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Journey from Youthful to Elderly: *The Role AGE-GRADES Play in Anioma System of Justice and Governance*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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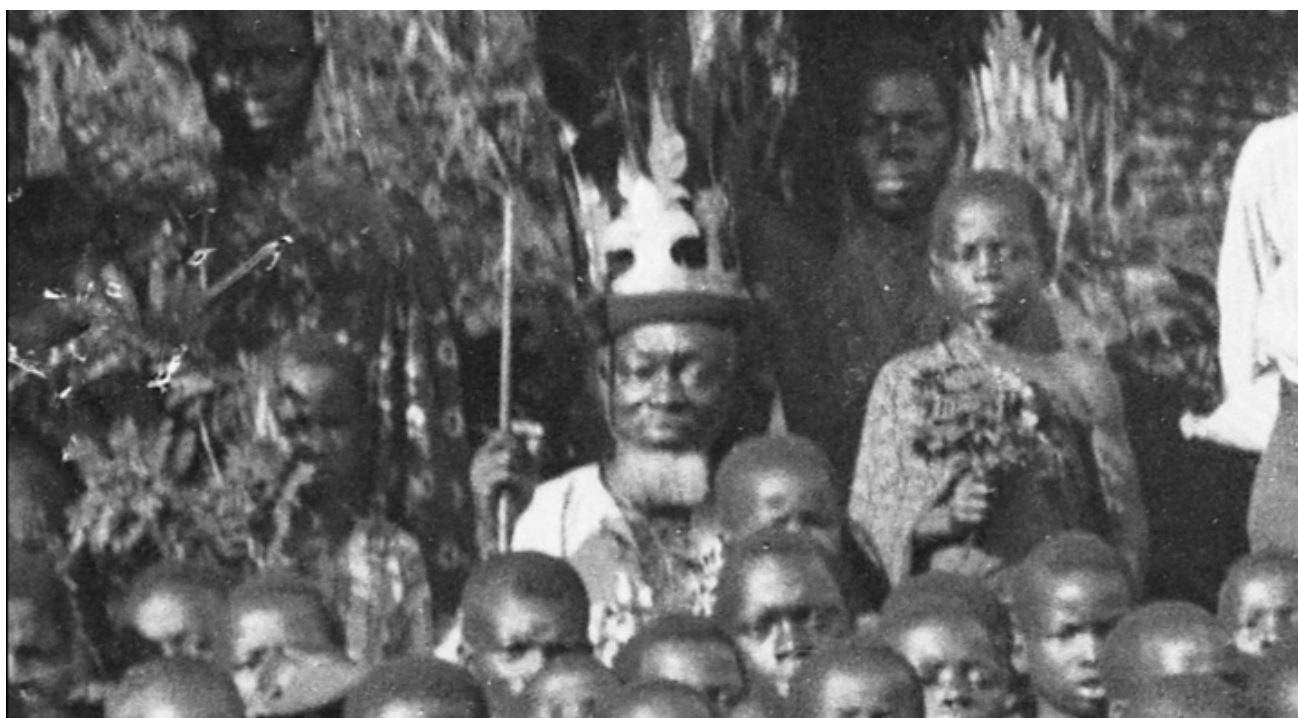
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Obi Okosi I, with group of children in Onicha. Photographed by Herbert Wimberley, c. 1903-18.

In every Anioma community, the system of age grade has always been the cornerstone of the society.. The age grades played major roles in making sure governance is in order.

Ranging from young people to elders in various Anioma communities, everyone had their various responsibilities to contribute towards the well-being of the community. The youngest level among the age grades were given important but menial roles like making sure the streets and markets were clean, providing a working and neat atmosphere.

The individuals are expected to transit into middle age grades as this is where they'll take on more important roles that includes being part of the defense army of the community and working on the farm lands during planting seasons. This age group executes decisions made by the higher age-grades.

The eldest age grades are called Ndi Okpala or Ama Ala, this grade holds the most power, making critical decisions that involves wars. They also decide on the opening, closing of farming seasons and when crucial festivals would be observed.

Some Anioma towns like Ahaba and Agbor, provides the higher age grades to be part of justice system, whilst the middle age carries out the punishment given to offenders.

At the height of the structured age grade system were old men that has reached a derived age and now having their rest in running the community affairs, they act as the advisors and they are well respected in the community. This age grade is regarded as the traditional guardians of the society.

The system of age grade among Anioma people gave room for every individual to contribute towards betterment of the society at various stages in their lifetime, thereby providing everyone with a sense of responsibility, and regard. The governance and cultural traditions of Anioma was preserved through this age grade system.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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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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