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## **THE EZEIGWE (KING) OF OGUTA**



**HRH NNANI AKWUAONYEUGWO**  
***EZEIGWE OF OGUTA***

HRH Nnani Akwuaonyeugwo occupies a unique position in Oguta. He is the Ezeigwe, the King, the Political Head, the Traditional Ruler of Oguta.

On the strength of the former East Central State Government of Nigeria rotation accord of February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1975, the Imo State Government accorded their recognition to his HRH Nnani Akwuonyeugwo as the Ezeigwe of Oguta on August 1<sup>st</sup> 95. This recognition was reaffirmed on September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1996. On November 12 1998, His royal Highness received his staff of Office from Col. P.K Zubairu, Imo State Military Administrator. The Instrument of appointment was gazetted as Imo State Legal notice(ISLN) no. 10 of May 18 1999.

By virtue of his appointment as the Ezeigwe of Oguta, HRH Nnani Akwuonyeugwo was made a member of the Imo State Council of Nde-Eze(traditional rulers). We wish his royal highness a successful reign.

HRH Nnani Alfred Nzeribe of blessed memory was the first Ezeigwe to benefit from the rotation accord.

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF OGUTA**

Originally, the people of Oguta (pronounced Ugwuta) belonged to the Ancient Kingdom of Benin before they started to migrate. That was around the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The migration became inevitable following the series of wars in which the Benin Kingdom was engaged for the purpose of extending their Kingdom and wielding greater economic and political power. Furthermore, the ironhanded reign of Oba Ewuare the Great and his successor, Oba Esigie, precipitated the migration, which affected many other peoples. Including Onitsha Ado and Ase.<sup>1</sup>

During their migration, the people of Oguta sojourned in various places like Ilah, Inyi, Igara and Ogbanyi Ibero, popularly known today as Obodo Akpuruekwe in Ubi Oshimiri.

Evidence of Oguta's migration from Benin can be traced to the fact that there are many words that are still being used as an integral part of the typical Oguta language. Moreover, there are certain traditional titles and common names similar in meanings and pronunciation in Benin, Onitsha, Aboh and other Ogbaru towns, for example, Iyasara, Ajie, Ogene, Umudei, Umuoga.

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed historical account, please see

- (1) A Short Cultural History of Oguta by Mr. A.O Ndupu
- (2) A Bridge Across by Mr. Obinna Ofili.

## LOCATION AND TERRITORY

### Location

Oguta is located in Imo State of Nigeria, and shares boundaries with Anambra, Delta and Rivers States. It lies within the Lower Niger drainage basin.

Oguta is the headquarters of the Oguta Local Government Area and is one of the only two crude oil-producing Local Governments in Imo State.

### Territory

Oguta is a socio-geographic community town with a surface area of approximately 2,025.75 square kilometers, made up as follows:<sup>2</sup>

Oguta Ameshi Metropolis	63.75 km <sup>2</sup>	3.15%
Osemotor, Oguta	46.50 km <sup>2</sup>	2.30%
Kalabar Beach, Oguta	30.50 km <sup>2</sup>	1.50%
UBI – Oguta Farmlands	1,885.00 km <sup>2</sup>	93.05%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,025.75 km<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>100 %</b>

The Oguta Ameshi Metropolis, which lies ten kilometers right of the Mgbidi Junction along the Onitsha/Owerri Road, represents only 3.15% of the Oguta Territory.

The **UBI**, which occupies over 93% of the territory, is a distinct sociological community of Oguta which comprises about 27 (twenty-seven) farm settlements and sub-communities.

Oguta Ameshi itself comprises twenty-seven villages. This is not a mere numerical coincidence because there is hardly any of the twenty-seven villages in Oguta that does not own a farmland. In fact during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), a lot of Oguta people took refuge in these farm settlements where they erected buildings with corrugated iron sheets. Right now, modern developments have turned these farm settlements into residential areas. It is the dream of every Oguta man to get this 93% of our community landmass economically revitalized at no distant future.

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<sup>2</sup> NWADIARO, Chukwuemekanim: Oguta in the Niger Delta: Fact or Fiction.

### Villages in Oguta

Oguta comprises the following villages:

1. Umuachishi	10. Okichi	19. Umuajoma
2. Umunduruowoku	11. Ishibe	20. Obeagwa
3. Amaozua	12. Umuorima	21. Umutogwumma
4. Umunkwocha	13. Umuenemanya	22. Obutu
5. Umuenu	14. Umunsoha	23. Umundanike
6. Umunkwokomoshi	15. Umuayata	24. Umudei
7. Umunkwu	16. Umuigbo	25. Umuama
8. Umunnarukwu	17. Umuopu	26. Abatu
9. Umuosuma	18. Ogwuma	27. Ngegwu

### The Oguta Lake

The Metropolitan City of Oguta is blessed with a Blue Lake, which happens to be the largest natural lake in Imo State and the second largest natural lake in Nigeria after Lake Chad. The Lake is of tremendous value to the people of Oguta. It is the identity and pride of the Oguta man just as it is the pride of Imo State. The Lake is constant supply of fresh fish, which constitutes about 80% of the protein of Oguta. During the old Nigerian economy, the Lake was a port for the evacuation of palm produce, which accounted for more than 10% of the total produce trade in the former Eastern Nigeria.<sup>3</sup>

The Oguta Blue Lake is a marvelous tourist attraction, especially at the confluence where the waters of the Lake and the Urashi River meet, but their respective colors of blue and brown refuse to mix. There is a 3-Star Motel, the Oguta Lake Motel, with a tourist resort and an amiable 18-hole standard international Golf Course.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> ANENE Afamdi: Perspectives in Restoration, Conservation and Management of Oguta Lake, 1999  
NWAPA, Ernest: Oil and Gas: Prospects for Oguta, 1888.

<sup>4</sup> OFILI, Obinna: A Bridge Across, Eternity Creations Int., Lagos, 1998.

## **KINGSHIP**

### **Introduction**

Oguta is one of three communities in Igboland with a historically renowned system of centralized kingship, the other towns being Onitsha and Arochukwu.<sup>5</sup>

In the former Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs, as constituted in 1963, only eight traditional rulers were recognized as First Class Chiefs. The Obi (Ezeigwe) of Oguta was one of them. Others were the Obi of Onitsha, the Eze Aro of Arochukwu, the Obong of Calabar, the Amanyanabo of Opobo, the Amanyanabo of Kalabari, the Amanyanabo of Nembe and the Amanyanabo of Bonny.

### **The Ezeigwe**

As the Eze-in-Council, the Ezeigwe administers the town through the Ndiche and also through the Town Union. Certain classes of information from the Government are usually passed through the King.

Traditionally, the King's Palace, the Obi Eze, is a place of general assembly where administrative matters are discussed. The Obi Eze also serves as a quasi-native court where disputes between individuals, groups or villages may be settled.

### **Coronation of the Ezeigwe**

#### *Preliminaries*

Before the coronation, the Ezeigwe goes through the following preliminaries:

#### *Screening*

Nominees from the royal village are scrutinized, and the oracle is consulted to determine the most suitable candidate.

Parameters for the stringent personal qualifying test include the following:

- a. Both parents must have died.
- b. Must be a member of the royal family
- c. Must be mentally fit with no physical deformity.
- d. Must be married with male and female children.
- e. Must have performed all the Age Grade ceremonies as well Ikeye Nmuo, Igbu Awaya and Igbu Akangbu titles.
- f. Must have a suitable building.
- g. Must not be a criminal or ex-convict.
- h. Must not be financially embarrassed.
- i. Must not be a drunkard.
- j. Must be a holder of the *Igbuu* (Ogbuagu) title.

#### *Ikwe Omu*

This is a ceremony which seeks to sanctify the Eze-elect for the exalted position. On the appointed Eke-Ukwu day, he goes with his people with kolanut and wine to the oldest man in his village, the Okpara, who

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pours libation and invokes the spirits of their ancestors, declaring that the man before him is to be crowned the Ezeigwe. He ties palm fronds (omu nkwu) around the candidate's two wrists and two ankles. The Eze-elect will wear these palm fronds for seven native weeks, that is, 28 days or izu asaa, during which period people will greet him 'OMU'. He will only wear white shirts and white "George" wrapper.

For the Ezeigwe-elect, this is a period of purification during which he reconciles with anybody who bears him grudge, and prays to God to forgive his sins. If he dies within this Omu period of 28 days, it is a bad death, onwu ojoo, and he will be buried without any funeral rites.

### **The Coronation**

In the morning of the coronation day, which must be another Eke Ukwu day, the Ezeigwe-elect is escorted by his people to his mother's home where he will sit on the bare floor for the last time before he is crowned. After brief entertainment, he is carried shoulder high to his home without his feet touching the ground, with the people singing – BUNI EZE O, EZE BURU AGADA, until they reach his palace, where the EzeUkwu, the Traditional Kingmaker, is waiting.

### **Oath of Office**

The EzeUkwu administers the oath of office by which the Ezeigwe-elect promises to run the affairs of the community with justice and fairplay. Thereafter, the EzeUkwu prays for him and washes his face, hands, and feet, thus preparing him for a new life.

The EzeUkwu then puts the *aboshi* leaf in his mouth and places the 'Red Cap' on his head, warning him that the cap is his own only throughout his lifetime, but that he will withdraw it when the Eze joins his ancestors.

At this juncture, the goat presented to the Ezeukwu is killed with a pointed iron rod, to mark the coronation. The blood of the goat must not spill on the floor of the Palace.

### **Entertainment**

As soon as the Ezeukwu departs, the Ezeigwe emerges to the front open reception parlor (Obu Ihu) and entertainment begins.

The Ezeigwe blows his elephant tusk and the people respond by saluting him "IGWE" as many times as he blows it. His head wife, usually his first, automatically becomes the Queen and is saluted 'ODOBA'.

At this stage, the Ezeigwe, his Queen, Odooba, the Ada Eze, that is the King's first daughter, and Nde Oririnzere dance in turn to the tune of the *Ufie* and *Opi* royal music.

As entertainment continues, relatives and well-wishers queue up to pay homage to the Ezeigwe, the No. 1 Citizen.

## The Ezeigwe's Regalia

Regalia includes:

- a. Pure Red Robe
- b. Immaculate White Robe.
- c. Red Cap with eagle feathers on forehead.
- d. Eze Agu – leopard's teeth necklace joined with *ejijere beads*
- e. Applies *nzu* – native white chalk -around his eyelids.
- f. Always holds an elephant tusk in his right hand and a bell in his left.

On ceremonial days, the Ezeigwe is led by a siren made of a bunch of bells of different designs – *mgbirigba imi na anya*. The siren is hung on the back of a page boy who uses his elbows to activate the bells, to announce the approach of the King..

## Hospitality

The Ezeigwe's hospitality knows no bounds. Anybody who visits him must be entertained with kolanut and sometimes drinks. Nobody visits the King without being offered kolanuts. *Eze ako oji* – the King never lacks kola.

The Ezeigwe entertains the community with food and drinks during the *Ibina* and *Omerife* (New Yam) Festivals. Nde Nze are entertained during *IduOwu* ceremonies.

The Ezeigwe neither eats nor drinks in public. Occasionally, however, he is persuaded to obey his taste; He drinks his favorite brand, which he gulps at a go amidst incantations by his subjects – *Obi gbori, Obi gbori* – a chorus of praise which is said as long as it takes the Ezeigwe to gulp his drinks.

## When the Ezeigwe joins his ancestors

When the Ezeigwe dies, it is secretly said that *Odibo*, the servant of the people, has gone home. The death is never publicly announced at this stage. His oldest son who will eventually be his Regent, that is, his *Udom*, is immediately taken away from the palace until the body is buried.

The grave is dug in a special way, and the EzeUkwu is invited to perform his traditional function of removing the Red Cap from the Ezeigwe's head. This uncapping ceremony is usually done in the night after which the EzeUkwu returns home with the crown.

The late Ezeigwe is now laid to rest, witnessed only by close members of his family and some important villagers.

The next morning, the first stage of the funeral rites begins with *Igbata Anya Mmiri Akwa*. *The final funeral ceremonies are postponed until the end of the Regency, which is three native years ahead*

## The Regent

On completion of the preliminary burial rites, the family leaders escort the eldest son back to the palace before dawn. To cleanse himself of all his misdoings, the son bathes with *oji* and *ukpa* leaves together with *uda*. As the day breaks, the Regent is installed in a colorful ceremony.

The Regent, now called *Udom*, wears a striped cap, *okpu afunaenupu*, , white shirt or jumper, George loin cloth or a pair of trousers, eze agu (leopard's teeth necklace), eagle feather on his forehead. He applies native white chalk, *nzu*, around his eyelids and always moves out with his elephant tusk and a bell in his hands. Like the Ezeigwe, a siren (bunch of bells of different designs) is carried by a young man, who rings the bells in front of the Regent to announce his approach.

The Regent enjoys all the rights and privileges accorded to the Ezeigwe, except that he does not sit on the throne (ukpo). He sits below at the foot of the throne. The Regent is saluted “*AJIE*” instead of “*IGWE*”.

The Regent holds office for two calendar years, equivalent to three native years, after which the Ezeigwe is publicly declared dead.

### **Nni Una Nine**

The next stage of the funeral ceremonies of the Ezeigwe is the feasting of all the members of the Regent’s Age Grade. The custom is that every member of the Age Grade must have his share whether or not he is present. *Nni Una Nine* connotes a feast, which must be extended to **all** members of the Age Grade. This compulsory feast serves as notice of invitation to the entire Age Grade to attend the oncoming royal funeral ceremony.

### **Nni Eze – Royal Feast**

This is a Royal Feast to which not only the Regent but also the Ada Eze (eldest daughter of the King) and other children of the late Ezeigwe, invite their respective Age Grades. The feast stretches over at least two days. On the last day, members of the Age Grades are expected to contribute money by way of donations, and hand over to their respective hosts.

Members of the Age Grades usually take pride in participating and donating generously towards the Royal Feast because it is a rare occasion, which is enjoyed only by lucky and privileged Age Grades. Some Age Grades in Oguta are known to have phased out by death without having the opportunity of participating in any Royal Feast.

The Nni Eze Royal Feast marks the end of the preliminary ceremony before the Final Burial Ceremony of the Ezeigwe.

### **The Ezeigwe’s Final Funeral Ceremony**

The Ezeigwe’s Final Funeral ceremony is customarily held between the months of March and May in order to pave the way for the Regent who has occupied such an exalted position in the town and who now returns to the society as a common man, to be the first person to be initiated into the *Ikwa Nmuo Cult* in that year. By this initiation he automatically becomes an Nze. Also as an honor, he does not pay any initiation fee.

### **Ibu Igbudu Eze – King’s Effigy**

As part of the Final Funeral Ceremony, an admirable effigy of the Ezeigwe is built and decorated with a variety of expensive George cloth.

To begin with, the villagers of the Ezeigwe dance round the town with their peculiar *Ikeregbe* music for four consecutive days. Nde Oririnze, the Palace Chief s, dance to the tune of the *Opi* royal music for three consecutive days

On the final day of the Funeral Ceremony, the Effigy, Igbudu Eze, is displayed in front of the Palace where the Chiefs – Nde Oririnze, Nde Igbuu (the Ogbuagus) Nde Okpara (Village Heads) the Umuishis (kindred Heads) and the Age Grades, assemble to participate in the Ceremony. Itu Uni, the last burial rite, is performed there by the Village Umuishis.

The Igbudu Effigy is then carried round the Village, visiting the palaces of the past Ezeigwes. On return to the late Ezeigwe’s palace, the Effigy is carried right inside the Compound, and this marks the end of the Ezeigwe’s Final Funeral Ceremony.

### **Regent's Last Days in Office**

**After** the Ibu Igbudu Effigy ceremony, the Regent (Udom) stays in office for another 28 days (seven native weeks) during which period he performs ritual sacrifices to the ancestors, and entertains the Village Umuishis every Eke day throughout the period.

### **Regent Visits his Mother's Home**

.After the 28-day period, the Regent visits the home of his mother in a dignified way, escorted by his Age Grade and his kinsmen and women. This visit marks the end of his regency, as he drops the elephant tusk (odu), the bell, the talking spear (oji) and his regalia, and sits down on the bare floor.

He returns home as a common man, greeting everybody, both young and old, and bowing down in salutation to his seniors, as if to return the honor that people had given him during the period of his regency.

He continues to be called UDOM and saluted AJIE.

### **IYASARA AND NDANIKE**

The Ezeigwe, the Iyasara (Eze Nnowu), and the Ndanike are all Ezes (kings) in their own rights, but with different levels of authority.

The procedures for their coronation are similar. They are all crowned by the EzeUkwu. A Regent is appointed when they die and they are all buried in the same manner.

### **EZEUKWU (THE KINGMAKER)**

**The Ezeukwu** (which literally means Big King) is the traditional kingmaker in Oguta. He descends from UmuEzeukwu kindred in Okichi Village, and the stool usually goes to the oldest man in the kindred.

As the kingmaker, the Ezeukwu crowns himself and also crowns the Ezeigwe, the Iyasara and the Ndanike.

The ascendant to the Ezeukwu throne must have the same qualifications as the Ezeigwe, the Iyasara and the Ndanike.

### **Ezeukwu's Special Rights and Privileges**

The Ezeukwu crowns himself and crowns the Ezeigwe, Iyasara and Ndannike, and removes their cap on death.

He receives preferential treatment whenever he visits the Ezeigwe, Iyasara or Ndanike. Each of them vacates his throne for the Ezeukwu.

The Ezeukwu's wife and his *Uko* wear the red cap (okpu omu) whereas the wives and Udom of the Ezeigwe, Iyasara and Ndanike wear the red-striped cap (*okpu afunenupu*).

The Ezeukwu greets the other Ezes standing.

On the Ezeukwu's death, the ceremonies are the same as the Ezeigwe, Iyasara, except that nobody decaps him.

**Ezechioha**

**Ezechioha** is the Chief Priest of all the people of Oguta. – *Chi Oha Nine*.

*The titles goes to the oldest man in the Umu Ezechioha Kindred of Okichi Village, provided he is qualified in other respects.*

Like the Ezeukwu, the Ezechioha is not installed by anybody but himself.

He is greeted “OGINI.”

His regalia – Red Cap (okpu omu), white long shirts, eagle feather on his cap. He also wears eze agu (leopard teeth necklace, and goes out with a talking spear (oji).

On his death the Osere is informed immediately and he is buried as an Nze.

A Regent is appointed and greeted AJIE and he holds office until the final burial ceremonies of the Ezechioha are completed.

## NATIVE ADMINISTRATION

Native Administration in Oguta comes under three tiers, namely,

- a. The Family/Kindred Level
- b. The Village Level
- c. The Town Level.

### The Family/Kindred Level

The Family or Kindred constitutes an administrative entity, with the oldest man, *Okei Uno*, as the head. The Okei Uno holds the *Family Ofor*, which is his symbol of spiritual authority with which he administers. The Family Usually he performs the *Imacha Nde Nmuo* ceremony to enable him minister unto the spirits of his father and his ancestors. Disputes between members of the same family or kindred are settled in the house of the Okei Uno.

### The Village Level

Family/Kindred heads who perform the *Ikeye Nmuo* ceremony automatically become the Fathers of the Village, that is, the *Umu Ishi*. The oldest man among the Village Umu Ishi becomes the Okpara (chief head) of the Village, and is expected to take the title in a formal way. The Okpara of the Village is the custodian of the Village *Ofor* which is also called *Ogbo Nmuo*. The Okpara and the UmuIshi make up the Village Administrative Council, with the Okpara as the head. Disputes between two families or kindreds within the Village are settled in the house of the Okpara. Any side that is not happy with their verdict may take the matter to the Eze-in-Council.

### The Town Level

The Ezeigwe of Oguta is the Eze-in-Council, and he rules Oguta through the Council of Ndiche which is constituted as follows:

Title	Description	Village
1. The Ezeigwe	Traditional Ruler	Umudei/ Ngegwu
2. The Ogene – Oldest Man	Spiritual Head	Can come from any village
3. The Ogana	Ezeigwe’s Spokesman	Can come from any village
4. The Iyasara	Prime Minister	Umuenu/ Umunkwokomoshi
5. The Ndanike	Warlord	Umundanike
6. The Ezeukwu	Kingmaker	Okichi (Umuezukwu Kindred)
7. The Ezechioha	Chief Priest	Okichi (Umuezechioha Kindred)
8. Nde Okpara	Village Heads	Produced by every village
9. Nde Oririnzere	Ezeigwe’s Cabinet	Can come from ant village

### The Town Union

**Oguta custom has** come to embrace the Town Union whose main functions include the welfare and development of the town. The current Town Union is the Oguta Community Development Union (OCDU).

## THE OGENE

**The Ogene** is the spiritual head of Oguta, the oldest man in the town. This No. 2 position in the hierarchy of the ruling body, the Council of Ndiche, is not an elective office, but an endowment of age and a gift from God.

The Ogene's symbol of authority and justice is the *Ofor of Oguta*, which is the aggregate of all the *Ofors* from the twenty-seven villages of Oguta. *Ipsa facto*, Ogene is the Okpara of every village, and can officiate as such, if the need arises.

At the funeral if any Oguta man whose Age Grade members have all died, the Ogene becomes the living member of the Age Grade, and delegates his *Uko* to attend the funeral..

The installation of the Ogene is quite simple. After formal notification to the Ndiche and other interested persons, the prospective Ogene goes to carry the *Ofor* from the Regent of his predecessor. He bows down and salutes the Regent. After a brief ceremony, he picks up the *Ofor* and heads to his house without looking back.

On arrival at his house, the Ogene sprinkles the *Ofor* with nzu, native white chalk, blesses everybody present as well as the whole town, and pours libation. Everybody salutes him "OGENE." He slaughters a goat and fowl on the *Ofor*. By this ceremony he becomes the Ogene of Oguta.

Early the next morning, he or his representative, *Uko*, goes round the town and offers kolanut to every deity (arushi) in Oguta and informs them that he is now the Ogene, and prays for the good of the people.

### Ogene Nwanya

Ogene Nwanya is the female counterpart of the Ogene Nwoke, being the oldest woman in Oguta.

Her installation is similar to that of the Ogene Nwoke.

### Reigning Ogenes in Oguta

Just for the records, the following Ogenes have officiated in Oguta during the past sixty-eight years:

Name	Village	Period
1. Ezeobi Imenwanya	Umunsoha	1935
2. HRH Nnadi Adikea	Umudei	
3. Nwadiaro Ezeanigbo	Abatu	
4. Mberekpe Obua	Umunkwu	
5. Azogu Nwama	Ogwuma	1948-1959
6. Onwuasoanya Uzoaru	Umunkwocha	1962-1970
7. Okororie Uzokwe	Umuenu	1972-1973
8. Ukachukwu Izeogu	Umuajoma	1975-1982
9. Osere Okororie Nduka	Umuopu	1985-1990
10. Ishiodu Enesha	Ogwuma	1992-
11. HRH Nnani Iworisha (incumbent)	Umuenu	2000

## AGE GRADE

Following the inter-tribal war during which the people of Oguta were chased out of Ilah by the combined forces of Igara and Aboh, they crossed the River Niger and sojourned at Obodo Akpuruekwe (Ogbanyi Ibero). As rumors of further attack and invasion gripped the town, the governing Council of Oguta, the Ndiche, mobilized the youths in groups according to their ages and charged them with the responsibility of mounting security guards and digging trenches for the defense of the town.

The groups gradually developed into strong associations of people of the same age range. They were recognized as Age Grades each of which was described by using the word *Ita* or *Otu*, thus, *ITA FRANCIS* and *OTU ADIMURE* refer to the Age Grades whose Presidents are FRANCIS and ADIMURE respectively.

The Age Grade system is fully embraced by the entire citizenry of Oguta. Today, as young people grow up and play together and know themselves, they form their own age grades, usually between the ages of fourteen, fifteen and sixteen, depending on the Adult Organizer who is known as *ONU OTU OCHIKOMA*. He organizes, directs, nurtures and grooms the Age Grade until the members mature and are able to elect their own officers and manage their affairs. As soon as they elect their officers, the Adult Organizer automatically becomes their founding patron.

Age Grades in Oguta elect their officers in a peculiar way. An office is zoned to a village or groups of villages by consensus. The Village or Group of Villages chooses from amongst themselves one person who will hold that office for them. The candidate is then presented to the Age Grade for ratification. The person presented is usually adopted unless the candidate is morally unacceptable. The office of the President, Onu Otu, is so important that sometimes the Village finds it necessary to consult an oracle to determine who is the most suitable candidate.

The following are the officers of a typical Age Grade:

### OFFICERS

a. Onu Otu	President
b. Akakanni	1 <sup>st</sup> Vice President
c. Akakaekpeyi	2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice President
d. Onoso Akakanni	3 <sup>rd</sup> Vice President
e. Oke Akata	Provost
f. Oga	Sharer of Food and Drinks

### Nde Okwa – Vocalists

There is no restriction in the number of Nde Okwa. These are the vocalists who are the live-wire of the Age Grade. They are not elected. Their aptitude and natural gift mark them out as very important members of the Age Grade, and are recognized as such, and held in high esteem.

There is a healthy competition among Age Grades in Oguta, especially the younger generation. The parameters for assessing the Age Grades include the following:

1. Good music
2. Number of quality members and patrons
3. Individual members' achievements in life.
4. Political and social status of members and patrons in the society.
5. Contributions of the Age Grade to the development of the Community.

## Outings

To ensure the continuity of outing engagements, the Oguta Age Grade system prescribes a number of traditional ceremonies which each member is expected to perform. These ceremonies are listed below in their order of precedence:

1. Ewu Egede
2. Ewu Ikwunne
3. Itume Ogugu
4. Ibu Uno
5. Igbu Ewu Chi
6. Iruma Chukwu
7. Igbu Okiri Chukwu
8. Igbu Okiri Ita
9. Igbu Okiri Agbaukwu
10. Igbu Ebunu Ikenga.

Each of the above listed ceremonies, except No. 3, involves the slaughtering of goats and the provision of seven or fourteen lumps of pounded yam (oba nni), pots of fish (ite azu), specified number and variety of drinks, plus kolanuts and cigarettes. Item 3 requires a big cork instead of goat.

The performance of these Age Grade ceremonies is compulsory for people who wish to take certain traditional titles in Oguta, for example, the Ezeigwe, Iyasara, Ndanike and Ogbuagu titles.

Any member of the Age Grade who has not performed any of the ten ceremonies is referred to as *IZHINA MMIRI OFE* or one who has not been “circumsized”. He will blame no one if he gets little or no share of the goat or chicken meat during any of the outings, or if the Age Grade presents only one fathom of “George” cloth instead of one whole piece of eight yards during his burial ceremonies.

Many Age Grades in Oguta have phased out by death since the inception of this tradition-oriented system. The current Ogene of Oguta belongs to the *UGBANI* Age Grade. The Age Grades before *UGBANI*, now all extinct, include *IBOM*, *ASAWA*, *GOLD COMPANY* and *OTU NKPONA*.

## Age Grades in Oguta

The following list of Age Grades is not exhaustive, and is taken at random:

1. Ita Odini	17. Ita James Opene	33. Ita Paul
2. Ita Ikenna	18. Otu Nde Wenike	34. Ita Francis
3. Ugbani Na Order	19. Otu Eze	35. OtuEzechi
4. Ita Benson	20. Otu White	36. Otu Stainless
5. Otu Anyadisa	21. Ita Major	37. Otu Osisioma
6. Otu Reggae	22. Original Chassis	38. Ita Amara Nwaogene
7. Ita Ebini	23. Ita Reuben	39. Otu Uwaoma
8. Ugbani Progress	24. Otu Original White	40. Ita Nwokoma
9. Ita Gogo Mberekpe	25. Otu Ibere Na Agba	41. Ita Aku Nwata
10. Otu Akubu Ikenga	26. Otu Adimure	42. Otu Oduenyi
11. Otu Ugo Chioma	27. Otu Ajashi	43. Ita Ozoemena
12. Ita Love	28. Otu Chinyere Ugo	44. Otu Chioma
13. Ugbani Ji Aku Ji Mma	29. Otu Amara Sanche	45. Oso Nde Owe Nde
14. Ugo Win	30. Odi Uba	46. Ofu Amara
15. Otu Watch	31. Otu Solution	47. Otu Ugo Jolly
16. Ita Peter Osere	32. Ita Johnson	

## FESTIVALS

There are two main festivals in Oguta, namely:

1. The *OWU* Festival *and*
2. The *OMERIFE* Festival

### *OWU FESTIVAL*

In the context of Oguta custom, OWU is an Institution, a Festival and a Masquerade all in one. Under normal circumstances, the Owu Festival begins around the second week of March and lasts for about two calendar months. If, however, the final burial of the Ezeigwe takes place in any year, the Festival may be shifted or delayed to enable the Regent to be the first person to be initiated into the Ikwa Nmuo (Nze) Cult.

The Owu Festival begins on an Eke Ukwu day and ends on an Eke Nta day. The Festival comes in seven stages, briefly described as follows:

Stage 1 - **Ikponyita Owu** - The calling up of the spirit of the Owu Festival

Stage 2 - The Owu Agbatani Assembly hosted by Ishibe Village.

Stage 3 - The hoisting of the Owu Flag by Umutogwuma Village and Okichi Village.

Stage 4 - Osere, the Chief Priest for Owu, opens the Echina shrine for initiation ceremonies. On that particular day, any violation of the law is not punishable. This is known as *Owu Ori Enwe Nso. Agugu* ceremony starts. All the new initiates to the Nze title dress in their regalia and are led out in procession by their respective Agbanta members.

Stage 5 - Nkwa Nmuo – Brief Drumming Session: only visiting spirits dance to this drumming.

Stage 6 - Owu Ipu Nkpa - Presentation of the Owu Masquerade – a most colorful aspect of the Festival.

- Igba Oda - Final Dancing day of the Owu masquerades and also dancing day for the Owu Title holders.

Idu Okpotu - Night ceremony is not witnessed by Ofeke, the non title holders.

Stage 7 - Idu Owu - Owu Farewell Ceremony

- IBINA - Ezeigwe and Iyasara host the generality of Oguta people at their famous IBINA EZE and IBINA IYASARA respectively.

Ikenyi Arushi - Final Ceremony performed by the Osere to formally close the Echina shrine for business.

## **OSERE - OWU CHIEF PRIEST**

Osere is the Chief Priest of Owu and Echina. He presides over all the ceremonies in Echina, including the initiation of Nze.

For the purpose of Owu, Oguta is divided into two segments, UGWUNTA and UGWUKWU, and each of these segments has an Osere.

Installation - The Osere installs himself. He must be the oldest man in his lineage – Umuopu Village for Ugwunta and Okichi/Umuosuma/Umunnarukwu Villages for Ugwukwu. The installation day is usually within izu asaa, that is, 28 days, from the death of his predecessor.

The prospective Osere invites all the Umuishi and Nde Nze of his village, pours libation to his ancestors, and informs his people of his impending installation. Every member of the Umuishi is given a kolanut with which to make offering to his ancestors. He also notifies his Age Grade.

On the installation day, his Age Grade accords him the last funeral rites due to a dead man. To mark the final severance of relationship with the Osere, his Age Grade divides a piece of George cloth into two and gives him one part. After this cancellation ceremony, the Osere is henceforth regarded as a dead man and can no longer dance to the music of his Age Grade or sit on the same mat or bench with anybody. All the funeral rites are completed while he is alive. Even the Ewu Amara goat, which is usually given alive to the Age Grade, is slaughtered, cooked and eaten together there and then. Henceforth, the Osere simply does not exist any more.

The following day, the newly self-installed Osere appears in his full regalia and sits on his throne (ukpo) to acknowledge the greetings of his people. The Osere Ugwunta is saluted OMODI and the Osere Ugwuku is greeted AJIE.

- Peculiarities – 1. The Osere is the only person in Oguta, perhaps in the whole world, who witnesses his own funeral ceremonies while he is alive.
2. Most significantly, the two Oseres do not meet. If they meet accidentally or intentionally, the Osere Ugwunta will die.

### **When the Osere dies**

The body of a deceased Osere is never seen by the public, particularly the *Ofeke*, non members of the Ikwa Nmuo Cult. Consequently his body does not lie in state but is buried secretly at night.

The Osere does not have a Regent (Udom) at death.

## **OMERIFE FESTIVAL**

Omerife is a New Yam Festival celebrated annually during harvest time. It stretches from the last week of August to the third week of September. It is a period of general merriment and thanksgiving to God and the ancestors, for a good harvest.

During the Festival, cows, goats and fowls are slaughtered by the Ezeigwe, the Iyasara, the Ezeukwu, the Ndanike, Nde Okpara, Umuishi, the Presidents and Patrons of all Age Grades, as well as the first sons of deceased fathers.

The Festival holds in two stages:

- a. OKIKA OMERIFE aka OGENE NKIRIKA
- b. ETITI OMERIFE aka OMERIFE PROPER.

**Ogene Nkirika** - This is so nick-named because of the shabby manner in which participants dress and dance along the Ameshi Road from Ngegwu Village to Umuachishi. Plays are improvised, rich with impersonations and deliberate show of physical strength.

Men plait their hairs and dress like women. This spectacular event draws spectators from all parts of Nigeria. Whatever is said or improvised during the Ogene Nkirika celebration, is not subject to litigation by anybody.

The two stages of the Omerife Festival last for 21 days, starting from an Afor Ukwu to an Afor Nta day.

During the first three days, people return to town to exchange pleasantries with relatives, friends and members of their Age Grades; farmers sell their wares, mainly yam and fish. At about 2 p.m. on the second day, young people dress in unusual and strange attires and dance in groups or individually, along the Ameshi Road, displaying their physical strength, improvising all sorts of funny acts. This is the preliminary stage called OGENE NKIRIKA.

There is a short break during which some people return to their farms or places of work, to prepare for the main festival. On the 17<sup>th</sup> day, Afor Ukwu Omerife, there is an influx of people back to town. This is an open day of invitation by Presidents, Vice Presidents and Patrons of Age Grades, for members to come and have drinks on them. On this day also, Family Heads set up fire with big logs of wood at the frontage of their house obu ihu}, for the ancestors attending the Festival to warm themselves against the cold rainy season. These logs of wood are usually donated by the younger ones as part of their obligation to the Family Head.

Day 18, Nkwo Ukwu, features most young people according to their Age Grades, dressed in their best attire and dancing round the town, usually until dusk. Young girls of various ages, some of whom have not come to town for many years, are seen gorgeously dressed, shining, full of excitement and enthusiasm.

ONU NWANYA ANUKWANA NWANYA OMERIFE - This is a popular caveat for young men which means: If you are looking for a wife, never pick one during the Omerife Festival, for all that glitters is not gold!

On the 19<sup>th</sup> day, Eke Nta, the Ezeigwe celebrates the New Yam by slaughtering goats, pouring libation and offering sacrifices to God and the ancestors. The entire people of Oguta are invited to the Feast and they sit in groups to ensure that every one is served. The Ezeigwe blows his elephant tusk four times intermittently and dances to the Opi royal music. He pokes the throne with the tip of his elephant tusk and sits down before the Odooba, the Ada Eze and Nde Oririnzere take their turn in dancing. When the royal music ceases, the standard opi music is introduced for the public to dance.

The Ezeukwu, Ndanike and Nde Okpara also celebrate their own New Yam on this same day.

On Day 20, Orié Afor Nta, the Iyasara celebrates his own New Yam, similar to that of the Ezeigwe.

Day 21 – Afor Nta – This is the last official day of the Omerife Festival, known as AFOR OGBUBE EKWENSU, the day when Oguta people “kill the satan.” The killing is performed by members of the Igbuu (Ogbuagu) Society, each of whom has a sword as part of his regalia.

The ceremony starts with each member of the Igbuu Society lavishly entertaining his villagers after which the Ogbuagu and his people, accompanied by a drummer and a trumpeter, move towards the waterfront of their Village, singing praises to the Ogbuagu.

At the Village waterfront, a pumpkin (nkani) is placed on the ground in front of the Ogbuagu, who cuts it into four slices with his sword, to indicate the symbolical killing of the devil.

Thereafter, the Ogbuagu and his entourage rejoice and dance round the town, singing, OKO – O – MA, OKO – O – MA, OKORIMA OKORIMA, AGU BU ONYE OKE O - Rejoice, Rejoice, the devil is killed. The Lion is the greatest. . When they meet other members of the Igbuu Society, they exchange greetings by clashing their swords four times.

The killing of satan, the devil, by members of the Igbuu Society marks the end of the Omerife Festival.

## HOW TO GREET OGUTA PEOPLE

### Based on Age

1. OGENE	(Oldest Man)	Ogene	3 times
2. OGENE NWANYA	(Oldest Woman)	Ogene	
3. OKPARA	(Village Head)	Ajie	
4. UMUIISHI/OKEI UNO	(Family/Kindred Head)	Ajie	
5. INDIVIDUALS		Individual Greeting Names	

### Based on Position

1. EZEIGWE		Igwe	4 times
2. ODOBA EZEIGWE (QUEEN)		Odoba	
3. EZEUKWU		Igwe	4 times
4. ODOBA EZEUKWU		Odoba	2 times
5. IYASARA		Nnowu	3 times
6. OMODI IYASARA		Omodi	
7. NDANIKE		Ndanike	
8. OMODI NDANIKE		Omodi	
9. OSERE UGWUKWU		Ajie	
10. OSERE UGWUNTA		Omodi	
11. EZECHIIOHA		Ogini	
12. OGANA		Ogana	
13. ORIRINZERE		Damanze plus Special Name, eg Damanze Enugwukamba	
14. OGBUAGU		Ogbuagu	
15. OGBUEFI		Ogbuefi	
16. OSHIJI		Oshiji	
17. UDOM	(Regent)	Ajie	
18. UKO	(Representative)	Uko	
19. AGE GRADE	(Men)	Ochiagha, Mazi, Ogbukagha	
20. AGE GRADE	(Women)	Idenu, Nwaononaku, Anama	
21. GROUPS OF MEN		Ochiagha, Mazi, Ogbukagha	
22. GROUPS OF WOMEN		Idenu, Nwaononaku, Anama	

## Based on Villages

SONS	DAUGHTERS	WIVES †	DAUGHTERS' CHILDREN
<b>UMUACHISHI</b>			
Ajashi Obodo Oyibo	Ada Obodo Oyibo	Abiaraeri Obodo Oyibo	Urekwere Nwa Obodo Oyibo
<b>UMUNKWOCHA</b>			
Obiya Chi Oma	Mgbaji Obiya	Abiaraeri Obiya	Urekwere Nwa Obiya
<b>UMUENU</b>			
Ogene Di Na Obi	Ada Ogene Nabu	Abiaraeri Ogene Nabu	Urekwere Nwa Ogene Nabu
<b>UMUNKWOKOMOSHI</b>			
Enyi Uwa Oma	Mgbaji Enyi	Abiaraeri Enyi	Urekwere Nwa Enyi
<b>UMUNKWU</b>			
Amadi Muru Eze Oyibo	Ime Muru Eze Oyibo	Abiaraeri Ime Muru Eze Oyibo	Urekwere Ime Muru eze Oyibo
<b>UMUOSUMA</b>			
Abani Bu Ishi Nwa	Mgbaji Abani	Abiaraeri Abani	Urekwere Nwa Abani
<b>OKICHI</b>			
Ajashi Animechime	Ada Animechime	Abiaraeri Animechime	Urekwere Nwa Animechime
<b>ISHIBE</b>			
Ogbama Agini Owu	Ada Ogbama Agini	Abiaraeri Ogbama Agini	Urekwere Nwa Ogbama Agini
<b>UMUENEMANYA</b>			
Ajashi Nkeshia	Mgbaji Nkeshia	Abiaraeri Nkesh	Urekwere Nwa Nkeshia
<b>UMUNSOHA</b>			
Ajashi Chukwukere Umudiani	Ada Mayor	Abiaraeri Mayor	Urekwere Umudiani
<b>UMUAYATA</b>			
Ajashi Uwaoma	Ada Uwaoma	Abiaraeri Uwaoma	Urekwere Nwa Uwaoma
<b>UMUIGBO</b>			
Amadi Muru Eze	Ime Muru Eze	Abiaraeri Amadi muru Eze	Urekwere Nwa Amadi
<b>UMUOPU</b>			
Akarucha Abia	Ada Akarucha	Abiaraeri Akarucha	Urekwere Nwa Akarucha
<b>OGWUMA</b>			
Ogwuma Ukwu Nwe Eze	Ada Ibuzo Eze	Abiaraeri Ibuzo Eze	Urekwere Nwa Ibuzo Eze
<b>UMUAJOMA</b>			
Ajashi Ogene Okwunaobi	Ada Ogene Okwunobi	Abiaraeri Ogene Okwunobi	Urekwere Nwa Ogene Okwunobi
<b>UMUTOGWUMA</b>			
Ajashi Oguagba	Ada Oguagba	Abiaraeri Oguagba	Urekwere Nwa Oguagba
<b>UMUNDANIKE</b>			
Ugoro Chi Oma	Ada Ka Ibea	Abiaraeri Ugoro	Urekwere Nwa Ugoro
<b>UMUDEI</b>			
Ekwueme	Nwa Eze Adi Onini	Oso Di Eri	Urekwere Nwa Ekwueme
<b>UMUAMAM</b>			
Ororo Kwere Ezigbo	Ada Ezigbo	Abiaraeri Ezigbo	Urekwere Nwa Ezigbo
<b>ABATU</b>			
Ego Di Na Ire	Ada ego	Abiaraeri Ego	Urekwere Nwa Ego
<b>NGEGWU</b>			
Nwoke Anishi	Nwa Eze Ka Ibea	Abiaraeri Eze	Urekwere Nwa eze
<b>UMUNDURUOWOKU</b>			
		Abiaraeri	Urekwere
<b>AMAOZUA</b>			
		Abiaraeri	Urekwere
<b>UMUNNARUKWU</b>			
		Abiaraeri	Urekwere
<b>UMUORIMA</b>			
		Abiaraeri	Urekwere

Sons	Daughters	Wives	Daughters' Children
<b>OBEAGWA</b>			
		Abiaraeri	Urekwere
<b>OBUTU</b>			
Nde Nwe Aku Oyibo	Ada Nde Nwe aku Oyibo	Oriaku Oyibo	Urekwere Nde Nwe Aku Oyibo

† **Wives who have advanced in age are greeted “ODOZIAKU” instead of “Abiaraeri.”**

## **TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE**

### **First Official Visit –Iku Aka - Ibeme Nwanya**

Intending husband and/or his family representatives visit their prospective in-laws, and present

- 1 bottle Schnapps
- 1 Carton Beer (12 one-liter bottles)
- 1 Crate Mineral (Soda) (24 half-liter bottles)

to inform the lady's family of their intention.. The list of drinks and other requirements for the Main Marriage Ceremony may be released at this meeting.

### **Ibu Mmanya Nwanya - Presentation of Marriage Drinks**

On the day of the marriage, the husband will be accompanied by his family, his villagers, his mother's people, his friends and wellwishers and his Age Grade. They will all assemble at the premises of the oldest man (okei uno) of the lady's family. The bride's own Age Grade will also be there.

Marriage in Oguta is usually a night affair, starting about 6 p.m., but if the intending husband is coming from afar, the ceremony may start in the afternoon.

### **Formal Welcome**

The family of the bride formally welcomes their in-laws and presents the following:

- Kolanuts and anara (garden egg)
- 1 Bottle Local Gin
- 1 Bottle Schnapps
- 1 Jar of Palm Wine
- 1 Crate of Mineral (Soda)
- 1 Packet of Cigarettes.

### **Presentation of Marriage Drinks**

The quantity of drinks to be presented by the groom's people will depend on whether or not they are paying any bride price. The following list is usually accepted when bride price is paid:

Kolanuts and garden egg	
Local Gin	12 bottles
Schnapps	12 bottles
Beer	12 cartons
Mineral (soda)	15 crates
Malt	3 cartons
Stout	2 cartons (small)
Palm Wine	4 jars (nkwu & ngwo)
Cigarettes	2 Rolls
Tobacco	5 heads
Akawu (potash)	to match the tobacco

The drinks are formally presented by the spokesman of the groom's family.

The Okei Uno invites the bride to sit by him. He tells her that some one who wants to marry her has brought the drinks. If it is true that she has agreed to marry him, she should go and identify him and bring him to the traditional parlour (etiti obu).

### **The search**

Accompanied by her entourage, the bride, gorgeously dressed, goes in search of her man, and brings him in front of the Okei Uno. The man bows and salutes the elders.

### **The Consent**

The Okei Uno or his spokesman asks the bride whether it is her wish that they accept the drinks. If the lady says 'yes' the marriage ceremony will continue, but if she says 'no' that will be the end of the ceremony.

### **Examination of the Drinks**

On the instruction of the Okei Uno, the drinks are cross-checked and confirmed complete.

### **The Marriage Ceremony**

The presiding Okei Uno blesses and breaks the kolanut and gives one piece to the bridegroom to share with his bride. He blesses the couple and pours libation with the palm wine and gives the wine to the bridegroom who drinks some and hands it over to his bride. The bride sips the wine and gives it back to the groom to finish. The bride bends down and salutes the groom, and both of them bow to salute the Okei Uno. The bride and groom are now proclaimed husband and wife. They now go out to their Age Grades to dance and celebrate.

### **Nni Izizi Ebe**

This is food prepared by the host family for consumption by the in-laws and the villagers of the bride. It is so called – Nni Izizi Ebe – Food which is not perched on by flies – because it is prepared at night when all flies have gone to bed. The goat to be slaughtered for Nni Izizi Ebe must first be presented live to the in-laws for approval. The Nni Izizi Ebe is shared into two equal parts and each side of the marriage serves its own people.

### **The significance of Nni Izizi Ebe**

The significance of Nni izizi ebe is that whenever the wife ages and dies, the husband's family is expected to reciprocate the hospitality by cooking nni izizi ebe for the wife's family during the wakekeeping.

In recent times, the scope of entertainment is not limited to the nni izizi ebe. Every guest at the present day traditional marriage is invariably served with jellof rice, salad and a variety of other delicacies.

### **Ihu Onu Aku**

Even though the actual bride price is settled in camera between the two families. Ihu Onu Aku provides a public forum whereby the bride price is deemed to be fixed. It is an interesting dialogue that revives the ancient Oguta language and witnesses the aggressive and querulous manner in which the people settle bride price.

The following items are required for the Ihu Onu Aku ceremony, which is usually done at the house of the Village Head (Okpara) or the Family or Kindred Head:

- Kolanuts and ego oji (money for breaking the kola)
- 1 Bottle Schnapps
- 1 Bottle Local Gin
- 1 Jar Palm Wine - or cash in lieu
- 1 Packet Cigarettes
- 5 Heads of Tobacco and potash - already mentioned.
- One Pound Twelve Shillings equivalent to Three Naira Twenty Kobo for the youths.

### **Bride Price Bidding**

The bidding starts after the presiding Okpara blesses the kolanut and pours libation. They do not talk in Pound Sterling; they do not talk in Naira, nor do they talk in Dollars. Rather they talk in the ancient monetary system of the COWRIES - UGBUGBA - Ugbugba Iri meaning Three Pounds Five Shillings sterling (£3.5/-) or Six Naira Fifty Kobo (₦6.50) and Ogu Ugba Ise meaning Thirty Two Pounds Ten Shillings (£32.10/-) or Sixty Five Nairs (₦ 65.00). Random and frivolous are made and rejected almost to the point of frustration on both sides. As the negotiation comes to a stalemate, the presiding Okpara or his spokesman furiously interrupts the proceedings as if he wants to start a new argument. This is followed by a moment of silence. Suddenly, the spokesman mellows down and declares that the offer of bride price made by the in-laws, even though ridiculous, has been accepted.. There is a sigh of relief as the leader of the husband's Village immediately jumps up on his feet and bows down to salute the Okpara, thanking him and his people for giving them their beautiful daughter in marriage at a reasonable price.

### **Other Marriage Requirements**

#### **Ego Oji**

Money given to the presiding Family Head for blessing and breaking the kolanut.

#### **Ego Ozogo**

Money paid by the in-laws to redeem the empty palm wine jar. The money is payable even if the in-laws originally paid cash in lieu of the palm wine.

#### **Ego Okei Uno**

Money which the husband gives to the Okei Uno of the wife's family. Out of this money, the Okei Uno gives to the wife one piece of Akwa Ogugu that is, 'George' cloth, with which she will cover herself in her husband's house. The amount is negotiable.

#### **Ego Umuada**

Umuada, the daughters of the Village, constitute a formidable group in the traditional marriage system. They are capable of stalling the ceremony. An agreed amount will be given to them by the in-law,

and they add their own prayer and blessing for the well being of the husband and wife.

### **Aku Nne**

Money given to the mother of the bride by the bridegroom. The amount is usually negotiated. Some grooms take advantage of this opportunity to show special appreciation to their prospective mothers-in-law.

### **Iji Ugbara**

Usually 50 yams in number are given by the husband to the parents of the bride. The ceremony is eye catching, as it involves up to 50 women from the husband's village carrying these yams in procession to the in-laws' house. The iji ugbara carriers are well entertained for their task.

Soon after the marriage, the parents of the bride will distribute these yams, first to the kindred daughters, and if possible, to the other Village daughters, to honour them and show appreciation for their good wishes.

### **Idu Nwanya**

This is the climax of the marriage ceremony, a period of great emotion, a period of tears, when the presiding Family Head hands over the bride to the leader of the in-laws.

A member of the host family makes a short speech admonishing and advising the bride on how to behave in her husband's house in order to make the marriage a success. The presiding Family Head now adorns the Bride with the Akwa Ogugu and hands her over to the leader of the guest family and enjoins them to look after the bride as they would look after their own daughter. The in-laws all stand on their feet and bow down to thank the Okei Uno and the host family and villagers for giving them their beautiful daughter in marriage promising to look after and treat her well. If the lacrimal glands of the bride are active, this is the time to let the tears flow.

### **Escorting the Bride**

Two or three young men are usually appointed by the Okei Uno to escort the bride to her husband's home. The purpose of the escort is to ensure that their daughter is safely handed over to the husband's Village Head, Okpara, or Okei Uno, as the case may be.

### **Reception by the Okpara**

The procession to the Okpara's house is usually led by the Age Grades. No matter what time they arrive, the Okpara or his representative must wake up to welcome and receive the bride, who is invited to sit by him at his Ukpo. The Okpara presents kolanut, blesses the couple, and pours libation. He gives the husband and wife the blessed kolanut to eat together. This brief reception at the Okpara's residence is a confirmation of the marriage by the entire Village.

Before their exit, one of the young men who escorted the bride offers his advice and enjoins her to live well with her husband and his people. Custom makes it mandatory for the escorts to be given some money. Custom also requires that the villagers who hosted the marriage will not disperse until the escorts return and report. Their return could be as late as 5 o'clock the following morning.

The ceremony continues at the Okpara's house where the villagers make donations to the newly married wife, in cash and kind, after which the couple are led to their own home by close friends and relations, including their Age Grades.

### **The First Food**

The first food which the bride eats in her husband's house in the morning is prepared by her own mother. It is really good food – usually pounded yam with delicious fresh fish or chicken nsara soup, which has no antecedent anywhere and cannot be traded for the best fillet mignon or Chicken Alfredo.

## **First Outing**

In the afternoon, after managing to take a nap, the couple engages in their first outing as the husband proudly shows his wife to his various relations. This first outing usually accommodates a few visits to the wife's own relations.

## **FUNERALS**

### **Introduction**

By Oguta custom, the type of burial accorded to the deceased depends on the status of the person and the circumstances of his or her death. The burial of the Ezeigwe and the other royal members of his Council of Ndiche, as well as Osere, the Chief Priest of the Owu Institution, has already been discussed. This paper will focus on other categories. Burial is generally conducted in two-stage - Preliminary and Final Ceremonies.

The Preliminary Stage covers the initial ceremonies leading to the actual interment. The Final Stage involves the fulfillment of the rather expensive requirements prescribed by the various social strata within the Society. Families with good financial background choose to tackle the two burial stages one immediately after the other, except in the case of a deceased Village Head, Okpara, where a Regent must be appointed for three native years equivalent to two calendar years.

### **Burial of Nze**

First Stage

#### **Notification of the Osere**

When an Nze dies, Osere, the Chief Priest, must be informed immediately. The family of the deceased Nze pays a fine if the news spreads, or if people to cry, before the Osere is formally notified with kolanut, one bottle of local gin and some money.

#### *Mgbaru*

Early in the morning of interment, the ceremony starts with Mgbaru by Nde Nze. As the Osere and Nde Nze assemble, the family of the deceased presents the following:

Native chalk (nzu) and kolanut  
Ego Oji 2 Naira, 1 bottle each of local gin and Schnapps, 1 carton beer, 1 crate Mineral; (soda)  
2 jars Palm Wine and Ntoani money given to Ndiche and Nde Nze.

#### **Mgbata Anya Mmiri**

As different groups of sympathizers arrive and present their 'George' cloth, they are each entertained with the following:

Kolanuts  
1 bottle local gin  
1 bottle Schnapps  
1 carton beer

- 1 crate Mineral (soda)
- 1 jar palm wine
- 1 packets of Cigarettes

The Groups to be catered for are:

1. Agbanta - the deceased's group of Nde Nze
2. Age Grade
3. Ikwunne - mother's family
4. Ikwuato - grandmother's family
5. In-laws
6. Other relatives
7. Clubs, if relevant - entertained according to their rules and regulations.
8. The Villagers

In addition to the drinks listed above, (a) the Villagers, Nde Ogbe, are given two goats, one for the elders and one for the youths

(b) Ikwunne, the mother's family, will be given one Dog and one Goat according to preference. The dog is used for the IWA NKITA ANYA ceremony.

### **Iwaya Iji Naka**

This ceremony puts slices of yam in the hands of the deceased., and is the last rite given by the Villagers before interment. One goat and one yam tuber are required for this ceremony.

### **Burial**

Male adults are buried with war cap (okpu afunenupu) on their head. Eze producing villages bury with the red cap (okpu omu). After the Iwaya Iji Naka ceremony, the deceased Nze is buried.

### **Shaving of the Wife's Hair**

Soon after the burial, the hair of the deceased Nze's wife is shaved clean by the women of the Village. She stays somewhere in the parlour for 28 days, that is, izu asaa, during which period she is not allowed to move outside the premises. Friends and relatives, including members of her Age Grade, keep her company and send her food. At the end of the first izu asaa, she is free to cook for herself, but her friends come back at night to keep her company until the end of the second izu assaa when she is escorted to the Lake to have her bath. This is called IYI UKWU NA MMIRI.

### **Ewu Amara**

This is the ceremony by which a goat is slaughtered to sever connection with the dead. In addition to the drinks already mentioned, the Ewu Amara ceremony requires one goat and one paddle, two yards of 'George' cloth and Ego Ntoani – Two Naira per person.

### **Ozu Uchichi (Night Burial)**

This ceremony starts about 5 p.m. and stretches to the small hours of the following day. Ozu Uchichi must be done within five days after the burial of an Nze, otherwise the family will be subject to monetary sanctions, i.e., IKPUCHI AFARA. Persistent failure to conduct the Ozu Uchuichi may lead to the Suspension of the rights and privileges of the Owu title holders in that Village.

Ozu Uchichi involves a considerable cash outlay for the procurement of drinks, goat, seven lumps of pounded yam (oba nni) fowls and all sorts of incidental expenses.

## **FINAL BURIAL CEREMONIES**

The Ceremonies are sub-divided into two stages. The Formal Notice, and the Actual Ceremonies.

### **Ikpa Aka**

This is formal notice of intention to perform the final burial ceremony. The notice requires kolanuts, one bottle each of local gin and schnapps, one carton of beer, one crate of mineral (soda) two jars of palm wine and cigarettes. This notification will be extended to each of the numerous groups involved in the final ceremonies.

Ikpa Aka will not be necessary if the family of the deceased performs the final burial ceremonies a few days after the interment ceremony.

### **The Final Ceremony**

The Ceremony starts as early as 5 a.m. on the appointed day, with a “21 Gun Salute” – the firing of cannon, now improvised with a local device called NKPONANI. About one hour later, the daughters of the deceased, accompanied by some members of their Age Grades and friends, go round the town with their metal gong, IBOM, singing and praising their late father or mother whose final funeral ceremony they are performing. This is the traditional way of reminding the Age Grades and others concerned to come to the ceremony.

### **Final Burial Ceremony of a Man**

#### **Age Grade**

The dead man’s Age Grade assembles in the premises and starts singing and dancing. They are entertained with

- Kolanuts
- 2 bottles each of local gin and schnapps
- 2 cartons/crates each of Beer and Mineral (soda)
- Stout, Malt, Palm Wine, Cigarettes

In addition to: 1 Goat – Ewu Amara

- 1 Paddle
- 1 Ram (Ebunu Nwaada, usually provided by the first daughter).
- 2 Yards of ‘George’ cloth.

#### **Nde Oririnzere**

If the deceased person is an OririNzere, the “Opi’ royal music is played and Nde Oririnmzere will dance in the man’s house for three days. They will be entertained with drinks and given Ego Akanshi, that is, Five Naira per person. This is called money for lifting the talking spear. This is for the first day. The entertainment will be repeated on the second day.

On the third and final day, the man’s children will join them to dance to the ‘Royal Opi’. In addition to doubling the amount of drinks to be provided, the family will provide the following :

- 200 Kolanuts
- 200 Ose Oji - alligator pepper

One Ram  
Ego Akanshi - Five Naira per person.

### Burial of an Oshiji

When an Oshiji title holder dies, his fellow title holders will assemble and will be entertained as a group, under the following aspects of the Burial Ceremonies

Mgbaru  
Ikpotu Akwa  
Ikpa Aka  
Main Ceremony  
Ozu Uchichi (Night Burial).

For each of the above listed ceremonies, the family of the deceased Oshiji will provide a minimum of

2 bottles Local Gin  
2 bottles Schnapps  
2 Jars Palm Wine  
2 cartons Beer  
2 crates Mineral (Soda)  
4 packets Cigarettes  
1 carton of Stout  
1 bottle of Gordon Gin

Kolanuts, Ego Oji, Ego Ntoani ₦4 per person.

In addition to the drinks, the Ozu Uchichi ceremony requires

2 pots of porridge yam  
2 pots of Goat  
14 lumps of pounded yam  
Ibu Nni – ₦520  
Ogburu aku na Ozu – ₦50

### BURIAL OF AN OGBUAGU

The following are the requirements for the burial of a deceased Ogbuagu Title Holder under the various stages of the ceremonies:

Requirements	Igbu Assembly	Ikpa Aka	Night Burial	Day Burial	Nde Ikwu Nne	Children's Age Grade	Deceased Age Grade	Itu Uni	Umuishi	
Cock	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Left and right Hand Drinks	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Palm Wine	2 Jars	N/A	6 Jars	6 Jars	2 Jars	2 Jars	2 Jars	1 Jar	1 Jar	
Beer	1 Ctn.		2 Ctns.	2 Ctns.	1 Ctn.	3 Ctns.	2 Ctns.	1 Ctn.	3 Btls	
Mineral/Soda	1 Crate	1 Crate	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1 Crate	6 Btls	
Stout	1 Ctn.	1 Ctn.	2 Ctns	2 Ctns	N/A	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	
Cigarettes	2 Pkts.	2 Pkts	3 Pkts.	3 Pkts.	2 Pkts.	4 Pkts.	4 Pkts.	1 Pkt.	N/A	

Ntoani	₦ 2 ea.	N/A	₦2 ea.	₦ 2 ea.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Goats	N/A	N/A	2 Okiri	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pounded Yam	N/A	N/A	7 Lumps	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Gordin Gin	N/A	N/A	12 Btls.	13 Btls	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Whisky	N/A	N/A	2 Btls.	3 Btls.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Udoamani (Fish Pot)	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ram	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	1 Ram	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ina Una	N/A	N/A	N/A	₦ 52	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kolanuts	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Local Gin	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1 Btl.	2 Btls.	3 Btls.	1 Btl.	1Btl.	N/A
Schnapps	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1 Btl.	2 Btls.	3 Btls.	1 Btl.	N/A	N/A
Dog	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Malt	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2 Ctns.	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ego Oji	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	N/A
Ego Uni	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A	N/A

There is also the Uno Akwa Ceremony, which requires all sorts of food items which the deceased cherished when he was alive, for example, yam, rice, beans, fish, meat, plantain, cassava, drinks, etc.

## BURIAL OF A WOMAN

The parties involved in the final burial of a woman include the following:

- Deceased Woman's Age Grade
- Husband's Age Grade
- Deceased Woman's Villagers - Ikwunne
- Husband's Villagers
- Children's Age Grades
- The Ogbuefi Society - if the deceased was an Ogbuefi
- Clubs - if she was a member

The Ceremonies include Wake-keeping, Uno Akwa and Itu Uni.

Each of the groups listed above is entitled to a minimum of the following

- Local Gin            2 bottles
- Schnapps            2 bottles
- Beer                    2 Cartons
- Mineral (soda)    2 Crates
- Palm Wine           2 Jars
- Cigarettes           2 packets - except for women's Age Grades
- Kolanuts and garden egg.

Itu Uni requires only one each of the drinks listed above.

Uno Akwa requires a variety of the favorite food items enjoyed by the deceased when she was alive.

A Goat is slaughtered for the deceased woman's villagers (Nde Ikwunne) during the wake-keeping as a reciprocal of the NNI IZIZI EBE hospitality which the woman's family accorded the in-laws during .her traditional marriage.

All the daughters of the deceased woman is obliged to give to their respective Age Grades an additional one case of Schnapps (12 bottles). This is called IGBUWA AKPATI MMAYA.

The practice of IKPA AKA, '21 Gun Salute', that is, the firing of nkponani at 5 o'clock in the morning and the subsequent parade of the daughters of the deceased, to remind their Age Grades and others of the final burial ceremony, also applies.

### **Ife Efi**

According the Oguta custom, the bride price on a woman's head is never fully paid. Ife Efi represents the balance of such bride price not yet paid. The amount now payable is negotiated between the deceased woman's original family and her husband's family. As part of the final burial ceremonies, the original family .of the deceased woman has the obligation to give one goat each to the first son and the first daughter of the deceased as Ewu Ikwunne. It is usually out of the Ife Efi proceeds that this obligation is met by the Okei Uno.

### **Ibu Ozu**

This is the symbolical carrying of the woman's dead body back to her family. This begins with the firing of the nkponani. The villagers of the deceased woman will lead the procession to their Village, followed by the children's Age Grades in their order of seniority. The procession affords the general public the opportunity to feast their eyes and admire the efforts of the children in giving their mother a befitting burial. The children take pride in being addressed as ORISHA ODUWA.

### **Ewu Ikwunne**

After brief entertainment at the deceased woman's village, the family presents the Ewu Ikwunne to the first son and the first daughter. In recent practice, however, the family also presents a goat to each of the other children who came with their Age Grades, in order to give them a sense of belonging. All the Age Grades. now depart to the homes of their respective hosts where they are again entertained. This is the time when the daughters of the deceased woman present their 'boxes' of Schnapps to their Age Grades.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

### **Burials without Rites**

The following categories of people in Oguta are buried without rites:

- Babies/Infants
- Person who drowns in water
- Person who hangs himself or herself
- Woman who dies in pregnancy or during childbirth
- An aspiring Eze who dies during 28 days of his Ikwe Omu
- An Okpara (Village Head) or Regent (Udom) who dies before completing 28 days (seven native weeks) after his installation.

### **One of the obstacles to Final Burial Ceremonies**

Final burial ceremonies within a family are conducted in the sequence in which the deaths occur. If there is an outstanding burial ceremony of a dead parent or close relation, the family will not be allowed to perform the final burial ceremony of a close relative who has recently died. Anybody who wishes to perform the final funeral ceremonies of his mother, for example, must first of all complete all outstanding burial ceremonies within the lineage.

### **Influence of Christianity on Oguta Custom and Tradition**

On February 7, 1971, a solemn declaration was signed by the leaders of the Ikwa Nmuo Title Order in Oguta, including OSERE, the Chief Priest of Echina and Nde Nze, to the effect that Christians desirous of taking the Ikwa Nmuo title shall not be required to undergo any pagan initiation ceremony, and that “the burial ceremony of a deceased Christian holder of the Ikwa Nmuo title should be in accordance with Christian rites and usages.”

### **Uko**

#### **The Significance of the UKO Delegation**

Uko is the delegate and special representative of the person who appoints him.

The following have the right to appoint Uko on an ad hoc basis for a specific purpose:

- The Ezeigwe
- The Ezeukwu
- The Ogene
- The Iyasara
- The Ndanike
- The Ezechioha
- The Okpara
- The Okei Uno.

The Uko enjoys the honor, dignity and respect usually accorded to the person who appoints him.

Uko is saluted “UKO.”

None of the above named authorities can appoint two Ukos at the same time to perform different assignments, because the Uko goes out to do his duty with the only Ofor of the person who appoints him.

Custom does not permit the Uko to carry out two assignments consecutively without first reporting back.

The Uko must concentrate on one specific assignment given to him. He cannot deviate to do other things for himself or for the person who appoints him.

The person who appoints the Uko cannot leave his Palace or home to carry out any other assignment until the Uko returns.

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