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Art, Spirituality, and Authority: *The Ekpe Society's Ngwomo-Style Meeting House in 1930s Igbo Culture*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Ngwomo Ghost House - G.I. Jones 1930s.

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ART, SPIRITUALITY, AND AUTHORITY

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“View of Ekpe (Egbo) society meeting house in Umuajatta (Olokoro) village [Umuahia area]. The house had a tall thatched roof, and a wall painted by an Annang artist in the style of Ngwomo ghost houses. Surrounded by trees.” G. I. Jones, 1930s.

The from the 1930s fieldwork of G. I. Jones, a British anthropologist and photographer who documented the cultures of southeastern Nigeria, particularly the Igbo and their neighbors.

The Ekpe (or Egbo) society, also known as the Leopard Society, was a powerful secret society found among the Igbo, Efik and Ibibio peoples. It played an important role in maintaining social order, law, and tradition in various communities.

In this description, the Ekpe meeting house in Umuajatta (Olokoro), a village in Umuahia, is depicted with a thatched roof and walls painted by an Annang artist. The mention of the “Ngwomo ghost houses” refers to the traditional artistic style associated with sacred or spiritual spaces. The trees surrounding the house would have added to the sacred atmosphere, as these spaces were often in or near groves considered to be sacred.

This scene provides insight into the fusion of art, spirituality, and social organization in Igbo communities during the early 20th century, reflecting the roles secret societies played in maintaining cultural and political systems.

Jones, G. I. (1989). The Art of Eastern Nigeria. Cambridge University Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odiike

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explores ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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