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Iwu-Ubulu: *As It Was In The Beginning*

By Idenze Ezeme

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IWU-UBULU

Iwu-Ubulu: As It Was In The Beginning

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The Iwu festival is the most culturally significant event in Ubulu Kingdom's life, steeped deeply in its historical beginnings. It has its origin from two of the early settlers of the village now known as Ubulu-Uku: Ezemu, the great progenitor of the kingdom; and Anugwe, a well-established yam farmer who preferred modesty and peace to the influence which such a position as royalty would provide. This modest beginning led to a disagreement that laid the bedrock for what is now known as the Iwu festival.

Ezemu was an influential hunter and the first king of Ubulu-Uku. He had a vision for his reign. He, in his wisdom, felt that he needed to devote some time to silence and rest to communicate with gods to give him the wisdom to rule his people righteously. He also declared during this period that a special type of yam was going to be prepared called "Iwu.". He was to eat it himself, but most importantly, present it to the gods as a sacrifice, to attract blessings.

The entire kingdom must respect that period, hence Ezemu also sent out a peer group, or age grade, into the land. Their mandate was to effect the period of silence throughout Ubulu, ensuring that nobody broke the quietude which Ezemu felt was imperative in his bid to communicate properly with the gods.

Fate had some other plans. The age group, while on patrol near Abuedo, came upon one of Anugwe's sons, high up a palm tree, tapping palm wine and singing so loudly that his voice rang out into the night. Anugwe, though uninterested in royal politics himself, was one of the earliest settlers in Ubulu, and his family was known. His son was arrested by the age group for breaking the silence and taken

to the palace for judgment.

Upon returning home, Anugwe heard of his son's arrest and was infuriated. Being one of the earliest settlers in this place, he considered himself grossly insulted by this act. He lived a very peaceful, humble life, but he would never put up with being treated like everybody else, especially by some king who had come after him. This was not just an arrest to Anugwe; it was a challenge to dignity and family honor.

He mobilized his sons, armed with long canes, and began to march angrily towards the palace of Ezemu. The marching was accompanied by singing: "ì waa oke ańya, ayi eweli itali gwọa ì ala, which literally means they were prepared for a fight over their honor. Their strategy was simple: beat the members of the age group who arrested his son and make them realize who was the boss.

Immediately upon arrival at the palace, Anugwe and his sons were ready for war. Instead of rushing into it, however, Anugwe's eyes caught sight of a cooking pot. The pot was that in which Ezemu was cooking the special yam called Iwu for his communion with the gods. Anugwe was consumed by a burst of anger. He kicked the pot off the fire, thereby symbolically showing his rejection of Ezemu's authority.

His sons erupted in loud cheers, praising their father's pride and bravery. To them, this was more than an angry action; it was a statement that their family wasn't to be messed with.

Ezemu did not react in anger. A wise and keen leader, he felt this was a test of the gods. He did not fight but instead smiled and joined in the dance that Anugwe's sons had begun. Surprisingly, he looked upon this as a sign from the gods that he had been given wisdom to lead, and he showed joy, and also unity, so what had started out as a conflict quickly turned into a celebration.

From that moment, this dance and celebration began to spread to all of Ubulu land. What was a personal quarrel that started between the

two brothers became a communal event in celebration of peacemaking, bravery, and unity. Hence, the Iwu festival was born and became a tradition that continued to bring the peoples of Ubulu and beyond into neighboring kingdoms together.

Thus, the festival was not just a commemoration of the wisdom of Ezemu and the courage of Anugwe but also a memo for those values close to the heart of the community: love, purity, and peace. The time when the family and community can be in unison, iron out their differences, and celebrate the worthwhile.

Modern Interpretations and Challenges

Though born of unity and peace, parts of the Iwu festival have taken controversy in these modern times. With the uprising of various religious practices and modern beliefs, some parts of the festivals are considered idolatrous to other groups. These misunderstandings have caused many of the original practices to be abandoned or reinterpreted.

For some, the festival is an outdated tradition that no longer has a place in modern religious views. For others, it remains the vital link to the past, a celebration of the very foundation of Ubulu-Uku culture and history. The symbolic acts of Ezemu and Anugwe-peace, bravery, and wisdom remain meaningful to those who can see the deeper meaning behind the Iwu festival.

2024 Iwu Festival: Ubulu Ezemu Publisher Hails Ubulu Uku

The Delta-born popular journalist and publisher of Ubulu Ezemu, Anthony Awunor, has joined other well-wishers to congratulate the good people of Ubulu Uku Kingdom on the successful celebration of the 2024 Iwu Festival held on Saturday, October 12th, 2023.

Awunor, who came from Lagos to Asaba, was in the joyous company of other villagers from Idumubo, adding glamour to the festival. He said: “Over the past few years, the cultural festival has declined, but is now making a gradual resurgence “. He looked forward optimistically at an

even more remarkable celebration next year.



Publisher of Ubulu Ezemu, Anthony Awunor (second from right), Sunday Osemene (left), Eze Iwu Idumubo Elozanam (second from left), Buchi (center), Tina (right), and others during the celebration of the 2024 Ubulu-Uku Iwu Festival, held at Ubulu Uku on Saturday, October 12th, 2024.

The story of the first Iwu festival in Ubulu is one of transformation. What could have turned out to be a war between two powerful families was turned into a unifying celebration. Ezemu's wisdom in turning anger into a festival of peace set the tone of leadership in Ubulu-Uku, just as Anugwe's bravery became symbolic of standing up for rights.

Though some may now see the festival as having lost its relevance or as a relic of the past, for those who understand its roots, the Iwu festival continues to be a celebration of the values that built the kingdom. Love, peace, and purity are virtues that are timeless, and the festival remains a powerful reminder of these values.

In the words of those who still celebrate the festival today, "If there

was any evil in the very first Iwu, it was a good evil.” What started as a confrontation became a tradition that reminds the people of Ubulu-Uku that even in conflict, there is room for peace, unity, and wisdom.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nze is an Igbo history and culture enthusiast with an in-depth passion for exploring the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and historical narratives of the Igbo people. His works is mostly focused on pre-colonial Igbo societies, traditional belief systems, leadership systems, and the impact of European colonialism.



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