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## Cultural Identity and Diversity among the Efik and Qua of Calabar, Cross River State

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### Abstract:

Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations. Many of the specific cultural differences that we observe today between the Efik and the Qua hinge upon the respective cultural premises about the reality of the migration, settlement, adoption and origination of traits. Whereas most of the differences spotted in the cultural heritage of the Efik and the Qua have a connecting link and mostly same interpretation but different modes of expression are adopted and struggle of originality keeps revolving. These differences have greatly influenced the people's conception of self and the other while at the same time providing unique identities for both the Efik and the Qua.

Key Words: Efik, Qua, Calabar, Culture, Identity, Cultural Diversity

### Introduction

Culture, is a historic phenomenon, whose development is determined by the succession of socio-cultural formations. Culture as a whole, is the product of the activities of the masses. It is characterised by relative independence and continuity of development, subject to the influence of the cultures of other people, and accordingly, assumes a class character in any class society as to its ideological contents, aims and

objectives. It implies all the material and spiritual values – the total values of all that man has produced and handed over from one generation to another in the course of his development and emancipation from all forms of vices. But, there is bound to be conflicts in the course of this historic and cultural development especially, in a class society as they occurred between the Efik and the Qua of Calabar.

Calabar, the capital of the then South Eastern State and now Cross River State, is a tripartite town housing three ethnic groups – the Efik, the Efut and the Qua. These ethnic groups all had and still have their kings who were later made Paramount Rulers for government control. The Efik have the Obong, the Efuts have the Muri Munene and the Qua have the Ndidem. The commonness that has engulfed some cultural traits of the Efik and the Qua could be described as the unity of opposites, though diverse in certain ways, but at the same time interconnected thereby creating a bond of co-existence.

Cultural diversity, beyond the mere fact of its existence, has aesthetic, moral and instrumental value as the expression of human creativity, the embodiment of human strivings and the sum total of humanity's collective experience. And Cultural identity on the other hand comprises both content and relationship levels of interpretation. The cognitive component of identity relates to the beliefs we have about that identity. Cultural diversity is a prime constituent of human identity. By that token, it is humanity's common property. Far from seeing it as a concession to variety on the part of some imaginary singular identity; we must bear in mind the thought that diversity is the very essence of our identity.

Cultural diversity basically means having to recognise and promote cultural pluralism in the broadest sense of the term. Yet equating human identity with cultural diversity equally means having to recognise that the very concept of diversity itself involves the presence of unity, without which diversity itself would merely amount to multiplicity. Diversity can only exist against a backdrop of unity, and widespread recognition of cultural differences, with all that it entails. It is by nature an affirmation of the deep-seated unity of human action.

### The Efik

Efik is a tribe in Cross River State, occupying a larger part of the Southern District of the State. The surviving historical documents dealing

with the origin of the Efik present rather disjointed and sometimes conflicting accounts. The historical record to be adopted for the purpose of this work is the report of the Commission set up by the Government of the then Eastern Region of Nigeria to investigate the Obongship dispute. In the report, the Sole Commissioner, A. K. Hart noted at least five different accounts of Efik origin and migrations.

According to the written evidence submitted to the Sole Commissioner by Etubom Ékpènyong Efiok Asama Ékpènyong Efiok Eyo Honesty VIII, has it that the Efik wandered from the Sudan into the region of modern Sekoni in Ghana (then Gold Coast).<sup>1</sup> From there they migrated into the district of the Niger Delta where they settled near Burutu and acquired the sobriquet, "Eburutu".<sup>2</sup> Leaving Burutu, the Efik migrants split up, with some settling in Abonnema while others went to Itu-Mbauzo and later to Ibom in Arochukwu. From Ibom, the Efik again migrated in different directions with some settling in Itu, Enyong, Mbiabo Edere and Oku Iboku, near Ikoroffiong. Later, the Oku Iboku group broke up and settled at Esuk Odu in Ibibio land. Hart adds that while the Efik were there at Esuk Odu, a great misunderstanding arose between the Ibibio and the Eburutus as a result of which the Ibibio nicknamed them "Efik" or "oppressors". The Efik then migrated to Ikpa Ene, an island on the Cross River, where they left relics that are still extant.<sup>3</sup>

At Ikpa Ene, the Efik were joined by their kinsmen who had previously settled at Mbiabo Edere while another section of the Efik from Mbiabo Edere went and settled at Ikoroffiong before finally dispersing to Ikoneto town. Hart maintains that "the Efik migrated from Ikoneto to Ndodoghi from whence the Ibokus – comprising Creek Town, Duke Town, Old Town, and Henshaw Town – went to the present Creek Town"<sup>4</sup> from where all other city states were founded.

The above account of Efik origin and migration fits fairly accurately with the account rendered by Etubom Edem Ékpènyong Efiom Ededem (Okoho group) before the Commission, except in one major detail. Instead of being a Sudanic people who migrated into Sekondi before entering the Niger Delta, this account claims that the Efik first settled at Uruan for a long time after they had left their place of origin called 'Niger' though with no definite location.<sup>5</sup> According to the Okoho group report;

The Efik had migrated from the Niger to Arochukwu and settled at Ibom. The Aros wanted the Efik immigrants to

worship their long juju called *Ibritam* or *Chuku*, but the Efik refused and said that they were worshippers of *Abasi Ibom*. The Aros asked them to get away from their town if they were not prepared to worship *Ibritam* and so a religious dispute arose.<sup>6</sup>

Following the religious dispute, the Efik left Arochukwu and settled at Uruan until a misunderstanding arose over a burial practice of the Efik. Upon the death of an Efik the new immigrants attempted to bury an Uruan man along with the dead. This was strongly resisted and the Efik were finally driven out since Uruan people did not want to live with such burial custom.<sup>7</sup> The Efik left Uruan and settled at Ikpa Ene, an island on the Cross River in the Uruan district.<sup>8</sup> It seems that the people of Uruan pushed the Efik out of their district which eventually led to the establishment of Efik communities in Creek Town, from where the city states of Henshaw Town and Duke Town were founded.<sup>9</sup>

The account by Etubom Ededem Ékpènyong Oku (Ambo group) sees the Efik as an oriental people who came from Palestine and wandered through Ghana to Ututu, Ibom and finally settled at Uruan.<sup>10</sup> At Uruan, the Efik were accused of civil disobedience and were compelled to leave after a brief war. The twelve Efik families, originally residents in Uruan, spread in different directions with the main stream of immigrants at Ikpa Ene, from Ikpa Ene, the Efik moved to Ndodoghi and then to Creek Town.

The other two remaining accounts of Efik origin and migrations are similar to the ones already recounted above except the account from the Ntiéro family, which claims that the Efik originated from Egypt and thence migrated through the banks of the Niger to Umuahia.<sup>11</sup> This account does not mention the Efik as having resided in Uruan; otherwise the details of migration are fairly similar.

### The Qua

According to Akak, the name Qua has no mystery in its origin or meaning. "It was originally, the habit of the predecessors of the present Qua to acquire new names whenever they arrived somewhere to make a new home"<sup>12</sup>, he adds that when the Qua left their original home in Central Africa as Semi-Bantus and settled at Mamfe District in the Cameroon they became



known as *Akin*. Among the Yakurrs at Nkpani they changed to *Akpa*, and arriving Calabar their first name was *Abakpa*, followed later with *Qua*. This assertion is confirmed by Eweng when he stated: "From records it is known that the *Akin* had this name while they were still at Mba-Akang in Ekoi land and their second name *Akpa* from people of Yakurr Clan when they were together before the tribal war that led to their expulsion from the community."<sup>13</sup>

The first nick-name of the Qua in Calabar (*Abakpa*) came from the Efik when two Qua hunters found themselves surprisingly on the left bank of the Calabar River, where they met two Efik fishermen in a boat. Jeffrey affirmed this when he noted:

The Akin tradition is that many years ago two Akin hunters arrived in the vicinity of Calabar and saw two men in a canoe. Each party spoke to the other, but the languages were different and neither could understand the other. One Akin hunter said to the other, *ba-akpa*, come away first and they went off. The men in the canoe hearing the words *ba-akpa*, called the Akin, *Abakpa*. This expression, *ba-akpa* with above meaning is still in current use for the Akin or Qua.<sup>14</sup>

In tandem with Jeffrey's assertion, Eweng adds that "the third name of the Qua, *Abakpa*, was first heard on the lips of the Efik fishermen who came to fish along what is now known as Calabar River. The name became a permanent name referring to Akin - the present Qua."<sup>15</sup>

Jones posits that "the Qua lived in a number of dispersed villages each with its own Village Head (Ntoe) and without a recognised head for the entire Qua settlements."<sup>16</sup> He suggested that the rise of Duke Town and other Efik polities did press home to the Qua the need for greater cohesion under one king in order to survive. This contention, is borne out of Hutchinson's remark that "the kingdom of Qua was governed from 1850 to 1854 by a queen who was a sister to the former king."<sup>17</sup> Hutchinson adds:

The political image of the Qua Kingdom was certainly eclipsed by that of Duke Town especially from the 1820's. With only a hundred inhabitants in their capital city, Qua town was swallowed up by Duke Town's preponderant population and political dominance.

Nevertheless, they were able to maintain their separate identity and in the treaty of 1878 they were assigned to certain parts of the river frontage near old town for their own without any interference from Duke Town. The same treaty gave their king, Ekong Odo, the same rights and privileges enjoyed by other Calabar monarchs.<sup>18</sup>

It is remarkable that even though the Qua were able to maintain their customs and dialect, there was such a high incidence of intermarriage with the Efik that both people have a lot of things in common. Jones noted that "some of the Qua people form part of the wards in the present-day Duke Town political arrangement."<sup>19</sup>

The Qua has over eighteen clans and other settlements spread over Calabar Municipality, Calabar South, Odukpani, Akpabuyo and Bakassi Local Government Areas.

### The Concept of Cultural Identity

Identity is about how individuals or groups see and define themselves, and how other individuals or groups see and define them. Identity is formed through the socialization process and the influence of social institutions like the family, the education system and the mass media. The concept of identity is an important one, as it is only through establishing our own identities and learning about the identities of other individuals and groups that we come to know what makes us similar to some people and different from others, and therefore form social connections with them.

Identity therefore 'fits' individuals into the society in which they live. The identity of individuals and groups involves both elements of personal choice and the responses and attitudes of others. Individuals are not free to adopt any identity they like, and factors like their social class, their ethnic group and their sex are likely to influence how others see them. The identity that an individual wants to assert and which they may wish others to see them having may not be the one that others accept or recognize. The Efik and the Qua have identities peculiar with who they are but then they share some forms of common identity, such are (amongst others):

1. Traditional Outfit: The Efik traditional outfit for the men consists of long tailed shirt worn over a wrapper, beaded waist coat, *Okpomkpom* (Efik

traditional neck tie), Bídàk (Efik traditional head-dress) or beaded cap, walking stick (Ésáñ) and beaded shoes. The women are usually adorned with Ònyònyò (elegantly flowing gown). All these are also used by the Qua who now see it as part of their cultural identity.

2. The Qua understand and can speak Efik which is the official language of the Efik people, having occupied the Efik territory for so long.
3. Both the Efik and the Qua have Christianity as their major religion.
4. In both societies, the Ékpè masquerade is a major cultural outfit. Though the Qua calls it Mgbe, it is played the same way as the Ékpè masquerade of the Efik.
5. Both ethnic group enjoy dog meat and palm wine as delicacies.

### Concepts of Cultural Diversity

Diversity is a subjective phenomenon, created by group members themselves who on the basis of their different social identities categorize others as similar or dissimilar. According to O'Reilly, Williams and Barsade, "A group is diverse if it is composed of individuals who differ on a characteristic on which they base their own social identity."<sup>20</sup>

Thomas defines diversity as "any mixture of items characterised by differences and similarities."<sup>21</sup> In support of this view, this paper defines diversity as the collective, all-encompassing mix of human differences and similarities along any given dimension.

Loden and Rosener define diversity as that which differentiates one group of people from another along primary and secondary dimensions.<sup>22</sup> Attributes that exert primary influences on our identities, are gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, age and mental or physical abilities and characteristics. The primary dimensions shape our basic self-image as well as our fundamental world views. Additionally, they have more impact on groups in the workplace and society. Secondary dimensions of diversity are less visible, exert a more variable influence on personal identity and add a more subtle richness to the primary dimensions of diversity. They include: educational background, geographic location, religion, first language, family status, work style, work experience, military experience, organizational role and level, income and communication style. The secondary dimensions impact our self-esteem and self-definition. There is a

definite trend towards definitions of a multiplicity of diversity dimensions; Maier adds culture, social class and language to the primary dimensions and healthcare beliefs and recreational interests to the secondary dimensions. He further adds a tertiary dimension, which encompasses historical moments experienced. Maier lists thirty eight possible diversity dimensions, and further suggests that his item "character traits" is "infinitely expandable". He illustrates this multi-dimensionality by reference to the individual as a kaleidoscope.<sup>23</sup>

The analogy of an iceberg comes to mind in the face of these potentially endless dimensions; the obvious characteristics of race, ethnicity, gender, age and disability relate to the small, visible portion of the iceberg, and are the basis of much anti-discrimination legislation around the world. Other dimensions such as religion, culture and political orientation are less obvious, and could be said to constitute the secondary dimensions lying just below the surface, which may be revealed with time. The tertiary dimensions are often the core of individual identity and lie deeper below the surface. It is the vast array of qualities that lie beneath the surface that provides the real essence of diversity to be tapped into, and these have not until recently been acknowledged.

Despite the shared identity, there are certain traits not shared by the Efik and the Qua. The differences which are based on their cultural heritage, institutions, marriage custom and leadership structure give definition to their existence as two different societies. The differences could be seen in the following perspective:

1. The head of the Efik tribe is called Òbòñ while that of the Qua is called Ndidem
2. Though the Ékpè masquerade of the Efik is played the same way by the Qua, it is called Mgbe by the Qua.
3. Major foods of the Efik are Ekpañkukwò, Ekpañ ikon, Òtòñ, Edikañ ikòñ, Òkwòhò while the delicacy of the Qua is plantain cooked with bush meat.
4. The Efik have Efik as a distinct language while that of the Qua is Ejagham.
5. The Efik carry out the Ñkuhò (Seclusion) practice for their maidens but the Qua do not engage in the practice.

6. The major dance of the Efɛk is the Èkòmbì dance, other dances include the Abáñ and Ítémbé dances while the Qua have Monikim as their major dance.

### Socio-Cultural Integration of the Efɛk and the Qua

The integration of the Akpas into the Efɛk community started with the change of their name on arrival in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to Abakpa and Qua.<sup>24</sup> The next change was in Efɛk names which the Qua have fully acquired through socially and culturally shared ties. Inter-marriages between the Efɛk and Qua have also accelerated the rate of integration within the two ethnic groups which have been described by G. I. Jones in his report as “indistinguishable elements of one community.”<sup>25</sup> Jones observed further that “though the Qua still maintain their separate cultural identity, they now form an integral part of the Calabar political system.”<sup>26</sup> They are still able however, to retain a few of their identity in spite of their long period of association, socialisation and assimilation under the influence of the Efɛk, because even though they speak and understand Efɛk, some still hold to the Ejagham dialect in addition to Efɛk language.

Of all the factors of socio-cultural integration, intermarriage act as major input to quicken the process through issues from the union, which equally develops a common language, intra-ethnic unity and firm and mutual understanding. The union creates a situation for a dual nationality, where a child born through this union, has a dual citizenship status as an Efɛk and a Qua as it was with the late Ntoe Okokon Ansa of Akim Akim who was paternally Efɛk of Adiabo and maternally, a Qua of Ikot Ansa. So also it was with the former Paramount Ruler of the Qua (Late Ndidem Usang Iso) who paternally was a Qua of Akim Town, and maternally an Efɛk of Adiabo.

Other shining examples are those of the Late Obong Adam Ephraim Duke, who was paternally Efɛk with Qua maternal lineage, while the Late Etubom Thomas Asuquo Effiom of Henshaw town held the Èkpè title of “Obong Ebonko” of Ekpri Obio Abakpa because of his Qua maternal lineage over there, so also was it with the Late Efɛm Okon of Archibong family of Duke Town, who likewise held the Èkpè title of Nkanda of Idundu, Qua clan. And Late Barrister Asuquo Nyong equally too on the same basis, owned lands in Qua through his hereditary lineage there. Today there are a thousand and one such examples which enhance social

integration and mutual co-existence among the Efɛk and the Qua.

### Conclusion

We all learn to communicate and understand our world through shared language, customs, behaviours, beliefs and values. Our cultural experiences and values shape the ways we see ourselves and what we think is important. Cultural identity defines our perspectives and it is important because it acts as a way to preserve history and provide individuals a place where they feel they belong.

The cultural heritage of the Efɛk and the Qua has along the track of history been injected with certain features proportionally to their images with a view to keeping the balance between the past and the present. This has enabled the people to progressively carry forward some of the original characteristics and norms of their progenitors. By this adherent, they are today able to preserve their diverse rich and ancient culture in continuity, which is a basic requirement in our ever increasingly diverse societies to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities.

Though at some point there have been conflicting issues surrounding the cultural heritage of both tribes with claims of cultural diffusion, acculturation and assimilation, the two tribes have weathered through to some points of compromise which never deprived them of the mainstay of their different cultural heritage. Instead of total deprivation, such hectic moments have produced adaptable adjustments with original cultural trends and palatable ingredients.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> A. K. Hart, *Report of the Enquiry into the Dispute over the Obongship of Calabar* (Enugu: Government Printer, 1964), p.65.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69.

- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*,p.74.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*,p.96.
- <sup>12</sup> Eyo Okon Akak, *The Qua Origin and History: A Handbook for Research Students, Scholars and the Public.* (Calabar: Akak and Sons, 1995), p.12.
- <sup>13</sup> Akin Eweng, *The Qua of Calabar.* (Calabar: Amuko Graphic and Press, 1988), p.7.
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- <sup>15</sup> Eweng, *The Qua of Calabar*, p.7.
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- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
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- <sup>24</sup> Eyo Okon. Akak, *The Qua origin and History: A Handbook for Research Students, Scholars and the Public.* (Calabar: Akak and Sons, 1995), p.70.
- <sup>25</sup> Jones, *Report on Chieftaincy*, p.36.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*