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Resilience and Tradition: *The Cultural, Social, and Agricultural Heritage of Ubulu Kingdom*

By Idenze Ezeme

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RESILIENCE AND TRADITION

Resilience and Tradition: The Cultural, Social, and Agricultural Heritage of Ubulu Kingdom

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The Ubulu Kingdom is a culturally and traditionally endowed kingdom situated in the midst of a dense and rich rainforest that greatly influences the lifestyle of its inhabitants. The way of life in Ubulu is hugely influenced by its agricultural practice, artistic expressions, and social structures, making it one unique and vital community.

The jobs during the early days of Ubulu included the following: agriculture, casting of bronze, hunting, and health services. Farming, hunting, and blacksmithing were solely men's jobs, whereas traditional midwifery and weaving were mainly carried out by women. It's through such division of labor that one appreciates the existence of both genders in maintaining a community.

The staple crops grown by the people were yam, cassava, and palm fruits. Yam is a crop that is particularly important as a male symbol; the palm tree is considered female. Thus, for instance, a successful man in the community is referred to as "diji", or "master of yam," while a successful woman is described as "Ome-Akwu," a term meaning "processor of palm oil." Not only do the names reflect achievement on the part of the individual involved but they also serve to underscore the highly significant manner in which such crops are considered within the culture.

Weaving is one of the major arts, where women are peculiarly gifted to perform by creating many beautiful fabrics in Ubulu. Such designs include "mkpulu-oka," "kilikili star," "aka ngwose," and "mkpopu,"

among others that help in making the region fashionable with clothes. The weaving industries are well structured at the local level. For example, wool is grown through processing into high-quality fabrics using what is traditionally called “Nsụ.”

In Ubulu, the rites of passage for males are crowned with “ịwa-akwa”-that is, “wearing of clothes”-into adulthood. They were given a piece of cloth to cover their lower bodies. Older males usually wear a white cloth woven by the women and draped around one shoulder or tied around the waist. Women, on the other hand, wear breast cloth and “mpe,” a short skirt, decorated with ornaments around the neck and hands made of ornamental beads, ivory, cowries, and precious stones. They also express their beauty with patterns drawn using “Uli,” a natural seed dye, and often have tattoos.

The young men, also referred to as “Ikolo” wear canine teeth from big cats that they hunt down, depicting strength and bravery. This aspect actually strengthens the respect that the community has for nature and what one achieves in life.

Farming is the mainstay of the economy in Ubulu, and most families are into farming, observing some forms of traditional farming. Men make large farmsteads called “Ụnọ-Ubi” where they would often go, sometimes up to a distance of several hours’ walking from their residences, to work on their farms. The farming week revolves around market days: “Olie” is a market day and “Nkwọ” is a return day, while “Eke” is kept as a rest day, closing the cycle of the week.

Food is always at the center in Ubulu life, with soup and pounded yam largely serving on the table. The native soup is “Ogwulu,” large-volume banga soup made from palm fruits, a usual serving during high-caliber ceremonies with a big calabash spoon called “Oziozi.” It is eaten in a communal way to bring all families together in order to always keep the social bonds intact.

Social Structure and Recreational Activities

In Ubulu, the social structure is interwoven into the social cloth of life. The three main divisions within the community are Ubulu-Uku, Ubulu-Unor, and Ubulu Okiti. Ubulu-Uku is further divided into about twenty-five lineages, each of which is headed by a “Dịọkpa”-the oldest male in that lineage. This kind of leadership reflects gerontocracy, a high regard for age and wisdom. The Dịọkpa, assisted by a cabinet of four younger men, presides over the administrative, legislative, and judicial affairs of the lineage.

Children are called “Ụmụaka”. They also play many kinds of traditional games, such as “funchọ”, “ nzizo,” and “ egwu nni-aja “. The elders usually sit around while the children perform these playful activities and reminisce about their childhood. Young men will also wrestle one another. It provides bonding, but at the same time, develops muscles to be physically strong. Storytelling is one important way of teaching the children. The moral lessons are carried by the experiences that characters undergo, thereby enabling the child to make fresh decisions to avoid past mistakes.

Political Organization and Religious Beliefs

Governance in Ubulu makes the stress on community-based activity and traditional governance. Family governance is the most important, with family leadership resting on the oldest man, known as “Okpala Ụnọ” or “Dịọkpa Ezi n’unor.” The women, on their own, run a parallel frame that is managed through the “Ada”-the oldest female-in every lineage.

All religious practices vary among the different families, for most of them keep private shrines where the lineage worship at a shrine called “Ishu-Ani.” They conduct cleansing and thanksgiving in this shrine to appease the supreme deity Olisebuluwa. The lineage Dịọkpa plays a very important religious observance role in reporting to the council of chiefs as “Ndi Oli Nzele Ani,” who then report directly to the Obi, which is the king.

Women also play significant roles in this governance system: the “Ada

Ebo” is the eldest woman who is responsible for organizing the women in activities and also maintaining the cultural standards. The “Anasi-Ebo” is the eldest wife of the lineage, which controls the group of wives. The community prescribes the cultural expectations on certain practices such as adultery, and the Ada Ebo has to enforce sanctions and uphold set standards.

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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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