

**Book Review**

**NRI: HISTORY, TRADITION AND MODERNISM BY IKE NWAKO,  
EMENIKE IKEGBUNE AND GODWIN UZOEGBO**

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The trio (Nwako, Emenike and Uzoegbo)'s *Nri: History, Tradition and Modernism* published this year, 2022 by Ikenne Publishers, Abuja has 200 pages. The book has a beautiful and well designed cover, a title page, copyright page, dedication, acknowledgments, table of contents, preface and foreword in preliminary pages. The book is presented in ten chapters, with conclusion, bibliography, appendices, epilogues and index as complements. The assemblage of these ten chapters dutifully attended to and did justice to the title of the book which discusses Nri history and tradition in the face of contact with western civilization and globalization over time. There is a page (iv) dedicated to quotes by the authors. Although this may seem unconventional, but considering the relevance and meaning of those quotes justifies the essence of embarking on this research to produce a work that will outlive this generation, and those of the future.

The preface, which started with a fable on the proverbial vulture's prayer for the survival and sustenance of the old so as to tell the people that vulture meat is forbidden in the land, leads the reader into this compendium on the myths of origin, migration and settlement patterns; socio-cultural cum traditional developments in Nri town over time. Agreeing with the position of the authors that reconstructing the history of Nri seem an uphill task owing to various contentions and postulations by different interest groups in Igboland, it is no gainsaying that Nri, over time, occupied and has continued to occupy a pride of place in the history and culture of the Igbo speaking people of southern Nigeria; and thus deserving of this academic attention. The foreword appreciates the place of history in the lives of humanity which cannot be overemphasized, as history encapsulates the origin, existence and essence of human living. For he who knows not his history knows nothing, and may not be existing. In other words history is the repository of human knowledge, and should be guarded jealously for the benefit of mankind. The book under review is a good example of

a treasure that will be beneficial to the Igbo, Nigerians and humanity in general. Introducing the book, the authors in what they referred to as the theories about Nri, carefully discussed the place of Nri in Igbo history. In page 1, they captured Onwuejeogwu's submission that one of the greatest events in Igbo land was the development of Nri civilization between AD800 and 1910. This civilization was based on the Philosophy that the Eze Nri derives his legitimacy from God (Chukwu).

Furthermore, they identified the Eze Nri, being the custodian of the sacred *ofò*, as occupying pre-eminent position among the Igbo. Continuing, the authors aptly represented Njaka's view on *Ofo* being a symbol of authority; the link between the dead and the living, the living and the unborn, God and human. It is a symbol of truth and justice, truth and confidence, without which no religious ceremony can be fittingly performed. It is therefore the crux of Igbo religion.

In page 3, the book captures A. G Leonard, (a Divisional Officer in-charge of the Central Division of the then Southern Nigeria)'s observation on the reverence and recognition accorded Nri by the entire Igbo people as an evidence buttressing the age-long belief that the Igbo descended from Nri. Efforts were also made in this section of the book to capture the origin of the Igbo as well as present an Igbo account of world creation. This, the authors, intended to situate Nri in the history of the Igbo people of southern Nigeria.

In chapter one of the book, the authors discusses the theories of Eri origin. Eri, the progenitor of the Igbo people is at the center of Nri migration. They also captured migration and early settlement patterns of Nri people, tracing the Nri point of departure to *Obu Uga* (Obu Gad) located somewhere at the bank of Omambala River, in the present day Aguleri. Efforts were also put in to capture the villages and families that constitute Nri town in this chapter. The authors, here also, chronicles the presidents and secretaries of Nri Progress Union (NPU), 1914-2022. Not also leaving out the Eze Nri's influence, and control over other Igbo communities as well as liquidation. Chapter two of this book titled *The Adama and the Making of Eze Nri* acknowledges the very important place of the Adama in cleansing the land of abomination, as well as in the installation of an Eze Nri. It chronicles the processes and procedures of selection and coronation of an Eze Nri.

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Chapter three captures in the history of Nri, a period of quagmire and the travails of the two Nri monarchs who reigned concurrently in the history of Nri town. The authors in chapter four of this book highlighted the importance of certain cultural practices and institutions in Nri town. The book discusses Eze Nri instituted practices and initiations that Nri people passed through in the different communal and social endeavours from birth to death. Some of these include: *ikwe ito* (third week ceremony/mother's ritual bathe/naming), *ibi ugwu* (circumcision), *ime asaa* (naming ceremony) *isi ekwensu* (exorcism), *ima mmonwu* (masquerade initiation), *igba agu* (reincarnation search), *iba n'ogbo* (initiation into age grade), *ilu agwu* (initiation into agwu cult), and *igbu ichi* (scarification), and so on. A list of names and age brackets of different age grades in Nri from 1846-1985 is contained therein. Chapter five dwelt on the importance of setting up a home by male adults of Nri. The first of which is building a house. Then marriage processes and rites as instituted by Nri people were chronicled herein. These also include the conditions for marriage, types of marriage, and process of terminating/severing distressed marriages in Nri town. Chapter six of this book contains the myth associated with the discovery of yam and cocoyam by the Eze Nri. The authors discussed the major and minor titles of Nri, as well as the processes and procedure of installation into those prestigious titles.

In chapter seven, the authors identified the place of death as the end for all mortals and the beginning of a life in the hereafter. Consequent upon which the authors highlighted different types of death as well as burial and funeral ceremonies that is associated with each type and for different categories and statuses of persons. Chapter eight discusses the origin and development of the Nri annual lunar calendar. Here they observe that *ubosi* (day) has four major and ten minor divisions, while *izu* (week) consists of four days; *onwa* (month) has twenty-eight days, and *aro* (year) has three hundred and sixty-four days. Instruments for measuring and keeping time were also identified herein. The penultimate chapter chronicles the celebrations of the thirteen lunar months in Nri, and some other parts of Igbo of southern Nigeria. The authors in chapter ten presents Nri tradition and modernism. Here they tried to capture the fate of Nri traditions in the face of western civilization. They also identified some unresolved issues between some Christians and the adherents of African Traditional Religion to include widowhood purification (*ije n'Ajana*), couple dust to dust rites (*ikponye aja n'ini*) and funeral ceremony (*ikwa ozu*), among others. Advocating freedom of religion and worship, the authors harp on the need to preserve the culture and identity of Nri town, and by extension Igboland.

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The book concludes that Nri survived threats of extinction in the face of western civilization and colonialism, Christianity, Islam and the wave of globalization which consumed so many cultures. The authors here aver that the major reason for the erosion of social values in modern times is the negligence of peoples' customs and traditions. In the face of these threats and consequent decimation of value systems, Nri still stand out and firmly preserving its culture and traditions, as explicated in this treatise.

Concluding this review, one may be tempted to think that I am on a mission to sing praises, pour encomiums and revere the book. Well I can say the book is deserving of all the encomiums being a product of a rigorous academic exercise. Being a work of man, it cannot come out perfect and without some errors. Prominent here is the pictorial representations which is not too clear and printed in black instead of coloured for a clearer and appealing view. The authors ought to have got original maps drawn specifically for this purpose by a cartographer. Also, the chronicling of Nri Progress Union (NPU) presidents and secretaries ought not to have been done in chapter one. A separate chapter should have been devoted to the NPU, capturing the union's activities, branches and leadership. The book did not in any way discuss the economic activities in Nri in time perspective, the place of women in Nri history and culture, Christian Missionary Enterprise in Nri, and Nri and her neighbours. All the themes mentioned above ought to have come as separate chapters. There are also a few typographical errors. The above observations notwithstanding, the gains of this book far outweigh the observed lapses. This is an invitation for more research on Nri. I encourage the commissioning of more research on Nri to complement this pioneering effort and as will give Nri the scholarly attention it deserves.

Be that as it may, the book is well researched, and information sourced from very knowledgeable elders of Nri and beyond was properly utilized to enable the book preserve age-long traditions and cultural practices that may be lost in the future, if not properly documented. Works of great scholars and historians of European and African descents were extensively consulted and cited which made the book come out as a strong academic treatise for consultation and reference in Igboland and beyond. Consequent upon the above, I recommend this book to every household in Nri, and Anambra state, to all secondary schools, and Departments of History, Sociology and Geography in all higher institutions

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in Nigeria, and as well to all researchers and scholars interested in the study of Igbo history.