

OZO TITLE IN IGBOLAND AS A NEGATION OF JUSTICE AND HISTORY: AN ANALYSIS OF AMECHI AKWANYA'S *ORIMILI*

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Abstract

In this essay, it is established that Ozo title in Amaechi Akwanya's *Orimili* is a negation of justice and tradition. This is because the Ozo title holders do not live up to the expectations of their role as the custodians of justice and tradition. We have deployed social realism theory in the analysis of the text. To achieve our artistic objective, we identify specific episodes---the quarrel between *Orimili's* boatman and six masquerades, *Orimil's* application for Ozo title and the selection of Nduka into the Ozo society---that calls for the custodians' unbiased verdicts, and analyse them critically. We discover that their judgements in the cases identified above are marred with illogicalities and biases. Their prompt decision to organize a flamboyant welcome party, coupled with the conferment of a double Ozo title on Osita, projects the custodians as shameless opportunists who will stop at nothing to realize their selfish objectives. We also look at women and scrutinize how they handle the disputes that come their way. We find that women are better judges and leaders than men. We, therefore, recommend that women should be made the custodians justice and tradition because of the unbiased and rational way they dispense disputes. The method of research is qualitative.

Introduction

In this essay, we have deployed social realism theory in the analysis of the text, *Orimili*. Social realism

is a literary theory that comes up in opposition to formalism which advocates that literature is not a reflection of society and, therefore, should be analysed on the basis of its literariness. The proponents of formalism are Murray Krieger and Roman Jakobson. But social realists advocate that literature should be assessed on the basis of its utility or function in addition to its form because literature is a reflection of the society. Social realism is more popular than formalism because virtually all the critics all over the globe adopt the utility function and form of literature.

Among the social realists are Sly Cheney-Coker, Adrian Roscoe, Lewis Nkosi, Ngugi Wa Thoug'o and Olu Obafemi. Cheney-Coker posits that "an uncommitted writer is not in anyway credible" (25). However, Akachi Ezigbo warns that "art should not be forced into the service of a particular ideology to the detriment of its aesthetics" (156). What we gather from this warning is that writers, while trying to address the social issues, should not compromise the aesthetics of their works. Both are very important in the works of literature. That is what Roscoe means when he submits that the writer should strive for commitment "without sacrificing one's aesthetic and intellectual integrity" (174).

We have employed social realism in this essay because Amaechi Akwany a uses his novel to criticize the social injustice in his Igbo society.

Ozo title in Igboland is highly revered and the holders of the title are held in great reverence because their *tongues* have been *washed* by the oath that guides the title. Having their *tongues washed* means that they can never use them to tell lies: it is an abomination for an *Ozo* title man to tell lies. This marks them out as dispensers of justice in Igboland. They are the highest judges in the traditional Igbo society and, therefore, the last resort for cases that require critical attention. Their verdict is highly respected and final. For a person to be initiated into the *Ozo* title, his conducts must not be in any form of doubt to the members of the community. In other words, he must be transparently honest because *Ozo* title holders are the custodians of the tradition and leaders of the community. For a person to be a custodian and a good leader, it requires a maximum amount of honesty. So, honesty is a criterion that can never be compromised. The holders speak with one voice. *Ozo* title is the highest title an Igbo man aspires to earn in his life. It is a mark of achievement and its holders are praised, respected and appreciated. A poor man, even though honest, cannot aspire for it because it is very expensive. B. Abanuka confirms this stance when he writes that “in some areas of Igboland, one of the highest titles for men is the *Ozo*. The *Ozo* titled man, *Nze*, lives in fullness of accomplishment, he is wealthy as depicted by the endless rows of yam in his barn, he has many wives and children” (74).

Ifezue Oforchukwu posits that *Ozo* title taking among the Igbo people originated in order to honour the ancestors who had distinguished themselves when they were alive. The ancestors and spirits are given a special place among the Igbo people. It is, therefore, not surprising that title taking originated to pay respect and to worship the ancestors who are the custodians of culture, tradition and customs. *Ozo* title is regarded as sacred in Igbo tradition. It is believed that the *Ozo* title is instituted by the gods. This is partly the reason it is limited to a certain class of people. The non-initiated members are not allowed to participate in any of the *Ozo* title ceremonies. He has quoted Ikekamma as having said that the music of *ozo* title is meant only for the initiates to dance. If one is not initiated into *ozo* title, he should not come close when the music is beaten on the drums.

Ifezue also records that the *Ozo* title taking is discriminatory in Igbo society in that it does not admit all classes of people. The title is an exclusive reserve for men: women are not allowed to take it. There is no way women can take the *Ozo* title because of the stigma bestowed on women all over the Igboland. He notes that slaves are generally not allowed to take the *Ozo* title, only the free borns (*Nwadi alas*) do. Strangers are not allowed to take *Ozo* title in the communities they live. Before any man is admitted into the *Ozo* circle, enquiries must be made concerning his character to ascertain the type of life he lives. This is apparently the reason for not

allowing strangers to take the title for it could be that the stranger might have committed some crime which his present community does not know. The *Ozo* title is conferred on people of good character and behavior. It is not conferred on people of questionable character. It has its code of ethics which is strictly followed when new members are to be initiated. Nze Onyebuagu submits that the life of a titled man is centred on his integrity. He is expected to live above all mean behavior. He must not be a thief, a debtor, or a liar. He must not embezzle public funds or encourage others to do so. He must not show partiality in judgment since his testimonies are taken to be correct. As a custodian of the people's tradition, he must cherish and observe all the progressive norms of his people. They are seen as models in the Igbo traditional society. People look upon them as decent people. A title holder is a symbol of love, honesty, truth, peace, unity, and harmony in the community. In addition, he must defend the rights and privileges of widows and orphans. These ethical values help to unify the members in the community. This is why the *Ozo* title is never conferred on anybody whose character is unknown to the people.

According to *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, the *Nze na Ozo* society is the highest and most important magico-religious and social grouping in the Igbo society of Southeast Nigeria. To become an *Ozo* implies that the title holder is now an 'Nze' implying living spirit and an ancestor. He then becomes the moral conscience of the

community and is seen to be a fair adjudicator in cases of disputes within the community. In times of crisis, most Igbo communities rely on *Ozo* members for leadership. Generally, in most Igbo communities, only holders of *Ichi* title may become candidates for *ozo* title. M. Jeffreys reports that, although there are cases of women with *Ichi* scarification, only men can belong to *Ozo* with membership according to the individual's extreme prestige, power and influence in the community. M. Finds and B.O. Onwuejeogwu record that taking *Ozo* title is extremely expensive with lower grades costing in excess of US\$25000 in initiation cost and up to another US\$2000 in annual subscriptions. Although there is hegemony across Igboland on the notion of *Ozo*, categorization and grades of *Ozo* titles are different among Igbo communities. For example, with the exception of Onitsha and Delta Igbo, certain titles of the *Ozo* such as *Ezeani* may not be taken until the candidate is seen to have been 'a man'. The basic precondition for such an assessment is to ascertain whether the father of a candidate is still alive. If the candidate's father is still alive, he may not be permitted to take the title.

I.K. Ogbukagu notes that there are generally two major classes of *Ozo*. The first is *nnukwu ozo* (big *ozo*). Within *nnukwu ozo*, there are three grades – *Dunu*, *Dim* and *Ezeani*. In the second class of *Ozo* referred to as *Obele ozo* (small *ozo*), there are also three grades consisting of *Eyisi*, *Ezuzo* and *Okpala*. It must however be recognized

that until about 1930, *nnukwu ozo* had a fourth (and highest) grade of *Ozo* referred to as *Igwe* (sky) which only the *Eze Nri*, the spiritual leader of the *Ozo* system holds. This has however changed with most Igbo communities. M. Odukwe makes it obvious that the different grades of *ozo* are not necessarily distinct based on nomenclature alone. For example, while *Ozo Okpala* is regarded as *obele Ozo*, the position is usually taken by the first son in a lineage who by taking the title becomes responsible for arbitrating internal family disputes.

C.E. Udendu submits that the red cap is a symbol of authority, culture and tradition of the Igbo people. It represents the institution of chieftaincy, of power and leadership. This is why it is used as a logo in anything that portrays the Igboman. It is synonymous with those recognized chiefs who have met certain required standards in their communities. These sets of chiefs do not tell lies because they have taken an oath "Isaile" (washing of tongue) to always say and abide by the truth hence they do not go back on their words. In some communities in Igboland, an *Ozo* titled man whose father is still alive does not put on a red cap. An *Ozo* man has to become an "Ogbuefi" before wearing the revered cap. The number of eagle feathers on the cap depicts the level attained by such a chief. He regrets that what is happening today is very unpleasant, uncomplimentary and an unfortunate bastardization of the Igbo tradition and its institutions.

It is good to note that all the theories reviewed so far in this essay are very important in reading and understanding of this paper. All of them border on the importance of *Ozo* title in Igbo society and the respect accorded to the *Ozo* title holders because of their position as leaders of justice. But in this essay, we shall witness a complete deviation from justice by the so called custodians of truth and tradition.

Not much has been written on Akwanya's *Orimili*. However, Florence Orabueze has an essay entitled "The Rights of the Stranger in A. N. Akwanya's *Orimili* and Sophocles' *King Oedipus*." She uses quasi – legal parameters to evaluate the extent of citizenship rights granted to the two migrant – characters, *Orimili* and *Oedipus* in the fictive settings of *Orimili* and *Oedipus* respectively. She writes that the comparative analysis of these two different genres, from different creative writers, from different cultures, climes and eras helps in the determination of whether their tragic flaws are as a result of the identity crisis they go through in their quest for the full realization of citizenship rights"(1).

About the Author

Amechi Nicholas Akwanya was born in 1952 in Awkuzu in Anambra State of Nigeria. He attended primary school in Awkuzu, and secondary school at All Hallows Seminary, Onitsha. At third level, Akwanya studied philosophy and theology (1972 – 1980), at Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, Nigeria. He was ordained priest in July 1980, and travelled to Ireland two

years later where he studied at Maynooth College, National University of Ireland, between 1982 and 1989. Akwanya gained a B.A. in English and Geography (1985), and M.A. in English (1986) and returned to Nigeria in 1989 having achieved a Ph.D in English. He is presently a professor of English and Literary Studies in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He has written many scholarly articles, nationally and internationally, and non-literary books. *Orimili* is his first novel.

In Amechi Akwanya's *Orimili*, the *Ozo* title holders abandon justice and go on politicking. To achieve their mischievous objectives, they form gangs among themselves. They are very happy when they see their victims suffer. A reference point is Ekwenze Orimili Nwofia, from whom the novel got its title. He and his father, including the grandfather were born and brought up in Okocha. His father and grandfather died fighting on the side of Okocha and they were buried in Okocha. The people of Okocha are farmers and illiterates. They are rich in the traditional sense of the word because they have yam barns and acres of cassava and cocoa yam plantations and feed on these locally made products. But they have little or no cash at hand and so cannot afford to build modern houses. They are poor in the modern sense of poverty. As Orimili grows up he deviates from farming and goes into ferring. He accumulates a lot of money which enables him build himself a modern bungalow which becomes a wonder in the community. Other people in Okocha cannot afford

such houses and so they build and live in thatched houses. Orimili is the first person to build such a wonder in Okocha and also the first person to send his son to study abroad. In Okocha not only that Orimili is outstandingly rich, he is the wealthiest person in the community. But his success does not make his people to love him rather it earns him their envy, resentment and rejection and in the process, they call him a stranger in Okocha. As the novel puts it, Orimili's house "was a wonder to the people; and in that wonder was a good deal of envy, and perhaps resentment; for the man was not assimilated as a full citizen despite the fact that both his father and grandfather had been born and bred in the town" (1). They refuse to assimilate Orimili because they argue that his great grandfather is a stranger and they do not know from where he migrated. Orimili cannot furnish them with the answer because he too does not know. In the logical aspect of the case, everyone is a stranger in his or her community because history makes it obvious to us that nobody sprouts out in a society; Societies grow up out of migrations and settlements: either the new immigrants push out the old settlers and establish themselves or they settle down with them as one. To treat a man whose father and great grandfather were born and bred at Okocha, fought with them, died and were buried in their midst, as a stranger is a negation of history and justice. One would have thought that the *Ozo* titled men would act contrary but it is these aldermen who champion injustice in Okocha.

A very clear example is the case between one of Orimili's boatmen and five or six masquerades. One of the masquerades threatens the boatman with a cane and the boatman holds it to prevent the masquerade from flogging him. The other masquerades immediately rally round the two and a scuffle begins. In the course of the scuffle, one of the masquerades accidentally knocks off the head cover of another masquerade. This action exposes the face of the masquerade. The exposure leads to a sudden cry of outrage and the boatman is apprehended and charged for unmasking a masquerade. In Igboland, it is an abomination to unmask a masquerade in public thereby unraveling the mystery associated with masquerades to the uninitiated, especially women and children. The reason is because Igbo tradition makes the uninitiated believe that masquerades are the ancestral spirits that live in ant holes. Whenever there is a festival or an occasion that requires masquerades, the masquerades migrate from the ant holes for the festivity after which they return to their abode, the ant holes. The uninitiated fear masquerades and run away whenever they see one. So, masquerades in Igboland are sacred and must be treated with great reverence by both the initiated and uninitiated; no wonder then the great aura and prestige that follows them. Anything that will unravel the mystery of masquerades is seriously frowned at and the person concerned is severely punished and made to pay a huge fine. He or she is banished if he/she fails to pay

and his/her things destroyed. But in Akwanya's *Orimili*, the boatman apprehended is innocent and, as such, does not deserve the punishment meted out on him. The *Ozo* titled men deciding the case have only invited the boatman and the *masquerades* concerned with the case without inviting other persons who had witnessed the incident. All the *masquerades* testify against the boatman and he remains a lone insignificant voice in the matter. *Orimili* has witnessed the incident and the aldermen know this but he is not invited to give his own version. However, two aldermen go to interview him in his house. He tells them exactly how it has happened but the traditional leaders fail to do something with *Orimili's* version. According to the novel, "the club finally decided that it was not an accident but sacrilege" (42) and the man is fined for unmasking *an ancestral spirit*. This is a gross injustice. For a verdict to be just, witnesses should be invited and interrogated thoroughly without bias. It is from the accounts of these witnesses that conclusions are derived. Any case of such serious magnitude that is not treated in this procedure is biased. The men of title know this procedure and fail to adhere to it. This suggests that the aldermen may have other ulterior motives for not inviting *Orimili* to come before the society of the title holders to say his own version of the matter. It indicates that the society does not want to identify with him. The fact that they did not make use of his interview by the two men suggests that the club does not regard him as a man of worth. It is also

possible that the aldermen's verdict has been tainted with the community's resentments, rejections and envy of Orimili since the man in question is Orimili's boatman, so that he should suffer because of his association with Orimili and not because he has done anything outrageous. For the aldermen to behave in this manner is a negation of what they stand for and, therefore, a betrayal of trust, and deviation from the Igbo tradition and culture.

The above stance is further reinforced and straightened when Orimil applies to the Society to be conferred with an *Ozo* title. The same men reject him with great vehemence. Their reason is not because Orimili's character is doubtful. They cannot project that because they know that Orimili is a good man whose transparent conducts are well known to the community. They say that Orimili is a stranger in Okocha and, therefore, not worthy of their society. It is outrageous to call a man whose father and grandfather were born, brought up and buried in Okocha a stranger. If he is a stranger, it implies that everybody in Okocha is a stranger as nobody sprouts out from the soil. By calling him a stranger, the men have defiled their *washed tongues*. It is a lie and, therefore, injustice to Orimili. In Igbo tradition, it is an abomination for an *Ozo* titled man to tell a lie. Rejecting a man who does not know any other home except Okocha is a gross injustice not only to Orimili but also to humanity as a whole. This decision negates Barine Ngaage's advice that "the communal role

of a leader is to liberate his people from oppression. He is expected to be the epitome of justice and fairness” (186). This is not so with the leaders of Okocha.

It is good to note that all the aldermen are not to be blamed on this issue. Ogbuefi Emenogha, Nwozo, Edozie Nwanze, Obianugu, Nwalioba and Echesi are not opposed to Orimili. Ogbuefi Udozo addresses the Society: “It is quite sufficient that we do know the man [Orimili], and that we are sure that he is worthy of the title. What do we know about him that makes him unworthy? What character blotch? Unless you can spot a handicap of the nature, let’s quibble no further, and go and feast with Orimili” (75). Seeing that there is no blemish in Orimili’s character and that his application will sail if character is the only yardstick, Ogbuefi Nweke Nwofia, the ring leader of the opposition camp, faces Ogbuefi Emonogha and asks him “whether you have a particular reason why you want to rush Orimili’s application through this assembly, without a thorough scrutiny. I won’t let you sweep me along in that manner, never! I should like to ask you, infact: do you not know that Orimili Nwofia is a stranger to the town, and that this is the reason why the debate has dragged on for so long? I am quite surprised that no one has brought out the fact” (77). At this point, Ogbuefi Emenogha projects a contrary view:

What I wish to ask is why a man whose family has been with us for several generations has been called a stranger in

our very presence. Has that man [Orimili] ever been heard to claim that he was from somewhere else apart from Okocha? Does he stay away from public works? Do we distinguish ourselves from him in our sorrows and joys? Is it not treacherous to be with him in work, play, and at the sacrifices, only to count him out when it comes to conferring honours. I think it utterly shameful that there should be found among us one who should stand up and voice out such dreadful things. Whoever heard such a thing as a man being called a stranger in the land of his birth! If you are afraid of Orimili, and want to stay as far away from him as possible, that's a different matter altogether, and I can well understand that. But that's no reason why you should try to prevent him from receiving the honours this land offers its children (78).

Both Udozo and Emenogha's speeches are remarkably important. From Udozo's speech, it is clearly discernible that Orimili is a man of good conducts as nobody has anything bad to say against him. But Emonogha's speech is outstandingly remarkable because, not only that it makes the statement that Orimili is a worthy man, it brings out the injustice inherent in Nweke Nwofia's speech for denying Orimili the Ozo title. The injustice is

particularly obvious because the people do not debar Orimili from working and suffering with them. It is only when it comes to enjoyment of traditional rites that the people remember that he is a stranger. The speech also indicates that Ogbuefi Nweke Nwofia is afraid of Orimili apparently because Orimili is wealthy and influential and if he is allowed into the club, his influence will drastically reduce Nweke's influence. So, Nweke does everything humanly possible to prevent him. It is surprising that Ogbuefi Ugonabo and Ogbuefi Ananwemadu should support Nweke Nwofia in this matter.

It is shocking that the club willingly and unquestionably endorses the candidature of Nduka, the eldest son of the late Ogbuefi Edoko, who has come up to reclaim his late father's ozo title because the tradition makes it possible for one of the sons to do so. But Nduka himself is not in anyway qualified for the title. In the first place, he is a man of doubtful character. Immediately the father breathes his last, starts to struggle for his father's title. As the first son, what should be uppermost in his head should have been how to give his father a befitting burial as the tradition demands but he keeps this aside and pushes for the title. When his siblings tell him the need to bury their father first before reclaiming the title, as they will not be able financially to meet both demands at the same time, he lies to his brothers that he has made inquiries and his inquiries reveal that they will lose the title if they do not

reclaim it immediately, preferably during their father's memorial ceremony. Secondly Nduka is not financially buoyant to reclaim the father's title which he wants by all means. He sells part of the family's ancestral land and uses the money to reclaim the title. In Igbo tradition, an ancestral land is a collective property of all the members of the family and it is an abomination to sell it. It remains the permanent property of the family. But Nduka sells this land without intimating any of his siblings and the aldermen welcome the money without questioning. Keeping Nduka's quests for the title in the fore, who is sure that Nduka's hand is not in the death of his father? Obviously, Nduka is a liar and a rogue and the aldermen prefer him to Orimili. This is quite ridiculous!

Ogbuefi Oranudu, the eldest man in the club, is a two-edged sword. In his recall of history, he says that "it is true that his [Orimili's] grandfather fought together with our people, died with them, and was buried with them. However, the strange thing is that Obiako his son did not on that account ask to be conferred with the title. Had he done this, the elders of Okocha would then have made a response and, in that way, left us something to go by. Nor has there been another foreigner on whom the title has been conferred" (84). Oranudu's speech is contradictory. He makes it point black that Orimili's grandfather fought together with Okocha people; he was killed in the battle and his remains were eventually recovered and buried in Okocha. He was united both in

life and in death with the people. This is plus in Orimili's quest for membership in the club. But Oranudu contradicts it with his illogical argument that Obiaku, Orimili's father, "did not on that account ask to be conferred with the title" and that if he had done, the elders would have set a precedent which would have guided them in considering Orimili's case. In Igboland, it is highly costly to take the *Ozo* title and this makes the title the prerogative of people who are fairly rich. It may be that Obiako cannot afford the cost of the title or that he is not interested in taking it since it is not compulsory for every elderly man. Secondly, that the elders of Okocha did not set a precedent does not mean that the present generation cannot set a precedent. Change is inevitable in every community. Assuming that the elders had set a precedent and the precedent is not convenient to another generation, the generation can change it to suit the people. Oranudu does not have a point in the logic.

Oranudu further says: "Did not our people come all the way from across the great river to this land, and did not the land receive them warmly? But the other side of the story is that the land itself is a gift from Okocha, our great father, to his sons" (84). Oranudu's recall of history makes it further clear that everybody in Okocha is a stranger and the land receives them warmly and they settle down peacefully. This is also a plus for Orimili's application into the club. But Oranudu contradicts it by saying that the land is a gift from

Okocha to his sons. The insinuation here is that Orimili is not one of the Okocha's children, and, therefore, does not belong to the land. So, Oranudu's recall of history does not help matters at all. The club adjourns the meeting without reaching any conclusion.

It is good to note that women react differently and live up to expectation. When Okwuese, Ananwemadu's second wife, calls Okuata, Orimili's wife, a stranger in their midst, "All the women were speaking, shrilly castigating Okuata" (91). As if this is not enough, there is an immediate meeting of all the women of Ebonasa and the women recommend "an enormous fine" (137) for Okwuese and until the fine is paid, she is banned from associating with Ebonasa women. It is ironical that women should champion the course of justice while the men whose *tongues have been washed* promote injustice. It is also suggested in the text that Okwuese has been instigated by a gang of the aldermen to do what she has done. This is believable because Okuata has been moving with the women ever since and nothing of the sort has ever cropped up. Okwuese's action comes up immediately after the riotous adjournment of the aldermen's arguments over Orimili's application.

Orimili is finally denied the title on the basis that "it is not remembered whether any of his people have ever held the title, and it cannot be remembered where his people originally came from" (168). Emenogha is wiser. He says that "Orimili deserves to be conferred

with the title.... He is reliable, and well-meaning fellow. He is rich and well-travelled.... The club, I think, has much to gain from his experience. His son is an asset too, and he is set to rise to great things. The way things are going, we may yet all gather around him for shelter” (167). His observation is both insightful and prophetic. The extract is, no doubt, an authorial commentary.

It is both ironical and ridiculous that Ogbuefi Nweke, who was in the fore front of the opposition gang that denied Orimili the Ozo title, should suggest to the club to organize a befitting reception for Osita Orimili Nwafia on his return from America as a barrister. He also moves the motion that a double ozo title be accorded to him during the reception and the club accepts it proudly and happily, without any arguments. This is the first time in the history of Okocha that Ozo title is given to a person freely and without the person requesting for it or undergoing a thorough scrutiny. But it is clear in the novel that the aldermen have approved all this owing to what they stand to gain from Osita. This assertion is captured in the following extract from the text:

News had begun to reach them in Okocha about their son, Osita Nwofia, who was proving himself a significant figure in national politics. This was the issue that Ogbuefi Nweke had seized upon and quickly got the solidarity to agree to hold a reception for the young man, give him a

feathered crimson cap for his head... and a pair of *ozo* threads for his ankles. That was the first time in Okocha that someone was given the *Ozo* title as a symbolic act, without his having to pay a fee and go through a scrutiny by the elders. Nor did they have any second thoughts as to the propriety of what they were doing (179).

From the above quotation, it is clearly visible that the aldermen rally round Osita because of his political prowess which they believe will yield material benefits, give them political positions and helps to develop their children and Okocha community. Not only that Osita is the first person in Okocha to study in the whiteman's land; he is the first lawyer and the first person to go to a tertiary institution. This is a great wonder for Okocha people. But judging from what transpired between Orimili and the *Ozo* titled elders, several questions stand out from the above extract. Why did the elders deny Orimili the *Ozo* title and readily grant Osita, his son, the same title? Is it rational to say that Osita is an indigene of Okocha while Orimili is a stranger? Have they been able to trace Osita's great grandfather's origin and fail to get Orimili's grandfather's origin? If the answer is negative, with whose faces will they look at Orimili? Does it mean that their treatment of Orimili does not matter to them? From where did they get the precedent to give Osita a befitting reception and accord him a double *Ozo* title? The extract, no doubt, portrays the

aldermen as wonderful schemers and shameless opportunists who are outrageously selfish and sadists to the core. Their red caps and the ankle threads are only disguises of their real identities. Not only that they perpetuate injustice in Okocha, they are the source of injustice. They are extremely myopic and unworthy to be leaders of Okocha. The solution to all the injustices in Okocha is to remove leadership from men and hand it over to women because they have exhibited greater maturity than men in their ways of handling cases to restore peace in the community.

On the other hand, Orimili is long-sighted and has shown greater maturity and wisdom in the ways he does his things. Although his people have treated him as a scorn, he does not prevent his son, Osita, from attending the reception and taking the *Ozo* title because his refusal will have social implications for his family: the title will help to integrate and establish his family in Okocha while the rejection of the reception will earn Osita many enemies which may make him lose his home base in his aspirations for national politics.

Conclusion

In this essay, it has been recorded that the *Ozo* title holders in Amechi Akwanya's *Orimili*, though custodians of truth and traditions, are shameless opportunists and promoters of injustice. This stance is taken owing to their selfish actions which negate justice and go contrary to the known historical fact of

community establishment through migration and settlement. Their actions portray them as envious, jealous, mean, irrational and sadists all of which deviate from the expectations of their oath. We have also noted that women are better leaders and judges than men because they are more rational in the ways they settle disputes. It is also noted that while the aldermen are myopic, Orimili is foresighted: he does not stop his son, Osita, from receiving the *Ozo* title denied him. He gives his support to both the flamboyant reception and the double *Ozo* title apparently to enable Osita establish himself firmly in Okocha which will help him win his home base when it comes to national politics for it is evident that he has the prospects of becoming one of the national leaders. It is also recorded that Nduka's acceptance into the *Ozo* society goes contrary to the community's laid down criteria for selecting *Ozo* membership. Not only that he is not financially qualified for the title, his character has everything objectable. The criteria for selecting *Ozo* membership should be reviewed and strictly adhered to.

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