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Ikot Ishie: *An Igbo Diasporic Settlement in Calabar*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Photo: “The Calaba and Opobo people at the show, Lagos,” 1909 postcard.

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

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IKOT ISHIE

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Introduction Ikot Ishie, a town in Calabar, has a unique history rooted in the Igbo diaspora. It was named after Ishie Offiong Okoho, an Igbo man who was once enslaved but later gained freedom and established his own settlement. Oral traditions tell the story of Ishie, who was purchased as a youth by Chief Offiong...

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Introduction

Ikot Ishie, a town in Calabar, has a unique history rooted in the Igbo diaspora. It was named after Ishie Offiong Okoho, an Igbo man who was once enslaved but later gained freedom and established his own settlement. Oral traditions tell the story of Ishie, who was purchased as a youth by Chief Offiong Okoho of Archibong House in Duke Town. He grew up in his master's household, where he was adopted and given the name Offiong Okoho. Through years of loyal service, he earned his freedom and was granted a large expanse of land, what is now known as Ikot Ishie to build his own community.

During the height of the transatlantic slave trade, Ishie Offiong Okoho became a wealthy trader. He participated in the regional trade networks, acquiring enslaved individuals from the Igbo interior and bringing them to Ikot Ishie. This suggests that he transitioned from being a former slave to a significant figure in the local economy. His story reflects the complex and often paradoxical nature of slavery in West Africa, where former slaves could rise to positions of power and influence.

02

Slavery, Household Integration, and Modern Legacies

Unlike the large scale plantation slavery seen in the Americas, slavery in the interior of the Bight of Biafra often resembled a system of indentured servitude. Enslaved individuals were frequently absorbed into their owner's households, sometimes adopting the family name and becoming part of the lineage. Over generations, these servant-master relationships contributed to the diverse ancestry of present-day populations.

This form of servitude did not entirely disappear with the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. Instead, it evolved into other social structures, such as the practice of employing houseboys and housegirls domestic servants who often live with the families they serve. These arrangements, while different from historical slavery, reflect a continuity in social hierarchies and labor relations.

03

The Historical Significance of Ikot Ishie

Ikot Ishie stands as a testament to the resilience and adaptation of Igbo people who were forcibly relocated due to slavery. The town represents how former slaves, once integrated into new societies, could carve out spaces for themselves and their descendants. Today, it remains a significant part of Calabar's cultural landscape, showcasing the lasting impact of Igbo migration and settlement in southeastern Nigeria.

Understanding the history of places like Ikot Ishie allows for a deeper appreciation of the interconnected histories of different ethnic groups in Nigeria. It also highlights how forced migration shaped societies, creating complex identities that persist into the modern era.

Akoda, W. E. (2005). The socio-economic impact of stranger communities in Calabar: A study of the Igbo and Hausa since 1900. In *History and Citizenship: Essays in Honour of Okon Edet Uya* (pp. 160-161). University of Calabar Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odi

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explore ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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