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**IGBO**



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# Igbo culture

**Igbo culture** (Igbo: *Omenala ndi Igbo*) are the customs, practices and traditions of the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria. It comprises archaic practices as well as new concepts added into the Igbo culture either by cultural evolution or by outside influence. These customs and traditions include the Igbo people's visual art, music and dance forms, as well as their attire, cuisine and language dialects. Because of their various subgroups, the variety of their culture is heightened further.

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## Music

The Igbo people have a melodic and symphonic musical style, into which they incorporate various percussion instruments: the **udu**, is essentially designed from a clay jug; an **ekwe**, which is formed from a hollowed log; and the **ogene**, a hand bell designed from forged iron. Other instruments include **opi**, a wind instrument similar to the flute, **igba**, and **ichaka**.<sup>[1]</sup>

Another popular musical form among the Igbo is Highlife, which is a fusion of jazz and traditional music and widely popular in West Africa. The modern Ibo Highlife is seen in the works of Prince Nico Mbarga Dr Sir Warrior, Oliver De Coque, Bright Chimezie, and Chief Osita Osadebe, who are the some of the greatest Igbo Highlife Musicians of the twentieth century. There are also other notable Highlife artists of igbo extract, like the Mike Ejeagha, Paulson Kalu, Ali Chukwuma, Ozoemena Nwa Nsugbe.

## Art

Anklet beaten from a solid brass bar of the type worn by Igbo women. Now in the collection of Wolverhampton Art Gallery. The leg-tube extends approx 7cm each side of the 35cm disc.

Main article: Igbo art

Igbo Art is known for various types of masquerade, masks and outfits symbolising people animals or abstract conceptions. Igbo art is also known for its bronze castings found in the town of Igbo Ukwu from the 9th century.<sup>[2]</sup> Igbo art is any body of visual art originating from the people of the Igbo.

## **Mythology**

Main article: Igbo mythology

While today many Igbo people are Christian, the traditional ancient Igbo religion is known as Odinani. In the Igbo mythology, which is part of their ancient religion, the supreme God is called Chukwu ("great spirit"); Chukwu created the world and everything in it and is associated with all things on Earth. Chukwu is also a solar deity. To the ancient Igbo, the Cosmo is divided into four complex parts:<sup>[3]</sup>

- Okike (Creation)
- Alusi (Supernatural Forces or Deities)
- Mmuo (Spirit)
- Uwa (World)

## **Alusi**

**Alusi**, also known as **Arusi** or **Arushi**, are minor deities that are worshiped and served in Igbo mythology. There are a list of many different Alusi and each has its own purpose. When there is no longer need for the deity it is discarded.<sup>[4]</sup>

## **Yam**

The yam is very important to the Igbo as it is their staple crop. There are celebrations such as the New yam festival (Igbo: *Iwaji*) which are held for the harvesting of the yam.<sup>[5]</sup>

The New Yam festival (Igbo: *Iwa ji*) is celebrated annually to secure a good harvest of the staple crop. The festival is practiced primarily in Nigeria and other countries in West Africa.<sup>[6]</sup>

## **Traditional attire**

Traditionally, the attire of the Igbo generally consisted of little clothing as the purpose of clothing then was to conceal private parts, although elders were fully clothed.<sup>[7]</sup> Children were usually nude from birth till their adolescence (the time when they were considered to have something to hide) but sometimes ornaments such as beads were worn around the waist for medical reasons. Uli body art was also used to decorate both men and women in the form of lines forming patterns and shapes on the body.

With colonialism and the Westernization of Igbo culture, Western styled clothes such as shirts and trousers over took traditional clothing.<sup>[8]</sup>

## **Females**

Women carried their babies on their backs with a strip of clothing binding the two with a knot at her chest. This baby carrying technique was and still is practiced by many people groups across Africa along with the Igbo who still carry their babies this way. This method has been modernized in the form of the child carrier. In most cases Igbo women did not cover their bobbie areas. Maidens usually wore a short wrapper with beads around their waist with other ornaments such as necklaces and beads.<sup>[9]</sup> Both men and women wore wrappers.<sup>[8]</sup>

## **Males**

Males would wear loin cloths that wrapped around their waist and between their legs to be fastened at their back, the type of clothing appropriate for the intense heat as well as jobs such as farming.<sup>[8]</sup> Men could also tie a wrapper over their loin cloth.

## **Modern traditional attire**

Modern Igbo traditional attire is generally made up, for men, of the Isiagu top which resembles the African Dashiki. Isiagu (or *Ishi agu*) is usually patterned with lions heads embroidered over the clothing, It can also be plain, (usually black). It is worn with trousers and can be worn with either a traditional title holders hat (a fez named okpu agu or agwu), or with the traditional Igbo stripped men's hat (which resembles the Bobble hat). For women, an embodied puffed sleeve blouse (influenced by European attire) along with two wrappers (usually modern *Hollandis* material) and a head scarf are worn.

## **Title**

Highly accomplished men and women are admitted into orders for people of title such as Ndi Ozo or Ndi Nze. Such individuals receive certain insignia to show their stature. Membership in these orders is highly exclusive, and to qualify an individual needs more than mere material accomplishment or gallantry. They need to be highly regarded and well-spoken of in the community, and most importantly, they must be a person of the greatest integrity, truthfulness and sanity. The slightest impeachment of character is enough to disqualify an individual from becoming a person of title and once admitted into the order, a person of title is forbidden to lie, cheat, climb a tree, covet or strip their neighbor of their belongings, or commit an abomination of a crime.

## **Apprenticeship**

The Igbo have a unique form of apprenticeship in which either a male family member or a community member will spend time (usually in their teens to their adulthood) with another family, when they work for them. After the time spent with the family, the head of the host household, who is usually the older man who brought the apprentice into his household, will establish (Igbo: *idu*) the apprentice by either setting up a business for him or giving money or tools by which to make a living.

This practice was exploited by Europeans, who used this practice as a way of trading in enslaved people. Olaudah Equiano, although stolen from his home, was an Igbo person who was forced into slavery to an African family. He said that felt part of the family, unlike later, when he was shipped to North America and enslaved in the Thirteen Colonies.<sup>[11]</sup>

## **Twin killing**

Before the rise of Christianity in Igboland during the late 19th century and early 20th century, the Igbo considered the birth of twins (and other multiple births), like neighboring groups such as the Ibibio, as against nature and inherently evil. Multiple births were believed to be only what animals should produce, and humans were believed to be meant for single births.<sup>[4]</sup> The reason behind this belief may have been that, because it was a rare occurrence, it was considered wrong.<sup>[12]</sup>

The community generally killed twins by abandonment in the community's *evil forest*, or by direct attack. After the birth, the mother of the twins went through cleansing rituals to purify her from the birth. This practice has ended.

## **Osu caste system**

Osu are a group of people whose ancestors were dedicated to serving in shrines and temples for the deities of the Igbo, and therefore were deemed property of the gods. Relationships and sometimes interactions with Osu were (and to this day, still are) in many cases, forbidden. To this day being called an *Osu* remains a stigma that prevents people's progress and lifestyles.<sup>[13]</sup>

## **Calendar (Iguafo Igbo)**

Main article: Igbo calendar

In the traditional Igbo calendar, a week (Igbo: *Izu*) has 4 days (Igbo: *Ubochi*) (*Eke*, *Orie*, *Afo*, *Nkwọ*), seven weeks make one month (Igbo: *Onwa*), a month has 28 days and there are 13 months in a year. In the last month, an extra day is added.<sup>[14]</sup> The names of the days have their



roots in the mythology of the Kingdom of Nri. It was believed that Eri, the sky-born founder of the Nri kingdom, had gone on a journey to discover the mystery of time. On his journey he had saluted and counted the four days by the names of the spirits that governed them, and so the names of the spirits (*eke, orie, afọ* and *Nkwo*) became the days of the week.<sup>[15]</sup>

<b>Months</b>		An example of a month: <i>Ọnwa Mbụ</i>			
<b>No.</b>	<b>Gregorian equivalent</b>	<b>Eke Oriẹ Afọ Nkwọ</b>			
1	<b>Ọnwa Mbụ</b> (3rd week of February)			1	2
2	<b>Ọnwa Abụa</b> (March)				
		3	4	5	6
3	<b>Ọnwa Ife Eke</b> (April)				
		7	8	9	10
4	<b>Ọnwa Anọ</b> (May)				
		11	12	13	14
5	<b>Ọnwa Agwụ</b> (June)				
		15	16	17	18
6	<b>Ọnwa Ifejiọkụ</b> (July)				
		19	20	21	22
		23	24	25	26
7	<b>Ọnwa Alọm</b> (August to early September)				
		27	28		
8	<b>Ọnwa Mmụọ</b> (Late September)				
9	<b>Ọnwa Ana</b> (October)				
10	<b>Ọnwa Okike</b> (Early November)				
11	<b>Ọnwa Ajana</b> (Late November)				
12	<b>Ọnwa Ede</b> (Late November to				

	<b>Ajana</b>	December)	
	<b>Ọnwa</b>	<b>Ụzọ</b> (January	to Early
13	<b>Alụsi</b>	February) <sup>[16][17]</sup>	

## **Naming after market days**

Newborn babies were sometimes named after the day of the week when born. This is no longer the fashion. Names such as *Mgbeke* (maiden [born] on the day of Eke), *Mgborie* (maiden [born] on the Orié day) are commonly seen among the Igbo people. For males, *Mgbe* is replaced by *Nwa* or "Okoro" (Igbo: Child [of]). Examples of this are Solomon Okoronkwo and Nwankwo Kanu, two popular footballers.<sup>[18]</sup>

## **Igbo masks and masquerades**

Main article: Mmanwu

There are two basic types of masquerades, visible and invisible. The visible masquerades are meant for the public. They often are more entertaining. Masks used offer a visually appeal for their shapes and forms. In these visual masquerades, performances of harassment, music, dance, and parodies are acted out (Oyeneke 25).

The invisible masquerades take place at night. Sound is the main tool for them. The masquerader uses his voice to scream so it may be heard throughout the village. The masks used are usually fierce looking and their interpretation is only fully understood by the society's members. These invisible masquerades call upon a silent village to strike fear in the hearts of those not initiated into their society.

## Kola nut (Ọjị)

Kola nut (Igbo: *Ọjị*)<sup>[19]</sup> occupies a unique position in the cultural life of Igbo people. Ọjị is the first thing served to any visitor in an Igbo home. Ọjị is served before an important function begins, be it marriage ceremony, settlement of family disputes or entering into any type of agreement.<sup>[20]</sup> Ọjị is traditionally broken into pieces by hand, and if the Kola nut breaks into 3 pieces a special celebration is arranged.

## References

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2. ^ [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/igbo/hd\\_igbo.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/igbo/hd_igbo.htm)
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4. ^ <sup>a b</sup> <http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEnglish/imperial/nigeria/religion.htm>
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6. ^ BBC Birmingham - 2005
7. ^ Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe Page 58: ... the men (i.e. the elders) ... were all fully dressed ...
8. ^ <sup>a b c</sup> <http://culture.chiamaka.com/igboclothing.html> "Igbo People: Clothing & Cosmetic Makeup at the Time of Things Fall Apart"

9. ^ Achebe Pg. 71: She (i.e. Akueke) wore a black necklace which hung down in three coils just above her full, succulent breasts... and on her waist, four or five rows of jigida, or waist beads.
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19. ^ Oji (Kola)