

Taking the Ọzọ Title in Igbo Cultural Area

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Abstract

This study focuses on taking the Ọzọ title in an Igbo cultural area. The Ọzọ title is one of the most respected cultural titles in Igbo land. The aim of this study is to look at the style of leadership of the Ọzọ title, different stages of Ọzọ title, fulfilment of rites and Ọzọ title in modern day era. The research method is qualitative and the design is descriptive survey design. Data for the study were collected through oral interviews and participant observation. The data collected were analysed descriptively. It was discovered that the Ọzọ title is a respected institution in Igbo land and it is for upright people, who are fair and equitable in their dealing with the other members of the community. One of the Ọzọ rules in Igbo land is to present an exemplary leadership for the young ones to emulate. There are different stages in the Ọzọ title taking, starting from the announcement to the market outing after the title taking. The study recommends that traditions like the Ọzọ title taking must be practised very often for the younger generations to learn and studies like this should be taking very seriously and given priority also in the Igbo cultural area.

Introduction

According to *Oxford Advance Learners dictionary*, 'title' means a name that describes someone's position or job. It is an adjective qualifying a name of someone specialised in certain honour, like Lord, Duke, Professor, Doctor etc. The Ọzọ title is a significant aspect of Igbo culture, signifying social status, leadership, and a commitment to upholding tradition and community values. Clarification of concepts of Ọzọ title group in Igbo society is the highest and most important spiritual, religious and social grouping in South Eastern Nigeria. To become an Ọzọ person implies that the title holder is now a titled man 'Nze' or 'onye Nze' and the person becomes another person rather than what he was formerly known.

According to the oral tradition from various parts of Igbo land, the origin of the Ọzọ institution can be traced back to the first Eze Nri Ifikuanim, who established the Ọzọ title during the rise of the Nri dynasty from the 9th century through the 12th to 15th century and declining until the collapse on the British ban of Nri activities in 1911. The Ọzọ title is as old as the origin of the Igbo people from the myth of Eri as the fore father.

The Ọzọ title is a status symbol, and a respected institution in Igbo land that aims to present an exemplary leadership style for the young ones to emulate. The Ọzọ title is not a title for all; rather, it is for upright people for their fairness, equity and integrity. It is usually for mature males, who are reasonably sound and well established materially. They are respected throughout the community.

The Ọzọ institution in Igbo land is one of the most enduring traditional institutions of the Igbo society. The Igbo were organic in a non-centralised system, whereby the traditional rule of the

different claims formed the highest political authorities in villages (Afigbo, 1980). These were seen as the symbols of the peoples' past custodians of their history and up holders and preservers of their culture and customs, epitome of cultural norms and values of the society such as truth, discipline, courage and responsibilities. There is no gainsaying that one important feature of culture is that it is dynamic. Culture and traditions change as the society socio-economic and other needs of a society change. A tradition suited in that society changes. No culture is a finished product; therefore, it follows that both the Igbo culture and western culture must learn from each other.

There are two studies that traced the Ozo title in Igbo land. One is from sociologists and anthropologists, who believed that the Ozo title institution grew as a form of social security, where mature men only could invest their agricultural wealth in the form of crops and live stocks into the taking of the Ozo title from which they derived many dividends from the new entrants. In this way, they secured for themselves the means of livelihood in old age, a kind of pension when they can no longer work. The sociologists believe that the Ozo title institution grew out of the need of priests and upright men, who will preside at the extended family and lineage meetings and supervise the cult of the ancestors and keep the family 'Ofọ' stick, which is a symbol of truth, justice and fairness. The study believed that the continuity of the lineage, clan or community depends on the existence of God-fearing men like the Ozo titled men.

The Ozo institution is respected in Igbo land not only because of their wealth but also their honesty, uprightness and justice, which they exhibit in their leadership roles, especially when presiding over cases and when managing the finance and common good of people in the clan or village. The Ozo title is a status symbol in Igbo land taken by those, who can afford it or who have friends or relations who can sponsor them provided they are people of upright character and integrity and are respected throughout the community. It is usually for mature males, who are reasonably sound and well established materially. The Ozo title is a respected institution in Igbo land and it is for upright people for fairness and equity. One of the Ozo rules in Igbo land is to present an exemplary leadership for the young ones to emulate.

Qualities of an Ozo Man

- Married with many wives
 - Rich farmer in crops like yam and animals like goats, sheep etc.
 - The indelible mark in the face must be done by Nri people.
 - Faithfulness and uprightness needed.
 - Free born bonafide citizen needed.
 - Ancestral hindrances that will prevent the Ozo taking.
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- ❖ Marriage with multiple wives: The Ozo title men marry many wives. They must marry more than one wife is the Ozo traditional custom. The wives must be following their husband in rituals and the process of Ozo title and they will be calling them 'Lọlọ/nwunye Ozo'.
 - ❖ The man must be a rich and wealthy farmer, who is known as "Diji", who make like ten (10) bans of yam annually and many livestock to enable the candidates to supply whatever the fraternity needs.
 - ❖ There must be an indelible mark called "Igbu Ichi" on the face of an Ozo to be. This must be done by the Nri people. This Igbu Ichi is a serious event, where some people may die in the process as a result of loss of blood. But the success victims are nourished with

many diets to celebrate their survival. The Nri people will be highly attended to or entertained during their process of Igbo Ichi.

- ❖ Uprightness and faithfulness are serious criteria needed because a criminal would not be eligible. It must be trusted persons both within and outside the community or village.
- ❖ It is only free born and bonafide citizen that are qualified to take Ọzọ title in the community.
- ❖ Ancestral hindrances: Some ancestors used to commit atrocities, the punishment of which are borne by their progenitors. An applicant to the Ọzọ title must be examined very well to establish their character and family background.

Stages in the Ọzọ Title Taking

It must be noted that the Igbo believe so much in customising and personalising culture. This explains the variations that are found in the way several communities handle the Ọzọ title taking. There are different stages in the Ọzọ title taking, depending on the community. The most common ones are discussed hereunder; the stages include:

a. Notice of Intention and Announcement

The first stage is the official declaration to one's family of the person's intention to take the Ọzọ title. This is called 'Inyedo Nna'. This is followed by 'Inyedo Mmụọ' rites, which are an intimation of one's ancestor of the person's desire to take the title in order to get their blessing. Finally, there is the 'Igbo mmụọ', where the applicant informs the maternal and other relations of his intention to take the Ọzọ title.

b. Visit to Abọh Ọzọ

The people or the person selected enters a place like a conclave called 'Abọ Ọzọ', where they stay up to eight market days and receive some training or orientation with their barbed hairs. The visit to Abọ Ọzọ is announced to secure the support of the kings. Upon security and the support of the kinsmen, the candidate consults with the Ọzọ fraternity through their leaders to obtain the requirements. This visit is usually made with eight Igbo kolanuts, a bottle of gin, and monetary gifts prescribed by the fraternity. The person may be accompanied by friends and relatives, immediately words quickly go round and his intention is declared.

c. Ibu Ego Ọzọ and Fulfillment of Rites

On the agreed with the fraternity, the aspirant invites the Ọzọ titled men to his house, where he presents all the requirements of cash, yams, goats, cockerels and other mandatory gifts meant for the Ọzọ title as prescribed by the fraternity. Members of the fraternity are lavishly entertained at this stage.

d. The Titles Conferment Ceremony

This is the day to which the whole community is called to come and eat, drink and be entertained. Several cows, goats and cockerels are butchered, to prepare the foods for entertainment and drinks are served abundantly. The installation then takes place after the entertainment and it is performed by the chairman of the fraternity in the presence of all the other Ọzọ members. The candidate is given the regalia of Ọzọ title and a name, which he has chosen, e.g. Ọchịnanwata, Ochendo, Ọnwanaetiriọra, Ikpemaraeziokwu, Akaazụdiya, Akurueulọ etc.

e. The Ozo Dance

This Ozo dance is the completion of the Ozo installation ceremony. The new Ozo man that has been installed dances the 'Ufie' dance and he is accompanied by his wives and other Ozo title holders in the gathering.

f. The Fattening/Recovery Period

This is the incubation period for the new Ozo to recover physically and mentally from the stress of the ceremony. He stays indoors for eight market days during which he is well fed and nourished in preparation for the market outing (Izu Ahia Ozo). He is spared from any case or cases of the community in these eight days.

g. The Market Outing (Izu Ahia Ozo)

Finally, the new Ozo man is escorted to the market square by noon on the appointed market day dressed in his Ozo regalia. He is accompanied by his richly decorated and well adorned wives alongside his kinsmen and merry makers. He proudly parades himself and his escort around the entire market for all to see and acknowledge that he is now a titled man. People are given opportunity to see him and pay him homage.

It is worthy to mention here that an Ozo man can be relinquished of his Ozo title, if he commits any abominable act (Nsọani) or convicted of stealing. This is regarded as desecration of the Ozo title. The convicted Ozo titled man undergoes full cleansing to make atonements, reparation and remediation of his evil deed before he can be re-admitted into the Ozo fraternity.

Mode of their Cooking and Eating

Every Ozo man must have a small hurt, where the youngest wife cooks and prepares food for him. When the food is done, the woman beats the big gong (ogene) to call the Ozo; then, the Ozo comes inside the hurt for his food. There is usually a small boy inside the hurt beating the 'ekwe' instrument. If one hears the sound of 'ekwe', one will know that the Ozo titled man is eating. When Ozo titled man finishes eating, he beats the big gong (ivom) to show that he has finished eating. Then, the little children rush inside the hurt for the remnant of the food.

The Ozo titled man does not eat any food made from cassava because the Igbo people say that cassava is not an original Igbo food; it is foreign food from Cameroon or Equatorial Guinea. The Ozo men only focus their food on yam, cocoyam and other Igbo natural foods. And no matter how hungry an Ozo man is, he does not eat outside his home. When he drinks palm wine, those around him will be clapping for him until he finishes the palm wine in the cup. There are many respects given to Ozo title men. Before someone becomes an Igwe of a community, he must pass be an Ozo titled man. All the children of the Ozo titled men are Prince and Princess.

Ozo Title Names and Their Classifications

The Ozo title names are those names taken by the Ozo title holders during the installation ceremony. These names are very important in their lives. The new names adopted by the Ozo title holders imply a remarkable change in their life and they are called by these names for the rest of their lives anywhere and anytime. Some of these names are outlined here under for further explanation.

Ọzọ Title Names Associated with God the Supreme Being or Divinities

There are several Ọzọ titled names associated with God or the Supreme Being. They include the following: *Chinyereugo*– God gave the honour or glory; *Ezechikwere*– King that God accepts or agree; *Ezechikwuru*– King that God talked about; *Ezemgbechikwere* – King when God said it; *Ezechukwu* – King of God; *Nwachinaemere*– Child that is made by God; *Omengbechikwuru*– It happened when God said it; *Ugochukwu*– God’s eagle or honour; *Ugwuchinyelu*– The respect that God gave. *Eze Anyanwu* - King of Divinities; *Eze Ejiọfọ* - A king who holds the sceptre or Ọfọ symbol of power and authority. And so on.

Ọzọ Title Names Associated with Ancestors

The following are Ọzọ title names associated with our ancestors or our fore fathers:

Nwagoziennaya- May the son honour or bless his father; *Afunwaechetanna* - When a son is seen, the father is remembered; *Nnanyereugo*– Father gives honour. And so on.

Ọzọ Title Names Associated With Personal Achievements

Akụabata- Wealth has come; *Akụbuude*- Wealth is fame, that is one may become famous by deeds; *Akụbueziokwu* - Wealth is truth; *Akụezuilo* - Wealth that is beyond the reach of an enemy. *Akụruoulo*- Wealth that reaches the home or community; *Akụsinanwata*– Wealth from childhood. And so on.

Functions of the Ọzọ Title and Names

There are many functions of the Ọzọ title and the names associated with them. They include:

Religious Function

Religion gives moral definitions and solutions to the problems of a man on earth. The Ọzọ society is a sacred society because it enjoys every member to be holy through living an irreproachable life. An ideal Igbo religion seems to rest with the Ọzọ society and names; neither fear nor any abject poverty compels its member to practise religion. The examples of names, which give religious functions are: *Ugwuchinyere*- Honour accorded by God; *Akụbueziokwu*– Wealth is truth; *Ezeudo* –King of peace; *Omekachikwuru*- Executor of God’s will; and so on.

Social Functions

The Social functions of an Ọzọ title man are the fundamental element in the title society. An Ọzọ man in Igbo land is never swallowed up in a crowd. His presence is always felt in the society and the social importance of his name is universally respected. Examples of Ọzọ names associated with social functions include: *Akụbuude*- Wealth is fame; *Ekwueme*- Proclaimer and executor; *Ezeamara*- A well known king; and so on.

Political Function

The Ọzọ title holders are advocates for their people in various communities. Their political function implies the art of acting and judging wisely. The Ọzọ title and the names offer their holders the opportunity and position to do the same art of acting and judging wisely. For instance, *Ọchịọha*- Public Leadership involves the man who has the name and engages in leadership role for public especially his community or town. The political function of the Ọzọ titled men indicates the holders’ abilities to be above his age mates or other members of his

society in providing good leadership **Agūnaechemba**- The lion that protects the community; **Ezeahurūnamba**- A king who is recognised in a foreign land; and so on.

Economic Function

Economy involves wealth especially what money can do. The Ọzọ title taking is a money consuming venture. Njoku (1992) observes that title and secret societies were elite clubs of the 'haves' from which the 'have-nots' were excluded; indeed, a means of institutionalising elitism. It is in the light of this that it is believed to be a ceremony for showing off one's wealth. Also it is a money saving enterprise in that the dividends accruing from it is throughout the beneficiary's life time. The examples of names include: **Ọchịrịọzọ** - Someone who gather to feed; **Akụkalịa**- Surplus wealth; **Akūrueulọ**- If wealth reaches home and so on.

In summary, the Ọzọ title names are more than mere labels on the bearer, it means much more.

Ọzọ Title in the Modern Era

In this modern era, a lot of changes are seen in the Ọzọ society today. People are not following the old procedure currently in taking the Ọzọ title and practising it. The major criteria for qualifying to take the title is wealth. If one has enough money, no matter the source, one will have any title at any level. In some cases, in the modern times, it is the criminals that are recognised as Igwe, Ọzọ, Chiefs and many categories of title. The new Ọzọ title men now wear trousers and boxers, which were not part of their regalia. The Ọzọ title holders did not eat outside their homes but now they eat outside even in the hotels and beer parlors, eating assorted types of food and drinking assorted types of beer. Also, they now form the Ọzọ title society as a secret cult, doing evils because of the dirty money they acquire.

Effect of Christianity and Western Civilisation on Ọzọ Title

Culture is dynamic. The Ọzọ title taking, which has witnessed a lot of changes in the way it is being taken in modern time. It is an institution among many, which the influence of Christianity and civilization is felt. When these forces could not obliterate the Ọzọ institution completely, they begged for some room to be accommodated. Hence, various changes have allowed many things to be accepted in Ọzọ society. All their ritual processes are monetised.

One does not need to go through the Ọzọ religious rites to become a titled man. No wonder Ekwueme (1974:13) laments that the early missionaries tagged all indigenous forms of arts as the work of the devil, especially as almost all those that are associated with some religious or quasi-religious ceremonies.

The Ọzọ title taking in the present times has been christened and modified to exclude what may be regarded as the fetish in order that Christians may participate in the exercises (Egudu, 2021). Archbishop of Onitsha, Charles Henry, about the mid-1950s, reported the stand of the Catholic Church on the Ọzọ title taking. After modifying the institution by removing some restrictions, the Christians of the Roman Catholic denomination were permitted to be initiated into the Ọzọ title society. It is in the light of the modification that this study x-rayed the Christian response vis-à-vis the Catholic Church in regulating the Ọzọ institution in Igbo land. This signals the point of contact between Christianity and the traditional religion as expressed in the Ọzọ institution. The Ọzọ title is one of the most prestigious institutions that the Igbo people cannot do away with. It is an institution that seeks to build the societal economic, ethical and moral values. In Igbo land, taking the Ọzọ title is the greatest achievement an average man can attain, according to Ilogu (1974), western names such as Joseph, John, Luke and Mark were given to people through

baptism from “heathen” to Christians. In marriage, monogamy was introduced in place of the predominant polygamy; knighthood was introduced to replace the Ọzọ institution.

Ekechi (1997) states that with the introduction of modern western cultural modes of dressing, traditional decoration, drawings and paintings as well as women beautification with cam-wood (uri) and red dyes (uhie), they were considered unfit for Christians. This exposure to new forms of life and possibilities it offered brought drastic change to people’s worldviews and Ọzọ title taking.

Conclusion

The Ọzọ title is a common and respected title in Igbo land that showcases men of high integrity. These title holders bear different names from their original names to show what they have become and these names they bear till the end of their lives. It is discovered that these names are associated with God, our ancestors and personal achievements. The Ọzọ fraternity has rules and regulations, in the olden days; but now, in this computer age, things have changed. So, many changes are seen in the Ọzọ fraternity of today than before. It is discovered that the greatest causes of these changes is the effect of christianity and western civilisation in Igbo land. The Ọzọ title no longer valued highly as was the case before, but the Igbo culturists are trying to reform it. The younger generations are being thought the culture and traditions of our land; hence the importance of this study.

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