

NZE NA OZO TITLE IN IGBO CULTURE: A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION ON ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN A CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Culture is a universal concept so predominant in the history of man and perceived differently by different sets of people. It is commonly understood as the totality of the people's way of life which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, traditions, practices, capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society. Since man primarily is a cultural animal, Ndi Igbo (Igbo people) are not without a culture. Among Ndi Igbo, the Nze na Ozo title is seen as an indigenous institution through which they engage in questions about the meaning of life. It is a sacred institution performed by initiated men who bridge the gap between the visible and unseen world of the ancestors. Ndi Nze na Ozo are regarded as the custodians of truth, dispensers of justice and the moral compass of the society. Interestingly, with all the sacredness generally associated with this group in Igboland, there have constantly been propositions, deliberations and criticisms of its being misogynistic and biased in its dealings. This is evident from its high cost of initiation, several restrictions put upon women and non-initiates and also some cases of the negation of the truth and justice it seeks to bestow. Thus, the burden of this work is to philosophically reflect on the Nze na Ozo title in Igbo culture so as to reveal its hidden meaning(s) which would assist one to get the truth about it and the various practices associated with it. This will go a long way in ameliorating this Igbo culture and deteriorating the several misconceptions about it. Therefore, employing the analytical method of philosophy, this work discovers that the Nze na Ozo title in Igbo culture has both positive as well as negative underpinnings. It recommends that their fetish and idolatrous ritual practices should be modified in fiscal terms in order to accommodate all and sundry. It further suggests that ndi Nze na Ozo should focus their energies more in enforcing the moral stance of their members in place of affluence.

Key words: Ndi Igbo, Culture, Nze na Ozo title, Philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Culture shows the general way of life people; that is the shared, learned behaviour of a people. It also fully underlines the people's worldview. It is defined as the complex totality of man's acquisition of knowledge, morals, beliefs, arts, practices, customs, traditions, medicine, technology, etc., which are transmitted from generation to generation and which mainly characterizes them. It includes everything we think, do, and have as members of the society.

Thus, it includes the ideas, values, beliefs, literature, religion and philosophy of the people and also the rules by which those people guide their behaviours. This means that culture refers to man's entire social heritage. Man is a creature and creator of culture. Every society has accepted rules of welcoming its new members, approving and dissolving marriages, burying the dead, relating to the supernatural, maintaining the existing cosmic order and unity etc. All these form part of the society's culture. Culture is characteristically transmissible from one generation to the next. A generation without culture is a generation with heritage.

As a people, *Ndi Igbo* are not without their own culture since primarily, man is a cultural animal. In Igboland, title-taking is valued as it is one of the greatest instruments of social control and authority and as such titled men are greatly respected. There are various titles existing in different parts of Igboland such as *Oba*, *Nze na Ozo*, *Ima Mmuo*, *Amanwulu*, *Ichi Eze* etc. The most common of these titles is the *Nze na Ozo* title which will form the focus of this work. *Nze na Ozo* is the highest and most important spiritual, religious and social grouping in the Igbo society of Southeastern Nigeria. The five major states inhabited by Igbo people are Imo, Ebonyi, Enugu, Anambra and Abia states, all in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. The *Nze na Ozo* title is seen as a major symbol of prominence in Igbo society because the title-taking event is organized with an abundance of yam, wine, meat and all other staple foods - all of which symbolize prosperity in Igbo culture. The titled men (in this case, *Ndi Nze na Ozo*) are symbols of truth, peace, unity, justice, love, equity and harmony in the Igbo society. They are regarded as sacred in Igbo tradition because they are believed to be instituted by the god(s). There are also certain rules and customs that regulate title taking in Igboland, namely, women are not permitted to take the *Nze na Ozo* title etc. An *Nze na Ozo* title holder is easily identified by the beads around his ankle and the ankles of his first wife, and also the eagle feather fixated on his red cap. Igbo culture is not made up of meaningless rituals. *Ndi Igbo* believe in customizing and personalizing their culture and that explains the variations you find in the way several communities handle the *Nze na Ozo* title-taking event.

Nevertheless, due to the exigencies of the cultural developments and transitions taking place in the world today and also coupled with the fact that there is an increasing diatribe of the title-taking being exceedingly expensive and *ndi nze na ozo* misrepresenting in certain cases the truth they seek to bestow, there is a real need for a critical and constructive analysis of *Nze na Ozo* title in Igbo culture. This will in turn pave way for a better cultural advancement of *ndi Igbo*. This paper will also attempt to portray the various diatribes people have about title taking in Igbo culture. Let's now gradually proceed into the hub of the work.

CULTURE AND PHILOSOPHY: ANY CONNECTION?

The concept of culture is derived from the Latin word 'colere' meaning 'to cultivate'.¹ Thus, in the pedagogical sense, it indicates the cultivation, education and/or the formation of man. Culture are those predominating attitudes, values, norms, behaviors, beliefs, art, heritage, music, letters and creative activities that characterize the functioning of a people and that distinguishes a social group, a tribe, a people or a nation. Simply put, culture is the way of life of a people. Culture strictly speaking is a developmental concept. It is not surprising that Chuta states, "A full identification of the genesis and implications of culture is basic to normative development."² Man primarily is a cultural animal, for he is both a creature and a

creator of culture. Culture is not God-made or natural but a product of the hand and mind of man. It is a mark of identity. True culture will no doubt lead man to a decent and organized life. Culture is possible because man has the gift of mind, is free, and has the disposition and ability to imagine, speculate, think and concretize what he has thought about. Nevertheless, culture has been over flogged in its usage, and most often it has been misused. This misuse of culture has placed us in a state of quandary. Our reaction need not be presumptuous and unreasonable for such would only turn out being unproductive. We rather need to think deeply and engage ourselves in a serious, committed and realistic search for a diagnosis and the prognosis which will aid in eradicating the root causes of our problem. Here comes Philosophy, the art that assists us to reflect rationally on human experience with the sole aid of human reason. It concerns itself with the fundamental principles of reality and as such interrogates reality (culture) because it is the quest for meaning. Philosophy which is a critical reflection on our experience, is at the basis of culture. When man begins to understand the meaning and values of life, there is no doubt that he is already on the road to cultural advancement. Thus, we need to study our culture philosophically in order to give it its pride of place. This is because philosophy despite not having the answers to every question in life, would assist one to get the truth or to be nearer to the truth with the aid of human reason.

It is in the light of this that we would like to cast the lens of philosophy at the “Nze na Ozo” title in Igbo culture.

A BRIEF EXPOSITION OF THE CULTURE OF *NDI* IGBO:

The Igbo culture are the customs, practices and traditions of the Igbo people. It comprises ancient practices as well as modern concepts added into the Igbo culture either through evolution or outside influences. These customs and traditions include the Igbo people's visual art, religious beliefs, birth, marriage and death rituals, use of language, music and dance forms, as well as their attire, cuisine (food) and language dialects. The culture of the *ndi* Igbo modify the thoughts, speech, actions and artifacts of the *ndi* Igbo so much that they are easily distinguished from other ethnic groups. How a culture survives depends on the people's capacity to learn and transmit it to succeeding generations. The Igbo culture expresses itself in the customs, beliefs, war, burial, social norms, religion, racial, social and material traits of the *ndi* Igbo. However, of particular relevance to us in this work is one of the cultural practices of *ndi* Igbo namely the *Nze na Ozo* title which is performed in various parts of Igboland. Having given a brief highlight on the culture of *ndi* Igbo, we shall now proceed into the hub of this work which is to elucidate on the *Nze na Ozo* title in Igbo culture philosophically in order to give it its pride of place in the contemporary society.

***NZE NA OZO* TITLE IN IGBO CULTURE**

In Igboland, it is a sign of respect to confer an individual with traditional or chieftancy title and the title is usually conferred to men of substance or people that have distinguished themselves from others by a traditional ruler³. Title taking is reckoned as one of the greatest instruments of social control and authority. Attesting to this, M.A Onwuejeogwu submits that, “the Igbo traditional concept of authority is structured and determined by the concept of 'Umunna', and the membership of associations based on elaborate title-system...”⁴. Various titles exist in different parts of Igboland as: *Eze, Nze na Ozo, Oba, Amanwulu, Ima Mmuo, Oriaku, Ada*

Oha, Iyi, Odibeze, Udo ka mma, Ogbu agu, Ogbaka ohia, Nwanonukpo-eze, Ome ka ozo di, Ebubedike, Okpu uzu, Dibia bekee, Ugonabo, Oji ofo etc. However, Ozo title is the most common in the Northern and Western Igbo culture areas except Nsukka, that calls it 'Ichi Ama'⁵ (or 'Ime Onokoro'). In the Eastern and North Eastern Igbo, it is called 'Iba Ekpe' and 'Iza Oza' respectively⁶. Despite these obvious differences in terminology, the meaning and the value which the Igbo attach to title-taking remains virtually the same.

The *Nze na Ozo* society is the highest and most important spiritual, religious and social grouping in the Igbo society of Southeast Nigeria⁷. For some people, the institution of *Nze na Ozo* is just another group of old men in some sort of social club enjoying the fruits of their collective labour. On the other hand, to the majority of the people, the *Nze na Ozo* social institution is a sacred representation of the ancestors in human form⁸. These are people that know the entire repertoire and who performs the rituals meticulously as decreed by the god(s) and ancestors so that it can retain its original ritual connotations in order to avoid sacrilege. That is why they are referred to as the spiritualized fathers in Igbo cosmology. In Igbo land, to become Ozo means that the title holder is now an “Nze” implying a living spirit and an ancestor. His moral qualities, nay his ritual consecration makes him “Nze” or “Nre-le” which etymologically can mean “separation”⁹, or “apartness”, or “sacrosanct”. That is to say, that he is by this title ritually separated from the 'commoners' or from pollutions. This is the reason the members of the *Nze na Ozo* institution are held as the conscience of the society and custodians of truth in their various communities.

Ndi nze-na-ozo as judges and custodians of our belief system and cultural norms and values usually undergo rigorous physical and spiritual training preparing them for this great assignment. Two major aspects of life must be properly addressed¹⁰. One borders on courage, bravery, determination and consistency, while the other relates to aristocracy. *Ima Nmanwu, Amanwulu, Ichi na Igbu agu, atu*, etc. refer to the first condition which is executed between the ages 15 and 35. Aristocracy¹¹ borders on title taking, which is concluded with final initiation into the order. We shall now take a brief look into the initiation ceremony of *ndi nze na ozo*, that is, the title taking procedures.

The *Nze Na Ozo* Title Taking Procedures in Igbo Culture

The beauty of culture is in its diversity, and for the *Ndi Igbo*, culture is best practiced when it is brought home. Thus, the Igbo people believe in customizing and personalizing their culture. For this reason, the practice of *Nze na Ozo* title-taking event in various parts of Igbo land vary slightly. Taking titles had been part of the Igbo cultural system, but it was not without purpose. By the time one gets to the status of *Nze na Ozo*, a lot of preparations aimed towards maturity had taken place. Notably, the Igbo *Nze na Ozo* are believed to be beyond the temptations of the society, namely, deceit, falsehood, bribery and corruption. They are the judges and custodians of our cultural heritage and this implied that they should be just in their words and actions. The arising question is: “How did the society maintain the required sanctity in their system?” Simply put, Igbo traditional society maintained the required sanctity in their system by maintaining sanctity in the *Nze or Ozo*. Before the conferment of *Ozo* title on the *Ozo* aspirant, he first of all undergoes a ceremony with which he becomes an *Nze* which implies a living spirit and an ancestor. To become an *Nze*, one has to go into communion with the *Ofo* of the

most dreaded *Agwu* in the community. *Ofo* in a nutshell, epitomizes the Igbo man's spiritual base through which the forces of nature are harnessed: procreated, sustained and dissolved¹². It is therefore their symbolism of attuning with the all-embracing creative energy. It offers him a great deal of security and respect. The Igbo peoples would generally say: *Ofo-bu-ike*¹³ which means that *Ofo* is power and authority in itself and never disputed. In Igboland, the *Ofo* is comparable to the staff of authority or the mace used by the senate president. Nkwo Nnabuchi sheds light on the *Nze* title-taking ceremony as follows:

At the appointed day, and having fulfilled all rituals, the *Nze* was brought before the *Ofo*. The chief priest blessed the Kolanut and called on the God of their ancestors to come and make this oath a living reality. He placed a lobe of the Kola on the *Ofo* and asked the participant to take the lobe of Kola with his tongue, chew it and swallow. Alternatively, the would be *Nze* or *Ozo* would be asked to lick the *Ofo*, called 'Isa Ile'. From the moment the ceremony was over, the *Nze* would no longer participate in any evil act. This ceremony was a condition precedent before conferment of the title itself. If after the ceremony, he still took part in any evil act, he would die instantly.¹⁴

Thus, *Onye nze* (the particular *Nze*) is responsible to the council of the dead of his lineage for his judicial pronouncement, and is assessed by both the living and the dead. On the other hand, the *Ozo* title taking procedure is a rigorous one full of rituals and procedures. No wonder Idigo comments that the *Ozo* titled men are spiritually developed and some could have magical powers and they are next in command to the King¹⁵. He goes further to state that the status quo for the qualification of an *Ozo* title is that one must have entered the stage of gerontocracy¹⁶. This is because an ordinary youth does not know the implications of prohibitions (*Nso Ani*) in Igbo cosmology. Since the position of *Nze na Ozo* can be said to be that of mediators and custodians of culture, it is only the people that have attained the stage of gerontocracy status quo that can be said to the traditions and customs of the people better. Again, the title is not conferred on people of questionable character and the members of *Nze na Ozo* must be solely men. Typically, for an Igbo man to become an *Ozo* titleholder, he must be wealthy. This gave rise to the Igbo saying that, "Ichi ozo bu maka ndi ogadagidi" meaning that taking the *Ozo* title is an affair for the high and mighty. Generally, for people in Igbo land, it is a symbol of prominence¹⁷ on people whom it is conferred because they can afford it. The title taking event is typically organized with an abundance of yam, meat, wine and other staple foods- all of which symbolize prosperity in Igbo culture. Attesting to this, Aloysius Attah writes that, "Across the length and breadth of Igboland, *Ozo* titleship[SIC] is a major symbol of prominence". Going further, Finds and Onwuejeogwu records that, "Taking *Ozo* title is extremely expensive with the lower grades costing in excess of US\$25,000 in initiation cost and up to another US\$2000 in annual subscriptions"¹⁸. All these testify that the *Ozo* title taking in Igboland is very expensive. A poor man, even though honest cannot join the *Ozo* title holders. Nevertheless, the procedures for becoming an *Ozo* in Igbo culture was reported in a Facebook page named "Igbo Amaka" as follows:

An aspirant for the *Ozo* title has to perform *Igba-Ego-Ozo*, *Ifeka-Ofo-Ozo*, *Idoo Muo*, *Ima Nza*, *Ala Mmuo*, *Ikpata-Ofo*, *Ebute Anulu*, *On Uka Eke*, he performs the *Izu Afia Ozo*, immediately after, he pays homage to

Eze Nri, Registration with *Nze na Ozo* title men association follows. He is now a full *Ozo* titled man with *Atali* (spun wool) on his ankle (his 1st wife wear beads on her ankle), a red cap with eagle feather on his head (*Nku Apkuko*). He is now *Ichie Ukwu* & only death or defilement can stop him from being *Nze Na Ozo*. Upon death, the *Nze Na Ozo* titled man joins his ancestors without his title. His *Ozo* title shall be disconnected from him. This is done by cutting the *Atali Ozo*. His title ends in this world.¹⁹

On the coronation day, different groups will be invited including the *Ufie* dance group. The *Ozo* members dramatically swirl in their ritual dance called the *Ufie* dance to infect the mystical experience on behalf of the entire community who are not initiates. *Ufie* dance would be compared to *Sulugede* dance in Igbo tradition because it is believed to be a ritual dance for the gods and ancestors. As such, women are not allowed to partake in such ritual dance or touch the *Ufie* drum. All the *Ozo* title holders go home with a tuber of yam and a fowl at the expense of the new entrant while cows will be slaughtered among other heavy feasting and merriment²⁰. The new entrant will choose an *Ozo* title name such as *Ozo Ebubedike*, *Ozo Ezeanawalimo*, *Ozo Omechaluofumbosi*, *Ozo Ochiagha*, *Ozo Ituludegwu*, *Ozo Akalaka* etc. It is very important to note that in all of these *Ozo* initiation rites, the chief priest that is allowed to officiate in the whole ritual exercise is an *Nri* priest. According to Idigo, this is because *Menri*{*Nri*} has an official responsibility for ensuring that the prospective members of *Odoloma Eri* meet the required criteria.²¹ At the initiation ceremony, every titled man commits himself to the preservation of the traditions of the land. They consider it as their prime duty.

***Nze Na Ozo* Dressing Code In Igbo Culture And Their Significances**

During the initiation rituals into the *Nze na Ozo* society, paraphernalia that are ritually imbued with some spiritual potency are handed over to the new entrant for their self-spiritual upliftment. Socially, the initiated person has the right to own, keep and use all the *Nze na Ozo* paraphernalia namely²² - the red cap, the white ankle threads, the double-headed spear, *alo*, the single-headed iron lance, *nguegiliga*, the *ofo-ozo*, the *ozo* bronze bell, the elephant tusk, *okike* and *oche-mgbo* respectively. As a point of emphasis also, part of the *Nze-na-Ozo* title holder's kit is the *Isi-agu* dress, the Igbo native red cap and the eagle feathers and beads. These *Nze na Ozo* paraphernalia portrays royalty, hegemony, aristocracy, sacredness and leadership in Igbo cosmology.

The red cap is a symbol of authority in the culture and tradition of the Igbo people. It represents the institution of Chieftaincy, of power and of leadership. Bossah asserts that the significance of, “the red caps...was introduced by Obi Okosi in order to differentiate the members of the native courts from other title holders and from ordinary citizens...these red caps are called *Okpu Ododo*. *Ododo* is a Bini word and it means red. Later on, these red caps were won by the *Ozo* members all over Igbo land”²³. The number of eagle feathers on the cap depicts the level attained by such a chief. The *Isi-agu* attire worn by some designated people especially the prestige in the Igbo society expresses the value of identity and incorporation. However, an *Ozo* title holder is easily identified by the beads around his ankle and the ankles of his first wife, and also the eagle feather fixated on his red cap. For an average Igbo child that grew up in

the Eastern part of Nigeria precisely in 'Otu Onicha', the white apparels adorned with red ornaments and the native anklet called 'atali ozo' worn by these men helps for an easy identification.

SIGNIFICANCES AND FUNCTIONS OF NDI NZE NA OZO

The position of *ndi Nze na Ozo* can be said to be that of the mediators and custodians of tradition. Appropriating Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the emissaries sent from Umuofia to mediate in the case of impending killing of Ikemefuna actually depict the real significance of these titled men. This is because those who have attained the gerontocracy status quo like the *Nze na Ozo* are better learned and experienced in the area of the customs and traditions of their communities.

However, the most important function of *Ozo* titled men is the fostering of unity, harmony of the units, harmony and peaceful co-existence among the members of the community through their exemplary lives. Thus, they are regarded as Igbo (traditional) moral pace-setters and role models. *Nze na Ozo* title in Igboland is highly revered and the holders of the title are held in great reverence because their tongues have been washed by the oath that guides the title. Hence, the common parlance, "Ndi Nze na Ozo bu ndi a kara mma n'ile". Having washed their tongues means that they can never tell lies. It is an abomination for an *Ozo* titled man to tell lies. This marks them out as custodians of truth, dispensers of justice and the conscience of the societies in Igboland. They are regarded as sacred in Igbo tradition because they are believed to be instituted by the god(s). They bridge the gap between the visible and unseen world of the ancestors and thus making possible an Igbo understanding of those forces that are believed to control the destinies of man. They are spiritualized fathers in Igbo cosmology who perform the rituals decreed by the god(s) and ancestors pedantically in order to avoid sacrilege. Their verdict is highly respected and final. To this, Nkwo Nnabuchi attests that: "As it is a blasphemy to challenge the statement as contained in the holy texts of religious bodies, so it is with those statements of illustrious sons challenging our spiritual authority belief system in its entirety and in its parts"²⁴. In times of crisis, most Igbo communities will rely on *Ozo* members for leadership.²⁵ The initiate of *Nze na Ozo* title is remarkably an important political personality both at his clan, lineage and state levels respectively. Once a person is initiated into the brotherhood, politically, he becomes a member of the traditional ruling group. Thus, he becomes a member of *Ndi-nze*, one of the state councils, and he is regarded as a man of upright character and integrity. He is part of the law making process in the Igbo community and can help to settle disputes in the family and village square. As a matter of fact, the kings of the various communities where they exist have to be chosen from amongst the already initiated members. They are also in charge of instituting the Kings.

In the aspect of spiritualism, an *Ozo* initiate in pursuit of spiritual excellence enhances his individual and general spiritual development in the brotherhood. Economically, taking an *Ozo* title means safeguarding oneself against poverty at old age because older title holders have a share in the food items given to subsequent title takers in settlement. Socially, the initiated person has the right to own, keep and the *Nze na Ozo* paraphernalia as we have discussed previously. Interestingly, all this paraphernalia are ritualized, imbued with spiritual powers in order for them to radiate extra-spiritual and angelic potency. Such paraphernalia given to

members of *Nze na Ozo* society as a sacred institution symbolizes the image of both the heavens and the assemble circle of mystics. In fact, for some, they represent the ancestors on earth.

In a nutshell, *ndi Nze na Ozo* in Igbo culture are emblems of truth, love, justice, honesty, hope, peace, unity and harmony in their various communities. Let's briefly look into the stand of the Church with regard to the *Nze na Ozo* title taking in Igboland.

EVALUATION

Despite the fact that *Nze na Ozo* title has plausible merits to *ndi* Igbo as discussed above, the institution is not without its own criticisms. The financial stands required to attain this membership is outrageous for an average man who has real impact as intentions. The fact that this title is seen as a manifestation of the prominence of its members relegates a honest poor man who could as well be an agent of positive change in his community to the background. The exclusion of certain people from the affairs of the community simply because they are not members of this group continually jeopardizes the quality of rulers and leaders the Igbo's inherit with each passing season. The negative effect of this singular act can be seen from the shared conspiracy and inefficiency among the member. This amongst others is typical example of such continuous reports of abuse of office by the people who are supposed to be the 'eyes of the gods'.

There have constantly been propositions and criticisms of the system being misogynist and biased in its dealings. For example: it has been observed that because of the nature of women being that they menstruate, they are not allowed to partake in the ritual initiation of the *Nze na Ozo* title making. This assumption of theirs is explainable by the virtue of their being misogynistic for they know that it is in the nature of women to menstruate. Joseph Murphy attests that, “the menstrual blood from women can disturb the physical and spiritual compounds that enable sacred...”²⁶. Moreover, its dealings being termed as biased stems from the fact that the tradition of *Nze na Ozo* title taking in Igboland is highly patriarchal. John Brenkman argues that this notion of dominance is a “socially organized forms of exploitation, coercion and non-reciprocity which structure the uses that one individual or group makes of another for the satisfaction of its own need”²⁷. The *Nze na Ozo* title ritual is believed to be the initiation solely for men in Igbo communities. These men are believed to be the earthly representatives of the gods and ancestors. There are a number of restrictions put upon women, non-initiates and children in so far as they are prohibited from becoming members or initiates. This traditional and institutional patriarchy is bolstered through the sacred ordinance of the *Ufie* sacred sound and for the fact that women's blood can defile the spiritual potency of the *Ufie* drum, therefore they are not allowed to touch it. Also, through the mediation of its ritual dance which the women are not allowed to participate in, all through the response to its sacred sound therefore, this upholds the *Ufie* and the traditional patriarchy in Igbo cosmology. Attesting to the aforementioned assertion, Martin Stokes argues that, “the playing of musical instruments like the *Ufie* not only define ranks and hierarchies but gender”²⁸.

The fetish and idolatrous ritual practices of *ndi Nze na Ozo* should be modified in fiscal terms in order to accommodate all and sundry, that is, both traditional believers and nontraditional

believers (Christians). Furthermore, in order to protect the beauty of the Igbo culture and still have an efficient traditional government system, the *Nze na Ozo* groups need to start focusing their energies on enforcing the moral stance of its members in place of affluence.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, this work has made effort to reflect on the *Nze na Ozo* among *ndi Igbo*. It is also obvious from this work that *Nze na Ozo* title has both positive and negative practices in their rituals. Nonetheless, the *Nze na Ozo* title taking in Igboland is perceived to be sacred. This clarifies why *ndi na Ozo* are regarded as emblems of truth, justice and equity in Igbo cosmology. The title is made sacrosanct by the Igbo communities in diaspora. That is the reason why there are so many rules and customs that guide it as a sacred institution. The brotherhood of *ndi Nze na Ozo* rely heavily on their oaths, obligations and articles of faith during initiation because it is believed that through the mediation of its secrecy, they interact with their deities while the spirit of their ancestors are managed. In view of the above, there is need for the continuous re-emphasizing of the real reasons for the *Nze na Ozo* institution so as to keep a positive relevance especially in our contemporary society. This is because when man begins to understand the meaning and values of his Culture, then he is already on the road to cultural development. When *ndi Nze na Ozo* uphold truth, justice, equity and love which they are known for, then there will invariably be growth and development. This goes in tandem with what Francis Njoku says, "People who extort, cheat and manipulate one another cannot be good harbingers of positive development; only people who make one another flourish in truth, justice, equity and love can"²⁹. The institution of *Nze na Ozo* is very sacred and should be treated as such by both the members of *Nze na Ozo* and also the society at large.

ENDNOTES

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