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Umuada: *The Silent Matriarchs of Igbo Society and the Spirit of African Feminism*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Umuada Igbo North Carolina Branch USA

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UMUADA

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Ụmụada Group

Umuada is a strong traditional group among Igbo people in Southeast Nigeria. Women who created it are daughters of one lineage or community. Whether they are married or not. The word “Umuada” is derived from the Igbo words “Umu” (meaning “children” or “plenty”) and “ada” (meaning “daughter”), so it translates to “daughters of the house or village.” They are very respectful and play a significant role in peace, culture, and development within their communities.

Umuada existed before colonial times. They have a strong influence in Igbo land, including Abia, Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi, Delta, and even Rivers state. In Igbo culture, they usually follow the men for family matters (patrilineal), but their daughters still receive respect and consideration. Even their first daughters generally known as (ada) can join in decision making and settle fight too.

They have a kind double identity- They are daughters in their father’s house, but when they get married and experience life more. This allows them to have a say in both communities.

When the Colonial people came, they spoiled many native ways, including Umada’s own. They placed Male Chiefs and followed the Western style of ruling. Still, Umuada refused to die. They are adjusted, like during the Biafran War (1967-1970). They helped people who are suffering, giving them food, shelter, and support. This shows that, over time, they will change but will still hold onto tradition.



Etche women drummers during the Etche New Yam Festival.

Umuada are known as peacemakers. If a quarrel happens in the family, or even between villages, people call them. Because they are not biased, people believe they would always tell the truth. For example, a traditional ruler from Imo State says that Umuada are always called because they stand for truth.

They could literally settle serious matters, such as a husband and wife fight, land disputes, or moral cases. They do use talk, mediation, and beautiful people who behave well. Sometimes, if any case isn't judged well by the men, Umuada revisits the case for a better judgment.

Umuada are guardians of the Igbo Tradition. In weddings, funerals, and other big events, they are in charge. If a man is getting married, he needs to settle Umuada first. If they disagree, that marriage will not hold. This way, their culture is protected.

They also monitor people's behavior. If anyone steals, or a woman cannot support her family, or a man abuses his wife, Umuada acts

according to the situation. In Diaspora, they organize events to teach children about the Igbo language and culture.

They don't just talk, they take action. In some villages, the Umuada built schools, bought an oil mill, and even brought light and water. Abroad, they do charity work, give scholarships, and help those who are sick. For example, Umuada Ndi-Igbo in Diaspora, who reside in California, have supported plenty of good causes.



AT 2018 UMUADA IGBO ORGANIZATION HOUSTON BRANCH INDUCTION

Even before feminism arrived in Nigeria, the Umuada had been fighting for women's rights. During the Aba Women's Riot in 1929, they joined to protest the colonial tax that affected women. Today, they are still fighting against child marriages and promoting women's education and rights.

They don't complain. They use the system available to demand change. They have voice and presence, and they also show that women can lead and make a real difference.

1. Double Power: As daughters and wives, they are capable of speaking from both sides. Even when they are married, they still have power on their father's side.
2. Check and Balance: Even if society favours men, Umuada checkmate them. If men or elders do anything, they help them behave. They balance the power of men.
3. African Feminism is an example of feminism that never copied the white people's method. This feminism grew in our culture. It shows a woman can lead with respect and tradition.
4. Global Reach: Even in America or the UK, Umuada groups still existed. They still preserved our culture and helped the community. They show our culture can survive anywhere.



United Umuada Igbo International UK and Ireland

I. Colonial Problems: The British people reduced their power by placing men in charge and pushing a foreign style. They are strong in

some areas.

ii. Criticism: Some people say they are too harsh, especially when they criticize someone or exclude them from the community. People in modern times do not like it.

iii. Inside problems: Not all Umuada behave well. In some places, they are biased and misuse their power.

IV. Culture Fades: Young people can no longer speak the Igbo language. Modern life and the internet have made tradition die a little bit every day.

In 1988, a woman named Lolo Kate Ezeofor helped organize Umuada groups under one umbrella. Umuada Igbo Nigeria in Diaspora. This made them more organized.



Lolo Kate Ezeofor

Abroad, they normally do charity work and promote Igbo culture.

They work hand in hand with the government and NGOs to develop projects.

Some Umuada groups also have websites and are active on social media.

Umuada is a strong institution for Igbo women. For a long time, they have helped bring peace, protect culture, build community, and support women. Even with all these challenges, they are still relevant. They show that Igbo women are strong, wise, and important. As Igbo land changes, Umuada still pushes forward our culture and unity.

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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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