



Ozi Ikòrò

AFRICAN HISTORY · CULTURE · INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Ofo in Igbo Culture: *Symbol of Truth, Justice, and Ancestral Authority*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

Ozikoro.com · Cultural Heritage · 4 min read

FEATURE
IMAGE

Right: Ofo from Anam, present-day Anambra state, Nigeria. Made of wood and iron. Length: 52.7 cm.
Left: Ofo from Aguleri, present-day Anambra state, Nigeria. Length: 90 cm. Collected by M.D.W. Jeffreys in 1930 in Aguleri. Photographed by Jerome L. Joss.

Ozi Ikòrò
OFO IN IGBO CULTURE

Ofo in Igbo Culture: Symbol of Truth, Justice, and Ancestral Authority

By Chukwunwike Ossai · Cultural Heritage · Ozikoro.com



WORSHIP OF ANCESTORS NZE, OFO AND IKENGA (ONİČA OLONA). See page 27.

WORSHIP OF ANCESTORS NZE, OFO AND IKENGA (ONİČA OLONA).

In Igbo Culture, the word “Ofo” is not an ordinary Stick or Staff. It is a powerful spiritual symbol that carries a lot of meaning. It stands for truth, justice, spiritual connection, and authority. If you want to understand the way Igbo people see the world and handle matters, you have to understand what “Ofo” means.

Ofo is a sacred stick, which mostly comes from a tree called *Detarium elastica*. But it is not just a wood- it is a serious spiritual item. In Igbo

land, holding “Ofo” means you can stand for truth, you have the right to lead people, and you can communicate with spirits and ancestors.

Ofo represents the following: 1. Truth and justice: If someone swears with Ofo, He cannot lie because lying brings a curse. 2. Spiritual Connection: It connects people with their ancestors and God (Chukwu). 3. Authority: Only people that has the right (like elders, titled men, or priests) can hold it. 4. Covenants and Oaths: If you swear with Ofo, it cannot be broken without serious consequences. To “jide Ofo” (hold ofo) means that you live truthfully and you represent good moral standing.

In Igbo land, they have different types of Ofo and what they are used for:

1. Ofo Okwukwe (personal ofo) One’s private Ofo, inherited from his dad. He used it for prayers and to make personal rituals.
2. Ofo Umunna (Family or Kindred Ofo) Meant for the whole extended family. The eldest man usually holds it. He uses it as a solution to solve family problems and also for meetings.
3. Ofo Obodo (Community Ofo) Ofo meant for the whole village and town. The traditional rulers or the chief priest keep it. He uses it for big events like festivals or coronations.
4. Ofo Dibia (Priest’s Ofo) A traditional priest uses it for healing, consulting with spirits, or performing rituals. Sometimes it usually has feathers, chalk, or cowries at the top.
5. Ofo Ala (Earth Goddess Ofo) This one belongs to the earth goddess Ala. It is used for land settlement and also to cleanse the community whenever a taboo occurs.

All of these are consecrated through rituals; it is not just something that can be picked up from the bush.

1. Authority and Leadership. Someone who holds an Ofo is a leader. If a family has a first son (Okpara) inherits it. In villages, it is the elders or the king. To hold ofo is not just power, it's a big responsibility. You must be fair in your doings, else you provoke the wrath of the spirit.

2. Justice and Dispute Settlement. In the Igbo traditional court, if you tell a lie just after swearing with Ofo, it could cause you sickness or death. People believe that “*ofo ga-egbu onye ugha*” (Ofo kills a liar). It is also used to settle marriage issues, land matters and even thefts.

3. Rituals and spiritual work. Ofo is used during: – Prayers to ancestors or gods – Sacrifices with kolanut, wine, animal, e.t.c. – cleansing of people or land – Initiation of new title men.

4. Women and Ofo Even though men mostly hold Ofo, some women could hold it too. Titled women like Lolo, or priestesses, could use Ofo. The Omu could use Ofo to resolve issues between women in Umuada.

Igbo people believe that life balances between physical and spiritual. Ofo is the connection. If someone holds Ofo and he's innocent (*ogu*), nothing happens to you. But if that person lies, he/she would be exposed or punished.

1. Chukwu (God) 2. Ala (Earth goddess) 3. Ancestors (Ndi Ichie)

So, the phrase “*ofo di ike*” means (ofo has power).

As Christianity and modern lifestyle entered Igbo land, most people stopped using Ofo again. But:

1. Some rural people and traditionalists still use them. 2. Christians still respect Ofo as a cultural symbol. 3. Ofo is displayed in Igbo songs, books, and stories as a symbol of tradition and justice.

Even Chinua Achebe mentioned Ofo in his book, “*Things Fall Apart.*”



Ofo, uxurhe, and other pieces, including Ikenga, from North Ika Igbo, present-day Delta State. Photograph by G. I. Jones in the 1930s.

1. Some people use Ofo as an idol or fetish because they lack understanding of it. 2. Urban life has made some youths forget how to use or respect Ofo. 3. Some people challenge the reason why only men hold Ofo in most cases.

But no matter the change, ofo remains strong in Igbo Identity.

Ofo is not an ordinary stick – it's the heart of Igbo tradition. It stands for truth, justice, moral uprightness and respect for ancestors. As it is said: "ofo na ogu di mma" – to live with truth and innocence is a better thing.

Whether for ritual, judgement, or leadership, ofo still guides how Igbo people live their lives even in today's modern world.

- Achebe, Chinua. Things Fall Apart. Heinemann, 1958.
- Umeh, J. A. After God is Dibia: Igbo Cosmology, Divination & Sacred

Science in Nigeria. Karnak House, 1999.

- Nwoga, D. I. The Supreme God as Stranger in Igbo Religious Thought. Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Isichei, Elizabeth. A History of the Igbo People. Palgrave Macmillan, 1976.

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.



Ozi Ikòrò

History worth reading.

African history · culture · indigenous knowledge
