

## **IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY AND OZO TITLE-TAKING IN NAWGU, DUNUKOFIA L.G.A**

**Emmanuel C. Anizoba**

Department of Religion and Cultural Studies

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

[emmanuel.anizoba@unn.edu.ng](mailto:emmanuel.anizoba@unn.edu.ng)

### **Abstract**

*This work studied Igwebuike Philosophy and Ozo title taking Nawgu, Dunukofial L.G.A of Anambra state. The aim was to critically analyzed the issues involved in Ozo title taking in Nawgu, such as the Qualifications of Ozo Candidate, processes involved in initiation into Ozo title taking in Nawgu, processes involved in initiation into ozo title taking in Nawgu, taking of the title itself in Nawgu, privileges of an ozo man in Nawgu, taking of the title itself in Nawgu, obligations of an ozo man in Nawgu, taboos of an Ozo man in Nawgu and death and burial of an Ozo man in Nawgu. Primary and Secondary sources of information were made use of while descriptive and narrative methods of data presentation were adopted. The study found out that five stages are involved in Ozo title taking in Nawgu and at any state certain rituals are performed. For one to qualify to take the title must be financially rich and person of no questionable character chosen by the community themselves. People accord them respects in the community. Truthfulness is one outstanding obligations of an Ozo title holder. They are not bound from committing adultery among other taboos in the area. Finally, an Ozo title holder is accord a befitting burial on their demise by the entire community.*

**Keywords:** Igwebuike Philosophy, Ozo Title Taking, Nawgu Community.

### **Introduction**

Traditional Ozo title taking constitutes one of the most fundamental and pronounced features of Igbo land and Nawgu town in respectively. Achievement is a prominent principle in Nawgu and Igbo land in general. Hence, people strive as much as possible to make something out of their existence on earth. People like to be looked upon as superior beings as a result of their achievements. They see title taking as a means or forum to establish their superiority and standard in the society.

Ozo institution had a widespread influence in Igbo land, in that only few could claim not to practice it. The institution is looked upon as the most prestigious, noble and sacred in Igbo land. The taking of title manifests to a greater extent a person's socio-economic status in the society. Ozo men are regarded in Igbo land

as custodians of the people's culture and tradition. The institution has its core in the traditional Igbo religion.

An Ozo holder to according to Igwebuiké Philosophy is a symbol of justice. This explains why they make it mandatory in the traditional setting, for any aspirant to be a person of unquestionable character. Some of educated elites take this title despite the influence of Christianity on Igbo culture and must be chose by the community as Igwebuiké Philosophy implies.

However, modern value system which enthrone materialism and success by all means fair or foul has affected the purity and sanctity of traditional Ozo institution in Igbo land especially in the area under study. The result is that nowadays anybody with cash can buy his way into this reputable system irrespective of his character dubious or not. The need therefore arises to investigate Igwebuiké Philosophy on processes through which the traditionalist involved to ensure the purity of this institution and the worthiness of its aspirants with a view to predict its future survival. The broad main aim of this paper is to analyze Igwebuiké Philosophy on the issues involved in taking Ozo title such as the qualifications of the candidates, processes in initiation into the title, taking the title itself, the privileges of an Ozo titled man, His obligations, taboos associated with an Ozo titled man and His death and burial.

### **Concept of Igwebuiké Philosophy**

Igwebuiké is the underlining principle of African philosophy and religion. It is the unity of the African philosophical experience. It is in fact, the fundamental category of African philosophy and religion. It is the substratum of African traditional values, philosophy and religion. Therefore, Ozo title taking will not been left out. Across the length and breadth of Igboland, Ozo title is a major symbol of prominence. The title-taking event is typically organized with an abundance of yam, meat, wine and other staple foods, all of which symbolize prosperity in the Igbo culture. This is used as a support from the relatives and community as the case may be in support of candidate taking the title to ensure the practice of Igwebuiké in the area

Mbiti (1969) sees African ontology as a religious ontology, which is heavily anthropocentric. In this ontology are God, the spirits, animals and plants, phenomena and objects without biological life; however, at the centre is the human person. If this ontology must be understand, there is the need to

penetrate its unity. Mbiti argues that the African concept of time is the key to understanding the basic religious and philosophical concepts of this ontology. He writes: The concept of time may help to explain beliefs, attitudes, practices and general way of life of African peoples not only in the traditional set up but also in the modern situation, whether of political, economic, educational or church life. (p. 16). He further writes that: This time orientation, governed as it is by this two main dimensions of present and past, dominates African understanding of the individual, the community and the universe which constitutes the five ontological categories mentioned above. (p. 17).

In his interpretation of African Philosophy on the concept of “Igwebuiké” Kanu (nd) observed that in Igbo philosophy is *idi*, that is, to be, Igwebuiké is the modality of being (Kanu 2015). It is an Igbo word, which is a combination of three words. Therefore, it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence: as a word, it is written as Igwebuiké, and as a sentence, it is written as, Igwe bu ike, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space (Kanu 2016). The three words involved: Igwe is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population. Bu is a verb, which means is. Ike is another verb, which means strength or power. Thus, put together, it means ‘number is strength’ or ‘number is power’. It was employed by Igbo traditional philosophers as a theory based on an illustrative statement to teach that when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force, and more so, to express their world of relationship, harmony, continuity and complementarity. At this level, no task is beyond collective capability (Kanu 2017). This provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. As an ideology, Igwebuiké argues that ‘to be’ is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. ‘To be’ is ‘to be with the other’, in a community of beings. This is based on the African sense of community, which is the underlying principle and unity of African philosophy (Kanu 2018).

### **Igwebuiké Philosophy and Qualifications of Ozo Candidate in Nawgu**

In the past, it was a taboo for a man to take the ozo title while the father was alive. They argue that it helped to reduce leadership conflict within the extended family. Moreover, the junior ones in the family, in order not to alter the authority

structure based on age seniority allows their senior ones to take the title first. However, nowadays the reverse in the case, according to my lovely father Nze Isaac Anizoba (Personal communications Nov.8, 2001) who stipulated that "Any one can now take the title, even as a little child provided that he has the money and other important things that may be required". Freeman are allowed to take the title but slaves are excluded. Men are expected to get married before taking the title a father or a wealthy relative might perform ozo title for his sons or relations even as an infants. The most significant point to note here is that, it is the community that will present the candidate who claimed to be qualify for the title. This has proves the philosophy of Igwebuiké that "no man takes the honour by him/her self except him/her is giving the honour by the community.

At this juncture, one important point that should not been left out is about a group of people-who on no account should be admitted into the ozo society in, they are called Osu (outcast) people and the slaves. in their practical liberty, as Osu is the same as an oru (slave); none of them has personal freedom. When a human being is sacrificed to a deity as a living oblation, he or she is called and "osu" the property of the deity and therefore should not be tampered with by the ozo society. The children and in fact the generations of these two categories inherit this unfortunate fate from their forefathers, but these "osu" and "oru" can take the title among their fellow "osu". Moreover, good conduct also plays an important part in qualifying one for ozo title taking. Bad conduct disqualifies one even towards the end of the title. A life of dishonesty is opposed to the moral code of the Igbo ozo title society. An act of stealing for example merits an immediate termination of tilted man's active membership of the ozo title society. According to Igwe Nwegwu (2001) "An Nze never steals or else he is stripped of his title".

### **Igwebuiké Philosophy and Processes Involved in Initiation into Ozo Title Taking**

To initiate into ozo title is an elaborate affair Here I shall only highlight a summarized version of the significant stages involved in taking the title.

**1<sup>ST</sup> STAGE: OFO OZO:** The person has to tell the entire *Isi nze* of his lineage, who calls a meeting of the ozo group to which the lineage belonged. The applicant also go along with 4 gallons of palm wine and 8 kolanuts. This is requirement for *ofó ozo* which meant that from the next day he could begin to take his share of payment. This stage can also be called *amanwulu* stage. The

items presented will be giving to a particular group of people who will now ascertain that he/she has commenced the processes of taking ozo title. Without the group endorsement as individual he/she cannot start the move why because Igwebuiké. "Groups are the strength". Same applies to every stage.

**2<sup>ND</sup> STAGE: IME EKWU:** Here the person involved has to call entire Nawgu Community according to their groups and give them whatever they require from him such as money, yam, goat and so on.

**3<sup>RD</sup> STAGE: IME MBARA:** This has to involve the entire Nawgu Community who has been initiated in the said title. He has give them whatever they require from him such as yams, goats and so on.

**4<sup>TH</sup> STAGE: IME AZU:** At this stage, one has to be initiated into *Azu* title and also has to offer something to the said title holders in my town Nawgu. At this stage also is entitled to wear "*owulu*" without an iron on ozo.

**5<sup>TH</sup> STAGE: IME UNO NGU:** One is also expected here to bring to the groups their own requirements of initiation into 5<sup>th</sup> stage set of people. Such requirements include some pieces of yams, goats, kolanuts and so on.

### **Igwebuiké Philosophy and Taking of the Title itself in Nawgu**

Having fulfilled all these processes of initiation at different stages as required by the title holder, the community now allowed the candidate to take the title ozo after fulfilling the demands of previous ozo holder. Some of these are the requirements of the 1<sup>st</sup> stage, 2<sup>nd</sup> stage, 3<sup>rd</sup> stage, 4<sup>th</sup> stage and 5<sup>th</sup> stage of the qualifications of an aspirant into the title taking. As a matter of fact, the levels of the honour that accorded to an ozo titled man are determined by the amount of rich he is. That is so to say that the more you can be able to afford, the more honour you received from the previous ozo holders. In the light of the above, many try as much as they can to offer a cow when taking the title which will give them the title of *ozo Ogbuefii*, likewise *ozo ogbuanyinya* and so on. Obviously, at this juncture one is expected now to put on his full title dress and complete top anklet with red cap. On the next market day also he is expected to go to market in continuation of the celebration of the ceremony. Later a certificate of honour will be issued to him by the previous ozo holder countersign by the Igwe of the town. It is the duty of the community to grace the occasion and invites their family friends, relatives and so on. On the day the title will be taking.

## **Privileges of an Ozo Titled Man in Nawgu**

Ozo taking can be seen as a cultural institution, or man-made social rank of distinction and honour based on recognized status of excellence occurring, from what a person is, has or has done. There are many privileges enjoyed or attributed to a titled man in the society. The ceremony has always been accomplished by traditional religious worship and rituals for the main purpose of preventing its essence, sanctity and respect. However, in modern times, the traditional religious aspects seem to be fast disappearing. The ozo titled man has the following privileges, right to share in the admission fees and entertainments, wear special red cap with eagle feathers, rope anklets on both legs, right to carry and blow the elephant tusk and the use of a special staff during public ceremonies. A members' house is sacrosanct and cannot be searched, likewise his wife (or wives). If any member abuses any of the privileges, the punishment is always grave. In some places, the offender might be sold or killed. It is a taboo to kidnap an ozo title holder or cause him and bodily harm.

He has the right of participation and consultation in most of the important decisions affecting his village and own. He takes precedent over other persons, after decisions have been reached; he gives or pronounces them with other members of the committee standing behind him. In kolanut breaking, the ozo titled man takes molestation and to be safe, people travels in his name in the near-by towns and distant places. Infact, he is the village custodian of precious articles or articles in dispute. He is forbidden to tell lies. He is exempted from a number of duties and communal labour however poor he becomes. He will be stripped off of his title when found guilty of theft and other serious misconduct. An ozo man never travels at night creates food cooked by the wife during menstruation. It is a taboo. He is entitled to special burial; ceremonies. Infact, most of the features of the title taking are repeated on the death of a holder, such as the cutting of the cord tied on the legs. The expense of his funeral is more painful than the death itself unless he is no longer a man of substances.

Singing and dancing form the foundation of the social recreation of Igbo people and in this ozo titled people are not left behind. They have own means of amusement, special and entirely exclusive to them. They have what they call *ufe* music, to the time of which no titled man is permitted to move his legs or nod his head. This infringement carries a fat fine. In fact, the community that brings the candidate monitor all the processes involved in taking the title will ensure that

all the aforementioned privileges will be accord to an Ozo titled holder. That is Igwebuike Philosophy.

### **Igwebuike Philosophy and Obligations of an Ozo Titled Man in Nawgu**

The rights of ozo titled men begin right from their respective families where their wives and children are made to realize the wrath of their title people. There are certain rules of etiquette which every titled man has to observe and the observance must be made known to every member of the family. An ozo titled man eats late in the night. The present day method of measuring time came with the white men. Ever wife of a titled man therefore must have supper ready and whenever she fails in this prime duty, "the titled man in obliged to roast yams in his "obi" and satisfy his hunger. When such negligence does occur, the wife receives appropriate punishment for that. Both the wife and children are obliged to salute their ozo titled man by any of his names every morning, after each mean and any other occasion decrees. For example, after the wife has frank the palm wine offered her by his titled husband; instead of "thank you" she will say "Nnaynelugo", Nwachinaemere or the like.

The ozo titled men are generally industrious men, but their rank forbids them to do certain of manual labour. As a universal rule, they do not climb trees including palm and coconut trees. It is not infrequently that disputes arise as to the correct boundary or the trees to be uprooted; all these come into the competence of the ozo men to resolve. "Sometimes but not regularly a dispute may arise as to the age-group that should participate in an take of the work" The ozo titled man is obliged to look into matters arising from these disputes. Above all, an ozo man never tells lies or steals; he is the ambassador of peace among his people and makes sure that everybody's right is preserved. He is obliged o eat only pounded yam and avoids taking palm wine called *ogoro*. But today all these are forgotten.

### **Igwebuike Philosophy and Taboos of an Ozo Titled Man in Nawgu**

After the great initiation into the ozo title, the ozo man is forbidden to do certain things because of his new state. They include that an ozo man does not eat at random. He eats only in his house especially in his Obi and does not eat in public places such as beer palours or clubs. Again, it is a taboo to see an ozo man climbing a palm tree or any kind of tree at all. He should not be a drunkard so as to let down the whole society. Furthermore, an ozo man should not be present where people are negotiating for the sale of a slave or killing of human being. He

should avoid telling lies no matter the kind of money or presents offered to him. It is also a taboo for an ozo man to sit directly on the ground or be pushed down by somebody knowingly or unknowingly. When it happens accidentally, a chicken must be offered as a sacrifice for that.

Finally, His state of life would be in compatible with much labour which involves moral risks. He is also forbidden to go to war and on no account would he light in single or command combat all his life because he is not allowed to shed blood. It is a taboo for him to carry a corpse, to climb trees or to hire himself for labour however poor he later becomes. On a more serious note, certain misconducts does not only be a taboo of an ozo man but warrants instant expulsion from the said title. To acquire the title again is sometimes impossible for the candidate. Such crime includes theft. Again, an ozo man never travels at night or eats food cooked by the wife during menstruation. It is a taboo. He is entitled to special burial ceremonies. The funeral of an ozo man costs a great deal of money and resources. To this are added more costly ceremonies, fees and rites.

### **Igwebuiké Philosophy, Death and Burial of an Ozo Titled Man**

The burial of an ozo man is always as important to him as his taking the titles. He is not buried anytime and anyhow in my town, because he is not a commoner. Some ceremonies as colourful as they are sophisticated are his special prerogative, which make his burial different from that of his non titled compatriot. One of these specialties is that, he is not buried on the same day his death occurs. Before his death, a diviner will be consulted to see if he has lived as is living a good and honest life. The answer to this will determine the type of burial to be given him. For an honest titled man, the general atmosphere at ceremonies of this type very closely resemble what is was that memorable day he was accepted as a full member of the respected ozo title society; feasting, dancing and shooting of guns occupy the entire period. In this regard, Talbot (1967:248-9) remarked: "Among the Ibos funeral ceremonies are considered of even more important than with most other tribes". His view is correct because not only the relatives of the dead gather, but also everyone who happened to know him when he was yet living and even those who are friends of his relatives. The Igbo Christian seem to be at variance with some funeral ceremonies of their non Christian relatives and titled men. Commenting on that Cardinal Arinze (2970:4) has this to say:



The members of the titled society, both Christian and non-Christians may attend the funeral rites of a deceased Christian member, but the title society will not perform religious ceremonies of any shape or form. Similarly, Christian titled men will not take part in any pagan religious ceremonies at the funeral rite of a deceased pagan member of the society.

As soon as Nawgu Ozo titled man dies. *ODU, Ekwe and Oyo* will be used to announce his death. An oracle will be consulted to find out who will give him lamb which he will go with to the ancestors. As an adage says: *Ebule ka dike ji ana* (A warrior proceeds to the spirit world with a ram), A *cock, ugo* or *iche* may be used as well, depending on what the oracle says. This later will be killed and shared among members. Next comes *Umuada* (daughter of the lineage) bringing a hen, eight yams and eight kolanuts. These symbolically show what the titled man presented initially before the title was given to him. They will do the necessary cleaning up of the house, including the washing of the remains. Then the deceased titled man is dressed up in his full title regalia and people are allowed to come to pay their last respects to him.

To enlighten the otherwise gloomy atmosphere, *palmwine* and *Laikai* (home-made brandy) are provided in sufficient quantity and the professional musicians especially the *Ufie* players kept the air warm. Most titled men do not bury their dead members with their ankle cords still around their legs. In my town, it must be cut by *Nwada* (daughter of the lineage) who tied it on the initiation day. It was this that the titled man Ogbuefi Onwurah was referring to when he said: "as a man comes into this world so he go out of it. When a titled man dies, his anklets of the title are cut so that he will return as he come...it will be in the end".

With the cutting of this cord which shows the final separation with the living, the entertainment takes place with other ceremonies or sacrifices. Actually, the burial of an ozo titled man is an elaborate affair just as taking the title. The fundamental religious significance is; the ancestors in the world beyond, and the acquisition of a social position commensurate with which he enjoyed in this visible world as titled man.

### Recommendations

- a. That Igwebuike Philosophy should be held in high esteem, to ensure nice selection of any candidate starting from the presentation of the candidate, processes or stages of initiation and so on. To ensure that right, honest, trustworthy etc. candidates are chosen.

- b. Ozotitle holders should not neglect the community decisions when the need arises, since the honour was not taking alone by themselves, it is a collective responsibility.
- c. Community leaders should ensure that they executes laws that everyone in the community should respect an Ozo titled man or woman.
- d. Being a rich man as one the qualifications in taking the title, an Ozo tilted holders should ensure that he/she is magnanimous to members of his/her community, since everyone is involved in the title taking.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, Igwebuiké Philosophy is a sine qua none in the study of Ozo title taking such as qualifications of Ozo title taking, Processes involved in initiation into Ozo title taking, Taking of the Title Itself, Privileges of an Ozo Man, Obligations of an Ozo Man, Taboos of an Ozo Man and Death and Burial of an Ozo Man in Nawgu. As at time of this research work, the researcher found out that Ozo title taking has been persistently practiced in the area as Igwebuiké Philosophy rightly stipulated that no one takes the title by him/herself except he/she were giving the title by the community.

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