

Efik,

people inhabiting the lower Cross River in Cross River state, Nigeria; their dialect of **Efik**-Ibibio (in the Kwa branch of Niger-Congo languages) has become the literary language of all educated **Efik**-Ibibio speakers. The **Efik**, an offshoot of the Ibibio, migrated down the Cross River during the first half of the 17th century and founded Creek Town, Duke Town, and other settlements. Because of a European error in confusing their territory with that of the Kalabari Ijaw (known as New Calabar), the **Efik** area became known as Old Calabar. Originally a community of fishermen, Old Calabar developed into a major trading centre from the 17th to the 19th centuries, exporting slaves and later palm oil in return for European goods. European ships had to pay a duty (*comey*) to **Efik** chiefs for the privilege of trading.

During the 20th century, a large part of the **Efik** population moved from the towns and settled in farming villages in the forest. The staple foods are yam and cassava, supplemented by taro, corn (maize), fruits and vegetables, and fish.

Households formerly consisted of a man, his several wives, and their children; but polygyny has become relatively rare. Groups of households related through male descent form a House, the leader of which was formerly the eldest male member but now is chosen for ability. Related Houses occupy the wards into which settlements are divided.

The Obung, or chief, elected from among the heads of various Houses, traditionally exercised his authority as head of the Ekpe (Egbo), or Leopard Society. In addition to ritual propitiation of forest spirits to ensure the well-being of the community, this graded, secret male society made and enforced laws by fines, capital punishment, or boycotts; judged cases; maintained internal peace; and served as the executive government of **Efik** society. The Ekpe was composed of the leading men of the community, and its higher grades were open only to those who could pay the heavy entrance fees. It also functioned as a force for tribal unity, for society members from one village were accepted by members in another village. The Ekpe continues to exist; but its dominant role in legislative, judicial, and economic affairs has been taken over by the state. Its supernatural powers have also waned.

Traditional **Efik** religion includes belief in a supreme creator god, ancestral and other supernatural beings, magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. Most **Efik**, however, are now Christians.