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CULTURAL HERITAGE

Nri Obalike: *The Eze Nri During Colonial Transformation (1889-1935)*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**Nri Obalike, the Eze Nri from Uruoji
who the Eze Nri from 1889-1935.**

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

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NRI OBALIKE

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Nri Obalike, the Eze Nri from Uruoji Photographed by Northcote Thomas in Agukwu Nri, 1910s. Colourized by Ukpuru 2018 and Filtered by Ozi Ikoro 2024.

Nri Obalike, the Eze Nri from Uruoji, ruled as the Eze Nri from 1889 to 1935, a period marked by significant political and cultural challenges in the north-central Igbo region. His reign coincided with the peak of British colonial expansion into Igboland, which brought about the systematic imposition of indirect rule and the restructuring of indigenous governance systems.

01

Historical Context

Eze Nri Obalike was compelled by the British colonial authorities to abolish key traditional Nri laws that conflicted with British economic and administrative interests. These included sacred practices related to land use, ritual cleansing, and the autonomy of Nri religious authority. Such impositions disrupted the Nri's role as a spiritual and cultural hub, undermining their influence in the region.

In a historically unprecedented move, Obalike became the first Eze Nri to leave the sacred city of Nri, an act necessitated by British demands to increase his political accessibility. This broke centuries-old traditions tied to the sanctity of the Eze Nri's residence and his spiritual authority.

02

Interaction with Northcote Thomas

Between 1910 and 1911, the British anthropologist Northcote Thomas visited Igboland to document the culture and governance of the region. He photographed Eze Nri Obalike as part of his research, which was commissioned to aid the colonial regime in implementing indirect rule efficiently. Thomas described the Eze as wearing a blue

ceremonial gown in one of these photographs.

03

Modern Representation

A 2018 digitally colorized version of the photograph by Ukpúrí reimagines Eze Nri Obalike's attire in brown instead of the originally documented blue which filtration was advanced by Ozi Ikoro 2024. This colorization and filtering added new life to the image, allowing contemporary audiences to engage visually with a critical historical figure whose reign marked a turning point in the Igbo relationship with colonial powers.

04

Significance of Eze Nri Obalike's Reign

Eze Nri Obalike's tenure symbolizes a transitional period where colonial demands disrupted indigenous leadership and spiritual traditions. His leadership was both a testament to the resilience of Igbo culture and an acknowledgment of the challenges posed by external domination.

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Afigbo, A. E. (1972). *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*. Longman.

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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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