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ETHNOHISTORY

## The Ohafia War Dance

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE  
IMAGE

**War dance photographed in Port Harcourt, 1950s. Keystone / Getty Images [Perhaps the Ikperikpe Ogu of the Ohafia, Abiriba, Abam, and Bende.]**

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

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The Ohafia war dance “Iri Agha”. Adult male carrying a headhunters trophy (Oyaya) on his head.” G.I. Jones, 1932-1939.

**I**ri Agha is a war dance of the Ohafia, Igbo subgroup, from southeastern Nigeria. The dance is an energetic interpretation of this culture and expresses the past martial arts activities of the Ohafia communities, who are very well known for their bravery and skill in battle.

Traditionally, the Ohafia were a tribe of feared warriors, and their culture glorified those people who returned from the battlefield with the heads of their enemies—a proof of their bravery and status. Iri Agha dance is done to commemorate such achievements through energetic

movements that mimic what exactly a warrior would do during combat. Dancers, usually in their warrior attire with ornamental swords or machetes, move in steps showing valour, agility, and victory of the Ohafia warrior tradition. The music of the dance is usually provided by drums, flutes, and other musical instruments.

War dance photographed in Port Harcourt, 1950s. Keystone / Getty Images [Perhaps the Ikperikpe Ogu of the Ohafia, Abiriba, Abam, and Bende.] From war achievements celebrated literally in the days of old, the Iri Agha has assumed a figurative dimension in these modern times, performed during festivals, ceremonies, and other important communal gatherings. Yet, it is still something very central to Ohafia identity in that it symbolizes bravery, honor, and that warrior spirit once claimed by the community.

The dance also helps in reminding the people of the virtues of bravery and security within the community as well as among the people of Ohafia.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Chuka Odiike

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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