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Igbo Leadership Through the Visual Arts: Back to the Future

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Abstract

The Igbo leadership systems had been fraught with concepts that often make the society seem egalitarian in nature. The reality seems to contain variants that could be analyzed as such. But modernity and the inherent traditions of social change have also created its variants according to the local groups that practice them. The structure of the autochthonous Igbo leadership shows a credible democratic cum republican dispensation. But most of the adherent's positions are titular. Hegemony as it suggests in the Igbo society is a relative term that needs Classification and clarification. Through Visual arts and some empirical investigation this study explains the modal changes that have affected the Igbo leadership system in Nigeria through Visual Art. Abatete, Nri, Ufuma, Npkor, Umuoji, Nnewi in Anambra state, all core Igbo towns are used as examples. The reality at leadership influence in the changes and development of the Igbo society in Nigeria and elsewhere is a relevant factor to the characterization of relationships between the Igbo's and their neighbours. Although the introduction of warrant chief's by the Colonial Masters seem to have distabilised the leadership structure of the people, they still hold strictly to traditions, but are flexible to changes that they consider viable to the development of the society. The Visual Art is given attention because it helps to define and identify the influence and changes that make Igbo leadership structure contemporary; for example in the regal regalia, greeting, breaking of kolanuts, the use of materials and the general life-style, transformations that have given new meaning to genealogy or pedigree. Lineages, kinship or kingship may no more accord adherent's rights to heraldry or recruitment of political leadership. Chiefdom ceases to be

hereditary. These and other trajectories and provocative themes are features of this study.

Key words: Igbo Leadership; Visual Art; Igbo Enweze (Igbo have no Kings)

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An artist's pencil impression of traditional Igbo meeting setting

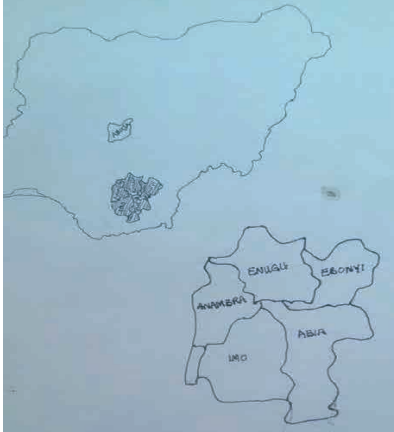
The drawing is by Uche Agonsi

INTRODUCTION

Who Are the Igbo?

The Igbo-speaking people belong to the kwa language group who claim Semitic origin. They have been identified as people living in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. In the map of Nigeria, the Igbo is situated under the right flank of the river Niger confluence. They are aligned with neighbours some of who have Igbo in their dialect. They are bounded by Kogi and Benue in the North, Edo and Delta in the west, Bayelsa, Rivers and Akwa Ibom in the south-south and Cross River in the

East, bordering, in-between the banks of the River Niger flowing into the Atlantic ocean through the delta area in Rivers State. For one reason or the other, most of these groups of people claim not to be Igbo although there may be Igbo dialect in their vernacular. The map as featured by Onuora .O. Enekwe (1987) in his book “Igbo Masks” is not a current representation of the Igbo as he wrote in the “Igbo Masks” when Eastern Region was regarded as Igbo. He marked out the Igbo-speaking people as living mainly in South- East and South-South Nigeria, in an area of about 15,800 square miles. In the new map of Nigeria, the five states marked out are the Igbo.



**Former Eastern Region
Map showing the Igbo of Nigeria in West Africa**

Origin, Significance and Diffusion

There are many postulations about the origin of the Igbo. Some emphasize that the Igbo tribe came from the land of Israel; some say it is autochthonous; some opined that they came from around the River Benue. There are many other examples suggested by scholars about the origin of the Igbo to their present location across the Niger to the southern-eastern Nigeria. An important point to note is that there was nothing like the name Nigeria before this time of origin. Nigeria was created by the colonial masters. It was carved out by joining many ethnic groups together. These ethnic groups or tribes were the share of the British colony after the partitioning of Africa among her different colonial masters. Nevertheless, the Igbo were found in its present location when the colonial master came. The Obi of Onitsha, Ofala Okagbue, stated thus about the relationship of the Igbo with Israel:

By the power of the covenant between God and Israel, Eri travelled from Egypt, arrived at the confluence of River Niger, Manu, and Anambra now known as Ezuna Omambala, lived

there as alien among the people he met, got assimilated and became their Samuel, King, high priest, judge etc. His tribe was Gad, his language Hebrew....

The Aro and Nri are two Igbo descent stories. These two words later became the identities of the Igbo culture. The Aro people are linked with the Jews or people of the middle East. The Nri are also linked to the same descent. The Igbo democratic-like society can be traced to the systematic lifestyle of the Aro or Nri where there was no autonomous king or Ruler. What they have were leaders, especially spiritual leaders. The Aro kingdom were led by village heads (through Okpara family system) who advice the Eze Aro, usually, a spiritual leader (chief Priest). In the history of Igbo culture, there was never a form of monarchy or oligarchy as we have in such places like Benin kingdom, Yoruba (oduduwa kingdom), Hausa-Fulani (Caliphate) or elsewhere till the time of this writing. Edmund (Alias Mkpuruonyekuru), an 89 years old man from Umuagu-Ufuma in Orumba-North Local Government Area of Anambra State confirmed that they never had a Ruler. He stated thus;

We do not cap anybody. But there are ceremonies where old people came to answer names as title. We never had a ruler. But now a group of elders above 80 yrs are called to be capped because they said that young people do not respect elders anymore. The Igwe title is new in ufuma. Also Ufuma people do not have ozo system till today. If there is ,it is a recent event , a new development introduced to Ufuma people.(Edmund, 2018).

In Chinua Achebe’s novel, Arrow of god”, Igbo elders are addressed thus, “Leaders of Umuaro....” This address show that all the elders are leaders. That is to say ,every man is a leader of his house. When the white man wanted to give Ezulu the title of a (Chief) King so that he will be overseeing the people of Umuaro and beyond he rejected the offer because it is an abomination to the tradition.(Chinua Achebe,Arrow of god,206,209).

According to Edmund, the Ufuma people do not have “Nze na Ozo” or “Igwe” titles. These titles came with the trend of time from around the Igbo neighbours. Ofala festival is foreign to Ufuma people. But Ufuma people have begun to celebrate Ofala just like Onitsha people where it was borrowed. The first Igwe Ofala in Ufuma took place in 2016 by Igwe Uchime.



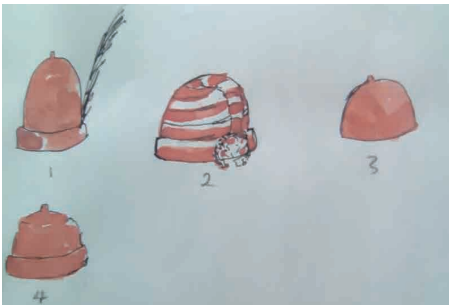
Igwe Ufuma in Anambra State on his Ofala festival in 2016

The Capping Systems

The Capping system is one of the indicators of leadership and rank in Igbo society. Also there are other images or items that identify rank or social status. While some show affluence others are mere materials that represent insignia or royalty; for example, the yellow palm frond, animal horn, elephant tusk, red or white piece of cloth, ankle, neck, or elbow beads. Nevertheless so much of these have changed in recent times to a more synthetic and sophisticated materials. The wrist bead, hand fan or special dressing can suffice. Usually the wrapper was the ideal waste tie and singlet for the top otherwise lion-head patterned sleeveless, short or long sleeve top. it signifies the official position and respect for the bearer.



An elders cap but can be worn by young men. It is a normal outing cap and can be worn during war or special occasions.



Ndi Nze (king makers)



Normal Ozo cap. An ogbuefi can wear Ozo cap or general one. Today people are free to wear they like. But to show real omenana tradition customs are obeyed.

*Horse whip ,elephant tusk, eagles feather, animals skull especially monkey skull and lions teeth and other significant materials that speak to the peoles values can be identified as objects of regal glorification.

The Concept of Igbo “Enweze.”

This concept tend to signify the identity and characteristics of a typical Igbo. “Igbo enweze” simply means that Igbos Have no kings. It is often misunderstood by many individuals. Igbo’s have leaders not rulers or kings. Chinua Achebe in his “Arrow of gods,” pointed this out when he was explaining the position of Ezeulu the chief priest of Umuaro.(Achebe,C.,Arrow of God,1964). Thus the leadership systems in the Igbo society is typical of the Samuel kind of leadership in the land of Israel, of the Bible. As Okwenna stressed further:

...Igbo Enwe Eze simply suggests that executive powers resided in a council, and not on one single person (Eze), not the absence of Eze. It also meant that the Igbo’s were, and still are, culturally and traditional republican, not paying allegiance to a single individual but to a collective or representative council where no one held a veto. (Andy Okwenna, 2002).

The Igbo is one of the three major tribes that make up the country today called Nigeria in West Africa. Its origin has been attributed to a lot of links which in itself is controversial. There are many suggestions to Igbo origin. Some point Igbo origin to hermetic instance, and the others directly to Egypt. The point of reference is strongly tied to tradition: world view, cosmogony or cosmology. For example, some claim that Igbo’s have a Jewish link: “entire Igboland and its tradition have close similarities to the Levitical Code of the Jews.” (Mao Law Mefor,2002). Nevertheless, this paper is concerned with the traditions that placed the Igbo tribe in the context of their current life style: Origin, influences and practices prevalent in the leadership systems.

Generally, the Igbo are found between the Niger River and the Benue confluence. It is bounded by the Igala and Idoma in the North, the Edo in the West, Calabar in the East and Port Harcourt in the South (Onuora Ossie Anekwe, 1987).The Igbo society was presumed to be an egalitarian society. This system was possible because of their cultural philosophy (Kenneth Ubani, 1994).They practice ascefalous system which is non-centralized governance where major political setting is family headship which is the “Okpara” that possesses the Ofo of the family.

Igbo origin has been traced to Eri.Eri is generally regarded as the spiritual head of the people called the Igbo(this word Eri is often mentioned in the Bible. It may be one of the reasons why the people are associated with the Jewish tribe despite the fact that similarity does not mean derivation).“Eri through Nri the chief priest introduced all shades of rituals aimed at upholding human sanctity, introduced circumcision as in the Jewish culture and urged the rest of the Igbo’s to accept both the albinos

and twins as normal children”.(Mefor, 2002).Without the approval of Eri, submissions, nominations or important representations may not be possible in the entire Igbo hegemony.

The Igbo are known to be descendants of Eri (Situating around Nsukka Questa) and Anambra River). However Nri later became the seat of spiritual authority (Eze Nri) perhaps because he was the son of Eri (Genesis 46:21). Agukwu Nri, and Oraeri are known as the brothers. Consequently, Umuleri, Aguleri, Awka and Igbookuwu are seen as descendant and subjects to Eze Nri hegemony. It is from this environ that the Igbo tribe are known to have spread from the north East or West down to the South (see Map).Mefor Quotes Idigo,(2001):Nri as a name is given to the second son of Eri who lived in Agu-ukwu to give way to the elder brother Agulu to inherit Eri’s immediate habitat. Agulu founded Aguleri where Eri’s ancestral home (Obu-Ga,) and shrine (Eri Aka) are to date.Mefor further stated that:

...the implication of this is that since Nri himself descended from Eri and not his only son, the Igbo if indeed they descended from a common stock traceable to the Nri kingdom couldn’t have descended from Nri but Eri. Other direct Children of Eri apart from Agulu (the eldest) and Nri (the chief priest) are said to be Onugu (Igbariam), Nteje, Nusgbe, Amanuke and a daughter called Adamgbo who begot Umuleri.

Arochukwu(Aro’di;chukwu means God, Genesis 46:17), another Igbo unit, claim origin outside Igboland. They are “said to be connected with the Jews and the people of the Middle East (Nduka Nwosu, The Guaridan, 2000). Eze Aro in Arochukwu is the custodian of the seat of Igbo democracy. There are other scholars who believed in the autochthonous nature of Igbo origin. Ijeoma made reference to this in the book ‘Igboland: A Historical Perspective’ suggesting homeland origin of the Igbo around the Northern plateau: Nri, Awka, Orlu/Owerri and parts of Okigwe. Whatever origin, the Igbo are a distinct tribe that have a regular culture like any other tribe in Nigeria.In Nduka Nwosu’s essay “Eri traveled from Egypt, arrived at the confluence of the River Niger, Mann, and Anambra now known as Ezuna Omambala; lived there as alien among the people he met, got assimilated and became”, the peoples high priest, judge etc.

The Influence of Colonial Masters

The essential cultures include the priest king or divine coronation related to the heliolithic sun cult worship. Also a reflection of the resurrection and death is prominent in the culture before a coronation of the Eze Nri is complete. However this resurrection concept caused a problem that almost condemned the Nri hegemony in 1910. At this period, the Christian European mission,“Confronted Eze Nri Obalike who with his subjects saw nothing new in the death and resurrection story of Jesus Christ. According to Eze Nri, ‘A decree was promulgated against

Eze Nri,Obalike who was summoned to Awka and was charged of Blasphemy’. He was asked to renounce all the Igbo taboos regulating the Igbo society; for example, that he was a spirit. When he emerged at Awka district, Igbo people there gathering fled. They were persuaded to come back with the reason that the “The myth surrounding the institution had been broken when they were renounced by Obalike “. Eze Nri stated that this was the beginning of the fall of the real Nri hegemony. Nevertheless, the colonial administration overlooked Eze Nri (king of Nri) and reduced their spiritual control over the people. Subsequent governments adopted the same method. They rather superimposed “an out of Igbo Character Chieftaincy institution in Igboland. Eze Nri reiterates “Except by the popularization of Ofala as a royal festival we can all see that this manipulation created no impact in Igbo cultural leadership but making the Igbo look like upstarts culturally before other major ethnic group in Nigeria,” thus the slogan “Igbo Enwe Eze”. Edmund also confirmed that Ufuma Ofala festival is borrowed in this twenty-first century from Onitsha people. He said that Ufuma had no leaders. The Igwe seat of the Ufuma political society is a recent event. According to Edmund, the reason is that they want to be like others.

Few examples that show the similarities with Semitic or hermitic peoples of the Middle East attest to this fact.



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3

Plate1, shows a tomb statue of Seneb the dwarf and his family, from about 2300 BC.Seneb and his wife ,Senetites, had two children—a boy and a girl. The boy is the darker skinned of the two children with a lock of hair on the side of his head, a reflection of the Igbo regular white and red cap.Some similarities abound between the Igbo cap style head or hair dress and the Egyptian head or hair style types. For example, a closer look at the male and female head in the sculpture in Plate (1), the reflection of the Igbo cap types as examples show is obvious. The normal Igbo cap that come in red and white with a round tuft at the end which flows down from the end of the cap on the head to the right shoulder is an example .By the female sculpture hair-dress, the female Igbo cap shape is worn by Igbo Lolo for titled women even today.

This image of pharaoh made of stone attached to the building shows the cap which reflects the Nze na Ozo at the upper part of the head.

The circular band worn across the head wig is also a reflection of what Igbo young ladies or musicians wear during dancing. As Shutter (1998) wrote, this wig ornament and crown belonged to princess Sit-Hathor Yunet. The wig is reconstructed.

Igbo Enweze

The issue of Igbo enwe eze (Igbo's don't have kings) can be understood in this light: Igbo leadership since the Eri civilization was essentially democratic. But this does not mean that the Igbo's did not, even in the democratic village republic arrangement, have central heads. There is evidence supporting the position that Ezeship was part of Igbo culture and their political organization and social transactions. Then the Eze was the number one citizen of each autochthonous community and presided over the community- Councils, which were mainly constituted by titled men (elders), Chief Priests and some others.The Eri/Nri civilization introduced the Nze Na Ozo society as the political class. The head of the Nze Na Ozo society invariably became the most important man in each community, the defacto Eze. He had rights and privileges-setting him aside as the first among equals; such as the right to say the grace (during breaking of kolanut), being

the only one with his cap on in a gathering and so on. In Umuoji, for example, he was called Eze Idu, while in Abatele and Nkpor he was called simply Eze. He reigned but did not rule, which made the Igbo society essentially democratic and republican.

This research therefore disagrees with the prevailing notion of Igbo Enwe Eze (Igbos do not have a king); the concept put in the right perspective, simply means that the Igbo monarch was paid no allegiance by his subjects and not that there were none at all. It also means that the autonomous communities had no single head (Eze,) that may be called Eze Igbo, but each retained its independence within its own confines. So like all human societies each autonomous Igbo community had a head, that he did not enjoy executive powers like his counterparts in other non-Igbo communities is quite a different issue altogether (Andy Okwenna, 2002).

Mefor like some others also disagree with the slogan often used against the Igbo as those who do not have kingship system- "Igbo Enwe Eze" (Igbos don't have kings.The issue of "Igbo Enwe Eze is not in the sense of its spirituality but in its administrative system. Igbo's have the title Eze (King) but in this contest, the Eze is one of the common titles that portray a head over a group of people. The control of this head is relative. It is more ceremonial than defined in terms of authority of the lives and property of the people. He presides over meetings and cases as a chairperson rather than as a governor or president who may be immune by certain arms of the law. Typically, the Igbo's have leaders, and not governors. Modern description may fall to the term **Chiefs**.

This understanding takes us to the archeological findings at Igbo-Ukwu the burial chambers of Igbo-Jonah, Richard and Isaiah (see map). The Igbo Ukwu art objects speaks for itself. Igbo Ukwu finds include terracotta pots, cast and forged metal objects, beadwork and a fragment of textile (Cornelius O. Adepegba, 1995). A study of these materials goes a long way to define the true cultural practice of the Igbo's and of course the leadership style of the people. Adepegba goes further to state that "of ritual significance are an alter stand with appliqué images of male and female human figures, three snail shells, each with different decoration, leopard's skin, conical and cylindrical bells, all cast in bronze. The realism with which some of these objects are done reminds one of the Rococo or Baroque art. Reflections of Igbo culture in Igbo-Ukwu art dates to about the 9th century A.D.

Suggestions of Igbo Hegemony Through Igboukwu Art

- Igbo women are known for their house and body painting (Uli design/motif -- these are found in Igbo-Ukwu art. Also rank or the female status, or position of leadership can be seen in her Aka (hand or bead of elephant tusk) ----- her waist, neck and ankle.

- Facial scarification. This is not a tribal mark per say but a titular mark. It is called Ichi mark

- Awka is one of the centers of the modern traditional metal smith center. They produce domestic tools and regal insignia or palace materials. The production of Igboukwu metal implements can be traced to Awka.

- A typical bell cylindrical in form, found in the burial chamber is significant of that carried by medicine men to “herald the approach of Eze Nri”.

- In Igboland, status is linked to hierarchical order; for example, in the taking of Eze, Ozo, Nze or Igwe titles. These can be seen in Igbo-Ukwu materials.

The Igbo-Ukwu finds shows that titled men are buried with grave goods commensurate with their earthly position. Adepegba quotes Thurstan Shaw: ‘It is likely that the copper, beads and bronze objects found in Igbo Richard belonged to a chiefly burial, since human bones were also found among them. The disposition of the bronze bowls, pendants, beads and bronze shells in Igbo Isaiah suggests a store of sacred vessels and regalia, abandoned for some unknown reason (Thurstan Shaw, 1977).

Using Ufuma in Anambra State as an example, the making of law traditionally is dependent on the will and wish of the people. No law is binding on the people. It can be revoked at any time. Any member of the society is free to reject an action by a law. This is why there is the Osu or outcast system. Where a member of the community runs to a deity for protection for whatever reason. Automatically, that individual and the family becomes custodians of the deity, sacrosanct, untouchable and excommunicated from the society. There are no marriage relationship between an Osu or Ohu (slave) and the free born. But they exist peacefully in the same society. There is no room for any informal interaction to take place between an Osu or free born. Some families still keep to this tradition till today whether they are Christians or not. In Ufuma, the making of law is by every member of the society. They have to accept or chose a principle with an oath of allegiance but any day or time the law becomes uncomfortable they will also jointly revoke it. Anything that brings progress, development, especially, physical growth is welcomed by the Igbo society be it alien or from the grass root. This is why the Igbo’s hardly resist change or reject cultural interaction of peculiar races that adds to the progress of the entire community.. They are known as wayfarers who sojourn into other lands to bring back wealth. This is why today the population of Igbo’s is seen in every nook and cranny of the states of the country. They are far much more than the population of other tribes seen in Igboland. They believe that much wealth could be acquired outside than from within. *Aku ruo uuo oko ebe osi*. Also there is a saying that any place where there is no Igbo man is a bad place.

Politicizing Igbo Culture

It was easy for the Igbo tribe to embrace western civilization although with frictions here or there. This does not mean that Igbo culture is dwindling instead they use materials they harness from outside to embellish their homes. This is also why wealth is often highly regarded and admired by the people. Titles can be bought. Influences of wealth are often prevalent and this made it possible for the people to grow according to the time. They do not want to be left behind. They may not want the federal government to do anything for them because the system can not satisfy their want. Thus many Igbo of today sojourn abroad individually. Many are in business and barely completed their form six. Thus fewer Igbo men go to school these days than women. A majority of the educated are women and this might bring a leadership handover to the women in future should the government administration go by the educated.

In a family setting the father is the head of the house that presides and provides for the whole family. He will be looked at as an infidel if he cannot take care of his family. At the age of eighteen a boy is adjudged a man and a girl a woman. Chinua Achebe’s “Things Fall Apart,” illustrates this example. At this stage the children must have been tutored in the socialization process recognizing the extended family system, *dos* and *don’ts*. They can represent the family anywhere. To be a weakling is unacceptable in Igbo society. To show signs of weakness may attract the wrath of the family, therefore every young man struggles to prove his mettle, to show that he can achieve in order to receive a part on the back by the parents, elders and the society. He or she must be morally upright and do not bring reproach to the parents and the community. His prowess attracts the decision of the parents or the society for nomination for a title like *Igwe*, *Ozo*, *Eze* or *Nze*. This is a sign of responsibility; not only for the immediate or extended family but for the society at large. Those values that make him an Igbo man must be distinct. He should be named with children and a family that he cared for. Often marrying many wives and having many buildings and establishments is a good sign of a man that has arrived in Igboland. Every parent would want such a man to be their in-law.

However, there have been many noticeable changes in the pattern of Igbo hegemony. The royal regalia is a good indicator of this change.

The Art of Chieftaincy costume: this have changed from time to time. They are listed below with illustration of the past and the present. The design can be determined by the choice of the bearer. Heavy regalia have been made light. Once *Ezeship* (spiritual head) was hereditary. This was terminated by the introduction of warrant chief system which liberalized it and made it rotational.

Problems Created By the Colonial Master

The divide and rule formulae created dichotomy rather than harmony. It created strife amongst the people. They

usurped power and brought about the super imposition of authority. They forced leadership on the people. This was unacceptable and they resisted it. Worst of all was the civil war. Its consequences seems to have been neglected. However this brought about self effort to develop the land.

REGALIA (SEE DRAWINGS)

Modernity has brought about sudden changes that harness the colourful nature of Igbo chieftaincy regalia. Apart from basic insignia like “Aka” worn on the left or right wrist or ankles, the round hand fan, crown or cap and beaded neck, any decoration that can enhance a person’s status is welcome whether it is a design from other tribes or not. Designs are dictated depending on the choice of the wearer or people. The most creative is adjudged the best. The designs have been changing over the years from heavy to light appearances.

Nze, Ozo, title holders wear large long or half-sleeve top, braided and beaded chest, collarless round turtle neck. The cloth material is often designed with paints or woven lion or lioness heads, (Isi Agu), repeated patterns throughout the cloth. Some would wear trouser length or cloth as the waist covering. The body adornment goes with ‘Aka’ usually worn at the wrist and ankle region. While some beaded neck are light, some are heavy. The cap is usually red. The Nze cap is taller than Ozo cap. They also put a plume at the cap. The plume is either the feather of a fowl or eagle. It also goes with tick and heavy hand fan designed and decorated as such. Their titles are written or carved at the surface of the hand fan. Their vehicle plate numbers are designed thus to be recognized. They Preside over community land matters and represent the community before government.

Large sums of money is reserved for Ozo coronation. An Ozo title holder is respected because it is assumed that the person is rich. A father can request for this title to be bestowed on the son or vice versa. The society following a man’s prowess, success and usefulness to the society or community development, may request for such a man to be crowned or titles as one of their chief.

The female hair tie is mostly modern although early before the coming of the western world they tie pieces of hides and skin, made from animal products. Generally the Igbo women make hair-do where they plait build the hair and use attachments of all sorts to beautify the hair especially on occasions or festive periods. Modern hair scarf is borne out of influences from around the world. The Christian type can be deduced from the Catholics. The gorgeous over florid ornamentation of hair scarf shows a culture of art in costume.

IGBO WOMEN LEADERSHIP

Women Title Holders

In Igboland women are respected as the architects of a prosperous society or the life-wire of the sons and

daughters of the land. For this reason whether they are pro-creative or not their role is non-negotiable in the life of men. Thus, a man is not regarded as a man until he is married. However, there are certain titles that are prerogatives of women. Such titles are Lolo or Inyom or Igba Odu as of Onitsha people. A woman whose husband is a title holder automatically becomes a title holder. She shares this responsibility with the husband.

Women title holders are aspects of women traditional leaders. In various parts of Igboland women receive, acquire or are crowned with such titles as “Lolo (Imo State) Inyom, Igba Odu (Onitsha), Ibu Okpiri (Abatete), Nwa-okpu (or Nwa-ada)”. Nwa okpu or Umu-okpu is a form of initiation into the daughters (Ada) of the extended family. “Inyom is the initiation into the association of all married women in the family, (Umu Nna---kinsmen). They all take the form of initiation. (Umu or Nwa means children). When they are classified as titled or initiated members, their activities in the society or community takes the form of leadership. They preside over meetings, land matters, representatives of government at the customary level, cases involving women; agency for interjecting the culture, enforcing laws especially marital laws, spokes persons of the people, counselors, ambassadors of the land; those that can represent the community in a delegation. Ndulue (1995) stated that:

A married woman in a family who is not initiated into the Association is regarded as a concubine by her colleagues and she would not participate in any function involving the inyom.

The husband makes sure that the first thing he does is to initiate the wife into the Association. In modern times the parents of the husband takes that responsibility. Kinship in Igboland has many segments. It is also a gregarious society. It sees marriage as bringing two kindred’s together.

Womanhood then is a serious emblem, because it is an important arm that sees to the development of the society. The society is not seen as a male dominated society traditionally. It may be male oriented but not male dominated. The matrilineal nature of the society gives room for the superior nature of women to be made manifest. For example, masking is all male affair, but a woman may be adjudged to have male status considering her wealth, responsibility or age. In as much as a male child is necessary, a girl child is also welcomed as divine blessing. Often elaborate ceremonies are conducted. The child enjoys maidenhood and prepare for motherhood and “even death and burials” are consecrated as a symbol of honour to both families (Chike C. Aniako). A girl child is often called ‘oriaku’ because the people believe that a girl easily brings wealth to the family through the husband. It is a thing of joy when a young girl marries a young rich man.

Any woman in Igboland who gives birth up to ten children is honoured with “ehi ukwu”. The ‘Cow of

the waist'. Ukwu means waist. This is honouring the woman's waist with which the children were born. Then, unlike, these days, having many children, boys and girls, is a symbol of blessing and a pride to the society. It is unfashionable for a woman to have many children in the Igbo land of today. Women are seen as "Obiageli", or "Oliaku", those who have come to enjoy wealth.

When any animal is killed, the parts are usually shared amongst the children, and the parents (husband and wife). The wife has the prerogative of the waist. For example (the waist of the fowl); the man and his committee owns the neck and intestine; legs and other parts are owned by the children. It is anathema or sacrilege for any non-deserving individual especially the child or any other male to eat the woman's part unless authorized by the woman. The man eats the rear of the fowl called "Eke" okuko.

Apart from other cultural issues that intimidate the modern Igbo woman like widowhood, genital mutilation, outcast, slavery, and initiation into the Muo cult, her personality and status are superior to an average male individuality. Although there are women battering, wherever it exists, either the man or the woman is regarded as bad. A bad woman according to tradition is a deviant or a disgrace to the family. Such women may be lazy, promiscuous, thief, diabolic or disrespectful. Where women battering are a sign of male chauvinism is treated with heavy disapproval. Such men are fined, beaten by the in-laws or excommunicated by the society. There is always a forum for the woman to air her view or defend herself. Where she is found guilty she is contended. It is not fashionable to have spouse conflict. Discouragement in women's battering seems to be a modern trend especially where couples are living outside the community environment: cities and the like.

All a man strives for is how to please his wife and make his family happy. Nevertheless, there are other forms of womanhood that make Igbo women unique amongst other tribes: marriage between a woman and a woman, keeping a woman in the family to produce a male child before being allowed to marry. "Irachi Nwanyi" or Ikuchi Nwanyi is usually prevalent when the husband or a wife dies. The brother or relation of the wife usually takes over the responsibility. This is mandatory or if the woman refuses, she will go back to her parents. Recently, these conditions are no more effective.

Social status

The Igbo have great regard for their womenfolk. She is not given her full social recognition until she is married and proves to have children and her own family. Marriage seems to protect Igbo women. They form a social group that can be mobilized at the grass root. Of course, they form co-operatives of traders, farmers, artists and guilds of many sorts. It was possible for Aba women riot to take place in 1929, because of the status of women in Igboland. They protested naked in the market against payment of

tax. The government was forced to consider their agitation as tax free citizens of the country. A woman does not climb palm wine tree. They domesticate things and keep the home. According to Ndulue (1995) "no traditional Igbo woman stays outside the matrimonial home after cocks have gone to roost." That is one of the ethics of Igbo culture.

SOCIAL TITLES OR ENGAGEMENT

The Judicial Title: "Agamaga" is the highest traditional judicial title that "Nwa-Adah" (the association of married first daughters) can take. An Agamaga is the spokes person of Umu-Ada. They are traditionalists and always objects to the dilution of culture which often bring "conflict with modern ideas". Anybody aggrieved by their judgment can appeal to the Ozo title holders where a joint session is called for final judgment.

A well behaved woman is often given her full right and respect in her home and outside her home. The woman does not have divorce in her dictionary of marriage in Igboland. She is initiated into all forms of "institutionalized traditional or social societies that befit her status in life", by her husband e.g. 'Agba-ekwe' and 'inyorn.' 'Agba-ekwe' is like an Ozo title. The two can greet in a like tradition of shaking hands. An unmarried woman or man cannot be initiated into any of these titles. the female insignia is carved with soft wood, shaped like fish and about three feet long which they carry just like their male counterpart that carry metal staff (Ngwu-Oghiligha). Other women carry horse whip.

"Inyom": This is one of the highest social titles held by women. It is more of a social status than spiritual but in most Igbo societies they play the role of mother of masquerades "Nne Muo".

Members are distinguished in any gathering by their very rich and expensive traditional attire adorned with high ivory rings called Odu on both hands and or on both legs. They walk in measured steps. Of course their outing is very occasional-once in a long while to mark big traditional ceremonial occasions like Ofala Festivals (Ndulue, 1995).

SUMMARY

Some instances in the Igbo leadership systems shows transcending practices that leave certain "forms" as basic tendencies while some of the contextual denotations are discarded. This seems to suggest that no matter the rate of social change inherent in the prevalent situation, those items that make the Igbo distinct are inevitably present as "formal pressures" than the spirituality which was a major content of Igbo traditional values.

Democracy could be seen in the Igbo hegemony in various aspects. The shortcoming of the Greek civilization as it affects democracy is in the area of slavery and the status of woman. Here the Igbo leadership system which

could be assessed as egalitarian seems to have perfected democracy, raising the status of the woman and slave or the outcast. Thus the so called Osu or Outcast can take on a title or become the leader of a group of people presently in the Igbo society. As we continue to reiterate that while the people discarded most of the spiritual content the forms continue to be demystified and made an open secret with greater understanding of the people and their leaders. In such cases as it were, any rule, law or leader that does not relate or conform to the progress of the entire society, whether it be secular or religious, is reviewed and impeached. This is the whole summary of the people that is tied strongly to the Nri genealogy of the Igbo god head or spiritual leader. All laws, material, systems are liable to change depending on the context, need and significance. No leader is binding on the people as long as it is under the Igbo hegemony. Every individual no matter the class or status has freedom of expression. It was never an autocratic or imperial government.

An Igbo traditional leader gets a confirmed coronation by the Nri spiritual head the seat of Igbo traditional authority. Any Igbo leader that is not confirmed by this authority is not regarded as the leader of the people. The people may (will) choose their leader but can only be confirmed by the Nri head or the imposed or usurper will not be honoured or allowed to function but only in his house.

- Initiation rites may be performed in the absence of the adherents; Chieftaincy title; the Nze, Ozo and the Igwes can live elsewhere yet remain leaders of their cultural group. Today, professors, doctors, returnees hook on to traditional titles.

- The issue of the regal lineage has been discarded. Anybody can retain any title and take decision for the entire community provided he has the reasons to back his influence which is usually economic and political in nature unlike the usual consideration of some spiritually inclined individual that was a popular theme in the past. The Igbo man does not worry much about how a man makes his money provided he takes care of his people or brings about development to the community. The elders may go to plead with a deserving individual to be given such titles.

- Marriages can be conducted any other day than the weekends. Days are no more made special or sacred as against any ceremony.

Christians can also take these traditional titles

Masquerades are seen as modern entertainment

- Nominations are made based on Economic grounds than spiritual growth or birth.

- In most cases such titles are ceremonial and can be bestowed on any deserving individual.

- Regalia are worn according to choice of design. Often untitled people could wear titled men's attire without molestation. There are self made titled men today. They answer titled names without portfolio or ceremony.

The Igbo chief wear the attire of any tribe today as his regalia or a mixture of other cultural designs— example English suite.

- It is natural that often those that are rejected later become the corner stone of the society like Ohu, Osu and the less privileged who were once maltreated, sold into slavery, excommunicated. As nature would have it, they were the first to embrace western education and later became leaders of the land in a modern society. The reason is that they were chosen as slaves to serve the white man. Bishop Samuel Ajai Crowther is a typical example. The story of Aguino is usually linked or related to the Igbo of old who were sold into slavery.

- Coronation can now be made in the absence of the individual unlike in the ancient times. (An Igbo leader of today can live elsewhere yet maintain leadership).

- Learned men for example, professors, academic doctors or states men can now be made spiritual heads unlike before when learned men see traditional men as diabolic people and transition as archaic. They have reformed and developed Igbo leadership to a more modern example. However, the presence of such elites has brought about a lot of positive changes in terms of development. An area that may not favour the healthy growth of the society has been discarded for positive ones.

Igbo leadership generally is only subject to a spiritual leader the Nri but the general spiritual leader has no power to impose any thing on anybody or the people to determine their leadership but can intervene in matters of Jurisprudence systematically through his spiritual agency. Even this cannot override the decision of the people or intimidate their proposal. As confirmed in the text, the Igbo hegemony however is fraught with dynamic transformation with the prospects that a richer and less complex society will be a legacy for the future society.





ILLUSTRATIONS AND PICTURES



NOTES

Some Levitical words that have the same meaning in Igbo word

Ada(Adah)—means daughter

Ana(Anah) means earth

Ehi-means cow (Genesis 46:21)

Eri, Aro'di (These are the sons of God—Genesis 46:17)

Eze (Ezer)—means King in Igbo

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PHOTO CREDITS

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Drawing of Igbo Ukwu bronze head showing Ichi marks (face scarification) is a mark of rank.

