



Ozi Ikòrò

AFRICAN HISTORY · CULTURE · INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

ETHNOHISTORY

Aguleri: *The Cradle of Igbo Civilization and Cultural Heritage*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

Ozikoro.com · Ethnohistory · 6 min read

FEATURE
IMAGE

NO FEATURED IMAGE IN THE RECORD

The article carries no featured image, so this panel is left as an honest empty space rather than filled with one.

Ozi Ikòrò
AGULERI

Aguleri: The Cradle of Igbo Civilization and Cultural Heritage

By Chukwunwike Ossai · Ethnohistory · Ozikoro.com

Aguleri is an old town in Anambra State, Nigeria, where the people are well-known in Igbo history as one of the oldest and most respected communities in Igboland. Some people see it as the place where the Igbo people first started. The town strongly connects with the legend of Eri, a mystical person people believe is the father of all Igbo people. Eri matter, also joined with Aguleri's oral stories, archaeological findings, colonial documents and new research, show that the place is very important in Igbo tradition, belief, and leadership. This article will explain the history, politics, economy, culture, and modern relevance of Aguleri in today's Nigeria.

Historical Origins of Aguleri Aguleri's history comes from an Igbo oral story that says Eri was the first to settle closer to the Omambala River around the 10th century. The name "Aguleri" came from "Agu Eri," meaning "Eri's farmland." Aguleri shares borders with Kogi State(the Igala people) and Enugu State(the Nsukka area). Aguleri people are mainly involved in fishing and farming, although modernisation has caused many to embrace white-collar jobs, while some have ventured into trade and commerce.

Even if they haven't found many artefacts like Igbo-Ukwu, little archaeological work still supports that people have lived in the Aguleri area for over 1000 years. The place is closer to the river, making trade and connecting with people like Igala and Ijaw easy. Aguleri also claimed to be the origin of many Igbo groups. An oral story said that people from Onicha and Nri came from the Aguleri people.

Before the white people came in, Aguleri already had good leadership under the Eze Aguleri. The Eze is both king and priest, and controls spiritual and political matters. The town is still strong to this day, with oral stories.



King Idigo of Aguleri

Socio-Political Organization Aguleri's governance system shows how Igbo people like to run their things—it is not one-man rule, but everybody is involved. The town was divided into three parts: Eri, Igboezunu, and Ivite. Each part had villages with their leaders. The Eze Aguleri, now His Royal Majesty Eze Christopher Idigo, is the main ruler and symbol of unity. He has power because he is Eri's child and spiritual leader.

The Eze has a council of elders called Ndichie. They are advisers and representatives of big families. Some of them have collected titles like Ozo or Nze. The Ozo title is big—if you have it, people will respect you. It costs money, and it shows that you have served the community

well.

Young men joined age-grade groups. Every few years, new age-grade forms are created, and they work for the community, such as building roads, guarding the place, or arranging festivals. Women don't take chieftaincy titles but are strong in associations like Umuada (community daughters) and Inyom Aguleri (women's council). They do solve matters, arrange events, and protect women's interests.

When the British came, they brought indirect rule and placed warrant chiefs who did not follow the Aguleri system. But the real traditional leaders were still loaded. Even today, Eze and the chiefs work with the government to help the community grow and keep the culture strong.

Economic Foundations Aguleri's economy is based on farming, trade, and handiwork. The area is very fertile because of the Omambala River, so they grow yam, cassava, corn and vegetables. Yam is the king crop and symbol of blessing. They hold Iwa Ji (New Yam Festival) every year to celebrate the harvest.

Fishing is also a big thing because of the river. People catch fish, smoke them, and sell them in the market. They also did very well in the palm oil business, especially in the 19th century when the white people bought it in large quantities.

Trade is one strong pillar in Aguleri. They traded food, pots, clothes, and many other things with other tribes. In fact, they occasionally supply food to Onitsha and other cities. They also have blacksmiths and potters who make tools, ornaments and ritual items.

Nowadays, people in Aguleri are entering businesses, teaching, and government work. Many people who live in Lagos, Abuja, or abroad send money home to support projects. But problems remain, like bad roads, insufficient jobs, and plenty of young people running to the city.



Ovala Festival of Aguleri

Festivals and Rituals The biggest festival in Aguleri is the Ovala Festival, the celebration of love, a time when people of Aguleri gather to celebrate. In the olden days, the king didn't walk anywhere. He will be in the palace. So it is only during the Ovala that people would see him, hail him, and show respect. People would wear fine clothes, dance, and play music; Diaspora Igbo people would come home for it.

Another big one is the Iwa Ji (New Yam Festival). People thank the yam god, Ifejioku, and celebrate with food and dance. They also do Ikpu Alu, a ritual to appease ndi ichie, who are now ancestors, to clean the community if a taboo happens. This one shows that they have spiritual roots like Nri.

Music and Dance Aguleri knows how to play music—they have ogene (gong), ududu (drum), and ekwe (wood drum). They perform Egwu Ota (war dance) and Atilogwu (acrobat dance) for events.

Masquerades like Ijele and Okoroshi perform too. They entertain and teach moral stories.



Ijele masquerade performing at a ceremony

Oral Traditions and Spiritual Claims The elders told old stories, passing them down to different generations. They talked about Eri and his children, who travelled to different places. They practised the Igbo religion, Odinani.

Aguleri in the Colonial and Postcolonial Eras Colonial times brought serious change. After the Berlin Conference of 1884, the British zoned Aguleri into the Southern Nigeria colony. The British respected Eze Aguleri, but still brought their people, whom they called warrant chiefs. Missionaries, mostly Catholic, built schools and introduced Christianity. At that time in Nigeria, all priests were foreign missionaries. Tansi from Aguleri was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Onitsha at the Cathedral Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity in Onitsha on 19 December 1937.



Sculpture of Tansi mounted on the wall of Mount St Bernard Abbey. England

During the Biafra War (1967–1970), Aguleri suffered loss and displacement. But after the war, people came together to rebuild and protect their culture. The war also caused many Igbo people to respect their roots again, and Aguleri’s story entered the spotlight. Aguleri is a living history of the Igbo people. As they said, Eri started from there, and the place held deep cultural and spiritual meaning. The king system, festivals, and old stories show how the Igbo people have survived for a long time.

As an Igbo proverb says, “A child that knows his history will not fall on the way.” Aguleri’s history has strong roots that help the Igbo people to stand strong.

- Isichei, Elizabeth. *A History of the Igbo People*. Macmillan, 1976.
- Afigbo, Adiele Eberechukwu. *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*. Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Onwuejeogwu, M. Angulu. *An Igbo Civilization: Nri Kingdom and*

Hegemony. Ethnographica Ltd, 1981.

- Echeruo, Michael J.C. "Igbo Culture and History." Nigeria Magazine, Federal Ministry of Information.
- Ubah, C.N. "Colonial Administration and the Igbo Traditional Rulers." The Journal of African History, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1976), pp. 651-670.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chukwunwike Ossai

An enthusiast in tech with deep passion for studying and showcasing the vibrant cultural heritage of southern Nigeria . Combining my skill with my obsession towards African history and traditions to create contributions that impacts the digital space.



Ozi Ikòrò

History worth reading.

African history · culture · indigenous knowledge
