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Nkisi River and Its Revered Goddess: *A Cultural and Geographical Overview*

By Idenze Ezeme

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**“Concrete Bridge over N’Kissi
Creek, Onitsha, built by R C
McWhirter 1909. River Niger.”**

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

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NKISI RIVER AND ITS REVERED GODDESS

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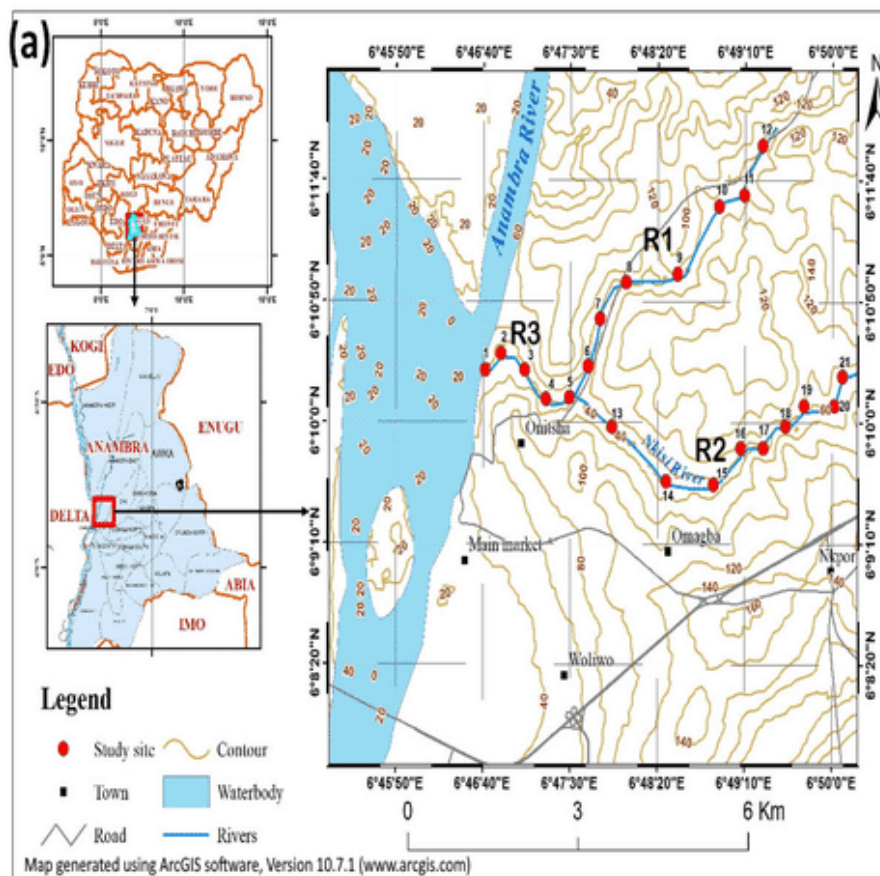
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The Nkisi River, also called Nkisa, is an important river in southeastern Nigeria, especially in Anambra State. It is not only a key waterway but also holds deep cultural meaning for the people who live around it.

01

Geographical Course of the Nkisi River

The Nkisi River originates from the Awka-Umuchu-Orlu highlands, a prominent hillside in southeastern Nigeria. From its source, the river flows through several towns, including Nkwelle Ezunaka, Nkpor, Oze, and Onitsha, before emptying into the River Niger. The river's geographical coordinates are approximately 6°9'55" N latitude and 6°46'34" E longitude.



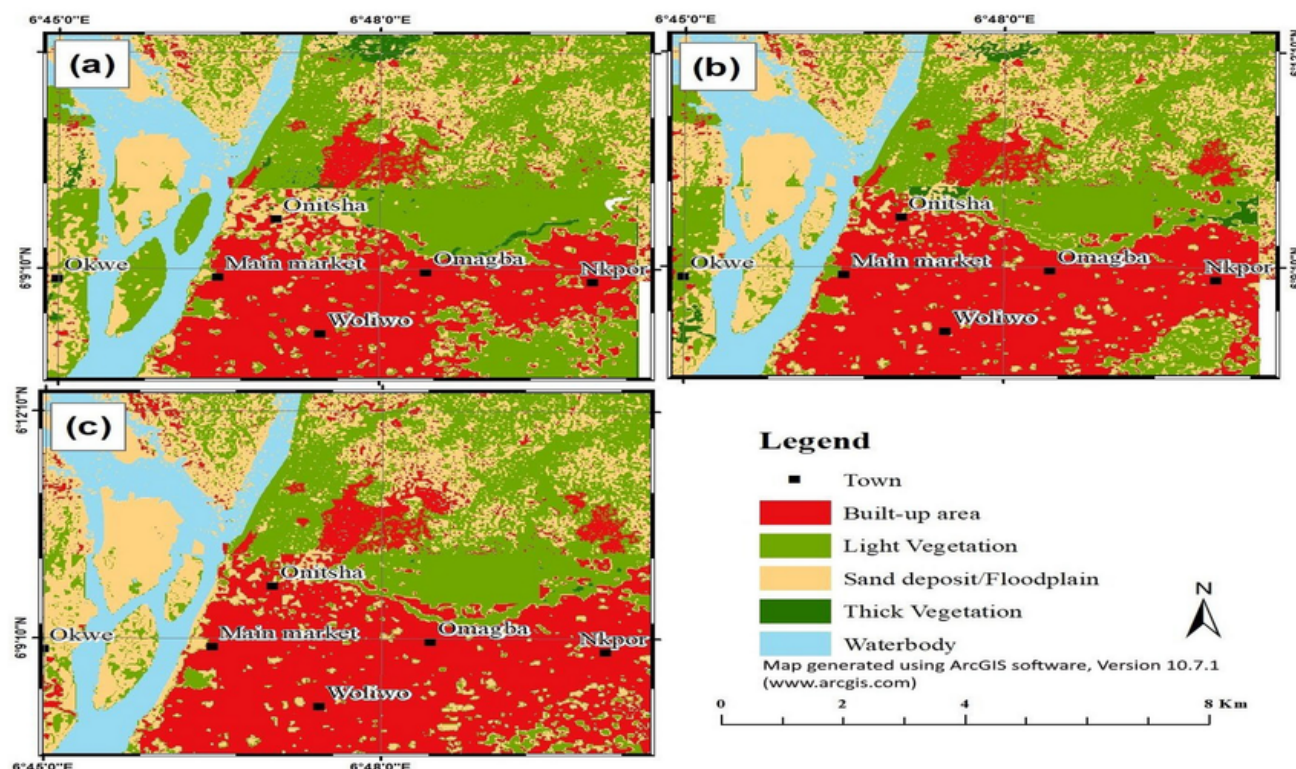
Location of Nkisi River in Anambra State. Photo: Research Gate

02

The Goddess of the Nkisi River

In the cultural traditions of the Igbo people inhabiting the Nkisi River basin, the river is personified and revered as a goddess known locally as Eze Nwanyi Nkisi, meaning “Queen of Nkisi.” She is considered a powerful water spirit (Mmụọ Mmili) who embodies the river’s essence and is a guardian of the land and its people.

Mmili Nkisi is known by a particular name, Nne Ora (Ezenwanyi mmili Nne Ora)



Land use/land cover (LULC) maps of the Nkisi River

03

Cultural Practices in Akuzo Village, Nkpor-Agu (Nkpor)

In Akuzo village, located within Nkpor-Agu, the veneration of Eze Nwanyi Nkisi is particularly prominent. The villagers engage in various traditional practices to honour the goddess, reflecting their deep spiritual connection to the river.

One of the key rituals involves annual festivals held along the riverbanks, where the community gathers to offer prayers and sacrifices to Eze Nwanyi Nkisi. These ceremonies often include offering kola nuts, yams, and livestock, accompanied by traditional music and dance performances. Such rituals are believed to invoke the goddess's blessings, ensuring fertility, health, and protection for the villagers.

Additionally, the Nkisi River is considered a site for spiritual purification. Individuals seeking cleansing from ailments or misfortunes often partake in ritual baths in the river, guided by local spiritual leaders. This practice underscores the belief in the river's purifying powers, attributed to the benevolence of Eze Nwanyi Nkisi.



Mmili Nkisi Day in Onitsha. Photo: Frank Amuta

04

Significance of the Nkisi River

Beyond its spiritual importance, the Nkisi River has historically been a vital resource for the communities along its course. Its waters support agriculture by providing necessary irrigation, and the river's ecosystem offers fishing opportunities, contributing to the local diet and economy.

The river also plays a role in local folklore and oral traditions, with numerous tales highlighting its significance as a life-giving force and a protector of the people. These stories often emphasize the reciprocal

relationship between the river and the communities, illustrating the deep respect and reverence held for Eze Nwanyi Nkisi.

The Nkisi River, or Nkisa, is a testament to the intertwined nature of geography and spirituality in southeastern Nigeria. For the people of Akuzo village in Nkpor-Agu and other communities along its banks, the river is more than a physical entity; it is a sacred presence embodied by the goddess Eze Nwanyi Nkisi. Through rituals, stories, and daily interactions, the reverence for this river goddess continues to be a cornerstone of the region's cultural identity and spiritual life.

05

Mmili Nkisi Day in Onitsha.

Mmili Nkisi Day in Onitsha. Video: Frank Amuta

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Idenze Ezeme

Nze is an Igbo history and culture enthusiast with an in-depth passion for exploring the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and historical narratives of the Igbo people. His works is mostly focused on pre-colonial Igbo societies, traditional belief systems, leadership systems, and the impact of European colonialism.



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