

Initiation And Burial Rites Of Ozo Titled Men In Igboland: An Assessment Of Ekwulumili, Anambra State.

Prince Emeka Emmanuel Ume-Ezeoke

Morgan Ogbonna

Department of History and International Studies,
Babcock University

Abstract: The Ozo title is one of the most prestigious and significant traditional titles in Igboland, particularly in the community of Ekwulumili, Anambra State. This study explores the intricate cultural processes involved in the initiation and burial rites of Ozo titled men, which serve as a critical expression of identity, status, and spiritual fulfillment within the Igbo society. Through a combination of ethnographic fieldwork, interviews with key informants, and a review of relevant literature, the research provides an in-depth examination of the symbolic meanings and socio-cultural implications of these rites. The initiation process, which includes rituals, sacrifices, and communal celebrations, is designed to integrate the individual into the spiritual and social fabric of the community, conferring upon them not only status but also certain responsibilities and privileges. Similarly, the burial rites of Ozo titled men are laden with symbolic acts meant to honor the deceased and ensure their smooth transition to the ancestral realm. These rites reflect the interconnection of life, death, and the afterlife in Igbo cosmology. The study also highlights the challenges faced by these traditional practices in the face of modernization, Christianity, and changing societal values. Ultimately, this research contributes to a greater understanding of Igbo cultural heritage and the ongoing relevance of the Ozo title in contemporary times.

Keywords: Ozo Title, Ekwulumili, Initiation, Ceremony, Candidate.

I. INTRODUCTION

The quest for recognition is an age long phenomenon to man himself. Among the Igbo generally and the Ekwulumili people in particular, title was usually bestowed on indigenes of the society as an act of honour and recognition of various efforts or acts of services rendered to develop and advance the society. Among various titles which were available in Ekwulumili, the Ozo title taking stands out. Ozo title taking was an expensive ceremony which probably grew out of the need for priests who would preside at extended family and lineage worship, supervise the cult of the ancestors and keep the family of staff among other reasons (Davidson, 1961, p.103).

In pre-colonial Ekwulumili, an Ozo titled man performed the role of the arbiter in matters of justice. Today, members of the society who are dissatisfied with the settlement of the Ozo

titled men go to court. With the advent of Christianity, various fetish practices which usually characterized the initiation process of new entrants into the Ozo title institution in Ekwulumili have been excised (Davidson, 1961, p.145). This made a mess of the institution as new entrants had nothing to fear anymore; such fetish initiation practices made the Ozo titled men directly responsible to the gods of the land which met out instant punishment to offenders.

Over the years since the advent of Christianity, once revered institution has today become a scorn, the honesty, truth and justice once associated with the institution has become a thing of the past. It is so sad that the effect of Christianity has eaten so deep into the fabrics of this age long institution. While it still wobbles so weakly, there is a daring need to revamp this institution before it dies off completely (Bradburry 1951, p.103).

Title institutions have been in existence all over the world from time immemorial. The Europeans have their Lords, Earls, and Counts. Here in Africa, many ethnic groups have their own institutions; the Yoruba of Nigeria have the Ogboni, the Nbiosakon in Northern Edo of the former Bendel State Nigeria have theirs in various names. In Bini, the titled men are divided into the peoples and palace nobles. But among all the title constitutions that exist among the Igbo people the most prominent is the Ozo (Ilogu, 1972, p. 24). In certain parts of Igbo land, there are other titles that could be taken by full-fledged citizen like the dune and the emume. But the Ozo titled man stands out clearly from the crowd by his regalia, his behaviour and the dignified way he moves about. He is gorgeously dressed, carries his elephant tusk and adorns his red cap with one or two eagles feathers stuck on it (Ilogu, 1972, p.24).

The Ozo title is a religious cum social association into which men of wealth are initiated in various stages with religious ceremonies (Bradburry, 1951, p.90). By his initiation rites, the Ozo officiates in religious functions, or other functions with religious undertones when he is in the midst of non-titled men, should there be two or more titled men, precedence as among titled men in Etsako tribe of Edo depends on the various individual ranks and the date of their initiation into those ranks. He also leads his village in social functions being a titled man, who has “a say” in the town affairs, he can therefore represent them effectively and protect their interest. As in many other communities, wealth is a prerequisite for the taking of Ozo title so it is in Ekwulumili. Among the Iname in Edo state a man must have married an “Amoya” wife and completed the funeral rites of his father before he takes a title. The funeral rites involve feeding the whole village and making presents to important individuals (Okafor, 2010, p. 1-2). This is almost similar to the prerequisite conditions which must be met by an Ozo aspirant in Ekwulumili before full title is bestowed on such one. For instance, he is normally expected to be a man of means and wealth; if not, he definitely cannot be able to fulfill or meet all the necessary conditions.

Moreover, he is expected to have completed his father’s funeral rites if he is late. If his father is still living, he must make sure his father is an Ozo. In essence, he will initiate the process of his father’s entrance into the Ozo institution first before he can now be permitted to take his own Ozo title. The Ekwulumili just as the Awka people, before A.D. 1905 (when the British came), were great people, resourceful, inventive and courageous (Ilogu, 1972). They were a race of specialists, working in iron, copper, brass and bronze; skilled in the carving of household wooden implements and ornaments. They are good in farming; in the practice of traditional medicine, and in the pursuit of wisdom. They did not belong to any known clan in Igbo land, neither had they any known relatives. They referred to themselves simply as “Ebe Anyi” – our stock (Okafor, 2010, p.3).

II. TITLES

Title names are appellations bestowed on individuals as a mark of distinction, rank and dignity and in some cases imply

office or vocation. Titles may be official, honorary, civil, military, temporal or ecclesiastical. The use of titles is as old as civilization itself and seems to have arisen from the desire of the society to reward and publicly express its appreciation of men or women who have done well in advancing and developing their community. Titles or honours could be for life or equally hereditary especially in the case of monarchies. The people of Ekwulumili had various title institutions among which the Ozo title stands out. The origin of Ozo title institution is difficult to trace (Isichei, 1996, p.497). However, it is safer to say that it grew out of the need for priests who would preside at extended family and lineage worships and supervise the cult of the ancestors and keep the family Ofo staff. Secondly, it might have grown out of the economic need of the peasant society in which young men invested their agricultural wealth in the form of crops and livestock into the taking of the title from which they expected to derive much dividend from the new entrants. In this way, the people secure for themselves means of livelihood at old age when they cannot do active work. The majority of the older initiates insist on the purely religious origin of the title as the most important reason for their taking it. They argue that the continuity of the lineage, clan or village depends on the existence of God-fearing men who share in the spirit of the land through their relationship with the earth goddess (Ala). They also desire to know how to please the spirit of dead ancestors and uphold the ordinance of the land. The Ozo title is said to be the religious means of achieving these ends (Ilogu, 1972, p.45). Therefore, the individual who has taken an Ozo title must live a holy life, uphold publicly and privately the morality of the land and observe all the taboos, religious and rituals of all the gods and goddesses of the community.

The Ozo institution has many features. The meaning and main features of Ozo title can be summarized as a religious cum social organization into which men are initiated (with their wives sometimes) in various stages with religious ceremonies. It is not a cult. It has no seasonal or annual religious celebration or a chief priest to supervise its doctrine as there is none. The members meet when there is someone to be initiated and the Onyeisi Ozo (the leader) functions at such times or at the burial ceremonies of one of their members (Davidson. 1951, p.98).

One of the features is “Ibu Aku Ozo” that is presentation of the appropriate Ozo wealth to the member in the form of goats, cock, rams, fishes, stout, various kinds of palm wine and other drinks (cloths in some places.) The presentation is done in various stages and at various occasions, sometimes spreading over a year. Another feature of Ozo title is the various sacrifices given to various gods at various shrines. This is followed by the planting of Ozo trees such like Oha, Oginisi or the installation of the ancestral shrine called Chi, where the panel doors can be built in the Iba of the newly initiated man (Umeadi, 1974, p. 24). Another feature is the giving of an Ozo titled man praise worthy names chosen by the initiates and his close relatives to convey the thought upper most in his or her family’s history at the time the title is being taken. The Ozo title can be taken only by a free-born of the village. In some areas, the Ozo title is inherited by the relations after the death of their Ozo titled brother like in Aku

town. In Awka during the pre-colonial era, this was not so (Ueadi, 19174).

The Ozo title was not hereditary. Moreover, since this is a very revered title in Igbo land, the holders play important roles in matters of law and order. Again this is not only because political authority is inherent in the title but because, the general tendency in Igbo society is for power to fall to anyone that has prestige or organizational zeal both by reason of wealth and the religious beam of the title to yield some influence. A titled man of great reputation in Ekwulumili as well as Awka, could make adequate arrangement for his young son to take the title in his life time or after his death. In this later case, all arrangements short of the final indication rites can be made in order that when the young boy is of age, he needs only to pass through short final rites before he is accepted as a full member of the Ozo title group. A man could also take the title for his absent son, in the case of the absent son, the fact that the fees have been paid and the rites observed, entitles the son when he is back to the village to carry Insignia and receive associated salutation as a full titled person (Nwankocha, Interview, 25/7/2015). A very young son for whom the preliminary rites have been performed does not receive any of the title tributes until he is of age and undergoes the final rites and initiation.

III. INITIATION OF OZO TITLED MEN IN EKWULUMILI (BEFORE 1950 TO EARLY 60'S) A REQUISITE QUALIFICATION INTO OZO TITLE MEMBERSHIP

Before the initiation into the Ozo institution is fully dealt with, it is also very important to discuss briefly basic qualifications into the institution. There are many expectations from an aspirant before he is admitted into Ozo title institution, this is to identify free born because it is open only to sons of the soil. The man will then perform the "Chi ceremony" which qualifies him to be a family head or village head. He can then occupy Obi if it is his town, after the Chi, the man performs the *Obele Emume*, which is three in one title. All these ceremonies are in preparatory to the Ozo ceremony. The *Obele Emume* comprises the *Aghajioku*, *Ajama* and *Ajamuada* (Ezike, 1998, p.58).

Aghajioku: This is associated with the harvest in Ekwulumili. It is taken to ensure beautiful harvest yearly.

Ajama: This is the travel blessing; Ekwulumili people travel a lot and have to take this title to ensure their safety.

Ajanwada: This is performed when the first daughter is getting married. The ceremony is done to wish her happy married life.

Ajalija: This is a distinguished and respectable title which every Ekwulumili man aspires to take. Unless a man takes the *Ajalija* title, he cannot stand to speak on important issues concerning the affairs of Ekwulumili. It is a very expensive title. *Ajalija* indicates that somebody is of average wealth, responsible and can be reckoned with in the society. A wealthy man can initiate as many of his children as possible and if he initiates five of his sons, he answers *Omeise*. A fully initiated person wears a red cap and carries a special stool (Umeadi Nwaosinaonu, 1974, p.10). Before the main Ozo title

ceremony can be performed, there are other ceremonies after *Ajalija* which qualifies the aspirant finally for the real Ozo title taking. These include: *Ozo Uno*: Here the aspirant will cook and entertain his kinsmen. Like in *Ozo Uno*, in Ekwulu Ozo, the aspirant cooks for his village. They will feast and rejoice with him on his impending title. After the feasting, he will be qualified to take the Ozo title (Okafor, 2010, p.34).

INITIATION PROCESS INTO THE OZO TITLE INSTITUTION IN EKWULUMILI

The initiation rites into Ozo title institution in Ekwulumili are usually very costly. In many cases, the title holder might become impoverished after his initiation. This does not in any way mean much to the Ekwulumili man as he has achieved the loftiest ambition of any Igbo man. The Igbo view about such a situation is summarized in an Igbo proverb which says "Ubiam dalu onye ozo adarozi gboo maka na oke agbafego ilulo wee tochie". This literally means that the poverty that visits the Ozo man is too late in coming, because the rat has fast crossed the field before the weed overgrew its path. Initiation in the Ozo institution is not a one day event; it's very tasking and procedural. The various procedures would be explained in details below (Talbot, 1923, p.140).

Ima okwa: (Publicity) Just as its direct English interpretation implies, it is a time in which the Ozo title aspirant informs various persons making them aware of his intent to take the Ozo title. An aspirant after informing his family and kinsmen about his intention, he also alerts the eldest Ozo title holder in his *Umunna* that he intends to take the title, he does this with a calabash of wine, kola nuts and stipulated amount of money. He then makes sacrifices to different shrines of his kindred with kola nut and wine. *Ika Ihe di N'Ozo*: Here, the eldest Ozo titled man would appoint a date usually on a particular market day (*Eke*) when the aspirant would come for the announcement. Naturally, he would not go there empty handedly. Kola nut and wine must be offered by the aspirant. This Ozo aspirant would then be told what he is required to do in order to go through the entire exercise. For instance, he would be told the cost in terms of money, palm wine, goats, fowls, yams etc, he generally does not tell him everything lest he frightens the aspirant away (Okekenta Nwike, Interview, 25/7/2015).

Izu Ndi Isi Nze: The eldest Ozo title holder in his *Umunna* would take the aspirant to meet the *Isi Nze* (leader/Chairman of *Ndi Nze Na Ozo*). He told them about the wishes and proposal of his kinsmen. After this is done, there is the ceremony of "Igbasa Mgbasa Ndi Isi Ozo" in which members of *Ndi Nze na Ozo* are given their due payments by the new entrant which consists of items such as wine, goat, fowls, yams and kola nut. There are cases in which the aspirant would be required to meet several relations, *Ndi Ikwunne* most especially to collect the "amuoku" (Nwankwocha, 2015) a symbol of approval from their mother's kinsmen, grand fathers and mothers to inform them that he would be performing the title. In each case, there is a large sum of money and sixteen yam tuber which would be given to the father of the candidate (if he is titled). If the father is not titled, he would only be given some amount of money (Amoku,

2005, p.41). There is chalk for every goat killed and money for every titled man.

Ana Eze: This is the "Ibu Nze" ceremony involving sixteen yams, chalk, money (Ego Nza) which would be given to every titled man as required at this stage.²³

Isi Anu: This is the head of the animal ceremony. The aspirant provides a goat, sixteen tubers of yam and some money. After, the candidate would carry all the remnants of the meat, food etc and deposit them at the Odudo Aja (the place of the ancestor,) (Nworji, Interview, 25/07/2015). This means reporting to the gods and ancestors of the candidate's intention to take the Ozo title. This ceremony takes place any time of the day and the candidate surrenders his old clothes and takes on new ones.²⁴

Iwunye Maya N'ofo: This is the ceremony in which wine was poured on the Ofo shrine sixteen gallons of wine were required. The first part of wine was accompanied with 64 cowries, the second 48, the third with 32 and the rest 16 cowries, and half part of each goat killed was used to cook for the person conferring the title (Amoku, 2005, p.45).

Iku Ozo: The candidate will go round the village with a metal gong and pay a huge sum of money, "Ogu ukwu iri" to them. In addition, he will give 600 yams, 2 female goats and 12 gallons of wine. These are done on the day he announce that he will be taking the Ozo title, he is carried shoulder high around the Ozo Shrine. Three able bodied young men normally carry him; if the Eagle feather shifts its position on his head, it will be a sad omen that the candidate would die. If the local gun which must be shot in the process did not fire, the juju priest would seize it. If the candidate died at this stage, the title will be conferred on him posthumorously (Nankwocha, 2015). After this, he will return to his house but would not enter until he is washed. It is after this ceremony that the candidate enter a sort of confinement (Akwu Ozo) and stay there for four days before taking his title names on the fourth night (Iza afa Ozo). On the fulfillment of all entertainments and other conditions for initiation into the title system, the aspirant is moved to a blacksmith with four kola nuts and two gallons of palm wine for the preparation of his Alo or Ngwuagiliga (staff of office made of iron, copper or other materials). The blacksmith gives his conditions, produces it on fulfillment of the conditions and presents same to the candidate. After collection and at his own pace and convenience, he moves to the overall head of Ozo with four kola nuts and two gallons of palm wine to meet him and his wife to his house for an agreement on a day to be fixed for the final initiation rites (Chinwuba, 2014, p. 54=57). On arrival for the initiation, the head and his wife are entertained with Nni-ocha, goat meat, asa and loaja (fish) ncha and abacha. Before the entertainment, he is presented with kola nut and ife na asato. In the evening and like the case of ajalija title taking, the wife of the man returns home with rich and well prepared lump of Nni-ocha leaving her husband behind to return later in the evening (Okekenta, 2015). After her departure, both the head of the Ozo title and the aspirant continue with eating of meat and drinking until they go into the details of fixing a date for the final initiation into a particular Ozo title group or Ijena Mkpu Ozo. As soon as this date (oye) is decided, the head of the Ozo title institution leaves for home to convey the messages to sectional heads (village Ozo head) who in turn

makes this date known to all members of the different villages. The aspirant on his part invites Umu Okpu of his kindred through the Isiokpu (older daughter of the kindred) to his house. The Umu-okpu receives this joyful message with happiness (Ndigwe, Interview, 25/07/2015).

They, on arrival, the invitees are profusely entertained with Nni-ocha, yam, meat, fish, ncha, abacha and drinks. At the end of the entertainment, he would tell them his reasons for inviting them and would tell them the date he would be moving to Mkpu-Ozo. They normally receive such announcement with joy and prolonged ovation, praying that it materializes accordingly. In the evening of the Eke day, which is actually part of the Oye day fixed for initiation rites, the Umu-okpu would assemble at the candidate's house anxiously waiting for the event of the day (Nwakalor, Interview, 26/07/2015). Later in the evening, the head of the Ozo titled men would join them in waiting for the events, the Umu-okpu and the head are generously entertained with foods and drinks all night. But on the previous Nkwo day, the aspirant would have moved to the village square to obtain a fresh Ofo after complying with their Mgoasa of ife na asato, eight kola nuts and two gallons of palm wine.

Mkpu Ozo: At about 3:30am on the oye morning. The head of the Ozo title, the aspirant, the okwa-nzu boy or girl and the umuokpu silently move enmasse" to the particular mkpu Ozo shrine of the village involved. The head moves to the mkpu- through „ogboli Ndi Nze" and not through an ordinary foot path. On getting to the Mkpu Ozo, the head moves straight on to the shrine, takes his position by standing erect on the Mkpu while the aspirant and his Okwanzu carrier are made to stand at a position near enough to the Mkpu Ozo (Mgada, 1972, p. 3). The umu Okpu would wait at a distance of about thirty meters from the zone of influence or the mkpu. While at his position, the head of the Ozo society holds his conventional ofo in readiness for the final initiation of the aspirant to consummate the initiation, he asks the titled man impatiently "Ichile gini" that is, (what is your title named) and he replies, "Echilim Nnayelugo" that is, my title name is Nnanyelugo (Nwakalor, Interview, 2015).

The head then strikes his ofo on the candidate's forehead once, the head moves two steps backwards and strikes the ofo on the ground saying "Nnayelugo iga Aza kaya nka" meaning that he will live long to enjoy the fruits of the title. Since every titled man is identified by four titled name; the head must repeat this very operation three more times each time ascertaining his title names to accomplish the four names required by the initiation rites. After the formal initiation, the head collects the fresh ofo from the new Ozo man. Traditionally prays and consecrates it and then returns it to the new titled man as his own ofo.²⁸ How tender or how hard the head hits the forehead of an Ozo man in accordance with the ofo ceremony depends on their personal relationship (Okoli, Interview, 26/07.205). If the relationship is cordial, it will be a mild hit, but if otherwise, the wound he sustains from the actions will last for days. The head picks the Okwa-nzu and gives it to the new titled man. This would be followed by a cannon fire marking the end of the initiation ceremonies, the head quietly returns to his home, while the new titled man and his okwa-nzu boy or girl happily moves directly to disclose his four title names to the Umuokpu. However prior to the ichili

gini question by the onye isi Ozo, the prospective Ozo aspirant is made to enter the grave for about three days. This in essence is very symbolic (Ndigwe, Interview, 26/07/2015). It signifies an oath or covenant between the prospective Ozo title holder and the spirits of the ancestors. They thereafter stand as intermediaries between the ordinary Ekwulumili indigenes and the ancestors. They serve as beacon of justice and truth. As a result of the instant consequence that follows any misconduct on their part as representatives of the gods here on earth, they avoid doing evil of any sort as it would look like a plague (Chinwuba, 1980, p. 22).

IV. BURIAL RITES OF AN OZO TITLED MAN IN EKWULUMILI

In Ekwulumili when an Ozo flies into eternity as they say when he dies, it is said that he has taken a flight into eternity and his life here on earth is celebrated by Ozo members and others. His first son goes with an uncle or a close relative, to the head of Ozo members to announce the bad news. He presents the customary hot drink and kolanuts, the Isi-Ozo laments the death of their colleague (Mgada, 1972, p.21). The isi-Ozo or Ozo head informs Ozo Ekwulumili at its next formal meeting of the death. The family of the deceased Ozo Ekwulumili goes ahead to prepare for the burial rites while keeping the Isi-Ozo abreast of all the arrangements. All the elaborate feasting ceremonies organized in the process of taking the title while the Ozo titled man was alive must be repeated all over again (Okoli, Interview, 26/07/2015). On the day of the burial proper; when the deceased is to be lowered into the grave, in Ekwulumili custom, it is the first son of the deceased who pours the sand first into the grave followed by other children. It is said that a parent has achieved greatness if he or she has children who pour sand into his or her grave at burial. An informant made it clear that a spouse does not pour sand into the late spouses' grave. According to him, it is an abomination to do that in Ekwulumili custom (Chinwuba, 1980, p.22). He argued that this custom is consistent with the Christian bible; since both the husband and wife are one after marriage, it is practically not possible to bury yourself.

The late Ozo is buried lying on his back in an *Osisi Oji* or a wood carved from the iroko tree which was the most reputable casket at that time. The only Ozo paraphernalia that goes down to the grave with the Ozo man is the *akiri okpa or apali* (anklet) of both himself and his living Ojiefi.³⁶ All the Ozo titles which a man acquired may be in a period of time extending for over fifteen years, are removed from him in a very solemn religious ceremony which involves the sacrificial killing of some goats, cocks and cows. It is believed among most Ekwulumili people that although the Ozo man must be buried with the rites, ceremonies and pageantry pertaining to his rank, yet the practice of removing the Ozo in symbolic religious rites is to teach people that no one should carry title or rank to the gods (Nwoga, 2000, p.44). This is because it is believed that before the gods all men are equal and the only title or rank to be awarded in the land of the dead is what the gods themselves give, according to the quality of life a man has lived on earth.

SOCIAL RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES OF AN OZO TITLE HOLDER

In pre-colonial Ekwulumili, the Ozo men hold political offices and represent their families and lineages in the village group council or preside over settlement of cases, making covenants and the establishment of new cults. Socially, they belong to the noble men's rank. This is a social status marked out by the honor accorded to those holding that position. They also take precedence in all public entertainments and feast irrespective of their age (Ogbalu, 1966, p.35). In Ekwulumili, the Ozo man however young, is to be served first at public events, he alone can carry and blow the elephant tusk, put eagle feathers on his cap, sit on a goat's skin, on the dais, pour libations of wine to the spirit of dead ancestor; be the *Okpara* or head of his extended family. It will be an insult for anyone to address him in public meetings other than in his title names. Only Ozo title men greet one another with the double handshake. The Ozo titled man would be the "banker" for his community because he is so trusted that people keep their precious properties with him. He is exempted from menial manual labour (Nwaoga, 2000, p.114). In Ekwulumili, any titled man convicted of stealing, automatically forfeits his title.⁴⁰ Such is the great honour society bestows on the Ozo title holder that when he dies especially in old age, his burial assumes pious and sacred form which indicates the people's belief that his spirit has joined the gods and the ancestors and that he has become divine. The titled man is a very proud man which may at times appear to the stranger as arrogance. The wives are also affected because they automatically advance in social status with their husbands. Although titles can vary, there appears to be a very special regard for the Ozo title in particular. In addition to that, the Ozo titled man is safely guarded from all bodily harm and assaults (Ogbalu, 1966, p.64). He also has an almost limitless authority to inflict any punishment, short of outright murder on any one who meddles with any of his wives. He holds a private council and exercises jurisdiction over traditional civil and even criminal cases among kindred and occasionally in the towns⁴¹.

They also handle problems threatening the internal and external political social and economic securities of the towns. These include settling land and other cases considered inimical to maintenance of peace and order in the town. The judgment delivered over an issue by them is fierce and irrevocable. The council of Ozo effectively governed Ekwulumili during the pre-colonial era. When they promulgated a Decree prohibiting certain social evils, no one dared to violate the terms of the decree without being subjected to penalties commensurate with the offence committed. An extreme case of intransigence attracts a punishment of banishment or being sold into slavery. It is the prerogative of the Nze na Ozo Ekwulumili to determine offense punishable by banishment or being sold into slavery (Chinwuba, 2007, p. 67). The Ozo man reserves exclusive right of fixing dates for the celebrations of the annual traditional festivities of Okpensi and Ngene. They also announce the dates for any other particular event at Ekwulumili, when it is to be celebrated. However, Ozo titled men who failed to perform the second burial rites of their

parents do not participate in the execution of this sacred exercise (Chinwuba, 2007).

V. NEW TRENDS IN EKWULUMILI OZO TITLE TAKING SINCE 1970

The Ozo title institution is the most important feature of Ekwulumili social and cultural life. Men who acquired riches take the traditional title that confers the title of "Ozo" on them, thus, making them members of the Traditional Ruling Council (TRC), in Ekwulumili communities. It is unarguable that, Ozo title taking is a very prestigious ceremony and accords a man an exalted position in his family, kindred and the entire community. It is an aristocratic position. In Ekwulumili society, there is hierarchy and the Ozo title society is the highest level of the hierarchy. It is like the "college of cardinals," "the privy council" or the *crème de la crème* of the community (Nankocha, Interview, 25/07/2015). Before a man is initiated into the Ekwulumili Ozo society, his character, conduct and source of livelihood are checked or verified. This is the case because the Ozo society being prestigious and famous would not accept a person with questionable character or a man whose means of livelihood cannot be ascertained. The report of the screening committee which is put together for this purpose will determine the fate of the aspirant viz-a-viz becoming an Ozo titled man in the community. The screening committee will be looking for, among other things: Criminal records if any; how his wealth was made; if he is an ex-convict, if he has taken other titles; if he lives in his own house; if he is married and has children etc. If the report of the screening committee is positive, the Ozo title aspirant can now proceed further. He then gets the list of requirements for Ozo title taking from the secretary (Bradburry, p.141). The Ozo aspirant must know what he is getting into. He wishes to be regarded as a dispenser of justice without any fear or favor irrespective of who is involved. He is not bankrupt in character. He did not acquire wealth through robbery and he is not a criminal or an ex-convict. Ekwulumili *Nze-Na Ozo* is open to male indigenes with good reputation.

This title taking is a very rigorous exercise which culminates in the aspirant becoming an Ichie Ukwu, a first class Ichie. As Ichie Ukwu, he has dedicated himself to what is good. He has to avoid what is evil. Membership has its privileges. He cannot be insulted because he never put himself in a compromising situation (Basden, 1968, p.134). He is respected and revered. In days gone by, an Ozo title holder had so many rules governing his existence; he could not eat food cooked by just about anyone; he drinks from a special cup; he is entertained while he eats; he does not engage in arguments; he always spoke the truth or faced serious retributions from *Ani*, the Earth Deity; etc (Talbot, p.42). In the pre-colonial days, there were elaborate initiation rites such as the ritual cleansing of the initiates, the would-be Ozo, by an Ekwulumili emissary known as "Nna Ozo", a midget from Ekwulumili Town.

Through the ceremony all mistakes and missteps of the past are cleansed off and the initiate was then prepared for the new life of a peaceful person who would no longer tolerate injustice, overlook oppression or tell lies (Ilogu, p.65). This

aspect of cleansing is done presently with *Nzu* or white chalk. *Nzu* stands for purity and is used to draw lines on the mat while praying for the initiate. Ozo still maintains its mystique. It is believed that one who has taken the Ozo title has sworn to an oath of truthfulness. He has done *Ika Nma Nile* that means that his tongue has been sanctified to speak only the truth. He must be honest, where there is dispute; he is expected to provide the correct information. In the olden days, *Ndi Ozo* of the Ekwulumili community was treated as saints. They led by example and protected the weak by speaking against injustice and the young ones were never misled by them (Isichei, p.321).

By 1970, gradually but steadily, various core aspects of the ozo title process began to be eroded. The prospective ozo initiate no longer performed some of the traditional rites which were termed idolatrous by the Christian churches (Roman Catholic and the Anglican) in Ekwulumili but it is still been practice in some other communities. For instance, in the modern Ekwulumili, it was decided at a meeting of 20th April 1970 that any man who wished to take the Ozo title must give £300.0 (three hundred pounds sterling or N600) to Ozo Ekwulumili (Umeadi, Interview, 2015). One hundred and fifty pounds out of this sum will go to the full pledged Ozo members while the remaining £150.0 will be shared by those who had not fully satisfied the requirements to be initiated. Also 22 gallons of palm wine (*Nkwu Enu*) were brought by the initiate. If the palm wine was not good enough, the initiate will pay a price of £15 (fifteen pound sterling) per jar of wine. It must be stated that in today Ekwulumili, most aspects of certain titles have been converted to cash payment (Ifemesia, 1973, p. 87). This monetization is very much welcome as it shows that after all, title-taking is about money. In distant past, title taking was intended to be a method of indirect saving as old members shared some money when a new member was admitted. The shares were taken according on seniority in the title group. Although, there are differences in the title fees, what is paid in Ekwulumili for the title, is now recognized universally.

VI. BURIAL OF AN OZO IN EKWULUMILI

The burial ceremony of an Ozo title holder in Ekwulumili is always very historic. At the death of an Ozo Ekwulumili, his first son goes with an uncle or a close relative, to the head of Ozo Ekwulumili to announce the event. He presents the customary drink and kola nuts. The president or head Ozo Ekwulumili laments because this is a loss but praises God Almighty for doing his will. Then the head informs Ozo Ekwulumili at its next formal meeting of the death (Okafor, 2005, p.183). The family of the deceased Ozo member goes ahead to prepare for the celebration of life, always keeping the Ozo members informed.

Ozo Ekwulumili is given the dates and even though invitation cards are brought to the head and distributed, members and Ozo and an *Ojiefi* of the burial rites. However, Ozo Ekwulumili has been Christianized and all fetish or unchristian aspects of the title taking ceremony have been abolished. Thus, presently if the dead Ozo is a Roman Catholic adherent or a member of the Anglican Communion or

a Pentecostal, it is the practice of his religious denomination that is followed. Ozo Ekwulumili presently is a church ceremony for the deceased and those who belong to the denomination participate in the ceremony. When it is over and the deceased is lowered into the grave, the traditional dust-to-dust rite follows (Umeadi Interview, 2015).

In Ekwulumili custom, it is the first son of the deceased who pours the sand into the grave first before the rest of the deceased children follow. It is said that a parent has achieved greatness of he or she has children who pour sand into his or her grave at burial. A child is an "achievement". A spouse does not pour sand into the late spouse's grave. It is an abomination to do it that way. It was so before colonial rule, it was also the same system during colonial rule, and has remained so afterward (Ifemesia, 1973, p.40). After the performance of the dust-to-dust rite by the first son, he is then initiated into Ozo Ekwulumili for a period of three native weeks or twelve days by the head Ozo Ekwulumili and before all attending the funeral ceremony, for this, he wears his late father's robe and presents himself looking regal. He presents agreed kola nuts, hot drinks, Nzu and his father's Ozo paraphernalia except *akiri okpa* or *apali* which are thrown into the casket and buried along with the *Ojiefis apali*. The head of Ozo prays for him and the family. The kola nut is then broken. He is given a lobe of it and he shares it with his siblings and wife, keeping to the seniority system in the family. He is also given the hot drink after the head pours the libation which he drinks and passes along as was done with the kola nut. The Ozo Ekwulumili around share the kola nut and drink. Then the first son is capped with his father's long red cap with white Ugo feathers. Finally, he is given the fathers Ozo staff of office or *Ngwu agaliga*. At each juncture, he beats the *ogene gong* signaling agreement and acceptance of the deed. Then he gets up with his wife facing him, he is led around the fathers' compound dancing to the *ufie* music and being hailed by Ozo Ekwulumili family and well wishers usually with his father Ozo title name (Ezeani, Interview, 27/07/2015). He is led around the premises and to the gate of the compound and where he engages in another aspect of the funeral ceremony, *Ina aka ikenga/ Ina akalor*, for this, he stands in his compound at the gate, facing a collection of Ozo Ekwulumili who are there to greet him and advice him on the future. The Ozo Ekwulumili does this according to seniority wishing him progress. After this, Ozo members retire to a compound to be entertained. They eat and are given souvenirs and invited to the *Pata Nuo*, it is exactly as it was done when the deceased took the Ozo title. A huge cow is slaughtered because there must be enough to eat. (Ifemesia,1973). The standard is maintained during initiation into Ozo Ekwulumili. The *Pata Nuo* process completes the burial ceremony of an Ozo Ekwulumili, which on its own is an expensive venture. On the day of burial, Ozo Ekwulumili and their *Ojiefis* are presented with some money and water only. The next day which is *Akwamozu* which means burial day, they are again presented with money and real drinks. They are richly entertained for poor people are not initiated into Ozo Ekwulumili.

THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON OZO EKWULUMILI

Like everything that Christianity touches, the initiation rites of Ekwulumili have been christianized, but some traditional elements are still preserved. Uche Ezechukwu states that Ndigbo accepted Christianity with ease and a great fervor. They believe that Christianity was custom-made for them. They find the Christian teachings and philosophy natural, rational and similar to their traditional world-view (Chinweuba, 2014, p. 57). For Ekwulumili which is part, Christian ethics and philosophies are identical and mere extensions of their own. Thus, the Christian missionaries were merely preaching to the already converted! Now, having accepted Christianity, Ekwulumili people have hardly ever regarded it as a foreign religion, because they find a natural accommodation with it. To that extent, many of their important traditional observances such as Ozo title taking have been modified without rancour, to make them easy to be assimilated by Christianity.

In the past, the missionaries did not allow the taking of Ozo title by the Ekwulumili Christians, this is owing to the rituals and traditional ceremonies involved in the title taking which are believed to be conflicting with the Christian belief. The Ozo institution was therefore dominantly monopolized by non-Christians. The Ozo institution since the colonial era lost some of the glory it had before. It was influenced by Christianity which also came with western education. People began to appreciate education more than Ozo title (Basden, 1966, *ibid*).

Christianity therefore posed a great threat to Ozo Ekwulumili institution, Christianity also made it that as long as the Ozo institution contained what had to do with idol worship Christians should not be members. Christians who were already members before conversion were asked to renounce their membership of Ozo title society. Many of them withdrew from being Christians instead of forfeiting the membership of Ozo institution and its advantages (Davidson, 1951, 48). Some Ozo title holders allowed their household to be members of the church while they themselves remain in Ozo institution. It is on record that Nze Robinson Ojirieyi who was the Obi of Urueze village Ekwulumili was a member of Emmanuel Anglican church Ekwulumili and had to change his membership to Catholic Church when he was asked by the Anglican Church to renounce his ozo title.

After some time, there were several attempts to introduce title taking to Christianity so that Christians would be able to take the title equally. At a church missionary society (CMS) conference held at Onitsha on Tuesday 12th of May 1974, where the issue of the ozo title was deliberated upon. The consensus was that the ozo title was idolatrous and as a result, no Christian should have anything to do with it. To this resolution, Rev. G. Anyaegbunam and some members of the conference replied; "Scarcely is there any custom in this country that has nothing to do with idolatrous or superstition in it! But what and where shall we be if we reject and throw all these customs out as quite unfit? (Egudu, 1977, p.77)

One Mr. Nwejei who was a participant requested that plans be drawn up to enable Christians to take Ozo title. Though in later years, a conference was held, yet the former

decision still remained unchanged. The Catholic Church saw early the role of the Ozo title holders in their communities and desired to have its adherents among such leaders. That was why Cardinal Francis Arinze and His Lordship, the Most Rev. A.K. Obiefuna and the other catholic hierarchy looked kindly on Ozo title holders and befriended them. With the Anglican Communion, it was quite a struggle (Ifemesia, 1973, p. 41). The problem over the purity (or Christianity) of the Ozo Ekwulumili title was laid to rest on 12th August 1978. It was during the time of Bishop A.K Obiefuna Emeritus Archbishop of Onitsha. The Catholic Church said there was idol worship in Ozo title-taking. In order to clear the doubts, Ozo initiate G.O Umeanadu on the day of his initiation, invited the Bishop. Bishop Obiefuna sent representatives to observe the initiation for possible approval by the church (Ezike, 1998, 56). The Ozo Ekwulumili title was taken in the new way, without the initiate having to go to the Udo shrine as before and without the cleansing services of the Isiogwu shrine. Thus Ozo Ekwulumili members, community, and the Catholic Church, agreed that Igwe G.O Umeanadu had been initiated into the famous and prestigious Ozo Ekwulumili on 12 August 1978. A report was sent to Bishop A.K. Obiefuna who approved and recognized the Ozo Ekwulumili title as being free of idolatry and accepted Ozo G. O Umeanadu as the first Ozo Ekwulumili in the new dispensation. In the later years, the CMS followed suit. As could be seen presently, these developments have some effects on Ozo title taking in Ekwulumili. Many Christians are member of Ozo institution in Ekwulumili and acquired full membership (Ozo Chizulu echizu). Ozo title holders in Ekwulumili town now partake in church activities in both denominations on their own individual merits. Originally, the Ozo title holders were charged with certain duties politically, judicially and otherwise. The coming of the white men relegated the Ozo institution to mere vestigial institution. The warrant chiefs who were mainly converts were used to run the political affairs of the societies. In fact with the influences of Christianity on the Ozo title institution, things have not been the same again (Okoroji, Interview, 27/07/2015).

VII. CHANGE AND MODIFICATIONS IN OZO TITLE TAKING IN EKWULUMILI

Ozo title taking in Ekwulumili has undergone several modifications. There are conscious and unconscious modifications. There is a consensus that a Christian aspirant does not need to go through all the rites before he attains the position of full Ozo title. They are no longer compelled to undergo all the religious stages which the man who took the Ozo title in a traditional way underwent. They are just made to feast the older Ozo members and pay the fees involved. However, their fees are higher (Egudu, 1977, p. 112). They also dedicate their Ozo insignia in special church services⁷⁹. Areas of modifications include such areas as initiation, burial rites and taboos.

VIII. MODIFICATIONS IN INITIATION RITES

The Christian initiates into Ozo title in Ekwulumili do not undergo the "Okuko Ozo Ofo", which the candidate uses to wash his tongue in the course of his initiation. Similarly, Christians are not required to visit any shrine during their initiation. Such initiation rites the Christian churches considered pagan, have been substituted or in most cases eliminated for the Christian Ozo initiates in Ekwulumili. The Christian candidates are not expected to consult the diviner but suspicious are high that some may secretly indulge in these. Rituals are no longer binding on them according to Fabian Ezeani who himself took the title some decades ago, the initiates requested the priest to offer the Holy sacrifice of the mass on them. The removal of the religious ritual is not restricted to Christians alone. Any non-Christian candidate who wishes to pay money in lieu of the actual ritual is free to do so (Okoye, 1978, p.106).

IX. MODIFICATIONS IN BURIAL RITES OF A MEMBER OF OZO SOCIETY IN EKWULUMILI

Burial rites of a deceased Ozo title holder have experienced some changes in Ekwulumili since the late 1970s. Though both Christians and non-converts attend the funeral of such deceased members, traditional religious ceremonies are not observed. The Christian priest conducts the funeral service of a Christian Ozo initiate. The announcement of the death of the deceased Christian member is by the Ekwe- the traditional wooden drum. The eyes of the deceased are not smeared with the blood of ram slaughtered for that purpose. Christian members no longer perform Igwaka and removal of ankle cord rituals. The ankle cord is removed by members without any religious rites. In fact, some of the Christian Ozo title holders in today's Ekwulumili never wear the ankle cord (Ilogu, 1974, *ibid*) There is no cleansing of the land anymore. Besides, the relatives of the deceased are no longer expected to stay around the place the deceased lay in state before the interment.

The deceased may be buried in his compound or in the church cemetery. Mourning rites and period have also been modified. The Christian widow no longer undergoes through all the hectic mourning rituals, which used to be inflicted on women as a form of discipline, in the past she is expected to take food to the grave of her husband every night. It is no longer compulsory for her to cry every morning as an honour to the dead husband (Okafor, 2005, *ibid*).

X. MODIFICATIONS IN THE TABOOS

There are also some changes in the taboos that guide the Ozo institution in Ekwulumili society. Certain taboos associated with the Ozo institutions were very stringent and to some observers, many appear so universal for instance, previously it was considered a taboo for the Ozo Ekwulumili title holder to eat some certain type of food, their chief food was yam, they were also forbidden from eating in public places. However, with the increase in the scope of economic and social activities, Ozo title holders in Ekwulumili can no

longer be limited to activities in their homes. Those of them who travel out of their residence could even sleep in hotels and also eat in public places. This has a lot of implications, for instance; they could eat food prepared by menstruating women which in times past it was a taboo (Nze, 1984, p. 45). Moreover, now that most Ozo title holders in Ekwulumili do marry one wife; such women must prepare their food regardless of their state. It must be noted that in the past, *Olu* or *Oru*- slave or *Osu*- outcast was not allowed to take Ozo title in Ekwulumili but at this time, opinions have changed at least in favour of their taking the title. A slave can now take the title freely without any restriction but the title is nicknamed "Ozo-obia" strangers Ozo title. The cult slaves are now given the right to take a type of Ozo which the people baptized *Ozo arusi-Ozo* title which is under the custody of a shrine. The cult slaves are allowed to perform this type of Ozo initiation among them. This does not in any way solve the problem of social discrimination they suffered (Nze, 1984, *ibid*). Most traditionalists see the participation of the "Obu" and "Osu" in any type of Ozo as a devaluation of the revered tradition. That is why Professor R.N. Egudu has remarked that; "When the slaves or outcasts are discriminated against with regard to Ozo title, the intention is not to oppress them, it is simply an act of recognition of a social disability." The modifications of societal norms along this line have however been very difficult. Though Ekwulumili society has destroyed the *Osu* cast system, other communities are still practicing it (Egudu, 1977, *ibid*).

XI. IMPACT OF THE MODIFICATION ON THE RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF THE OZO TITLE HOLDER

In the past, the traditional Ozo title holders after initiation are given the full insignia of Ozo Ekwulumili, however, members initiated in recent times are not given the special stool, red cap, Egu feather and elephant tusk. Now, members are being addressed in the respected title of *Ndi Nze* with those who were members before them. The Christian Ozo members also enjoy church fellowship like communion, wedding and Christian burial rites in Ekwulumili. However, some of the judicial adjudication reserved for the Ozo members in the past like land disputes, group quarrelling and other cases are today tried in lower courts, thereby depriving them of the special power to executive traditional authority conferred on them (Chinuba, 2014, p.88).

Occasionally, the privileges enjoyed by the ozo titled men were tampered with, for instance an ozo man according to Ekwulumili tradition was not allowed to perform such functions as digging graves or clearing public places considered to be undignifying. Moreover, an ozo man under arrest should not be bound in chains. But the colonial administrator ignoring the people's traditions arrested ozo men and handcuffed them under prison sentences where they perform such undignifying duties mentioned above. Moreover, as a result of various dreadful processes they are made to pass through during the process of initiation which has strong spiritual significances, the ozo lived a pure and a transparent life. Today, with the erosion of these rites, an ozo now tells lies, steals, and does money rituals (Okwaraoke, Interview,

27/07/2015). The modern Ozo Ekwulumili man can no longer be trusted; ozo has lost its prestige!

The modifications in Ozo Ekwulumili has however caused a lot of problems not only in the society itself but also in the whole clan. The traditional Ozo Ekwulumili members believed that they derive certain powers from the gods and from the ancestors by performing the religious rites during their initiation. Such powers are denied new members who did not pass through the religious rituals. Consequently there is an intra-societal struggle between the older members and those who are joining a few years back. Sometime, it was reported that the traditional Ozo members did not invite some new members in discussing a vital issue in the village because the dispensation of justice and fair play is synonymous with *Ofo* and *Ogu*, which the modern Ozo Ekwulumili members did not possess. Some new members ignore the traditional morality associated with Ozo, some of the informants complained that some values of Ozo institution are becoming extinct among the Christian members (Mmaduka, 1974, p.29). For instance, in Ekwulumili there is a general impression that Christians who took the title by the payment of money do not care to observe the taboos that are inherent in the title. Some elders fear that if the members continue to pay less attention to the rules and regulations of the society, the institution will no doubt die away. This is in conformity with Mr Eddy Umeh's remark that "if "Isa-ire" in Ozo institution which requires religious rituals which ensures that Ozo members do not tell lies is neglected, there will be no more trust on Ozo title holders, they tell lies because they have nothing to fear and when they tell lies, where does the prestige of Ozo lie?(Nze, 1984, p142) Ozo title which was formerly looked upon as an embodiment of holiness and honour has now been politicized.

In Ekwulumili of today, Ozo title is now used as a means to achieve political power in the society. Many young men who wear Ozo ankle and red caps as Ozo members do not show the amount of zeal in maintaining the integrity, truthfulness moral rectitude with which the Ozo is associated. They have to some extent debased the moral principle of Ozo by the way some of them live. Some rich traders have also used the society as a stepping stone to acquire a political power. Some modern Ozo members neglect their regalia and prefer wearing pairs of trousers, long shorts and gold anklets possibly as a way of shinning modern improvement on the traditional attire. Consequently, in Ekwulumili some non-members now dress in the traditional Ozo attire without being penalized unlike what prevailed in the past (Okwaraoka, Interview, *ibid*). Traditionally, only Ozo title holders used to greet each other with the back of their palm, but these days, members of social clubs practice it without being rebuked by members of the Ozo society (Okoroji, Interview, *ibid*). Gradually, it is becoming a common pattern of greeting by non-members of the Ozo society. Moreover, the various modifications experienced in the institution have some advantages. With the current modifications, the society has started to admit many men; those who could not have joined because of their church affiliation are now members. This has in effect enriched the older members who share in the proceeds realized from the initiation of a new member regularly. However, the growth in membership is restricted to a particular grade of Ozo society, called the Ozo Ume.

Besides, elites protect the system further and the traditional regalia are now improved (Umeadi, Interview, *ibid*).

XII. CONCLUSION

Igbo society and culture emphasize considerable individualism as well as communal solidarity. It is through the membership of the community that individuals assisted by the in-built values such as bravery, justice and cooperation to aspire towards achievements in status and prestige as in Ozo title taking. It is so sad to note that such an organized institution with traditional origin has been rather placed at the back burner (Maduka, 1974, p.29). Frankly, with the solid foothold of Christianity in Ekwulumili, the Ozo has yielded some grounds to Christian missions, government and indeed other foreign influences thereby causing diminutions in its sacredness and sanctity.

According to Nze Donatus Umeonusuru, a member of Nze -Na ozo Ekwulumili “as a result of the break with the past, the sanctity virtues, indeed the spiritual contents of titles have been drained... the fate of traditional titles is jeopardized as it now depends very much on the mercy of the alternating effects of the marriage between the old and new influences”⁸⁶ The Christian missions exerted most of the disastrous influences on the prestige and sanctity of the Ozo institutions in Ekwulumili and indeed the whole of Igbo land. The Ozo society was inseparably bound with the traditional customs and religious beliefs of the people. Unfortunately, it was these aspects of Ekwulumili customs that were termed bad and superstitious by the missionaries that actually gave vigor and authority to Ekwulumili customs and traditions like the Ozo institutions. Their revival has therefore left an indelible mark in the cultural life of the people. This has reduced the state of the Ozo in particular to a mere social club without any religious and ritual content. Also the colonial administration contributed to the decadence of the prestige of the Ozo society in Ekwulumili. Before the advent of the Europeans, the Ozo title-holders in Ekwulumili were the holders of important social, political and economic power.

When the Europeans came however, the situation appeared to have changed. The colonial government and their agents became the power in the villages. Court Clerks, Messengers and Interpreters, because they could speak English became all powerful, their social background notwithstanding, the government now provided security which was formerly given by the Ozo society. There are new rules governing the conduct of every member. If anybody has cases or complaints, they take it to the courts. The Ozo institution has lost its prestige, relevance and revenue it formally derived from adjudicating cases in Ekwulumili. The Ozo society was no longer able to take action against any offender. There are now several government agencies for social control and maintenance of law and order. All these has culminated in the dishonorable way this revered traditional institution is handled today with their members lacking in respect and reputation when compared to the state of this institution in the pre-colonial period. The result is that within three decades of colonial rules, the Ozo institution has lost its position of prominence not only in Ekwulumili but all over Igboland

where Ozo titleship is observed. Another extraneous influence that posed a formidable threat to the existence of the Ozo society in Ekwulumili was the social clubs. Though social associations like Age grades, Umuada (a group of women married to different places from a family) existed in pre-colonial Ekwulumili, these social groups have bearing on native customs and traditions in a way that they interfered with the working and privileges of the Ozo Society. Moreover, the kind of social clubs that came with colonial impositions and western education is entirely new and without linkage to the traditional values of the people. Membership of one or more of the social clubs has become fashionable and the aim of every young man. This has made the Ozo Ekwulumili society to lose in membership to only the elderly men alone as it has become unfashionable to young men. These young men today find it more prestigious to identify with social clubs like Peoples Club of Nigeria than to come home and take the Ozo title that is traditional to us. It is pertinent to note that Ozo society in Ekwulumili has been able to absorb the shock of all these extraneous influences and survived to the present day even though with modifications. The reason for this can be found in the fact that the society is deeply rooted in the traditional custom and the belief system of the Ekwulumili people. Any attempt at a total demolition of the Ozo society would have been to all intents and purposes unsuccessful. When the missionaries discovered that they could not put an end to it, they adopted it along with most of the customs of the people. According to Rev. M. Mmaduka, “If we take necessary pains and interest to look into the mysterious labyrinth of our customs, we shall discover in their prescient precious germs that are not foreign to Christianity (Nze, 1984, p.32).” This shows that despite inroads blazed by colonialism, modernity etc into the culture of Ekwulumili people and the Igbo race at large, the foundation has remained essentially intact. It is a glorious triumph over European influence and sincerely worthy of celebration. The Ozo institutions in spite of all influences have yet still remained to a towering extent dynamic, enlivened and treasured in Ekwulumili. Nze Chukwuemeka commenting in one of his journals on Igbo culture stated categorically that “even dormant culture like dead games if not preserved will be eaten up by ants and worms or will simply decay and rot away”⁸⁹. Be that as it may, Ozo Ekwulumili has come to stay.

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