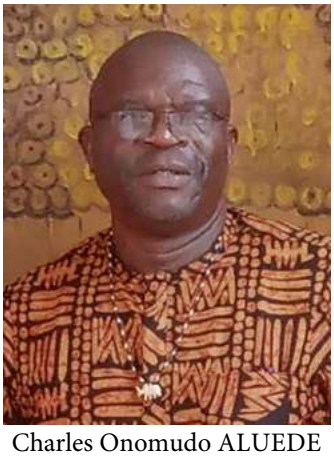
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OGUEGA POEMS AS REPOSITORY OF ESAN (EDO) INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IN NIGERIA



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***Oguega* Poems as Repository of Esan (Edo) Indigenous Knowledge in Nigeria**

Abstract. This paper explores how *Oguega* poems serve not only as spiritual tools for divination but also as oral archives preserving the community's cosmology, moral philosophies, ecological wisdom, and social values. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Esan (Edo) community, and textual analysis, the paper sightsees the thematic structures, symbolic language, and ritual contexts of *Oguega* performances. It unveils that, *Oguega* poetic expressions encode complex systems of knowledge relating to health, governance, conflict resolution, environmental stewardship, and other sociopolitical wisdom passed down from across generations. The paper posits that *Oguega* poems constitute an enduring medium through which the Esan (Edo) people negotiate identity, transmit ancestral wisdom, and adapt to socio-cultural change.

Keywords: Esan-Edo people, Indigenous Knowledge, *Oguega*, Divinatory poems.

Poemele *Oguega* ca depozitar al cunoștințelor indigene Esan (Edo) din Nigeria

Rezumat. Această lucrare explorează modul în care poemele *Oguega* servesc nu doar ca instrumente spirituale pentru divinație, ci și ca arhive orale care conservă cosmologia, filozofiile morale, înțelepciunea ecologică și valorile sociale ale comunității. Bazându-se pe munca etnografică de teren în comunitatea Esan (Edo) și pe analiza textuală, lucrarea analizează structurile tematice, limbajul simbolic și contextele rituale ale spectacolelor *Oguega*. Dezvăluie că expresiile poetice *Oguega* codifică sisteme complexe de cunoștințe legate de sănătate, guvernare, rezolvarea conflictelor, gestionarea mediului și alte înțelepciuni sociopolitice transmise din generație în generație. Lucrarea susține că poemele *Oguega* constituie un mediu durabil prin care poporul Esan (Edo) negociază identitatea, transmite înțelepciunea ancestrală și se adaptează la schimbările socio-culturale.

Cuvinte-cheie: poporul Esan-Edo, cunoștințe indigene, Oguega, poeme divinatorii.

1. Introduction. Every human society, no matter its culture or religion, has its own ways of gaining and passing on knowledge [1]. Scholars are unanimous in pointing out that, oral traditions have served as the main vessels for the preservation and transmission of African indigenous knowledge [2]. Studies has also unveiled that African indigenous knowledge is obtained through variety of ways that includes mystico-spiritual media such as divination. In fact, Obioha and Eyo argue that, "divination as an African theory of knowledge is an attempt to give a comprehensive and holistic insight into what it means to know and how knowledge is achieved in the African space" [3].

Oguega is a kind of divination apparatus that is in common use among Esan (Edo) people of Nigeria. "The use of this divination apparatus is concomitant with exclamations, songs, narratives, chants and poetry" [1, p. 16]. The *Oguega* divinatory codes form a crucial aspect of this system, acting as rich repositories of the community's collective wisdom, history, spirituality, social values, and worldview [5]. Through carefully crafted poetic expressions, the *Oguega* priests (or diviners) provide spiritual guidance, explain the causes of misfortunes, prescribe remedies, and offer moral instruction, all grounded in the indigenous knowledge systems of the Esan people of Edo state. Ebhomienlen [5] notes that *Oguega* divination is not merely a spiritual exercise; it represents an intricate system of knowledge that covers areas such as philosophy, cosmology, medicine, ethics, and social governance. Each poem recited during the divinatory process contains layered meanings, proverbs, historical references, and coded lessons that reflect centuries of communal experience. Thus, Oguega poems serve as both a living library and a practical tool for navigating life's challenges.

Despite the profound value of Oguega divinatory poems, modernization, urbanization, and the spread of foreign religions and cultures have contributed to the decline in their usage and transmission. The younger generations, who appear to be detached from traditional practices, and may not fully, appreciate the wealth of knowledge embedded in these poems. Moreover, formal education systems, which often prioritize Western epistemologies, have historically marginalized indigenous knowledge forms like that of Oguega; risking their gradual disappearance. In recent academic discourse, there has been a growing awareness of the need to preserve and study indigenous knowledge systems, recognizing them as valuable intellectual traditions in their own right. Within this context, examining the Oguega divinatory poems becomes essential for understanding not only the Esan people's way of life but also for appreciating the broader contributions of African oral traditions to knowledge, culture, and identity. This study, therefore, seeks to explore Oguega divinatory poems as a vital repository of indigenous knowledge in Esan society, shedding light on their content, functions, and contemporary relevance. By doing so, it aims to highlight the importance of safeguarding these oral traditions as part of Africa's rich intellectual heritage.

2. Method of Data Gathering. Since much of traditional arts of the Esan people are under-documented, the paper relied on mixed method approach in the collection of its data. It incorporated oral interviews as primary sources and analysed secondary materials to contextualise its findings. Oral traditions among the Edo people serve as essential sources of knowledge, encapsulating their identity and collective memory. Even though oral history is often faulted, it remains a valid and authoritative source of knowledge [2]. Five Oguega diviners each were selected from the communities, which make up each of the local government areas. This amounted to fifteen diviners because the locale of investigation is made up of five local government areas. Out of them, were five research assistants who proved to be highly skilled in Oguega divinatory poetry and Esan ethnography. For ease of data collection and to further enhance the quality of data, a whatsapp platform was set up where respondents freely discussed and presented their viewpoints on the issues that we constantly raised. In order to keep information within track, we partly used the question guide as an inspiration for free interview. This approach facilitated the examination of the cultural values and norms that underpin Esan Indigenous Knowledge system. The insights gained are situated within broader

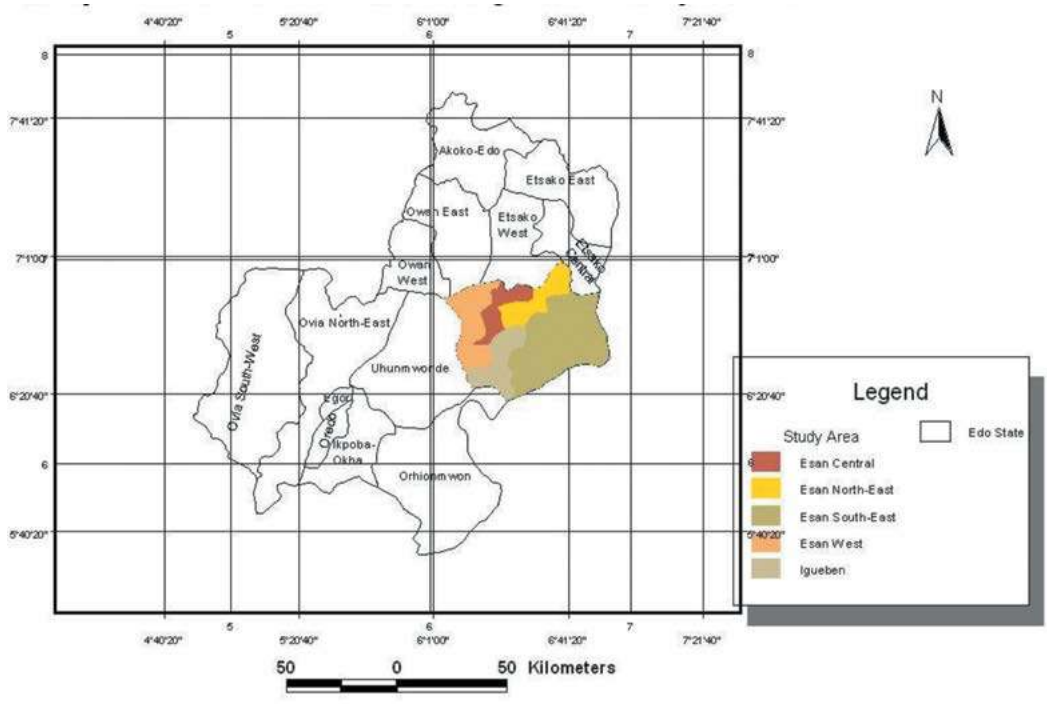


Fig. 1: *A map of the study area*

academic discussions on indigenous knowledge in postcolonial African contexts, contributing to an understanding of cultural resilience and identity negotiation among the Esan people and other African communities. Note also that, we used ChatGPT sparingly to enhance the clarity of the sub titles in the paper.

Esan as the Field of Investigation. The Esan are people of Edo extraction whose communities lies between the savannahs of the north and the tropic rain forest of the south of Edo State. They are believed to have migrated from the Old Benin Kingdom to their present location [6]. Indeed, oral tradition holds that the word, Esan is a derivative of the Benin word, San meaning "jumped away', or 'flee.' It is drawn from the Benin expression, *iyan ni san la uwoha*. Meaning, 'those that fled into to the forest' [6]. The name became the accepted name of the group of people who escaped from the reign of Oba Ewuare of Benin in the middle of the 15th century.

Esanland (Oto Esan) occupies a total land mass of 2,814.347 square kilometres out of Edo state's 19,794 square kilometres and Nigeria's 923,763 square kilometres territory [7]. Esan is located at Longitude 60`5′ celcious and Latitude 60`5′ celcius. It has boundaries on the North West with Owan and Etsako on the North-East; on the South-West with Orhiomwon and Ika, while on the South and South-East with Aniocha and Oshimili, all areas that were controlled by ancient Benin especially from the 15th century. The people populate areas such as *Uromi, Ewohimi, Ewatto, Igueben, Irrua, Ubiaja, Ogwa, Ebele, Ekpoma, Ohordua* and *Ewu* in central Edo State, South-South Nigeria. It has a flat landscape, lacking in rocks and mountains, and good for agricultural purpose.

A large percentage of postcolonial Esan people of today are Christians, mostly Catholic but in recent times, other denominations have surfaced in the region [8, p. 96]. Esan people like other Africans, have their own indigenous religion and tradition. The traditional Esan worldview encompasses both a spiritual and physical world that resembles each other, a duality approach or worldview. In other words, the physical and spiritual are existing and interacting simultaneously, one interlocked with the other. *Erimnwin* (heaven) mimics the physical world and the physical world mimics heaven [9]. They believe in a Supreme Deity (God) called *Osenobulua* in Esan dialect, who administers the universe through, Ebo (divinities) and other spiritual realities. They vener-

ate their dead relatives as ancestors (*enikalo*) who are believed to have lived well, died well and have been accepted into the realm of the spiritual elders of the household and communities. For the Esan like other African, the *Enikalo* enjoy dual existence and are bi-lingual i.e. they speak and understand the language of man and that of the spirit. Hence, possess the power to direct the affairs of the living members of the family.

3. Understanding Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS). Indigenous knowledge is, connected with the social, cultural, spiritual, political, and economic realities of an indigenous people. According to Soul Shava and Tintswalo Manyike [10, p. 37];

"Indigenous people (the knowers) are creators of indigenous knowledge; they give it discourse and meaning based on, and relating to, their experiences in interactions with their environment (the known) over time. The accumulated knowledge that indigenous people generate is embedded in their culture and embodied in their practices. It is mobile knowledge carried in/by indigenous people that can reside both within and without their lived context (hence the existence of 'urban indigenes' – individuals who are able to maintain their indigenous identity and attachment to a particular locality while being geographically distant from that place). This knowledge is transgenerational, transmitted from generation to generation orally (through narratives, stories/folklore, songs and poetry), visually (through arts, such as "bushmen" paintings, writings, craft, cultural rituals and dance), practically (through doing and the artefacts associated with practice) and spiritually (through dreams and visions from the ancestors).

IKS thus refers to the cumulative wisdom, practices, and beliefs developed by indigenous communities through sustained interaction with their environments and societies. They embody skills, innovations, and experiences used to support and improve livelihoods within specific local contexts [11, p. 22]. Omojola and Kanu [12, p. 94] describe IKS as "homegrown knowledge" that helps communities understand their identity and maintain life-sustaining relationships with their environment. Akena [13, p. 601] emphasizes its contextual richness, reflecting ancestral wisdom and the diversity of cultural histories. IKS also plays a vital role in epistemology, integrating medicine, agriculture, social norms, and spiritual beliefs into a holistic understanding of knowledge. Mammon [14, p. 16] captures this integration, defining IKS as a set of long-standing, locale-specific ideas and practices, often rooted in indigenous religious traditions, that guide interaction with both the environment and others.

IKS forms the bedrock of cultural identity and continuity, encompassing language, rituals, values, art, and social structures that shape communal life. Language, in particular, is central to IKS as it encodes vital ecological and cultural knowledge, such as information on local species, seasonal patterns, and land use. Therefore, the decline of IKS is often accompanied by the erosion of indigenous languages and cultural heritage [10, p. 37]. Among the Esan people, IKS is a holistic way of life, expressed through norms, trade, beliefs, values, wisdom, and communal practices. It informs ethical behavior and social conduct, such as teaching children to greet elders, maintain cleanliness, show honesty, humility, charity, and engage in cooperative efforts like communal labor and mutual support systems.

4. **The Wisdom of Signs: Divination in Indigenous Epistemology.** Among the Edo people, life is viewed as a vast, unpredictable sea that requires spiritual guidance for successful navigation, often sought through the practice of divination [15]. Divination, known as *ubọmin* in Esan, is a foundational aspect of indigenous knowledge and epistemology. It functions as a traditional method of acquiring, transmitting, and validating knowledge. It serves as a vital link between the physical and spiritual realms, offering insight and direction on personal and communal matters [16, p. 10]. Historically, divination was one of the earliest knowledge-seeking tools, relying on the interpretation of natural signs, dreams, and symbols to construct meaning in a world without modern science. Ogah [17] describes it as a remarkable cultural tradition that has persisted through generations. According to Ebhomienlen [5], modern science has roots in ancient divinatory practices, with disciplines like astronomy, mathematics, and

physics having evolved from early astrological and cosmological insights found in ancient Near Eastern, Indian, and Arabic traditions.

Divination functions as a repository of Indigenous knowledge, encoding cosmology, history, ethics, and social regulation. It involves structured codes, symbols, and interpretive rules. Its authority is validated through communal recognition of the diviner's role and ancestral/spiritual backing. Its truth is tested by outcomes, alignment with communal experience, and ritual consistency while its knowledge is transmitted through apprenticeship, oral instruction, and practice [18, p. 8].

The Esan people possess distinct cultural and religious traditions in which divination plays a central role in accessing spiritual knowledge and guidance. Diviners, known as Ọbo, are respected spiritual mediators who undergo specialized training in the techniques of divination. Their role involves invoking spiritual entities (*bọ*) 'to diagnose illnesses', 'predict future events', and 'address various traditional and spiritual challenges' [5].

5. Oguega: An Epistemological Tool in Esan Indigenous Though. Divination practices across various Nigerian cultures reveal shared techniques with localized adaptations. *Oguega* is recognized as the oracle of Great Benin, although it is also used in regions such as Igboland, Etsakoland, Owanland, and Urhoboland [15]. In Urhobo, it is referred to as Epha [19], while in Benin and Esan it retains the name *Oguega* [20; 21; 22]. Regardless of location, communities often regard the divination system as indigenous to them. The *Oguega* apparatus consists of sixteen seeds arranged in four rows and is used by diviners/traditional healers to predict future events, diagnose ailments, and prescribe remedies. A similar divinatory tool among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria is the *Opele Ifa*, a divination chain, and sixteen palm nuts are central instruments in their divinatory system [18].

Oguega is a prominent divinatory practice among the Esan people, with the term, *oguega* itself, meaning, "I know how to care or serve." It involves a divination apparatus made up of sixteen seeds arranged in four rows and is used by traditional healers to inquire into a client's past, present, and future, as well as to diagnose illnesses and prescribe remedies. Ebhomienlen [5] conceptualizes *Oguega* as the Esan "Encyclopedia", a repository of traditional mythology encoded in the Iseṣ (seeds). These sixteen main Iseṣ serve as interpretive symbols for various conditions and circumstances. According to Chief P.A. Agaga of Idumebo in Irrua, as cited by Ebhomienlen [5], "*Oguega* knows every place, person, and thing," and as the custodian of Esan traditional medicine, it contains the names, causes, and cures of all diseases.

Among the Esan myths establishing the origin and source of *Oguega* is the oral tradition that it was brought first to Benin by Ominigbon (Chief Nosakhare Isekhure 2009; cited in, Daryl Peavy [9, p. 3]. In corroboration, Ebhomienlen adds that, "a few weeks after the death of *Ominigbon*, his son, Ogbeide observed that a plant germinated on the grave of his father, Ominigbon. The fruits of this plant that fell to the ground were able to make Ogbeide see beyond what the ordinary eyes could see. By gazing at the shells he was immediately endowed with the power to foretell upcoming events. Ogbeide then made *Oguega* from the shells of the fruits of that tree."

According to Ebhomielen [5, p. 130-132], there is also an Esan (Edo) mythology that holds that the *Oguega* divinatory system originated from chimpanzees. The myth recounts how an Esan ancestor, a hunter, observed a group of chimpanzees gathering each morning to divine what the day held for them, using spiritual languages during the process. Fascinated, the hunter carefully studied their practices and eventually adopted their divination tools, leading to the development of *Oguega* among the Esan people.

Oguega has sixteen kinds of names, divided into four lines that embodied two paralleled lines; The first line has one hundred and twenty-eight meaning. Both lines when added together became two hundred and fifty-six different words. Each of these words symbolizes different human endeavours and the astral world. Below is a photograph of *Uta* (the tooth of a boar) and *Oguega*.

According to Ebhomienelen [5, p. 129], in the process of interpretation after reading each line they are joined together to give one word.



Fig. 2. *A photograph of Oguega.* Source: Photograph taken from field investigation by Author[1].

Emovon in corroboration explains that, each *Oguega* string has its own distinct nature, but it must be combined with another string to form a "House of Divination "in order to carry a message when the code is read. An arm of *Oguega* divination may be duplicated to form a combination, for example: Oha + Oha. If both positions are the same in this way the name is followed by "nabe." Thus our duplicated Oha example would be read, *Ohanabe*. It should be noted also, that in *Oguega* divination, the seeds (ise) are read like Arabic letters. That is, the presentations in the apparatus are read from right to left [4, p. 19].

6. A Textual Analysis of Selected *Oguega* Divinatory Poems. According to Charles Aluede [4, p. 18], Oguega poetry is beautifully crafted, and has themes which border on the Esan worldview.

Oha+Oha = Ohanabe

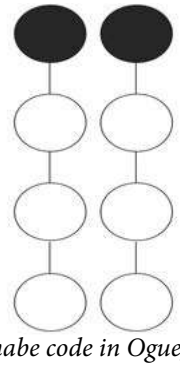


Fig. 3. *Ohanabe code in Oguega divination*

Esan Text	**English Translation**
Enyen no khi bha akhe,	The snake that has coiled at the base of the pot
abha gue gbo le	If care is not taken in killing it
a ki gba akhe-a	the pot will be broken
gbilighidi ole okhuo	It is with suddenness a lady's
mi ehe le	menses comes
gbilighidi ole emena	It is with suddenness the bull
ho ogba	breaks into any fence

This poem explores three key themes: carefulness, precautionary measures, and sudden occurrences, particularly in the face of danger and delicate situations. In Esan indigenous thought, wisdom is rooted in caution and foresight, which help prevent harm and manage risks effectively. Scholars like Oguagha [23] affirm that both traditional African and modern perspectives view precaution as essential for reducing the impact of unforeseen events. Sudden crises often reveal the dangers of neglect and impulsiveness. Traditional societies, as noted by Mbiti [24], used rituals, proverbs, and taboos to promote vigilance and self-restraint. Proverbs like the Esan saying, *Oba ri ne iye, o rie ne ilimi* and the Yoruba adage, *Ká mọ̀ọ́kan ṣáájú ìjà, kì í jẹ́ kí a dákẹ́*, emphasize foresight and preparation as vital tools for navigating uncertainty.

Etule + Ete = Etulete

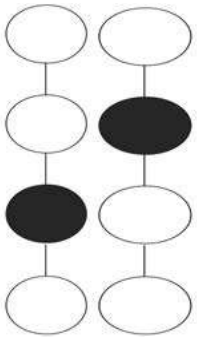


Fig. 4. *Illustrating the Etulete Code in Oguega Divination*

Esan Text	**English Translation**
Etulete-i men	Abomination is not good
Ehurie -i men	Worthlessness is not good

Etulete dua oranmen	Abomination sprained his leg
Ehurie da yole ote	Worthlessness then said sorry

This divinatory poetry reiterates the ripple effects of abominable acts. Among the Esan people, acts such as incest, murder, theft from sacred shrines, disrespect to elders, and false oath-taking are abomination, seen not only as social deviations but as violations of spiritual order and ancestral expectations. These actions are considered pollutants of communal harmony, attracting curses, misfortune, or spiritual sanctions. Within this moral framework also, worthlessness is not merely economic or social failure but reflects a deep loss of moral standing, often applied to those who violate the communal values that define personhood (*orhia*). A person who has committed abominable acts may be regarded as "lost" or "disconnected" from both the living and the ancestral realms [2, p. 48].

Ete + Etule = Ete-etule

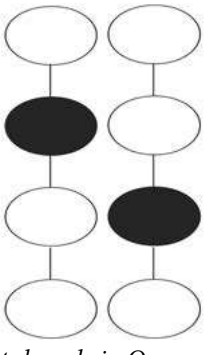


Fig. 5. *Ete-etule code in Oguega divination*

Esan Text	**English Translation**
Unu no le ebhie-i van:	The mouth which has eaten kola nuts does not go angry

This Oguega poem highlights how peaceful gestures and symbolic rituals, especially the offering of kola nut, play a vital role in promoting emotional transformation and communal harmony in Esan tradition. The kola nut is not merely a fruit but a sacred symbol of peace, reconciliation, and unity. Offering it signifies goodwill, and partaking in it binds individuals to a spiritual and communal code of peace and respect, making anger or conflict inappropriate. As respondents explain, sharing and eating kola symbolise entering a covenant of truth, restraint, and unity. Pa Afeisumun Orende (Personal Interview, 2025) adds that its use in traditional courts or family meetings reflects a commitment to sincerity and reconciliation, with its distribution based on age, status, and hierarchy, reinforcing communal values and leadership structures.

Akuo+Akuo=Akuonabe

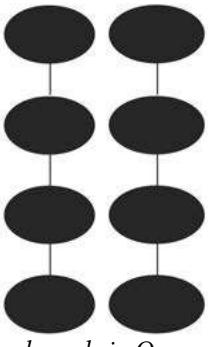


Fig. 6. *Akuonabe code in Oguega divination*

Esan Text	**English Translation**
Egbodia,	Being in one place
omen no *Ojie*,	is good for the king
Oimen no Oka	it is not good for corn
Oi men ni Enyan	it is not good for yam
omen no Oba	it is good for the Oba
oi men no ovien.	it is not good for the subject
Aha re min ko obha jie,	when a planted crop fails to germinate
ohanmen ki gbo oria.	hunger will be upon the land

Akuonabe poem serves as a warning against stagnation and spiritual vulnerability. In Oguega and other oracular practices, movement symbolizes life, growth, and alignment with destiny, while "being in one place" reflects stagnation, disconnection from ancestral and communal expectations, and potential spiritual or moral failure (Daniel Ewah, personal communication August, 2025). In Esan thought, this condition may indicate laziness, moral lapses, or unresolved issues with one's *ehi* (personal spirit). Socially, it signals a failure to fulfill one's responsibilities, as Esan ethics emphasize individual contributions to family and community progress.

Erokhuaeghare

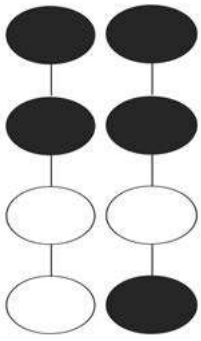


Fig. 7. *Erokhuaeghare code in Oguega divination*

Esan Text	**English Translation**
Osankan sankan	It is without finesse
a nye man wa le	that a dog's food is prepared

This divinatory expression conveys the Esan belief that things of little value do not warrant refined attention or effort. Just as one would not carefully prepare a dog's food with the same care as human meals, tasks, people, or issues deemed unimportant are not given elaborate treatment. According to an Esan diviner, this reflects an understanding of social and spiritual hierarchy, where treatment is based on perceived worth. The dog symbolizes the lowly or undeserving, and thus, what is offered to it lacks honor or detail.

Eghare+ *Erokhua= Egharerokhua*

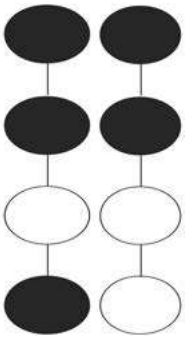


Fig. 8. *Egharerokhua code in Oguega divination*

Esan Text	**English Translation**
Oresin fua se	No matter how elegant frame-up is
na re ra egbe	it is never rubbed on oneself

Egharerokhua poem emphasizes a core Esan belief, as expressed by *Oguega* diviners: one should not do to others what one would not accept for oneself. It warns against manipulating the truth, especially in sacred or judicial settings, as such actions disturb the cosmic order. In Esan culture, unjustly framing others up invites ancestral disapproval and can lead to spiritual consequences like illness, misfortune, or public shame.

Ekogholi

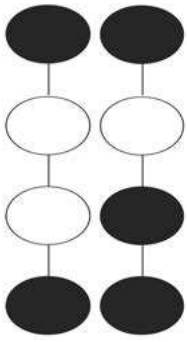


Fig. 9. *Ekogholi code in Oguega divination*

Esan Text	**English Translation**
Udu bha kpon	If the heart does not cease
ai khin elimin	going to the world beyond is impossible

The ekogholi poem in Oguega divination highlights death as a necessary passage to the ancestral realm, symbolized by the stopping of the *udu* (heart). It reflects the Esan belief that the heart is both the source of physical life and a spiritual symbol of existence. The poem conveys a worldview where life continues beyond death, linking the living, the dead, and the unborn in a spiritual continuum.

Oha+Oba=Ohoba

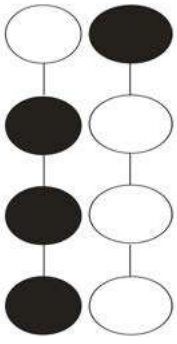


Fig. 10. *Ohoba code in Oguega divination*

Esan Text	**English Translation**
Ebe ko 'khun no Osenobua	Whatever is greater than God
oi ribho	is non-existent God

The Esan worldview upholds the absolute supremacy of Ọsenobulua (Oselobulua), whose omnipotence is not merely theoretical but ac-

tively shapes their ethics, legal systems, and communal spirituality. As the highest being in the cosmological hierarchy, all other spiritual entities; *eboh* (divinities), *enibiema nikare* or *enikalo* (ancestors), and other nature spirits, derive their power from him and remain subject to his will. Though intermediaries may be engaged in everyday rituals, ultimate appeals in critical matters are directed to *Ọsenobulua* [25, p. 121], [7, p. 262-263]. In *Oguega* poetry, *Ohoba* expresses humility and alignment with this theological truth within Esan cosmology and moral thought.

Oha+ Ogbi=Ohogbi

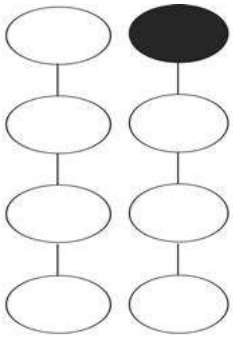


Fig. 11. *Ohogbi code in Oguega divination*

Esan Text	**English Translation**
Obo ha khin akhe	When the hand is going into the earthenware pot
oki ja amen no obhiole len	it should let his or her siblings know

This Oguega divinatory poem metaphorically emphasizes the Esan values of communal accountability, transparency, and shared responsibility. *Ẹmuata* (Truthfulness) and *ọghọ/ekpẹn* (honour) are deeply embedded in Esan ethical, spiritual, and political life, particularly for those in leadership positions. Deviations from these values often attract both communal condemnation and spiritual consequences [6]. Esan proverbs such as *Omon no muebhoro ru, egbegho omuru* ('a child who deceives the community, deceives himself') and *jia ri'ẹmuata gbugba nọ'ha fanọa* ('let's build our fences with the truth so that it will not scatter') illustrate the sacred nature of accountability. The *Ohogbi* poem warns against secrecy and unilateral actions in communal matters, framing them as betrayals that can disturb social harmony and invoke ancestral disapproval [6].

Odin+Ete=Odin-ete

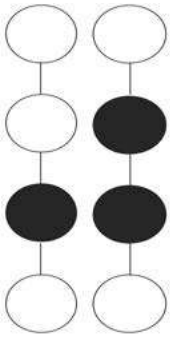


Fig. 12. *Odin-ete code in Oguega divination*

Esan Text	**English Translation**
O khue kede	The drummer
Khue no 'ba	drummed for the Oba
Khue ne 'zomo	drummed for Ezomo
No kire khue oso le, Ebi da lo	but before drumming for self, night fell

Odin-ete poetry serves as both a moral warning and a source of wisdom, highlighting the Esan value of service to others, particularly leaders, while stressing the importance of self-care and personal fulfillment. According to Kenneth Okhifoh (personal communication, August 2025), Esan culture encourages communal responsibility and respect for hierarchy but warns against neglecting one's own needs. Those who sacrifice their well-being for duty may earn public admiration but are often privately pitied, as such neglect is viewed as a lack of wisdom. This idea is encapsulated in the Esan proverb, *Ẹgbede n'ọdọn'uwedin ọsọria nọi dọn'osọle* meaning, 'The needle that sews others' holes but cannot sew its own'. It cautions against self-neglect in the name of service. Additionally, *Odin-ete* critiques procrastination and missed opportunities, illustrating through metaphor that time may run out before one tends to personal needs. Peter Alli (personal communication, August 2025) echoes this, noting that those who constantly pour into others without replenishing themselves risk burnout, breakdown, or unfulfilled lives.

7. **Discussion of Findings.** Earlier in this study, we mentioned that *Oguega* has sixteen seeds which is interpreted in two hundred and fifty-six ways. In this article, we examined just ten of the two hundred and fifty-six presentations. This sample forms 3.90% of the entire

Oguega corpus. That this insignificant sample can present data worth examining is indicative of the fact that *Oguega* is replete with stupendous collection of indigenous model and knowledge worth examining for the good of the contemporary man. In this study, we would like to rely on the contextual dimensions in analyzing *Oguega* poems. We will examine the contextual dimension from the angle of culture and value system. Thus, we will concern ourselves with analyzing these poems from the contextual and semantic viewpoints. For the sake of emphasis, the ten poems under examination in this article will be studied in bits to enable us have a near-complete view of some of the coded knowledge in Oguegaology. From the ten poems selected, we observe that they centre around issues like carefulness, hygiene, infidelity, kolanut eating, the king and his kingdom, pet keeping, avoidance of frame-ups, the heart and its bio-medical connection with life, the supremacy of God, siblingship and time management. These issues have been encapsulated in the diagram below which is captioned as figure (13).

The first poem which we would like to examine here is Ohanabe. This poem has three subjects. It talks of carefulness that is required to kill the snake that has coiled around an earthenware pot, the suddenness with which a lady's menses comes and the suddenness that the bull breaks into a fence. In the case of *Etulete*, we are reminded that abomination and worthlessness are not good. Far from admonition which characterized the first two poems, we find *Ete-etule* which simply says that the mouth which has eaten kola nuts does not go angry. Why kolanuts? What is the relationship between kolanuts and abomination? And what is the relationship between *Etulete* and *Ete-etule*? These issues will be dealt with at some length in the next segment. While *Akuonabe* talks about how being in one place could be good for X and ungood for Y, Erokhuaeghare gives a vivid idea of the Esan people's approach to how their dogs are treated in terms of feeding. *Egharerokhua* admonishes everyone to eschew frame-up, *Ekogholi* draws our attention to the heart as the sustainer of mortals, *Ohoba* intimates us that nothing is greater than God. Moving forward, *Ohogbi* addresses siblingship and *Odin-ete* cautions us on adequate management of time.

From a sample of ten poems out of two hundred and fifty-six that forms 3.90% of the entire Oguega corpus, we are faced with a multiplicity

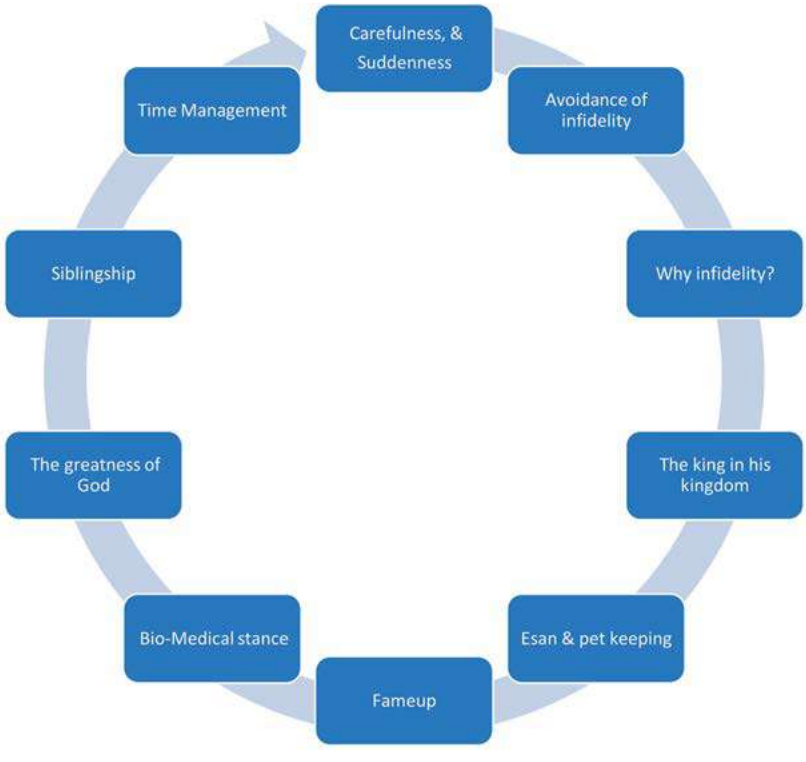


Fig. 13. *A diagram of select Oguega themes*

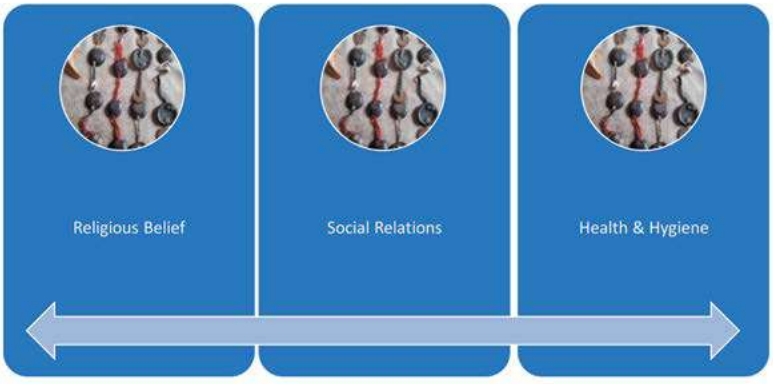


Fig. 14. *A diagram of some Oguega themes*

of ideas that we would like to reduce into three broad themes. They are the people's religious beliefs, social relations and health and hygiene. These themes have been condensed into a diagram in figure 4 below.

Esan Religious Beliefs

'Whatever is greater than God is non-existent'

The traditional Esan people are monotheistic. By this we mean that they believe in one great God. This belief in one God is an age-old religious belief in Esan. To them, the supreme God is that entity that was not created but who created all things and the entire universe. Put side by side anything or deity, none is greater than him. Even before the advent of Christianity and in the light of the common maxim that what God cannot do does not exist, the traditional Esan people already knew this and devised means of worshipping him.

Social Relations. Being in one place is good for the king, it is not good for corn, it is not good for yam it is good for the *Oba*, it is not good for the subject. When a planted crop fails to germinate, hunger will be upon the land.

Without contradiction, humans are generally known to be social animals. Beyond this general conclusion, the *Oguega* of Esan being the repository of esoteric knowledge teaches its practitioners much more about life itself, social relations and conduct. For example, the poem above addresses many issue. First of all, it admonishes kings and chiefs to domicile in their palaces. According to Aluede [26].

There is only one person in *Eguare* who is greeted *Ọmọn khaẹbhọ*, the person is the king. The king is found at the centre of his kingdom. He lives in the village of the blue-blooded (*Ẹguare*). *Ẹguare* is the residence of the king. He domiciles at the centre of his people that his people may protect him and he too will protect his people.

It is somewhat sacrosanct that the king should always be seen on his throne. There is a reason for this. A proper explanation of the poem will help us appreciate this if a planted seed refuses to grow, it will not produce any food for humans and hunger will be upon the land. If the citizens of a particular kingdom are stagnated economically or agriculturally, paying homage to a monarch will be out of it. But contrastingly, if the king is always in one place-his palace, he will always receive visitors who will leave him with gifts. It is a common saying in Esan that when one is visiting the king, one is either carrying or holding items [26]. When a king ascends the throne, he is of necessity saddled with three major responsibilities. He is a political, religious, and judicial head. An absentee king cannot discharge the duties associated with such an office. In discharging the duties, fines and duties are charged and for being objective, his people will always go to the palace to appreciate him. All these point to the advantages of having a king stay in one place. But viewed from the opposite lens, it is not good for the king's people and crops to face stagnation or retardation lest the land will experience failure.

'It is without finesse that a dog's food is prepared'. Contrary to how dogs are treated in the Western world, they do not have any right in Esan tradition. They are used to hunt bush animals for the family and for sale, as means of

security and as livestock business. Although local dogs are quite common in Esan, they feed themselves in part by eating the carcass of animals, human wastes, and sacrifices often deposited at road junctions. For owners who are quite magnanimous, leftover or rancid soup are served to them with morsels. Such foods are usually not fit for human consumption. Although this narrative is changing by the day, the position of *Oguega* on the treatment of dogs is indicative of how human relationship has been with these pets in this locale.

'When the hand is going into the earthenware pot, it should let his siblings know'. 'No matter how elegant frame-up is it is never rubbed on oneself.' And 'The drummer, drummed for the Oba, drummed for Ezomo, but before drumming for self, night fell'.

Just as it is with Sub-Saharan Africa where their daily lives are dotted with ideas of collective and communalism, life in Esan is replete with idea of thinking first of the system, family, lineage and community rather than self. From these three separate *Oguega* poems, the idea of oneness can be directly educed. The first one warns that in all that we do, we should learn to confide in our sibling. The second one is quick to observe that even in our collective way of life, there should be accountability. Everyone should be accountable for his or her action. Thus, we should be of integrity, avoid lies and never try to rope people into whatever they know nothing about. The third one in this segment is very instructive. The poem talks of the drummer who drummed for the paramount ruler, the king and chiefs but before settling down to drum for himself, dusk had come. This therefore typifies the need for time management in whatever we do. No doubt, hallmark of our mutuality is our collectivism. Even at that, we are admonished to know when to be communal and when to meet one's personal needs. For the drummer to drum his life away without considering self is a show of arrant lack of wisdom. In all that we do, moderation is necessary.

To end this segment, we dare to interrogate *Etulete* whose poem is "abomination is not good, worthlessness is not good. Abomination sprained his leg and worthlessness then said sorry." This poem is quite clear and simple leads. As the diviner narrates it, the client is able to conjecture is not exactly able to get the meaning of what is being said. The meaning is forbidden thing, foolish thing, shameful act, dishonorable act and infidelity to mention a few. When *Oguega* presents *Etulete* to a married woman. It means that she is involved in unwholesome acts of infidelity… that a man order than her husband has had carnal knowledge of her. This trend is believed to have the propensity of bringing calamity to the entire family.

Beyond mere speculation as it is common with religion, we do know scientifically that unprotected sex and having more than one sex partner is actually capable to bringing this calamity. In *Oguega* divinatory space (divinospace), it was known early in time that just like me, no matter the laws put in place, cheating on partners will happen. This is what is coded in *Ete-etule* which is the direct opposite of *Etule-ete*. The poetry of *Ete-etule* simply says that "the mouth which has eaten kola nuts does not go angry". The kola nut is as a gift item often presented in honour of a personage. While examining some aspects of Oguega divination, Aluede [27, p. 126] draws a connection between *Etule- Ete* and *Ete- Etule* thus:

what is the connection between infidelity and Kola nut? Kola nut is used as a gift item, to honour someone and to initiate friendship. It is also an instrument for entering into covenant. Beyond the literary appreciation of this item, in 'Oguegaology', women are thought of to be susceptible to infidelity in that they see their private parts as Kola nuts which when split, others share of it. In this discourse, the outer hip of a woman's vulva (Labia Majora) is seen as the lobes of Kola nuts hence in Esan, it is said that when a woman refuses to offer a gift for a man, we know it is a deliberate act miserliness, not because she has none to offer; after all, women are naturally endowed to move about with their gift items.

Health and Hygiene. It is with suddenness a lady's menses comes and if the heart does not cease, going to the world beyond is impossible. *Oguega* touches almost all facets of human lives, here, it teaches hygiene. Because it is a known fact that menses comes suddenly, Esan daughters in their teens are taught menstrual hygiene. They

are told to be prepared once they begin to develop abdominal pains to arm themselves with sanitary pads so that they do not get soiled. Beyond this, they are also taught the art of disposal of these items. They are not expected to litter the neighborhoods. In a similar strain, when the heart does not stop working, dying is impossible. This shows that *Oguega* knows the connection between the heart and being alive and diviners are able to counsel clients to be of good cheer and avoid anything thing that could threaten the heart.

8. **Conclusion.** In this article, we examined a select presentation of *Oguega* by documenting graphically its divination, poetry and meaning in Esan weltanschauung. In the course of this research, it was observed that *Oguega* is highly eclectic-delving into sociology, social justice, civic education, health science, and spirituality and religion where it resides. The grasp of its tenets, no doubt, will contribute meaningfully to the proper understanding of man, his nature, and environment and how he is to relate in a given locale for the sake of mutual coexistence. The findings affirm that *Oguega* is far more than a divinatory tradition, it is a living archive of Esan epistemology, functioning as a medium for intergenerational knowledge transfer, social regulation, and cultural sustainability. The oral nature of these poems allows for adaptability and continuity, even in the face of modernity, colonial legacies, and religious shifts. Furthermore, the study reveals that *Oguega* poetry embodies a form of indigenous intellectualism, where knowledge is not only spoken but performed, not only remembered but ritually enacted. The meanings embedded within these poetic utterances reflect Esan perspectives on truth, justice, morality, human relationships, and the sacred.

9. Ethical Considerations. This research was conducted in accordance with ethical standards guiding studies in the humanities and social sciences. The researcher ensured that all interactions with participants were grounded in respect, transparency, and cultural sensitivity. Prior to data collection, participants were informed of the purpose and objectives of the study, the nature of their involvement, and their right to decline or withdraw at any point without any negative consequences. Informed consent was obtained verbally and, where necessary, in writing.

Given the study's focus on *Oguega* as a repository of Esan Indigenous Knowledge, special attention was paid to the protection of cultural heritage and intellectual property rights. Indigenous knowledge shared by participants, especially elders, custodians of oral tradition, and performers, was treated with confidentiality and respect. No sacred or restricted information was disclosed in the final report without the explicit permission of the knowledge holders.

Anonymity was maintained by avoiding the use of personal identifiers unless participants consented to be acknowledged. Data collected were used solely for academic purposes and securely stored to prevent unauthorized access. The researcher was careful to represent participants' views accurately, avoiding misinterpretation or cultural insensitivity.

Throughout the study, honesty and integrity were upheld in data collection, analysis, and presentation. Proper acknowledgment was given to both oral and written sources in line with academic and ethical standards. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional and local authorities before fieldwork began.

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