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Exploring Ngwa Territory: *The Heart of Igbo Culture and Tradition*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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EXPLORING NGWA TERRITORY

Exploring Ngwa Territory: The Heart of Igbo Culture and Tradition

By Chukwunwike Ossai · Cultural Heritage · Ozikoro.com

Inside the green palm belt zone in southeastern Nigeria, Ngwa Territory, which people still call the Aba District, covers 960 square miles of better farmland between the Imo River and the side of Ibibio. This is where the Ngwa people stay; they are one strong Igbo subculture that shows the Igbo spirit of equality, a strong mind in business, and a better culture. They call them Ngwam, which means “the lucky ones,” and truly, they have enjoyed their fertile land very well. In the 1952 Census, Ngwa people had 315,159 (160,038 men and 155,112 women). They came from the Mbaise region originally, but today, they have built a society that has combined old traditions with modern life. This article will talk about their culture, how they marry, and the special way they normally do concubinage, which shows that the Ngwa people are very important in Igbo culture.



Ndị Ngwa, around Aba, photographed by Northcote Thomas, c. 1913. MAA Cambridge.

Ngwa Territory: A Land of Prosperity and Pride Ngwa land, which has Okpuala-Ngwa as its capital, is the main area in Northern Ngwa. The land is filled with good soil that allows them to farm well. Ngwa people live in villages that rule themselves, and their village forms a bigger group that people call “town,” based on a common story or ancestors. They are not like city people, but their area is wide and natural like a garden, as one white anthropologist, Sylvia Leith-Ross, describes it. The farming lifestyle and good soil had helped the Ngwa people to survive for many years, and that’s why they are called Ngwam.

Cultural Patterns: Egalitarianism and Women’s Empowerment Ngwa people follow the Igbo way of doing things, which values equality and respect for everybody. Scholars call this style of governance “ultra-democratic” and “conciliar.” Ngwa doesn’t believe in the osu (cult slave) matter, and they give everybody chances to succeed. Women in Ngwa have better respect and rights—they can be

landowners, marry who they want, and even become leaders.

One big time that Ngwa women showed power was in 1929 when they did the Aba Women's Riot, which Nwanyieruwa led. They were angry about the British colonial tax problems. Ngwa women are strong in the market and farming and could even surpass men for respect if they succeed. One anthropologist, Simon Ottenberg, says that Igbo people like it when someone hustles and makes a name, and Ngwa women really show that type of example.

Marriage: A Pillar of Ngwa Society Marriage is a big thing in Ngwa culture. Polygamy was common, and if a man had many wives, it meant that he had money and respect. Each wife has their hut. This style helps to avoid fights between wives and gives them respect. In Ngwa, the price of a bride is a big part of marriage. It confirms the marriage and shows who has the right to the children.

The Ngwa people also have a special marriage in which a woman can marry another woman. The woman who marries will still be in charge of the children, but she will choose a man who will be intimate with her. This type of woman's marriage raises their status and helps keep the concubinage tradition.

Pre-Marital Chastity and Social Norms Before, the Ngwa people took virginity seriously. If a girl hasn't slept with a man before marriage, it shows that she could have a better character. Mothers make sure that their children will not misbehave, and things like marrying from outside the umunna, early engagement, and the belief that daytime sex causes problems for a born child, all help. But now that schools, city life, and modern ideas have entered, virginity is not as important as before, and people now change how they see sex before marriage.

Concubinage: The Institution of Iko Mbara One of the most special traditions in the Ngwa people is concubinage, which they call iko mbara (public lover), uga, or enji. It's not like a secret cheating; this one is open and accepted by society. Husband or wife can have a side person, but the main partner will know. They will do small traditional

rites to confirm it. Sometimes, the man would collect a small gift from the wife's lover, like palm wine or money. The lover doesn't have a right over any child born from an affair, because the bride price determines who the father is.

1. Oke Iko (Status Paramour): A high-class side lover whom a woman goes to meet in his place. 2. Tukwuo Lie (Separate When Tired): At a lower level, the man can live with the woman in her husband's house and help with housework, but he doesn't have a say in child matters. 3. Nketara (One Who Inherits): A woman without a male child would find it difficult to help her child to continue her father's lineage. 4..Utugbara (Penis Bought): The lowest one, that is just for sexual pleasure, no social or money gained.

Iko Mbara solves many problems. If a man cannot marry because the bride price is too high, this one can help. If a woman has just given birth and cannot have sex, or her husband, too, is old or dead, Iko Mbara can comfort her. Even for the women who marry women, Iko Mbara still helps.

Economic and Social Benefits of Iko Mbara Iko mbara is not just about sex. The husband can tell the lover to help with farming or running errands. Women also have things like clothes, school money, and gifts from their lovers. Even if it doesn't balance out, if people understand each other, everybody would benefit. Some women even said they enjoy their side man more than their husband—it is more emotionally sweet.

Concubinage in the Context of Acculturation The Ngwa people have seen many changes from the slave trade, colonialism, and Western education, but Iko mbara remains strong. Even though Christian marriage now exists, and many educated people see it as a higher status, many Ngwa still follow their traditional ways. Some African churches in Ngwa land didn't see Iko mbara as a sin—they believed it could work with Christian belief.

The Enduring Legacy of Ngwa Culture Ngwa land is a strong example

of the rich Igbo culture. They have equality, a strong economy, and a clever social system. From women who fought colonial rule in 1929 to their special way of doing concubinage, the Ngwa people balance old tradition with new life. Their marriage customs, focus on family, and open minds towards human needs show that they know how to live well.

Even as the world changes, the Ngwa people still hold their culture well. They are true Ngwam—the lucky ones. If you want to know the Igbo people better, look at Ngwa land. It has a sense of community, respect for ancestors, and resilience.

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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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