**Igbo History**

The **Igbo**, sometimes (especially formerly) referred to as **Ibo**, are one of the largest single ethnicities in Africa. Most Igbo speakers are based in southeast Nigeria, where they constitute about 17% of the population; they can also be found in significant numbers in Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. Their language is also called **Igbo**. The primary Igbo states in Nigeria are Anambra, Abia, Imo, Ebonyi, and Enugu States. The Igbos also constitute more than 25% of the population in some Nigerian States like Delta State and Rivers State. Traces of the Igbo Culture and language could be found in Cross River, Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa States. Igbo language is predominant in such cities like Onitsha, Aba, Owerri, Enugu, Nnewi, Nsukka, Awka, Umuahia, and Asaba, amongst others.

**Origin**

There have been postulations of different origins of the Igbo; however, serious studies based on testable facts clarify that the Igbo have lived in their country for tens of millennia. The archeological finds at Ugwuele Okigwe make an insightful proof of human activities in the theatre of Igbo civilization more than two hundred and fifty thousand years ago. Evidence of man-made tools like axe, pottery and carved stones dug up at the present day Enugu and Ebonyi states establish the credibility of the habitation of Igbo for a very long time. In other words, traditions of Igbo origin favor Igbo genesis in Igboland.

According to Professor Oriji as well as Forde and Jones, the Isu group of the Igbo nation would appear to be the largest in population and seem to occupy a contiguous stretch of land from the center of Igboland expanding to all directions. This implies that the initial Igbo cultural and structural ideas likely evolved from the Isu. Their spread has helped to harmonize the features of
the Igbo Cultural Area. In the Orlu section of Isu that claim autochthony for instance, a primogenitor was recollected of the name Igbo Ngidi, who was spiritually and scientifically advanced. He founded Ama Igbo [The abode of the Igbo].

From Ama Igbo in Orlu, he instituted various blacksmithing centers, agricultural practices, commerce and religious oracles. He further established his ideas at a place he called Igbo Ukwu [Igbo the Great] in praise of his success. It was from these places of initial causes (Ama Igbo and Igbo Ukwu) that the Igbo multiplied and occupied the present-day Igboland. It is recollected that Igbo people called themselves Umu Igbo Ngidi [Children of Igbo Ngidi], which was shortened to Umu Igbo. Today, Igbo means the people, the language and the land. Etymologically, the word "Igbo" connotes "human community".

With regard to the genesis of the Igbo in relation to their original population stock and areas of initial settlements and dispersals, four views are worth mentioning:

THE AMAIGBO VIEW OF IGBO ORIGIN

There exists the speculation of settlement from antiquity among the Orlu and Isu group. Within this zone, Amaigbo stands out with complex sophistication that ushers valid insight into Igbo settlements of old as well as the evolution of the cultural, linguistic, behavioral and psychological patterns that give the Igbo a distinct outlook. Some historians noted that with population explosion, people from this region spread rapidly and founded other parts of Igboland. The axis in question constitutes the upper half of the "Southern Igbo" involving the Isu, Orsu, Orlu and Ihiala group. THE OWERE VIEW OF IGBO ORIGIN
This is shared by both indigenes and foreigners alike, who see the Owere region as the archetype originality of Igbo. Critical insights into the height of linguistic and cultural evolution attained here attest this standpoint. This region covers the stretch of land from Urata surroundings to Umuahia areas. This view is held by Elizabeth Isichei, who suggests that Igbo origin has its root somewhere in Owere-Umuahia axis. Hence, from here, there skyrocketed the outward radiation of Igbo characteristic elan. In other words, the original population stock from this region expanded north, south, east and west. THE AWKA VIEW OF IGBO ORIGIN

It suggests an earlier habitation of the Awka and Nri axis, whose people emerged as the first and original Igbo group. After elapsing series of internal evolution, there was the need to expand due to population pressures. There are claims of autochthony here, where migrations are just remembered to be a few miles from the present abode. Igbo cultural thoughts could have developed by this region around the Omambara and Ezu river basins being among the important elements of civilization. Factors that fuel this view include the Awka smithery and the emergence of Nri ritual functions. THE OWERE-AWKA VIEW OF IGBO ORIGIN

The fourth satisfies the result of archaeological studies that noted the continuous inhabitation of Igboland from prehistoric period. Regarding the complex dynamism involved in the question of Igbo origin, K.O. Dike and P.A. Talbot argue that Awka and Owere form the focal foundation of early Igbo dispersal. Chikezie Uchendu also holds this view that the area stretching from Awka to Owere form the Igbo heartland belt. Botanical and anthropological evidence confirm a continuous settlement of the Igbo in Igboland with a cultural continuum from the lithic periods to this day. Uchendu elaborates that "the belt formed by Owerri, Awka, Orlu and Okigwe divisions
constitute this nuclear area" of Igbo evolution. People in this area have no tradition of coming from anywhere else. Within this belt, villages are small in area but are very densely populated due to internal sub-divisions over long period of habitation and group autonomy. Communities lying outside this core belt make a sharp contrast, where villages are large in area but are scantly populated. In summary, the Igbo are African people who have occupied their land for many millennia, splitting off from other Africans and evolving a distinct system.


**Pre-colonial life**

Pre-colonial Igbo political organization was based on semiautonomous communities, devoid of kings or governing chiefs. With the exception of towns such as Onitsha, which had kings called Obis, and places like Nri and Arochukwu, which had priest kings known as Ezes, most Igbo village governments were ruled solely by an assembly of the common people. Although titleholders were respected because of their accomplishments, they were never revered as kings, but often performed special functions given to them by such these assemblies. This way of governing was immensely different from most other communities of Western Africa, and only
shared by the Ewe of Ghana. Igbo secret societies also had a ceremonial script called Nsibidi. Igbos had a calendar in which a week has four days. A month has seven weeks and thirteen months a year. The last month had an extra day. They also had mathematics called Okwe and Mkpsi and a saving and loans bank system called Isusu. They settled law matters by oath-taking to a god. If that person died in a certain amount of time, he was guilty. If not, he was free to go, but if guilty, that person could face exile or servitude to a deity.

**Post-colonization**

The arrival of the British in the 1870s and increased encounters between the Igbo and other Nigerians led to a deepening sense of a distinct Igbo ethnic identity. The Igbo also proved remarkably decisive and enthusiastic in their embrace of Christianity and Western education. Under British colonial rule, the diversity within each of Nigeria's major ethnic groups slowly decreased and distinctions between the Igbo and other large ethnic groups, such as the Hausa and the Yoruba became sharper.

The novel *Things Fall Apart* by Igbo author Chinua Achebe, is a fictional account of the clash between the new influences of the British and the traditional life of the Igbo.

**Instability and Biafra Seccession**

In 1966, a failed *coup d'État* by Nigerian army officers led by an Igbo—Major Kaduna Nzeogwu—resulted in the death of Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, a prominent northern Nigerian of the Hausa ethnic group. Although the coup was foiled primarily by another Igbo, Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsì, the belief prevailed in northern Nigeria that Hausa leaders were singled out for death. This situation gave rise to a retaliatory pogrom in which tens of thousands of Igbo were murdered in northern Nigeria, which led to the headlong flight back to the Eastern
Eventually, the crisis reached an apex in May 1967 with the secession of the Igbo-dominated Eastern Region from Nigeria to form the Republic of Biafra headed by the aforementioned Colonel Ojukwu. The secession quickly led to civil war after talks between former Army colleagues, Yakubu Gowon and Ojukwu broke down. The Republic of Biafra lasted only until January 1970 after a campaign of starvation by the Nigerian Army with the support of Egypt, Sudan and the United Kingdom led to a decisive victory.

**Excerpt from last wartime speech of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu Head of Biafran state.**

"In the three years of the war necessity gave birth to invention. During those three years of heroic bound, we leapt across the great chasm that separates knowledge from know-how. We built rocket, and we designed and built our own delivery systems. We guided our rockets. We guided them far; we guided them accurately. For three years, blockaded without hope of import, we maintained all our vehicles. The state extracted and refined petrol, individuals refined petrol in their back gardens. We built and maintained our airports, maintained them under heavy bombardment. Despite the heavy bombardment, we recovered so quickly after each raid that we were able to maintain the record for the busiest airport in the continent of Africa. We spoke to the world through telecommunication system engineered by local ingenuity; the world heard us and spoke back to us! We built armored cars and tanks. We modified aircraft from trainer to fighters, from passenger aircraft to bombers. In the three years of freedom we had broken the
technological barrier. In the three years we became the most civilized, the most technologically advanced black people on earth."

The Igbo Today

After the Nigerian Civil War, Igboland had been severely devastated. Many hospitals, schools, and homes had been completely destroyed in the brutal war. The Federal government of Nigeria denied the Igbo people access to all the hard currencies such as pound sterling they had saved in Nigeria banks before the civil war, and only allowed them a minuscule compensation of Â£20 per adult bank account holder. For example, a man who had over Â£450,000.00 savings in one or several bank accounts could only receive Â£20.00 following this policy.

In addition to the loss of their savings, many Igbo people found themselves discriminated against by other ethnic groups and the new non-Igbo federal government. Due to the discrimination of employers, many Igbos had trouble finding employment, and the Igbos became one of the poorest ethnic groups in Nigeria during the early 1970s. As an even greater insult, in Port Harcourt, their control was handed over to their Ijaw neighbours and the Ikwerre (an Igbo subgroup who have separated and claimed no Igbo origin). Igboland was gradually rebuilt over a period of twenty years and the economy was again prospering due to the rise of the Niger Delta petroleum industry, which led to new factories being set up in southern Nigeria. This recovery, from the depths of the Biafran War, is an example of the uncanny resilience and resourcefulness of the Igbo. Many Igbos eventually regained government positions.

The Igbo, however, also face many problems and challenges today. Even today, Igbo people
have sometimes continued to face discrimination from other ethnic groups. Igboland towns, such as Enugu, Onitsha and Owerri, lack sufficient resources and good infrastructure for their inhabitants. Also, because the traditional Igbo homeland was becoming too small for its growing population, many Igbo have emigrated out of Igboland.

The Igbo Diaspora

After the Nigerian Civil War, many Igbo emigrated out of the traditional Igbo homeland in southeastern Nigeria due to a growing population, decreasing land, and poor infrastructure. Not only have the Igbo people moved to such Nigerian cities as Lagos, Benin City, and Abuja, but have also moved to other countries such as Togo, Ghana, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Prominent Igbo communities outside Africa include those of London, UK, Houston, Atlanta and Washington D.C USA. Infact Igbo’s can be found in virtually any part of the world.

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