

A Review of the Making of The Second Igwe of Uhueze-Nenwe Autonomous Community

Onyeka Ike 

Ph.D., Department of English and Communication Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

The review provides a critical analysis of the historical collection, *The Making of the Second Igwe of Uhueze-Nenwe Autonomous Community* (2025). The paper is a careful record of the nine-year interregnum and the following amicable solution in the form of choosing the traditional ruler of the community, particularly the critical role played by the non-partisan Uhueze Elders/Senior Stakeholders Group (UESSG). The review praises the authors because of their clear prose and insightful information of the historical course of Uhueze, his cultures and leadership philosophy. It brings out some important lessons concerning conflict resolution and how community elders can utilize their social capital and integrity to prevent crises and create a legacy system that revolves around rotation and consensus as opposed to politicization. The story about Warrant Chief Alimba Chukwu is isolated as an ideal structure of heroic sacrifice and transformational leadership. The book is suggested as the inevitably case study on the sustainable community governance and thus promotes the overall implementation of the effective mediation model that was developed by UESSG.

Keywords: Community Leadership, Conflict Resolution, Igweship Succession, Historical Documentation, Elders' Mediation.

Let me begin a critical assessment of this masterpiece entitled *The Making of the Second Igwe of Uhueze-Nenwe Autonomous Community* by merging my voice with that of thousands of Uhuezerians, as well as well-wishers of Uhueze at home and across the globe to heartily felicitate with His Royal Highness, Barrister (Dr) Godwin Chijioke Nwobodo, fdc, DIG (Rtd), Egbeleri II of Uhueze-Nenwe Autonomous Community on the auspicious occasion of his coronation and ascension to the throne of Uhueze-Nenwe Ancient Kingdom. His steady reassurances of a peaceful, prosperous and egalitarian Community; a community where justice, unity and progress are the watchwords are truly heartwarming. Indeed, it has been our collective prayer that God Almighty will continue to direct him as he leads Uhueze on the pathway of righteousness, justice, valuable development and greatness.

It is indeed a call to noble duty to review this priceless piece articulated by

fifteen distinguished intellectuals and contributors of Uhueze extraction, three of whom serve as its editors in the persons of Professor Michael Maduagwu – a former Senior Fellow and directing staff at the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, Jos, Air Vice Marshal Christian Ndubuisi Chukwu, OON – a retired instructor fighter pilot and currently an aerospace consultant and lecturer at African University of Science and Technology, Abuja, and Dr Innocent Ugochukwu Nweke – the Chairman and Managing Director of UK-based Social Innovations Ltd, specialist in child protection, corporate parenting, domestic abuse and family safeguarding consultancy services.

The foreword was articulated by no less an icon – the first Military Administrator of Gombe State and an aircraft maintenance engineer – Group Captain J. I. Orji, PhD, (Rtd). The dutifulness of these worthy sons of Uhueze and the rest of the contributors has placed this significant historical compendium

in the hands of readers. Thus, in the words of Nelson Mandella, "In life, everyman has twin obligations – obligations to his family and obligations to his people, his community." Truly, the obligation to effectively document certain critical leadership developments in Uhueze has given birth to this rich historical compendium.

The Making of the Second Igwe of Uhueze-Nenwe Autonomous Community is a 202-page insightful historical piece published in 2025 by Onye Ventures Publication of No 3 Oji Street, Uwani Enugu. The graphology and artistry of the cover page portrays a symbol of royalty by the left side and an elephant which has been the agelong cultural mascot of the Uhueze-Nenwe people by the right-hand side. And when the people look at the elephant, they usually exclaim, "Uhueze bu enyi" meaning that Uhueze is an elephant. That metaphorical exclamation is a vivid reflection of the massive human population divinely positioned on a vast arable land which has productively supported its inhabitants for centuries. It is equally a reflection of the community's enormous human and material resources and cultural heritage.

Having carefully studied this significant work, I can clearly state that a material of this nature and title can be reviewed from either its aesthetical and literary qualities or from its philosophical cum ideological merits. Let me confess that since I first received this loaded educative and informative material, I found it difficult to let go even with all the very busy preparations of the coronation until I read the very last word on page 202. The diction of the book is fluid, prosaic and readily

accessible to all categories of readers; the lexico-semantic and syntactic foregrounding are appealing. These are, of course, some of the distinguishing beauties and attractions of this wonderful book. I see it as a timely revelational, educative and informative treatise that would solidly endear readers to the history, cosmology, culture and critical leadership developments not only of Uhueze but of the entire Nenwe. The book is a clarion call to learn from history in order to ensure that better legacies are bequeathed to posterity; in order to ensure that truth and decorum prevails in the Community. Yet, Aldous Leonard Huxley, a renowned English philosopher and writer who lived between 26th July, 1894 – 22 November 1963 once said, "That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons of history." As indicated by the date of his birth and death, Huxley lived long enough from the 19th through the 20th Century to have been able to reach that critical conclusion.

Indeed, the history of humanity is replete with various exemplifications of repeated historical developments. And when a society rightly learns from history and makes the necessary amendments, success is usually achieved. For Uhueze and really Nenwe as a whole, divers lessons to learn from history regarding chieftaincy institution/Igweship matter as encapsulated in this valuable material began from the early 20th Century.

The Making of the Second Igwe of Uhueze-Nenwe Autonomous Community has a total of thirteen chapters divided into two parts. While part one provides the background information and the exemplary philosophy

which gave birth to the book, part two spreads the roadmap to the selection of the second Igwe of Uhueze. These two parts situate the entire work in the appropriate historical and sociological context thereby creating an enduring philosophical and aesthetic whole. The chronological arrangement of all the kindreds/Umunnas of Uhueze in the early part of the book, beginning with Eziecho the eldest son to Umueze the youngest is intended to enable Uhuezerians and readers to comprehend the roots of the Community. The dedication of the work to the memory of Ichie Nnabuikie Valentine Obasi, one of the dependable members of Uhueze Elders/Senior Stakeholders Group (UESSG) who sadly died in May 2015 and to the entire good people of Uhueze who solidly stood for what is right and ensured that the Community has in place a peaceful and enduring system for the emergence of their Igwe; a system devoid of violence and schism as a good legacy for posterity is quite significant. Truly, considering all that had transpired during the nine-year period of interregnum as clearly documented in the book and how all issues were amicably resolved, one can unequivocally state that God Almighty – the Maker of Heaven and Earth is actually an Uhuezerian.

The agelong Igbo philosophy and adage that an elder cannot be at home and a pregnant mother goat will give birth while being tethered at the backyard is well amplified in the book, and was the prompting factor for the avuncular intervention of the UESSG to save the Igweship selection process from highwire politicization through general

election to rotation in the order of seniority of the villages. Also, the Igwe's unflinching assurances and reaffirmations that he will be a leader and not a ruler are clearly highlighted in this vital historical documentation. The UESSG as unambiguously stated by its patron, His Excellency, Group Captain J. I. Orji, PhD (Rtd) believes that "At every age and every community, the Almighty God inspires a person or group of persons to rise to the occasion and save the community from any impending calamity" (viii). This, no doubt, has become the good fortune of Uhueze at this moment of historical development.

The book recalls that by early December 2023 an ominous cloud of uncertainty, tension and danger had sadly crept into the horizon of Uhueze and settled uncomfortably on account of an Igweship election slated for 20th December that same year. The trees trembled as the ground shook at the trepidation which had gripped the hearts of the inhabitants of the land – the peaceful descendants of Mazi Joku Onwe, the great hunter from Nenwenta and progenitor of Nenwe of the Egbeleri Dynasty. It has been a challenging journey finding a successor to the throne of a community with a virile republican spirit characteristic of Igboland of southeastern Nigeria. Thus, against the wishes of a vast majority of the citizens to select the next Igwe through the principle of rotation in the order of seniority of the villages as already enshrined in the gazetted Town Union's constitution, a few persons reasoned otherwise. In foreseeing the imminent danger the situation will most likely produce, many wailing voices rose to the high heavens, calling

upon the elders of the Community to intervene before it was too late – before a pregnant mother goat suffers the pains of childbirth while an elder watches idly – a situation considered both as a sign of gross irresponsibility on the part of the elder as well as a sacrilege.

With determination and patriotic courage, the UESSG fashioned out a blueprint – a model which effectively averted the impending conflagration. These are the intricacies clearly and categorically unraveled in this interesting masterpiece. Issues of historical and cultural evolution of the Community are also well documented. Of particular interest is the story of Warrant Chief Alimba Chukwu of Umualukwu, Umuewo – the first British-appointed Warrant Chief of Nenwe. It might interest many Nenwerians to know that Chief Okoro Eleke was not the first Warrant Chief appointed for Nenwe by the British colonial administration.

Chief Alimba Chukwu is described in the book as “a very courageous and patriotic man who volunteered to die to save Nenwe from an impending colonial calamity” (20). Unlike his tyrannical successor, the story of Warrant Chief Alimba Chukwu is that of exemplary heroism and noble legacies bequeathed to Nenwe; legacies that are unfortunately not known to many Nenwerians. In the words of the author of that particular chapter, Comrade Adindu Okoro,

The circumstances that brought Alimba Chukwu into power may have played a great role in his life and leadership role as a humble and very accommodating gentleman. This is somebody who had condemned himself

by volunteering his life to save his town and was only waiting to hear his death sentence to be pronounced by the colonial masters. Instead, his self-condemnation, the sacrificing of his life promoted him to the highest position in the Community. (22)

Alimba Chukwu’s narrative is a clear demonstration of uncommon bravery, determination and quintessential courage. As it is well documented and known to many, the British colonial administration was not well received in many parts of Nigeria, and the Igboland was not an exception. This historical development is also a major thematic preoccupation of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. It was in the process of trying to resist the incursion of the British colonialists into Nenwe territory as Okonkwo tries to do in Umuofia Obodo dike of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* that a man from Nenwe was said to have killed a British missionary in 1868. Expectedly, just as also in *Things Fall Apart*, the British authorities deployed soldiers to go and deal with Nenwe people in brutal retaliation unless they handed over the murderer to them. At this point, the killer had already escaped for his life and it was well known to everyone. On realizing the enormous destruction that would befall the entire town on account of this incident, Mr Alimba Chukwu surrendered himself to the British claiming to be the culprit instead of allowing the British soldiers to destroy Nenwe in pacification and retaliation. When the British soldiers took Mr Alimba Chukwu away and did not carry out any destruction in the town, Nenwerians concluded that Alimba had been killed by the British as a ransom and went ahead to perform

his funeral rites. After a period of nine months, however, the British brought him back and appointed him the first Warrant Chief of Nenwe in 1869. Functioning in this capacity, Chief Alimba Chukwu was instrumental to the abolition of slave trade, ohu and osu caste system in Nenwe. He went ahead to show a good example from his own family by setting Nwankwo Nchikiri – a slave originally bought from Nomeh free.

To further demonstrate the sincerity of his leadership policy in this direction, he called for merriment and celebration in his house as a way of appeasing the ancestors – a ceremony known by Nenwe people as ikpa ugbo. He slaughtered a ram and allowed Nwankwo Nchikiri to freely participate in the feast, even allowing him to eat from the same okwa and ochiri like every other person. The climax of the gathering was that Nwankwo was given the family name “Alimba” as his surname thereby transforming Nwankwo Nchikiri to Nwankwo Alimba. In this manner henceforth, other slaves in Nenwe became bona fide citizens - amadu, without any discriminations.

In view of Chief Alimba Chukwu’s uncommon heroism and laudable contributions to leadership development in Nenwe, this review recommends that he should be significantly remembered and immortalized. This will undoubtedly encourage others to make commendable sacrifices that would result to peace, development and upliftment of the Community.

Although the kingship selection process of Uhueze has been successfully concluded with the emergence of Egbeleri II,

Barrister (Dr) Godwin Chijioke Nwobodo after about nine years of interregnum, the intrigues and contestations it generated and, most importantly, the amicable resolutions and logical reconciliations attained through the noble efforts and determination of non-partisan elders of the Community as clearly encapsulated and submitted in this beautiful compendium are issues that hold a million lessons in contemporary Africa. Similar situations in divers climes in Nigeria and indeed the continent have resulted to monumental catastrophes in several communities. But the development in Uhueze has demonstrated that when elders and eminent personalities of a community sincerely and altruistically deploy their social capitals, wealth of experiences and capacities for the good and interest of their communities a lot can be achieved in any given situation without resorting to violence. The good people of Uhueze equally deserve kudos for their exemplary submission to the resolutions of their patriotic elders.

The lessons and messages elaborated and amplified in The Making of the Second Igwe of Uhueze-Nenwe Autonomous Community are quite many as contained in several chapters of the book. Elders and elevated people in any community should realize that by their noble statuses, they have great, even divine role to play for the maintenance of order and peace in their domains. They should avoid either sitting on the fence to watch things degenerate to catastrophic dimensions or being partisan because the people can only harken to their decisions and directives when they observe the

purity of their motive and the sincerity and strength of their character in conformity with laid down rules of their land. Uhueze people massively followed the directive of their elders because they perceived them as men of honour and integrity. In other words, the good image or reputation of the elders and senior stakeholders was their greatest asset in this situation. They are all men highly regarded for who they are and not necessarily what they have. Indeed, the UESSG approach and model in restoring harmony to the Community in this crucial process is a yardstick that should be further studied by researchers for further development and amplification. It is a model that should be further developed, copied and applied in several similar situations in Nigeria, Africa and even globally for community harmony and sustainable development.