

Historicizing the Myriad of Traditions on the origin of Igala of Central Nigeria.

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Abstract

The question of origin has been a reoccurring decimal in history as societies attempt to trace their roots. In Africa, the urge to trace one's descent is as important as life itself. Various societies in Africa try to trace their origin as a sign of legitimacy towards actualizing their hold on a particular locality and by extension lay claim to anything therein including chieftaincy. The urge to actualize this has led to myriad of traditions which seek to unravel the originality or otherwise of their claim(s) for ownership of land, titles indigenous to them and other benefits accrued to such claim(s). The drive to legitimize such claim of ownership has led the Igala just like many other indigenous societies in Africa to portray several traditions that seek to legitimize the ownership of the land and area they found themselves. This paper attempts at historicizing the myriad of traditions that tries to explain the probable origin of Igala of central Nigeria.

Introduction

Igala represents the name, language and the identity of a people who occupy a triangular tract of land located on the eastern flank of the rivers Niger and Benue. They occupied a landmass approximately put about 13,150 square kilometers (Amstrong 1970:77). It lies approximately between latitude $7^{\circ} 30'N$ and from $6^{\circ} 15'E$ to $8^{\circ} East$ (Ukwedeh 2003:2). Igalaland is bounded in the north by the river Benue, in the west by the river Niger, while the eastern boundary is demarcated by the Idoma polities of Onyagede and Otukpa and the northern areas of Eteh, Enugu-ejike, Itchi, Edem, Uvuru, Adavi and Ogurugu on the river Anambra and in the south by Onitsha (Ukwedeh:2003:2). With a total population of about 1.2 million people (Census 2005).⁴ The Igala are classified under Kwa groups of languages and speaks a language that has some semblance with the languages of the Yoruba, Idoma, Igbira and a host of others (Amstrong 1970:77). Tradition holds that the Igala has affinities with wide spectrum of languages scattered around the Benue Basin.

The geographical location of the Igala has placed her at immense advantage and highly significant in her historical developments. The location brought her in contact with vast array of peoples and cultures. The vast influences created the problems of actually locating the probable origin of the people or attributing their source of origin to one particular ethnic group. In this

view, (Boston 1969:29) holds that the vast range of contact between Igala and other people create many problems of historical analysis. The historicity of this traditions is discussed in the foregoing paragraphs.

Traditions of Origins and Migrations

The origin of the Igala is surrounded with myths, several traditions of origin points at Agenapoje, Jukun, Bini and Yoruba (Boston 1962:373, Crowther 1970:173 & Hutchinson 1966:54-55). These traditions were reflective of the relationship that had existed between the Igala and the various peoples. Equally, an analytical study of the various traditions reveals that they were in most cases historical traditions or explanations that tend to trace the history of the ruling clans. In other words, most of these traditions are directed at the patterns of migration and possibly the history of the *Attah* Kingship. Therefore, what existed as the history of the people in most works constituted a meagre fraction of the entire history of the polity and people of Igala. Early European explorers, writers, anthropologists and historians who delved into the history of the Igala people could not make any serious analytical study of the area except through the instrumentality of inter-group relations. Also, these scholars could hardly trace the historical origin of the Igala except those that connect their kingship ties to either Bini, Jukun and so on. Therefore, what actually existed as the probable historical origins of the people were those that have been established as a result of language affinities as is the case of the Yoruba or those that have to do with either cultural or kingship relations as is the case of Bini and Jukun. (Boston 1969:29) expresses the problems surrounding the historical origin of the Igala thus:

The Igala are located at one of the natural crossroad in Nigerian geography...this has brought them into contact with a wide range of peoples. The confluence area like Poland in Europe seems to have been pulled in different directions at different periods. At times the Igala have been oriented towards the Yoruba, at other times towards Bini, or again, later on, towards the Jukun Empire, and they themselves have exercised a considerable influence on surrounding peoples such as the Idoma, the Northern Ibo and the Nupe.

For a proper understanding of the various versions of the historical origin of the Igala people, attempt is made here to discuss the various views of scholars. Before this attempt, it is perhaps important to note here that before the introduction of kingship as explained by various scholars, the Igala as a people or the indigenous Igala's represented by the Igala-Mela (probably represented by the name Akpoto) were the original inhabitants of Idah and the outlying districts. Various traditions tend to look at this group as mere kingmakers who in themselves did not evolve any serious or perhaps central political organization until the emergence of immigrant "super kings"(Bini or Jukun). As (Byng-Hall 1907:165) has noted "The country is said to have been always occupied by the Okpoto tribe except a strip of land by both the Benue and Niger

Rivers, which the Bassa-komo and Bass-Nge (also called BassaBuno and Ibara) tribes succeeded in wresting from the Okpotos.”In most works the origin of the indigenous people was played down, for that of the historical origin of the kingship. In most cases the people themselves misconstrue their origin to mean the origin of their kingship. This perhaps account for why every attempt at tracing the origin of the people is attributed to the personalities of Ebulejonu and Ayegba Oma Idoko who were progenitors of Igala royal clans.

In a corpus of tradition collected by Patridge a colonial officer, he gave a narrative on the emergence of the Igala kingship. According to him:

The present royal families are “strangers” but they have held the throne for many generations. The older race is represented by the Asadu, a hereditary title signifying Prime Minister... a great land owner, having as much power as, if not more than the Atta himself. Long ago the older race voluntarily made over the throne to these “strangers”. The first *Atta* was a woman named Ebulejonu, but her rule was so unsatisfactory that the Salic law was instituted, and still prevails (Patridge 1904:329).

In another source, (Byng Hall 1907:166) is of the view that “A man called Aiyagba, or Ajagba came from a far country called Apa. He settled in Idah and married an Okpotowoman. He was successful in war and became Chief of the whole tribes and country.” These two traditions point at the transfer of sovereignty from an indigenous population to a few immigrant groups who eventually had power and authority relinquished to them. A more daring tradition is that which tries to find favour in the diffusionist theory as espoused by Sir Richard Palmer. The tradition holds that the Igala were of Jukun origin.

In an analysis of the Bornu from the fourteenth century, Palmer as quoted by (Clifford 1965:303) tries to look at what he described as the “Ahel Dirk” (warrior) and the “AhelGara” (natives). According to him “A branch of the Ahel Dirk of Kanem established themselves on the Benue at Wukari in the sixteenth century, and called the aborigines they found there Gara, which, by the common meta-thesis, becomes Gala. In what seems to be an affirmative statement on Palmer’s view on the link between the Igala and the Bornu region, Clifford is of the view that “the Idah Chieftdom is in some ways connected with the Jukuns Chieftdom of Wukari. There is no doubt, as also that Igala is the same name as Gara or Ngala (Clifford1936:395).” He gives an account that:

The Igala chieftdom was founded by their ancestress Ebele Ejaunu, the daughter of AbutuEjeh, a noble of the Jukun court of Wukari, who for some reasons had migrated westward along the south bank of the river Benue and had settled in the vicinity of Amageddie. At his death Ebele Ejaunu is claimed to have assembled

his followers and led them southward through virgin bush till they reached Idah, where she was installed as chief with the title of *Ata* and met and married Omeppa an Aro slave, on whom she conferred the title of *Asadu*. On her death Omeppa summoned her brother Agenapoje and installed him in his sister's stead...as Ata (Clifford 1936:395) ”

This account has played down on the personalities of the Akpoto represented by the Igala-Mela who were believed to be the original inhabitants. The female stranger had power relinquished to her and equally saw no indigenous person to marry except an Ibo stranger to whom another important title (Achadu) was conferred. An indication that the indigenous populations were uncivilized as some account describes the Akpoto to such an extent that every important facet of their political lives was transferred and dominated by some stranger elements among the indigenous population. In as much as this view cannot be dismissed by a wave of hand because of the locational or geographical factor and the fact that the Igala had interacted with various ethnic nationalities, it can equally not be taken as the gospel truth as Clifford wants us to believe. In the light of this argument, (Boston 1969:32) is of the view that by paying special attention to the Jukun tradition of origin, Clifford gives the impression that other tradition of origin of the Igala kingship were either nonexistence or else of no importance.

Another myth surrounding the historical origin of the Igala is that also recorded by Clifford. This version holds that “Agenapoje was a “sky-god” who descended miraculously upon a rock in the Niger opposite Idah and was the founder of the divine kingship under whose aegis Igala was colonized” (Clifford 1936:395). This version is so mythical like the Oduduwa version of the origin of the Yoruba or Ife, that a clearer historical explanation cannot be given. It is perhaps a ploy to shy away from the lack of explanations on the probable origin of the people. The explanation that Agenapoje descended on a rock in the Niger opposite Idah, may probably, have a link with the settlement of Agenabode opposite Idah. However, research has not linked any relation between the name Agenapoje and Agenabode in the historical developments of the two areas. However, the two neighboring areas have been interacting in several ways for several centuries.

Another version is that which explains the linguistic relationship between the Igala and Yoruba. Crowther confidently popularizes this version and believes in an ancient historical link which he claims had existed between the Igala and Yoruba (Crowther 1970:173). In Boston's view the most definite historical statement that can be made about the Igala is that they had a common origin with the Yoruba and that the separation took place long enough ago to allow for their fairly considerable linguistic difference (Boston 1969:32). In one of his versions, Crowther as quoted by Sargent stated that:

The king of Yoruba made a journey to Rabah, the old Nupe capital on the Niger, and asked the Ata to indicate a suitable place for him to settle. The Ata accordingly took a canoe and dropped down the river till he came to Idah where the Akpoto, who lived there, allowed the Yoruba king to stay. The Ata had great influence and precedence over the Akpoto (Sargent 1976:1).

This tradition presupposes that *Attah* either as a name or title existed somewhere in Raba. It is equally not clear the relationship that existed between the supposed *Attah* and the Akpoto of Idah. Therefore, this version is confusing and historically not definite. The legend does not mention the particular Yoruba king involved in the situation and was equally silent on the relationship between the *Attah* and Raba people where the unidentified Yoruba king met the *Attah*.

Another version is that of Igala-origin of Bini. This version was related by Talbot, Egharevba, Boston and later Sargent (Sargent 1976:2). In a successive explanation, the Igala kingship was linked to the personality of Aji-Atta purported to be a younger brother of the ruling Oba of Bini and dated around the early sixteenth century. In an attempt to find a historical relevance in this version Sargent who appears to be the scholar who lately works on this area comes up with another historical explanation that seek to divide the origin of Igala kingship into two. According to Sargent:

It has become evident from a review of all the available literature that we are now able to resolve a long-standing debate on Igala chieftaincy. On the one hand, we had J.S. Boston arguing that the Igala Monarch is of Benin origin. On the other hand, Miles Clifford, writing in 1936, argued that the monarchy was of Jukun origins. The resolution of this debate seems to emerge clearly from available evidence, including Clifford and Boston, and from some relatively new data. Therefore, it is the position of this author that there were two (atleast two) dynasties in Idah, the earlier one originating from Benin, but replaced by an 'eastern' monarchy after five generations (Sargent 1976:2).

Sargent's strategy for providing an explanation to the historical origin of the Igala kingship is predicated on the study of the king list and other political and cultural developments amongst the neighboring nationalities of Nupe, Bini, Agatu and Idoma within the region. According to Sargent, "it has proven possible to discuss internal Igala history, and interpret the event more clearly through the corrective aid of neighboring states, rather than depending exclusively upon Igala tradition" (Sargent 1999:48-49). In his analysis of the regnal kinglist through which Sargent demonstrates his idea of two dynasties for Igala monarchy, he gives a historical stretch of time between 1510-1720, a chronological dating which started with the reign of Atta-Aji (1510-1540) to the period of AbutuEjeh (1600-1630) as representing the first phase

of Igala monarchies that were linked to Benin, while the period starting from the time of AbutuEjeh dated from the 1630A.D. as the probable period when the eastern monarchies represented by the Jukun overlordship started. This however generated another historiographical and chronological problem. Sargent's explanation using his chronological dating failed to indicate what happened between the reign of Aji-Atta (1510-1540) which Igala oral tradition was silent about and the period 1540-1600 when Jukun influence started. Sargent historical explanation is silent for about sixty-year gap between Aji-Atta and AbutuEje.

What is undisputable among the scholars and even the oral traditions among the Benin and Igala people is the fact that there was a war of supremacy between the *Oba* of Benin and the *Attah* of Igala (Sargent 1999:48-49). Secondly that Benin's influence is noticed in Igala political and material culture as reflected in the pectoral mask is not arguable. Igalaland appeared to be a cosmopolitan society. This assumption is predicated on the belief that, Igalaland hosted quite array of various ethnic nationalities who by now have lost their identities and were subsumed into the Igala language. The locational factor and waves of migrations that culminated in the formation and or birth of various ethnic nationalities gave credence to this. This factor makes it a center of not just commerce but of political developments with its influence radiating on the various ethnic nationalities occupying the general Niger-Benue Confluence area. Against the above discussion attempt is made here to see the position of the Akpoto in Igala tradition of origins.

The Akpoto Factor in Igala Traditions of Origin

The Igala (Akpoto) presently occupied the eastern flank of the Rivers Niger and Benue and play host to several migrant settlers who mostly have integrated into the Igala ethnic nationalities, the ruling clans perhaps inclusive. In an analysis of the emergence and genealogical records of king lists at Idah, Boston while referring to the tradition of migrations recorded by Monsel and Clifford clearly states that there was no earlier dynasty at Idah, but a system of clan government in which the head of the indigenous families or Igala-Mela participated (Boston 1968:9). This statement portrays an acceptance that certain indigenous population of the "Igala" inhabited Idah and probably some other areas within the triangular land space occupied by the people. Therefore, the attempt made on the history of the kingship by several scholars were merely a segment of the general history of the Igala people. This paper therefore, tries to justify that, the aborigines generally referred to as Akpoto were indeed the same people called the Igala and may have shared common historical origin with other nationalities around the Niger-Benue area. Therefore, Clifford's submission that Igala history literally begins with the kingship and with the arrival of the immigrant rulers from Wukari is as earlier stated, a segment of the people's history and so cannot be accepted as the beginning of the people's history. The fact that, some aborigines occupied the plain of Idah and some other areas of Igalaland is no longer in doubt. The character and persons referred to as Akpoto and the role of *Igala-mela* in the social, political and cultural lives of the people vis-à-vis the institution of *Atta'atewa* was a clear evidence

that people had lived in the area before the immigrant who was said to be crowned king emerged. The answer to the question which this section is trying to find is what was the correlation between the language spoken by the aboriginal people and the immigrant population who eventually emerged as the king.?

Even though, answer to the question might not be readily available, but an interrogation of the name *Akpoto*, and the *Igalamela* may lead us into a new historical discovery of relations that had existed in the time past and the basis for arriving at a conclusion that some group of ethnicities had lived and interacted in the time past. Similarly, the oral account which attributed a sort of mystical relationship between Ebulejonu and a leopard purported to be a husband to Ebulejonu and the birth of AbutuEjeh believed to be the offspring of the leopard (Boston 1968:13-14) suggest that actually people had lived in the vicinity of Idah before the immigrant. J.S.Boston is of the view that, "... the foundation of the Igala State were laid by the transfer of sovereignty from a group of clans representing the local population to an immigrant lineage of royal descent" (Boston1968:14). This assertion coupled with another tradition which explained a relationship between a woman believed to be an Akpoto and Ayegba also goes to show an existence of an original indigenous population in the area. According to Byng Hall, "A man called Aiyagba or Ajagba came from a far country called Apa, he settled in Idah and married an Okpoto woman..." (Byng-Hall 1970:166). In the context of various group relations in the larger Kwaraara Confederacy, the Igala and the Idoma appeared to have lived together and shared common name Akpoto, the variation in the dialects may have arisen as a result of longtime separation. Generally, the Igala called the Idoma and even the Igala people occupying the border towns between Igala and Idoma as Akpoto. This paper is therefore, trying to correlate that the earlier settlers at Idah who were generally referred to as Akpoto and the present day Idoma people were the same in the time past.

In assessing the level of relations between the Igala, the Idoma and Yoruba and that between Igala, Idoma, Igede, R.G. Armstrong while supporting Samuel Crowther's view gives a submission that the Igala and the Idoma were closely related. (Armstrong 1970:79). He bases his argument on language affinity. According to R.G. Armstrong, "The fairly obvious resemblances between Igala and Idoma have often been explained by the suggestion that the original Yoruba dialect of the Igala invaders became mixed with the language of the original Akpoto (Idoma) inhabitants". (Armstrong 1970:79).

Even though Armstrong seems not to agree in totality with this line of argument, a closer analysis of the languages, and other socio-cultural activities of these peoples suggest that they might have lived together as one and that, the migration of the Idoma (Akpoto) from the vicinity of Idah might have accounted for the variations in the language spoken by the peoples. In Ukwedeh's analysis of the people called the Akpoto; he is of the opinion that the Akpoto represents the proto-culture of the region (Ukwedeh 2011:4). He argues that even though the word Akpoto has fallen into disfavor amongst the groups namely the Igala, Idoma and the Ebira,

it is arguable that each of these groups might have had some close connections with these early inhabitants called Akpoto at some point in history (Ukwedeh 2011:4). Ade Obayemi argues in similar direction when he sums up that the three groups comprising of Igala, Idoma and Ebira had at some time commonly come to be called Akpoto and come to a conclusion that the usage of the word Akpoto or Okpoto by the earlier nineteenth century explorers referred basically to the Igala and Idoma peoples. He expresses further that, the usage of the word Akpoto had fallen into disfavor and survived in Kwoto, kato or koto (Obayemi 1980:151). This indicates that, kwoto or koto is a corruption of Akpoto which in its real meaning is a combination of Idoma, Igala and Igbira (Obayemi 1980:151).

It was similarly reported by Samuel Crowther during his 1854 Niger expedition that, “from Idda to the confluence, all the land on the left side of the river, and from the Confluence to this place (Mitshi country), is called Akpoto land, and bears the same name as Igara (Igala). The Igbiras, Bassa, Agatus (a tribe of Doma), and also the Mitshi, who are found in the immediate vicinity of the south side of the Tsadda have all come from the north side, either as refugees or settlers; and are not the original proprietors of that part of the country, as they themselves confess. Even the *Attah* himself appears to be a settler or colonist in Akpotoland” (Crowther 1970:64-65,74). Both Ade Obayemi and Samuel Crowther appeared to have driven almost at the same direction. Obayemi tends to have accepted that the Akpoto is a proto-language that occupied a substantial large region in the Niger-Benue Confluence area and which perhaps antedates the emergence of the *Attah*. In similar vein, Samuel Crowther appears also to hold the view that the Akpoto are a people whose occupation covered the entire Benue Basin (Crowther 1970:174). His explanation therefore connotes that, the Mitshi (Tiv) and probably other ethnic groups who have no antecedents with the Igala, Idoma, and Igbiras are mere sojourners who came to live in Akpoto land. This may suggest that the Akpoto as a people or ethnic group is an embodiment of larger groups of peoples inhabiting the Benue Basin.

If this submission is anything to go by, it therefore means that the name Akpoto may not be wholly attributed to the Igala people alone, but an embodiment of a larger proto-language group called the Akpoto. W.B. Baikie in making reference to the peopling of the Igala area makes allusion to the Akpoto as a group of people who formally inhabited the Igala area. According to him “what is now known as Igala was formally all Akpoto”, (Baikie 1966:86). In what seems to be a general explanation, the Akpoto as a people are referred to as people of ancient dwellings or simply put, people who were regarded as “uncivilized.” This view tends to hold that the Igala met a group of people known as Akpoto who probably had no central administrative system. The coming of the Igala believed to have a more centrally organized administrative system into the area and the acceptance of this stranger believed to be superior by the aborigines led to the diffusion of the original name of the people. Similarly, K. Officer who was a Colonial Officer in the area in 1923, holds that “At Awuru Market (in the present Odolu area), they (AyegbaOm’idoko and party) were met by Omeppa the head of the Okpoto, the then

inhabitants of the country, who were impressed by his (AyegbaOma'idoko) prowess and decided to help him." (Baikie 1966:86). According to N.J. Brooke as quoted by J.S. Boston "we are told that the Apa came to Idah on top of the Okpoto already settled there." (Boston1969:30) Other tradition which supports the existence of certain group of people is that written by Boston in his work "Oral tradition and the history of Igala". In this work, Boston's explanation on the emergence of a centralized political system amongst the Igala people vis-à-vis their relationship with the *Igalamela* and *Achadu* clans posit that "the royal dynasty in Igala is an immigrant one. The indigenous population of Igala is represented politically, and in the oral traditions, by a group of clans called the Igalamela, who are supposed to have occupied Idah from the beginning. They acted as kingmakers in the political system, and also controlled an earth cult which symbolizes the fertility and benevolence of the land throughout the Igala kingdom" (Boston 1969:30).

Yet another tradition which tends to support the existence of an aboriginal group before the coming of the ruling clan and who, perhaps by prowess and charisma came to be given the title of *Attah* meaning (father of all) is that espoused by C.L. Temple. Temple while gathering data on the peopling of the area made reference to the Apa people. Ostensibly, meaning people from the Jukunoid stock who during their wave of migration from Ibi in Wukari area got to Idah and probably got merged with the indigenous population (Akpoto) and overtime lost their identity. According to him "whatever is the origin, their identity is now merged into that of Okpoto, in whose country they settled at the end of the fifteenth century, and with whom they intermarried, so that their history and customs must of necessity be treated together." (Temple 1965:148). This as earlier explained in the preceding discussion shows that the area occupied by the Igala has not been devoid of human occupation at least before the coming of Ayegba Oma'idoko, who essentially became the progenitor of the modern Igala people.

Temple's explanation tends to add another dimension to many traditions or theories surrounding the coming of AyegbaOma'idoko to the vicinity of Idah. While other scholars try to explain the royal connections between Ayegba as a prince from the Jukunoid stock, Temple's explanation points at a migration that was occasioned by conflict and or wars. According to him, "the Apa or Ife, tribe are said to have lived at Apa near Ibi and to have fled from the Jukons in canoes down the Benue about 1490 A.D. under their Chief Idoko... they landed in the district now called Agatu, and were defeated and scattered there by the Jukons, who not contented with their victory took to their canoes again and fought refugees Apas along the bank of the Benue killing the Chief of the Apas at the little village of Amagedi. ...One of the Chief's sons, AiyagbaDoko fled to Auwru market, and camped there. Omeppa the head of all Okpotos who then occupied the whole of what is now Bassa province and... went with his people to meet the strangers ...". (Temple 1965:148). He is of the view that the Okpotos were a very backward race. (Temple 1965:149). This description of Igala (Akpoto) as a backward race was generated by Temple, simply because in his view, the Apoto lacked an organized central political leadership

then. This extract is perhaps suggesting that, their decision to accept and surrender to the leadership of AyegbaOma'Idoko was because as a prince Ayegba was already familiar with the exercise of authority. A careful study of the use of the terms 'primitive and uncivilized' most probably may be a ploy initiated to justify the imposition of an alien, who perhaps may be stronger and well-organized militarily to subdue the Akpoto people. E.O. Erim corroborates this when he states that, the derogatory connotations surrounding the name Akpoto today and the stress that they were backward and primitive are the types of tradition which one expects from dominant immigrants. (Erim 1981:53).

This also, is a confirmation of the fact that the Akpoto as a race or group lived and occupied the present location where the Igalas are found. Temple explains the relationship between the Apa and the indigenous Okpoto population. This explanation tends to probably explain the emergence of the general name Igala by which the people are known and identified today. According to Temple,

The Apa Chief then sent messages to the Okpoto head-men of Iyali (Iyale), Ogumi (Egume), and Oddu and when they visited him, he gave them Apa women as wives, and title of Onu to their Districts... He also sent out Apa men and gave them land and titles butmade them marry Okpoto wives. The descendants of the latter marriages were called Igara(Temple 1965:149)

It should however be noted that the title '*Onu*' claimed to have been bestowed on the Igala chiefs by the Apa may not be true afterall. This is because, even though there are claims that the Igala does not have a centralized political system before the immigrant chiefs (Apa), atleast it was agreed that they were using indigenous political system to rule their people. And since the title *Onu* appeared not to be a borrowed term, the Igala couldn't have been given the *Onu* title by the immigrant Apa. In an explanation to justify the status of the Apa men with Okpoto women, Temple maintains a clear-cut separation in the status or identities of the offspring of such relationships or marriages. In doing this, Temple may have tried to follow the principle of paternal affiliations as obtainable in most African societies. In his explanation, offspring's of Apa men with Okpoto women are Igara, while those of Okpoto men with Apa women are Okpoto. (Temple 1965:149)

Perhaps in trying to justify the superiority of one group over the other as claimed by several other scholars, Temple gives a remark that "the proper Igara does not call them so" (Temple 1965:149). A critical analysis of this final statement perhaps gives one the room to look at the peoples who occupies the Idah area. If Temple's explanations are anything to go by, then, the ruling clans who mostly occupy Idah, are generally the descendants of the Apa people. While those occupying the outlying districts in all other Igala areas can best be describedas the descendants of the Akpoto. W.B. Baikie states in his narrative while describing the extent of Igala influence that "Under its original name of Okpoto it extends inland and along the lower

Binue for a considerable distance. The western part only is known as Igara...” (Baikie 1966:63). Also Erim explains the dispersal of the Apa immigrants, and thus states that, a third group were those who settled to the North-east of Idah, identified as the Akpoto and were believed to be the progenitors of the Idoma, (Erim 1981:5). He further explains that, “probably because of the arrival of Yoruba king, the Akpoto were driven further east of Idah into the area of modern Ankpa Division from where some of them later found their way into modern Idomaland. This perhaps explains why people in Idah town refer to people east and north of Igala Division as Akpoto”. (Erim 1981:5).

Sydney Seton while trying to unravel the mystery surrounding the origin of the Igala people comes up with a view that the present crop of Igala people were originally Akpoto.⁵⁰ His analysis appears to view the Igala and the Akpoto as one. He sees the Akpoto as the name of the people and the Igala as the language of the Akpoto. According to him “in the “Olden times”, the king of the Yoruba went to Raba and asked the *Attah* for a place to settle, so the *Attah* went down to Idah, which was then inhabited by the aboriginal peoples called the Okpoto, whose headman was an Igala. The *Attah* then settled in Idah, and in the course of events he lost his original language to the Okpoto, who were speaking Igala, (Seton 1930:23, 29).

The analysis of the various traditions on Akpoto-Igala suggested a possible inter-group relation between the two groups who may have lost their individual identity and collectively came to be known and called the Igala. An Overview of the relationship between the Igalas in the western part and those in the eastern part and their manner of identification reveals that the occupants of Idah area generally referred to the eastern areas as Akpoto. While in the eastern part people in the Idoma regions are also referred to as Akpoto. Modern yardstick for identifying somebody as Akpoto has to do with the languages spoken. The Igala in Idah area consider their own mode of speaking Igala as pure and untainted, while referring to those in Ife and Ankpa regions as Akpoto. This is simply because the Igala in those areas mingle some aspects of Idoma and Agatu dialects in the Igala language they speak. In similar manner, the Igala living in Ankpa area referred to their Idomaneighbors as Akpoto. What this means is that, the Akpoto as compound name is synonymous with various groups in the Benue basin.

Conclusion

In conclusion the above analysis suggests that the various claims and traditions of the Igala origin is an exercise aimed at justifying individual and groups claims of the ownership of the tract of land in and around the Niger-Benue confluence area. By and large, what the various traditions point at and which seems not to be in contention is the fact that, the area east of the Niger was by no means vacuum. And that from the earliest period had been occupied by a group of people known and identified as Akpoto (Okpoto). An identity which seem to have been diffused into the name Igala. Also, very many of the traditions agree that the *Attah* which came to rule and dominate the people politically was of foreign origin. The circumstances surrounding

the acceptance of a foreigner to the exalted throne of *Attah* remains unravel. From all indications, most of the traditions are rapt with questions begging for an answer. However, in the analyses of the various theories and or traditions on the evolution of the Igala people, one thing is probably certain, that is, that geography and inter- group marriages have played serious roles in the relationships between the Igala and a host of other ethnic nationalities who currently have forgotten their individual identities and have come to be known generally as the Igala people.

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