

T. Akachi Ezeigbo, *Women's leadership roles in Igbo society: A study of Ime Chi, Omoku, and Omugwo Institutions.*
(Purple Shelves Publisher, 2021), 59 Pages.

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Book review

In *Women's Leadership Roles in Igbo Society: A Study of Ime Chi, Omoku, and Omugwo Institutions*, T. Akachi Ezeigbo embarks on a captivating journey through the often-overlooked leadership roles held by women in Igbo culture. The book, which can also be described as a well-knitted narrative, is a testament to the author's thorough research and profound understanding of Igbo traditions and rituals. It illuminates three vital cultural institutions in Igboland, namely Ime Chi, Omoku, and Omugwo, elucidating their roles in empowering women as leaders in their families and communities. After a description of each institution, appendices that further illustrate the significance of the institutions are provided.

A prominent and recurring theme throughout the book is the concept of "servant leadership." Akachi Ezeigbo effectively portrays how Igbo women exercise leadership through service to their families and communities, emphasizing the importance of humility and selflessness in this context. This perspective offers a fresh and unique angle to the study of leadership and gender roles, shedding light on a leadership style that is deeply rooted in Igbo culture.

The book's most remarkable strength lies in its rigorous research methodology and deep engagement with primary and secondary sources. Drawing from historical records, personal experiences, and interviews, Ezeigbo constructs a robust and well-informed narrative. This

meticulous approach not only reinforces the book's scholarly credibility but also provides readers with a rich and authentic portrayal of Igbo culture.

The first section of the essay introduces readers to the Omoku ritual: a celebration of motherhood and fertility in Igbo culture. The author highlights the significance of this ritual in reinforcing the bond between mothers and their daughters. During Omoku, mothers perform rituals with their daughters to strengthen connection and foster solidarity. The author masterfully illustrates the leadership role mothers assume in the act of guiding their daughters through the rituals. For example, Appendix I provides a personal perspective on the emotional and introspective journey of a grandmother, who reflects on her transformation into a "mother-of-a-mother." The narrator of the story in the Appendix 1 captures the essence of Omoku by highlighting the complexities and simplicities of her experience. This narrative adds depth to the essay's argument by offering a first-hand account of the emotional and personal dimensions of the Omoku ritual, emphasizing how it empowers women to exercise leadership in their families.

The Omoku ritual serves as a major rite of passage, symbolizing the transition from girlhood to womanhood in an Igbo society. Mothers play a pivotal role in guiding their daughters through this transformative process, which imparts wisdom, cultural values, and a sense of identity. It is during Omoku that daughters receive not only practical knowledge but also emotional support, which is aimed to strengthen the intergenerational bond among women in the community.

Moreover, the book underlines the importance of unity and solidarity among women during Omoku. While it is a celebration of individual womanhood, it is also a collective reaffirmation of the enduring strength of women in the Igbo culture. The leadership roles assumed by mothers during this ritual extend beyond their immediate family circles, as they contribute to the cohesion and resilience of the broader community.

The second section of the essay delves into the Ime Chi ritual, an act of worship used by Igbo women to express gratitude to their personal gods or guardian angels. Ime Chi is portrayed as a celebration that allows women to take control of their spiritual welfare and that of their families. Women's leadership during the Ime Chi ritual extends beyond the spiritual realm, as they act as mentors, offering advice and emotional support to their families. Appendix I does not directly relate to the Ime Chi ritual but provides insight into the narrator's evolving perspective on motherhood and family bonds. This personal narrative helps readers connect with the emotional journey that women go through during significant life transitions which

indirectly contribute to the essay's overarching theme of women's leadership in cultural rituals.

Ime Chi epitomises the role of spirituality and personal empowerment in Igbo women's lives. During this ritual, women exercise leadership by embracing their spiritual identities and connecting with their ancestral roots. This act of worship is not merely a religious duty but an affirmation of women's agency in shaping their destiny and that of their families. Furthermore, Ime Chi represents an occasion where women share their experiences and wisdom with the younger generation. The leadership exhibited by women during this ritual involves mentoring and guidance, strengthening the bonds between mothers and daughters and fostering a sense of unity within the family. The book under review stresses the fact that women's leadership roles during Ime Chi reflect their roles as advisors and emotional anchors in the family.

The third section of the essay explores the enduring tradition of Omugwo, in which a woman's mother or relative is invited to care for her and her newborn child. The author asserts that this tradition has survived various societal changes and continues to be a significant expression of leadership in Igbo culture. Women's leadership in Omugwo is shown in their guidance and nurturing of the young generation, the offering of wisdom and support to their married daughters and their own families.

Appendix II introduces another personal narrative that highlights the complexities of human emotions. It narrates the story of a woman's initial envy and her subsequent personal growth as she befriends the wife of a man she had secretly desired. Although the narrative is not directly linked to the Omugwo ritual, it complements the essay's theme of women's roles in nurturing and supporting each other, as well as the idea of adjusting to societal norms.

Omugwo stands as a testament to the enduring rich traditions of Igbo society and the vital role women play in nurturing the next generation of women. The quality of leadership women demonstrate during Omugwo is multifaceted, encompassing physical care, emotional support, and the transmission of cultural knowledge. The Omugwo tradition symbolizes the cyclical nature of life and the wisdom passed down through generations in Igbo culture.

Also, Appendix II adds a layer of complexity to the discussion of Omugwo by exploring the intricacies of human emotions and personal growth. It illustrates the transformative power of relationships and the capacity for individuals to evolve in their understanding of societal

norms and expectations. This personal story underscores the theme of resilience and adaptation to cultural traditions.

T. Akachi Ezeigbo's work, comprising three significant Igbo cultural institutions with Appendices I and II, creates a nuanced understanding of the leadership roles of Igbo women in cultural rituals. While the work provides a structured analysis of the rituals and their significance, the personal narratives in the appendices offer a more emotional and relatable dimension to these cultural practices. Together, they paint a comprehensive picture of how women in Igbo society exercise leadership within their families and communities, not only through traditional roles but also through personal growth and mutual support. This multi-faceted approach enriches the reader's appreciation of the subject matter by emphasizing the enduring strength and resilience of Igbo women in preserving their cultural heritage and nurturing future generations.

However, while the book excels in content and insights, the offering of comparative perspectives on women's leadership roles in different African cultures or globally, would have further enriched the book's depth and scope by allowing readers to contextualize the unique qualities of Igbo women's leadership.