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The Untold Story of Okpai-Oluchi: *History, Culture, and Struggle*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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FEATURE
IMAGE

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Okpai-Oluchi is a community in Ndokwa East Local Government Area in Delta State, Nigeria. This place is filled with oil, and it faces different problems. It is located in Niger Delta, where history, tradition, and modernity are mixed. We are going to talk about its origin, the king in power, the Biafra massacre that happened there, its oil, and the Okpai Independent Power Plant that was built but was not of much use.

It originated from the Ndokwa people, who are part of the Igbo-speaking group in Southern Nigeria. Before the coming of the whites, farming, fishing, and trading close to the River Niger were mostly their occupation. The land is good, and their tradition holds them firm. During colonization by the British, they joined the people of Okpai-Oluchi in the Oil Rivers protectorate, later Nigeria, and things started changing.

In the 20th century, after the independence of Nigeria in 1960, the oil found in Oloibiri (1956) drew people's attention to Niger Delta, including Okpai-Oluchi. But the Nigerian Civil War of (1967-1970), known as the Biafra War, disorganized the environment. The name "Okpai-Oluchi" shows their Ndokwa root, it seems their history is mixed with blessings and suffering.

In Okpai-Oluchi, the king, called "Eze" is a big man who is firm in tradition. He settles land disputes, keeps the culture alive, and brings the people together. Though they never had enough names given to kings, they are just like Eze Ugbonyamba of Uboh, a big ruler in

Ndokwa town.

During the war, the king was faced with many troubles, including oil cases; he spoke out for the community. He fights for their rights, but the government and most companies are gradually reducing his supremacy. Yet people still respect him as their voice.

The Biafra Massacre that took place in Okpai-Oluchi

The Nigerian Civil War started when Biafra, led by Ojukwu, proposed their separation from Nigeria in 1967. The war extended to Niger Delta and Okpai-Oluchi, close to River Niger, and places like Ahaba and Onicha suffered from it too. In Ahaba, they are aware of the killing done by federal soldiers in October 1967, but Okpai-Oluchi has its own story as well, even though it is not widely known. Around late 1967, when the Biafra soldiers fled from the Midwest, federal troops entered Ndokwa. They suspect anybody who is Igbo or supports Biafra. In Okpai-Oluchi, it was told that soldiers came in, killed every man who was suspected of supporting the Biafra, burnt down houses and separated families. Nobody was able to keep count, but it was believed that either tens or hundreds were killed. Hunger and illness from the war blockade got things worse. This is how the Biafra famine killed millions of people; kings and elders were just watching as villagers suffered as they couldn't really help. This injury still lives in them to date.

Nigeria Agip Oil Company (NAOC) was first started by the Eni people in Italy. They were easygoing for years, building small roads and other things. However, when Sterling Oil (SEEPCO) emerged in 2015, problems arose.

SEEPCO inserted pipelines in farmland without permission from landowners. They burned gases (flaring), polluting the air and land. People like Chibuzor Ikwuobodo stated in 2022 that "oil companies are enjoying while land owners are suffering." The king tried calling them together, but it was difficult as large companies seemed stubborn. The oil that is supposed to fetch money in Okpai-Oluchi has

turned into a curse.

Okpai Independent Power Plant: Lack of Electricity

The Okapi Independent Power Plant, which was built in 2005 with NAOC and NNPC, has 480 megawatts in phase 1, transferring light to the Nigerian grid. Phase 2 was planned for 980 megawatts but is still pending. In 2024, the House of Representatives said they were going to check why NAOC and Saipem did not finish it, whether money had been squandered or something.

For the people of Okpai-Oluchi, this plant is seen as a pain. It generates light in distant places, but their houses are dark. The king and people beg for electricity, jobs, and better lives from it, but nothing is showing up. As of March, 2025, we are still waiting to see if this check will make a change or just a say.

Okpai-Oluchi has gone through a lot, from a farming village to a war zone, and now an oil land that is not gaining from it. The Biafra massacre left a mark, and their land is condemned by oil and false promises by power plants. The pain inflicted by the war and oil problems shows that the government needs to improve its management in places like this. As of March, 2025, Okpai-Oluchi is still waiting; they are strong people who deserve better than suffering.

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