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Reclaiming Ekwensu: *Rediscovering the Igbo God of Battle and Bargain*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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RECLAIMING EKWENSU

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By Chukwunwike Ossai · Cultural Heritage · Ozikoro.com

Ekwensu is a big name with many meanings in Igbo tradition. It's not the devil, as people think. Back in the day, Igbo people believed that Ekwensu was a spirit called Alusi, with its functions.

Back in the day, Ekwensu was a spirit that did things properly

God of Business and Bargain: If you were trading or selling at the market, you would call Ekwensu to help outsmart your competitors. He knows how to negotiate, and people who do business like him because he makes them smart. They connected him with the tortoise because the animal was smart

God of War: During wars, warriors would call Ekwensu for guidance and power. Especially when things are tough. People who hunt heads or fight big battles respect him. Till date, so many Igbo communities like Onicha Ukwuani in Delta state and host of others annually celebrate Ekwesu in memories of how their forefathers defeated and defended the community against Idu armies that tried to hunt the people running back home during Aya Idu.

Trickster: Ekwensu was like a spirit that played tricks, broke the rules, and boasted. He can help you but can also scatter things; he's not predictable.

In Igbo people's minds, spirit is not purely evil, like Satan, as Christians say. Ekwensu is just one spirit that has his own way. Some places in Igbo land normally hold festivals for him, like Ekpensu in

Delta, or name a village after him, like Nru N'ato Ezike Ekwensu in Nsukka.

How White People Changed the Story

When white people came to Igbo areas with Christianity, they turned Ekwensu into the devil. They needed something to match their Satan story, so they picked Ekwensu because he's wild and strong. But that's not the whole truth. Before, Ekwensu wasn't the enemy of Chukwu (the Big God), but they twisted it to make Igbo people fear their culture and follow the Christian way. That's why today if you call "Ekwensu" in church, everybody will assume that it's Satan, historically it's clearly not.

Some people say it's a spirit sent by Chukwu to test people. It can bring trouble, but that trouble can make you strong or wise if you handle it well. In Igbo, if someone does something bad, they will say Ekwensu pushed them to do it, but not that Ekwensu is the bad thing himself; it's the human who chooses.

Today, many Igbo people fear Ekwensu because of how Christianity portrayed it. But some people are trying to bring back the real story. After realizing Ekwensu isn't Satan but a powerful spirit that was distorted by colonialism. Even in a book like *Akata Witch* by Nnedi Okorafor, you'll see Ekwensu as a strong masquerade, not just an evil spirit.

So, Ekwensu is a spirit of war, business, and play that can shake things up. He was not a devil, but colonialism turned him into that. It's a powerful thing that shows how life is— it taught ndi Igbo to be smart and ready for anything.

- Chinelo Okparanta *Under the Udala Trees* (2015)
- Victor C. Uchendu *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (1965)
- John Anenechukwu Umeh *After God is Dibia: Igbo Cosmology, Divination and Sacred Science in Nigeria* (1997)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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An enthusiast in tech with deep passion for studying and showcasing the vibrant cultural heritage of southern Nigeria . Combining my skill with my obsession towards African history and traditions to create contributions that impacts the digital space.



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