

Ike Onochie RN – Chief Akunne of Onitsha

My name is Ikechukwu Onochie, formerly called Ike. All Igbo names hold significant meanings, and those names are specifically chosen by their meaning. My name was given to me by my great grandmother, Ike – meaning power and Chukwu – meaning God so in entirety my name means “God’s Power or Power of God”. When I was 14 years old when I came into the United States with my entire immediate family in 1997. My mother worked on immigrating herself, my father, my three younger siblings, and myself to United States for several years until we were finally granted Visas. I attended Northwest High School in Indianapolis Indiana and graduated in 1999 at age 17. I have spent my time in the United States pushing and striving for the best for myself and my family. I am most proud of my education and my Ozo Title of which I received the Chief Title of Akunne, which means Mother’s Wealth just this year.

I am married to an American woman who has accepted and thoroughly embraced all aspects of my culture. We have been together for 18 years and married for 11 years. We do not have any children at this time but hope to one day soon. We met when we were both working together as CNA’s and we have both elevated our positions within the healthcare field and are both Registered Nurses. I first earned my Bachelor of Science degree from Indiana State University in Human Resource and Development. I then decided that I wanted to go back to school and earn my degrees in nursing first as LPN in 2021, then most recently RN in 2024 because I enjoy the clinical aspect of healthcare and interacting with patients.

Nigeria is a vibrant country located in West Africa, bordered by Benin to the west, Niger to the north, Cameroon to the east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. It's known for its diverse culture, rich history, and bustling cities.

Nigeria's history is marked by ancient civilizations, colonial rule, and eventual independence in 1960. Its diverse population consists of over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own unique traditions and languages.

Among Nigeria's major tribes are the Hausa-Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the southwest, and Igbo in the southeast. The Igbo people, to which I belong, are renowned for their industriousness, entrepreneurship, and vibrant cultural practices.

Anambra State, situated in the southeastern region of Nigeria, is predominantly inhabited by the Igbo ethnic group. Within Anambra State lies the bustling city of Onitsha, known for its commercial activities and vibrant markets. Onitsha is home to various Igbo subgroups, including the Aniocha, Nri, and Odoje people.

My father originates from “Odoje Village”, located within the vicinity of Onitsha, holds significance as an ancestral homeland for many Igbo families, including the Onochie family to which I belong. The relationship between Onitsha and Odoje village is deeply rooted in history and cultural ties, with many families maintaining strong connections to their ancestral roots while contributing to the growth and development of both communities.

My mother originates from "Umm Ikem" village in Onitsha, further enriching my cultural heritage and familial ties to the region. Being born into the Onochie family, I am proud to carry

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on the traditions and values passed down through generations, embracing my Igbo heritage and contributing to the diverse tapestry of Nigerian culture.

The Ozo Title and Its Significance in Onitsha

The Ozo title in Onitsha is a significant and prestigious traditional institution that plays a crucial role in the community's social, political, and spiritual life. The title-taking process involves several stages, including the notice of intent, fulfillment of rites, title conferment ceremony, Ozo dance, fattening/recovery period, and market outing. This process transforms the individual into a respected leader and community elder, symbolizing integrity, justice, and ancestral reverence. The Ozo title is deeply embedded in Igbo culture and is revered for its role in governance and maintaining societal norms.

The Ozo title, deeply rooted in the culture of the Onitsha people, is one of the highest social and political achievements. It dates back to their probable migration from Benin around 1520, where it was already a part of their traditions. The title is expensive and prestigious, primarily conferring the priesthood of the ancestral cult upon its recipient, elevating them from a commoner to an aristocrat within the exclusive Agbalanze society. This society is not secretive but highly respected, drawing more people in Onitsha to pursue the title due to the honor it brings.

The initiation into the Ozo society involves several elaborate rituals, including the presentation of kola nuts, palm wine, and money. The process includes various ceremonies such as Ibu ego Ozo, Igo mmuo, and the final enthronement, where the initiate is formally recognized as an Ozo titled man. The title emphasizes integrity, justice, and leadership, serving as a bridge between the living and the ancestral spirits.

The Ozo title is a status symbol in Igbo land, available to those who can afford it or have sponsors, provided they are individuals of upright character and integrity, respected by the community. This esteemed status transforms the individual into a community leader and elder, upholding justice and ancestral reverence.

Stages of the Ozo Title Initiation Process

1. **Igba oko nti na inyado nna:** The initiate presents kola nuts, palm wine, gin, and a substantial sum of money (approximately N17 million) to his immediate family. A goat is slaughtered, its skin separated and dried for later use in the installation ceremony.
2. **Igo mmuo:** On the appointed day, all Ozo members gather. The initiate is enthroned as Eze-ozo by sitting on the dried goat skin. The initiation date is announced, and the Ozo men disperse.
3. **Ibu ego na ikpalo:** During this stage, the initiation fees (around N5,000) are paid. Performances exclusive to Ozo titled men take place, although non-titled men and relatives can attend as spectators.
4. **Ina obibi:** The candidate collects symbolic objects, including a pair of osisi, Okwachi, Okposi, Ikenga, and Ofor. All Ozo titled men are invited to attend the initiation

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ceremony, where the candidate's Okpala leads the rite of Iwalozo. A representative of the Obi of Onitsha arrives with the Nza, a symbolic object with purifying powers.

5. **Final Ceremony:** The initiate's body is smeared with white chalk powder, and a white strip of cloth with a white eagle feather is tied around his head. The Okwachi is carried behind him by a virgin. After this, the new titled man is celebrated and led home by his admirers.
6. **Ugwu Ozo a Afia Ozo:** The following morning, the initiate and his relatives gather at the Ani shrine for the final ceremony. It begins with the breaking of kola nuts and libation by the Okpala. The remaining initiation fees are collected, thrown into the air for children to scramble and pick, symbolizing the conclusion of the traditional initiation process.