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The Role of the Divine and Women in Pre-colonial Igbo Life: *A Unique Balance of Power*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**Women of the prestigious Otu Odu
Society. Source: inlandtown.com**

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Prior colonial invasion into Igbo society, spiritual beliefs guided every layer and way of life of the people, strong revered female deities and goddesses were big players in both social and political structures.

The worship of Ala, the (earth goddess) was important as it guided the values of Igbo culture, offenses against the earth goddess, like incest or homicide, is capable of polluting the land, so it demands spiritual cleansing, this ritual is being carried out by the the Ezeala priest.

In various Anioma communities, sacred roles were being held by women who acted as representatives with the spirit world.

Priestesses, like Agbala of the Chielo oracle of Awka, covered authority over women and men alike, showing a social hierarchy reversal that is rare to see. Beyond realm of the spirit, well to do women in many communities of Igbo also climbed to power via “woman marriage,” a special institution which provided women to get wives and start lineages, thereby uplifting their status in the society. Although the Igbo society was more than less patriarchal, but such institutions gave women a special leverage in the society

However, the women’s rights were mostly limited as ownership of property and power to make decisions lies majorly with men, showing a crucial balance of limitation and respect. Getting to understand these female roles shows the complexity and depth of women influence in the Igbo world prior to British invasion.



Chuku, G. (2004). Igbo women and economic transformation in southeastern Nigeria, 1900-1960.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chukwunwike Ossai

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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