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Discovering Anioma: *A Unique Cultural Identity in Nigeria*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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DISCOVERING ANIOMA

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The Anioma people are Igbo living in the western part of River Niger, mostly inside Delta State, Nigeria, with small parts in Edo and Anambra State. They are found in places like Aniocha, Oshimili, Ika, Ukwuani (Ndokwa), and some other areas. They call these places “Anioma,” meaning “good land” in Igbo. Anioma culture is an interesting mixture of Igbo traditions involving little special things because they are close to the river and other tribes. Here is the full gist about Anioma culture: how they started, their language, festivals, how they live, and what happens now.

Anioma people have been originally Igbo in the beginning, and most people with historical ideas suggest some came from Igbo land like Nri, Aguleri, or Akwa, which was part of Anambra a long time ago. They crossed the River Niger to the west, maybe hundreds of years back, to find a good farming land. Most of the things they found are the Igbo-Ukwu bronze from the 9th century, which shows that the Igbo’s have long been circulating and have been strong since then. Anioma is the place where this Igbo people settled in Delta State, holding their Igbo tradition firm, even though they are close to people like Urhobo, Ijaw, and Itsekiri.

They formed the name “Anioma” in the 1950s to unite all the Igbo speakers in Delta State. The name comes from the first letter of their places: Ndokwa (Ukwuani), Ika, Oshimili, and Ma, which means “good” in Igbo. So it is just like “good land,” which shows that they like the place that gives them abundant blessings.

Language: Anioma people speak different types of Igbo language, but all inside Igbo. We have Enuani (the Asaba-speaking, Issele-Uku, and

Oshimili), Ika (the Agbor and Ika areas), and Ukwuani (the Ndokwa part). This one sounds a bit different, but if you understand one, then you tend to understand the rest as it comes from the same Igbo root. Like Enuani, they speak soft and clear, while Ika and Ukwuani tend to have some difficult sounds because they live close to the riverine people.

The language carries many Igbo words, like “nno”(welcome), “chukwu”(big God), and “Ala” (earth), which shows their Igbo nature. Even with all the trading and association with other tribes, they didn’t allow their Igbo language to change much.

New Yam Festival (Iriji): This is one of the biggest celebrations in Anioma. It is celebrated during the yam harvesting season to thank Chukwu and Ala for giving them food. Everyone eats yam, pounded yam, yam porridge, and roasted yam, and they dance, sing, and pray. Elders lead the prayer, and masquerades are present to bring ancestral blessings.

Masquerades and Dance: Masquerades are big deals in Anioma. They believe they are being controlled by the spirits of the dead, dancing with drums and flutes to make everywhere lively. Each town has its own type, like in Issele-Uku, where they have big ones in Ine festivals, which is just like a war dance to show their powers.

Kola Nuts and Palm Wine: Breaking a Kola Nut is considered holy, portraying peace and welcome. It is presented to visitors and also used for prayers. It is followed by Palm wine, which keeps people happy and talking.

Clothes and beads: Anioma people love fine clothes like wrappers (Akwa Ocha) and beads worn on their hands and necks. They dress up very well to show respect and style at larger events.

Old ways and church: Before the introduction of churches by the whites, the Anioma people followed Odinani, an Igbo traditional belief that worships Chukwu, Ala, and ancestors. Most of them are now

Christians, while some are still into some of the old rituals, like pouring water on the ground to honor the past.

Since they are close to the river, they eat fish and other seafood, including yams, which makes their food outstanding compared to other Igbo communities.

The people of Anioma live like typical Igbo; families and villages are the main thing. What normally happens are;

The village meetings: Elders and people with titles (like Obi, Okpara, or Diokpa) control the village affairs. They settle fights, plan festivals and keep the tradition going. It is not controlled by an individual like a king, but towns like Iselle-Uku have an Obi that is respected by everyone.

Family life: Larger families stay in the compound and are always recognized by their paternal families, who name them and give them land. The oldest man in the family, known as(Diokpa) heads them all.

Age Group: The young join groups according to their age range to carry out work like farming, building, or guarding the village. This allows them to work together while they gain some knowledge about their town.

Women also hustle; they do farm work, trade, and cook for most large events. In some places, there are women's groups that help keep peace while supporting each other.

Farming is the heart of Anioma, and yam is the king. They also plant cassava, maize, and vegetables and catch fish from the river. Years back, they sold palm oil and other things to people sailing the River Niger, which made them business minded. Most of them are now engaged in petty trading, government work, or going to school as missionaries have introduced them. Asaba, which is a big town in Anioma, is a place where most people go in search of good jobs.

The Anioma people are proud of their Igbo roots, especially after the Biafra War of (1967-1970), where they suffered with other Igbo tribes. It makes them feel united with the Igbo people, but most people still classify themselves under “Anioma” as their first origin, maybe to show how special they are in Delta State, which has many tribes.

Youths normally relocate to cities like Asaba and Lagos or even abroad, which makes the village smaller. Oil produced in the Delta sometimes spoils the land and water, causing problems. They are trying to keep their culture alive. Festivals like Iriji, groups like the Anioma People’s Association, and even social media help them show off their culture worldwide.

Anioma culture is a nice mixture of the Igbo tradition, which is strong, and the Delta life, which is soft. They come from Igbo land, settle in a good environment that is close to the river, and hold their language, festivals, and family ways tight. Even with all the evolving changes, the church, the schools, and city life, they still show that they are Igbo, with little Anioma styles that make them outstanding. Anioma is good proof that the Igbo people can grow anywhere and still be the same powerful people that they have been from the beginning.

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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.



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