See R. G. Armstrong, 'The Idoma Speaking Peoples...', p. 100. Others with similar view include A. Magid, *Men in the Middle...*, pp. 38-39; Y. A. Ochefu, 'Idoma and Igala State Systems...', p. 267; and O. O. Okpeh Jr., 'The Idoma Minority Group Politics...', pp. 20-122.
90. *Ibid*, p. 123.
91. Within the context of the geographical proximity of the Idoma and the Igbo and against the background of the history of their inter-group relations, it is possible the Idoma got the idea of secret cult from the Igboland.
92. We owe this information to N. O. Agbo. For details see his, *Idoma Politics and History...*pp.37-38 and pp. 41-45. Also see A. Magid, 'Political Traditionalism in Nigeria...' The secret societies were banned in 1917 by the Colonial Government for what Magid erroneously calls anti-social activities like the destruction of homesteads, organised adultery and praedal larceny.