

BOOK REVIEW
Book Title: Eze Mmuo

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Preliminary Observation

The book title is Eze Mmuo. It is a paperback print and self-published. It was published on 70 grammage paper, an indication of taste, quality and intent for long lasting usage. The illustration on the front cover page resonates the book title. It depicts a model of Eze Mmuo with white chalk on his left eye, an indication of visionary powers of Eze Mmuo and his function to foresee and forewarn his people of the future. The mark further presents Eze mmuo as partly human and partly spirit. The book is given a mystic colour to evoke the mystical qualities of Eze Mmuo.

What problem did this book set out to address?

The book raises a socio-political problem of Igboland about title of Eze Mmuo? There has been role confusion between Eze Mmuo, Dibia Afa, Dibia Aja, and Dibia Ogwu, a confusion which has led to discrediting the roles of Eze Mmuo and Dibia among Ndigbo (Ndi gboo). The book focuses on the questions: Who are Igbo people? Where are they found in Nigeria? What is the place of religion among Igbo people? Who is Eze Mmuo? What are his functions, regalia, qualities, and symbol of authority? Other related problems are the question of increase of crime rate in shrines and the desecration of shrines by police and army in order to address human right abuses and crimes. In this last problem, the ethico-moral dimension of Eze Mmuo demands that the true qualities of Eze Mmuo be exposed in order to rescue what is left of Igbo traditional religion and culture from moral depravity. We must have read of the raiding of Okija Shrine in 2008 and arrest of Eze Mmuo following discovery of dead bodies used for rituals. On the 18th of August, 2022, Edo State Police command discovered a ritual shrine in Benin with 20 mummified bodies and arrested three men as culprits. The Guardian Newspaper on 17th July, 2017 reported a number of

kidnapped victims who were housed in a shrine until police attacked to release them etc. these scenario is to portray the social and moral decadence perpetrated by the misuse of powers of the Eze Mmuo and shrine.

How did the author go about addressing these problems?

The author first situates his discussion and gives it a background through establishing the geopolitical area known as Igboland. The question concerning Igboland and the Igbo question have come to the forefront of ideological debates within and beyond Nigeria. The questions of land, people and freedom of Igbo people has become one of the most frequently asked questions and questions of great concern for the Igbo people and lovers of freedom.

The author leading his readers through the original map of Nigeria locates Igboland in what is known as the Bite of Biafra. And this area shows that Igboland covers the areas from Bonny to Idoma and Igala. It must be noted that political creation of state in Nigeria ignored cultural disparity and lumped some Igbo people into Delta state, Kogi state and Benue state. Thus, the author states that Igbo people are found in *Anioma people of Aniocha, North and South, Ndokwa East and West, Ika North, East and South, and Oshimili North and South local government areas of Delta State and Ikwere people, Oyibo, Obio-Akpo, Port Harcourt, Etche, Omuma, and Enohua local government areas of River State. The Igbo people have common boundary with Igala and Idoma on the North, the Ijaw and Ogoni on the South, the Yakp and Ibibio on the Eastern boundary, and Bini and Warri on the West.* This geo-political excursus dislodges some negative narratives about Igboland, people and freedom. Igboland is not a dot nation. Igboland is not landlocked. Igboland is home to a people with well defined identity, social socio-political system, a cultural bloc and a well-defined traditional religion around which their world ideology, belief system, and life revolve. Facts speak. Igboland and people have been in existence since 300 B.C. A cultural bloc is determined not by its geographical space but by its homogenous cultural elements. Igbo people share similar cultural characteristics like Igbo language spoken with some tribal tonal nuances across the area, cultural symbols like ofo, four market days, seven lunar calenda in a year, yam festivals, traditional rituals of atonement, use of kola nuts and alligator pepe for reception of visitors, and cultural values as respect for elders, communitarian social system, women tie wrapper, wear blouse and braid their hair. The elders offer libation as occasion demands and invoke hierarchy of the gods of Igboland. These cultural

elements have been in existence for generations of Igbo people's existence.

Igboland is not a dot nation. There are more than ten smallest nations of the World that smaller than Igbo nation: The Vatican nation, Monaco, Tuvalu, Republic of San Marino, Republic of the Marshall Island, Republic of Nauru, St. Kitts and Nevis, Republic of Maldives, Republic of Malta. These World nations are smaller than Igboland but are free independent nations. Igboland needs justice. The question is not if Igbo people are comfortable in Nigeria or their stay in Nigeria is a viable economic option. The question is about lost of national identity. It is about cultural identity, values, symbols, belief, worldview, land, and harvest of shame for the blood of ancestors. The point Adiele Afigbo made about Igbo language as the primary cultural identity of Igbo people and one that serves as a guide to discuss the theme of Pan Igbo is important. It leaves, however, much worry because as Igbo language is going extinct, the cultural identity is about to be lost. This means that a people without identity is not a people.

This thought-provoking work delves into a discussion on religion of the Igbo people. The central message of this chapter is that for Igbo people existence and religion are one. Religion is the pivot around which life of Igbo people revolves. The concern is does religiousness work for Igbo people or has it degenerated to Marxian analysis that religion is *the opiate of the masses, and sigh of the oppressed*. Has religion become a system of exploitation of the people within the Christian setting as it was used during slaver trade to sell fellow Igbo people to America and Europe within traditional religion setting? This dark side of Igbo religious attitude is still haunting most blacks in diaspora and causing resentment among them for their Igbo origin.

How best can one understand Igbo people's religious affiliation. Freudian conception of religion as infantile dependency complex that forces religious adherents to turn to a paternalistic figure in moments of difficulty. Igbo people look unto religion as a way out of hardship, trouble, disappointments and for success in life. There seems to be a dissociation between religious faith and moral obligation.

The book Eze Mmuo highlights the view of Kunirum Osia *that Igbo religious categories are not bound together in purely ideal order. The categories do not form a system, a bundle of abstractions, as it were. Rather, they define a style of life and a guide to practical living.* The question is who sets the ideal order that religions should follow? It is error of universalism to assess other religions based on pre-conceived categories or categories drawn from other religions. If ideal categories should be established on

religious grounds Igbo tradition religion should serve as one of models to serve as blue print. It is one of the oldest world religion. It has survived the test of time. It is open and accommodating. It is gender sensitive. It is almost the only religion where a female can be Eze Nwanyi and mouthpiece of a deity. Igbo traditional religion has well established categories as Chukwu – The Divine Creator is at the highest echelon of power, followed by the non-territorial deities, localized deities, other spirits, spirit of ancestors, living human being, animals, plants, objects. Apart from well established ontological hierarchy, Igbo traditional religion has clear anthropology, codes guiding rituals and sacrifices, taboos, etc.

Other World religions focus on God as Supreme Being as a central category around which other religious categories are organized. It is pertinent to note that Igbo traditional religion conceives God as Chukwu Okike, the great divine creator. This attribute is what sets God apart from other deities and spirits. As Theophilus Okere observes that the use of the word supreme to refer to God should be done with caution as it smacks of possible conception of other gods competing with God in power.

Igbo people's religious affiliation brings out the exalted position of Eze Mmuo as a religious-personnel among a deeply religious people. The Eze Mmuo is at the center of socio-cultural, political, economical and above all religious life of the people. The Eze Mmuo does not call himself. He is called to service by the gods of the land. He must display some qualities as traditional spirituality, respect for the sacred, purity or sacredness of life, truthfulness and integrity. The ritual of consecration makes the Eze Mmuo partly spirit and partly human. These qualities are symbolized in the robbing of the priest with white chalk on one part of the body and charcoal on the other side during consecration rite. Eze Mmuo performs sacred functions of leading the people, offering sacrifices, performing rituals of initiation, wedding, child dedication. In the Book: Arrow of God, Achebe describes the function of Eze Ulu, the Eze Mmuo of Ulu. He must perform the ritual of Pumpkin leaves, a ritual for atonement and cleansing of the land in anticipation for New Yam festival. Eze Ulu refusal to perform this ritual had devastating consequences both on the people and mostly on him. He refused to perform it in order to punish his people. The gods punished him instead. This scenario brings out the dynamism of Eze Mmuo's call to duty that it is a call to serve the gods and the people and for selfish caprices. Eze Mmuo leads the people across the four Igbo

market days of the week in the midst of thick and clouds. Eze Mmuo leads the people at prayer and at thanksgiving sacrifices.

Eze Mmuo's office is the shrine of the god he serves. His regalia must be in alignment with the demand of the god he serves. The colour of regalia often reflect the hierarchical order or power the god occupies and the function of the god or deity of his shrine. Eze Mmuo leaves a life as one set out aside to serve a god or goddess. There strict rules about what to eat, where and how. Sexual habit and conduct.

The author did not leave out discussion on the authority symbol of Eze Mmuo as Ofo. Ofo means truth, justice, righteousness, power, authority, wholeness and moral innocence. Thus, it can also be truly affirmed that Ofo is one of the pillars of Igbo traditional religion. Ofo is found in all Igboland. This fact makes Ofo one of the cultural elements of identity to prove that a people are of Igbo ancestry. The author cited Robin Horton who believes that Ofo has magical powers. Ofo has mystical powers and not magical powers. Ofo indicates mystical union between ancestors and the living, a connection of authority succession, and a channel between the physical world and supernatural World. It establishes the connection between the physical, the supernatural World and Chukwu, the creator and originator of all things.

The place of Ofo in Igboland is seen in the names people give to their children. The word Ofo is seen as a prefix or suffix in most Igbo names as Ofoji, Ofokansi, Ofodum etc. These names as well as some proverbs that feature Ofo indicate strong epistemic relevance of Ofo in Igboland. Are there other authors who have addressed similar problems and how did such authors reconcile polemics arising from understanding of the title and position of Eze Mmuo in Igboland? Ezena Nnanna Okorie, Nwa Eze Mmuo shared a folklore in his website titled Sawaleh. In this tale, he narrates the story of his grand father and his own father/s disinterestedness of the stories of Eze Mmuo as narrated by his grandfather. He told about how the powers of Eze Mmuo transforms people from boys into men.

Emeam (1998, p.71). in his work: *People and Culture of Ngor-Okpala* under the subtitle of religious personnel discusses Eze Mmuo's characteristics in these words: The priest of a deity as a titled man (Eze Mmuo) has personal laws guiding his conduct. He does not eat at the house of another person. He does not drink with the cup of another person. He does not sleep with a woman on the sacred day of his deity. He does not sleep in another town or village on the sacred day of his deity/He cannot cut palm fronts or fruits on the sacred day of his deity.

He does no work on the sacred day of his deity. Through such conduct, he distinguishes himself as a sacred person and people accept him as such.

The motif of Eze mmuo featured in Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to blame* (1971). In this case, the author cited the role of Eze Mmuo of the Yoruba people, the Chief priest of Ogun, (the god of iron). The chief priest assisted the people in breaking a curse brought upon the land by killing of the first king, Adetusa by his son Odewale. He broke the curse that was responsible for suffering, sickness and death of his people. The motif of Eze Nwanyi Uhamiri was explored in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1967). In this Novel, Flora noted that Eze Nwanyi, the custodian of the shrine of the goddess of fertility was childless as Efuru who sees the goddess constantly in her dreams was also childless.

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Mmuo is a significant personnel in a community and occupies a significant social status that cannot easily be wished away. The question we should be asking is how should the society reform the religious and social status of Eze Mmuo, regulate the activities of Eze Mmuo and umu Dibia, checkmate activities at the shrine to avoid ritual killings and anti-social operations. This epistemic arbiter should extend its scope to social re-engineering as reformation of other self-acclaimed religious status of men and women of God to restore sanity in our land.

Relevance Of The Book

What are the relevance of the book *Eze Mmuo* to Igboland and the World? The book *Eze Mmuo* is relevant especially in the midst of current discussion on Igbo question. The title *Eze Mmuo* is a socio-cultural status which is prominent in every Igbo traditional community. The Eze Mmuo is unifying agent, a visible sign of spiritual presence of the gods in the life of the people. The community revolves around him or her. The traditional ruler takes orders from him or her. The author by focusing on the ought to be qualities and functions of Eze Mmuo, invariably exposes who the Eze Mmuo is in the *hic et nunc* order of things in the community. The aura around the Eze Mmuo within the Igbo traditional society has weaned. This is not unconnected to the decay in morals and religious bigotry evident in our communities. The negative narratives of the missionaries about community deities, the equating of Satan to be a traditional deity, and mounted pressure on the personality of Eze Mmuo as a personification of Satan did the damage. The question begging for answers is the designation of deities as Satan or devil. At most traditional deities are localized spirits. These spirits though incorporeal and immortal are not self-subsistent and uncreated. If one subscribes to the fact that the spirits are uncreated and therefore self-subsistent beings, one creates error of dualism. All created entities seen and unseen are creatures of one eternal God each at different degrees of hierarchy of existence. It needs to be noted that in Igbo Ontology, Satan (Ekwensu) is just a scattering spirit. It is not parallel force of evil fighting God and the good. It can be placated through a sacrifice. The Western Worldview which divided reality into two-the power of good (God) and the power of evil (Satan) contradicts the power of God as the eternal, uncreated and creator of all things. Within this horizon of understanding, the Eze Mmuo is not serving Satan nor a personification of Satan.

The axiological line of thought of the author in depicting the positive qualities and role of Eze Mmuo is an indication that true Eze Mmuo

does not encourage nor condone evil and the shrine is not a place to house kidnappers or crime syndicates.

The Eze Mmuo status is therefore one the identity marks with which to designate a community as Igbo or not. The Eze Mmuo commands political, cultural, moral and spiritual authority in the community. The book will be a resource book for students offering Igbo studies. It is once more a wake-up call to Igbo people to work hard to include Igbo thought and culture in tertiary institutions. There are Hausa, Islamic studies, and Arabic language in curriculum across all levels of education. There are Yoruba language, Ifa studies and Yoruba culture in the curriculum. What is seen in the primary and secondary curriculum is Igbo language. Igbo people should be grateful His Grace, A.J.V Obinna who through Odenigbo lecture series has generated enough resources materials for Igbo studies even to the level of doctorate and to Prof. Jerome Okonkwo who initiated the masters and doctorate degrees Igbo program in Imo State university. The book Eze Mmuo is another work calling for inclusion of Igbo thought and culture in tertiary education programs. People who studied in Akwa Ibom will remember that Akwa Ibom thought and culture is a compulsory course in all institutions in Akwa Ibom. Why should that not be the case for Igbo thought and culture.

The Igbo is relevant to the general public as it reconnects people to their tradition and culture. No one that loses his or her identity and remains the same person. Frantz Fanon insisted that loss of self-identity is the brain behind the psychiatric disorders suffered by the colonized.

Conclusion

Do not go without a copy. Buy a copy for yourself and another for your children. Sponsor copies for school libraries. Get involved in corporate social responsibility by making this book available for school libraries and state library.

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