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The Oguta People: *Guardians of Ogbuide Lake and Keepers of Igbo Tradition*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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FEATURE
IMAGE

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THE OGUTA PEOPLE

The Oguta People: Guardians of Ogbuide Lake and Keepers of Igbo Tradition

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Who are they? The Oguta people are Ndi Igbo, who live in the local government area of Oguta, southeast of Imo State, Nigeria. Oguta town is close to Oguta Lake, the biggest natural lake in Imo state, and that lake is a very big part of who they are. They called themselves “Oguta-Ameshi” or...

01

Who are they?

The Oguta people are Ndi Igbo, who live in the local government area of Oguta, southeast of Imo State, Nigeria.

Oguta town is close to Oguta Lake, the biggest natural lake in Imo state, and that lake is a very big part of who they are.

They called themselves “Oguta-Ameshi” or the “Ameshi,” and about 20,096 people lived in the town of Oguta (when they counted in 2012). They had 27 villages, and despite being part of modern life, they still held on to their old ways.

02

How do they start?

Nobody can tell the story of how the Oguta people started because there were no books or much evidence. Still, according to the way

people explained it, the story shows they came from Igbo land, which traveled from places like Ado-Naidu, close to the Benin kingdom, before the Oguta land. Most people said they entered from the Nri Anambara, but they all acknowledge that the lake in Oguta town brought them together. They have water, fish and good land for farming.

Once upon a time, the water connected them to the river Niger, so they were marketing their goods well, even before they encountered the white people. When they came in contact with the British in the Royal Niger Company and the United African Company, they used the town of Oguta to transport palm oil to Europe. In the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), the Biafra people turned the Oguta Lake into a naval base, and the Ojukwu Bunker was still there.

03

The culture and way of the Oguta people.

The Oguta people love their lake more than anything else. They named the lake “Ogbuide,” and they see the lake as their god, both for women and men. The woman’s name is Uhamiri, while the man’s name is Urashi(from the Arashi River). The story they tell about Uhamiri and Urashi is about a husband and wife who fought, so their water is not mixed even if they flow together.

The lake’s green and brown water is clearly visible, and there are shrines on two sides where people also drop their gifts.

They gave the shrine the special names “Obodo mmiri bara Gburugburu” (a town surrounded by water) and “Ameshi ogidiga”(an oguta that shines).

04

They have a variety of festivals:

The omereife(ogene) festival: it usually happens around August and September. New yam, party with the flow of music, dance, and food for the villages like Mgbele, Nkwesi, and Egbuoma.

The Okorosha festival: The New Year vibes are from August to September, with masquerade dances and plays from nearby villages like Awo-Omamma.

Owu festival: This festival is a dance connected to the lake goddess. Both women join the masquerade, which is not common in Igbo land.

They have a king they call Eze-Igwe, who controls all 27 villages. The men join the Igbuu society and earn the title of “Ogbuagu” (Leopard Slayer). In the past, they killed leopards, but in modern times, they paid for monkeys.

05

How do they strive

Fish work: the lake has over forty different types of fish, and over 2,400 fishermen catch the fish full-time, with a number of 150 part-time. Fish is 80% of the meat in their town.

Farm-like: The floods that come every year make their land so nutritious for cassava, yam, and palm. The women wash cassava in the lake; they already have Oguta Lake as their office.

Trade and Boat: Ferries and speedboats in Oguta move people and goods across the lake to places like Onitsha and Port-Harcourt, just

like in the past.

Oil money: Oguta has a lot of oil, so big companies like Shell, Chevron, and AGIP extract from it; they bring cash, but sometimes spoil the land. Celebrities like Flora Nwapa(the first woman who wrote the first novel in Nigeria), Justice Oputa (a big judge), and Francis Nzeribe(the money man) came from here, so you know they have a higher rank.

06

How do they live their lives:

The town of Oguta has two sides: the old part, which has 27 villages, and the new part, which is planned like a city. The Egwe gateway is the only road on which they don't have water to enter. Women wash clothes and soak cassava in the lake, the men fish and also make oil work, and everybody is mixing the old and new life. They speak Igbo in their own special and sweet style, and the music, dance, and stories they tell about the lake draw people to learn from them.

Floods occur throughout the year and destroy people's houses and farmlands, especially when there's a lot of rain.

Small development: even though they have a lake motel and resort, they don't have modern amenities like the Overri people do.

07

But they never give up:

They have tried several times to protect the lake with projects, and the government has been excavating the Atlantic Ocean since 2023. If they make more effort to fix it, it will bring better days to the people of Augusta.

The Oguta people are the strongest group of Igbo people, and they tie their lives to Oguta Lake. They've seen more through marketing, war, and farming, and their culture is interesting and pleasing. At this point, they are trying to hold onto the old ways while facing a problem today.

The story of the Oguta people is like a deep and strong lake, but it has no end.

08

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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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