

Divine Rites of Kings and Rituals of Royal Regalia: Its Symbolism and Ensemble among the Traditional Igbo People of South-Eastern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Igbo art is well known to the readers of African Arts and the corpus of scholarship on this subject is expanding dramatically. Recent studies tend to be particularistic, focusing on forms associated with specific ritual contexts that surround the royal regalia and its ensemble. This paper examines an alternate and complementary method, analyzing the significance of the royal regalia and its motifs often discussed orally and totally unexplored. I will refer to this very royal regalia and its motifs broadly as “royal regalia: its symbolism and ensemblage in the tradition of Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria”. The projection must be attached to the colors or the top of construction before it can be ritually contained and managed. The motif appears in the regalia costumes. Despite fantastic variation in form and shades of meanings, these projections share a fundamental principle of Igbo religious thought.

Key words: Culture, Evoke, Hidden, Ideology, Symbols.

INTRODUCTION

It is a known fact that every culture has the responsibility of describing reality, its origin and models of structural development as well as the hidden knowledge and truth about being. This responsibility is evidently illustrated, addressed or depicted in Igbo paradigm in form of symbols. Devoid of these symbols, signs and images, the traditional life experiences of the Igbo's will completely be void, abstract and meaningless because some of these symbols represented in tangible visible forms were believed to be real and living. This paper focuses towards understanding the regalia of the Igbo Kings cloth in Igbo context through the examination of the dynamics of the cloth production, patronage, consumption and social significance of dress projecting high social status and political power. The proper underpinning of this symbol of lion on the indigenous people cloth of the Igbo's will go a long way in the full integration of the Igbo people's life and their immediate cultural ecology with messages it disseminate. It must be noted also that despite the significance of this integration, it must be informed that such is evidently limited in their transmission of reality.

This paper investigates how the symbol of the regalia of the Igbo Kings basically play significant roles in mediating and facilitating religious communication in Igbo Traditional Religion, giving rise to thought, interpretation, and symbolic meanings. In Igbo cosmology and leadership, the symbol of the Regalia of Igbo Kings encapsulates so many things which are very distinctive thereby representing so many things and ideologies thereby projecting African philosophy.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE IGBO

This infers that the Igbo as a distinct tribe of “one people – one destiny” (Arkin, 1989: xi) came from the lineage of the Lion of Judah. The origin of people would be linked to the migration of Igbo race to their present-day Nigeria as a nation which is believed to have been among the “Hebrew patriarchs” (Bright, 1981:23) through Gad, one of the sons of Jacob, who migrated from Mesopotamia and the father of Eri. John Bright concedes that although widely held, this position has been “vigorously contested in recent years by certain scholars who maintain that the patriarchal narratives are more or less imaginative literary creations of a much later date with no appreciable stream of

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oral tradition behind them, and without real historiographical intention or historical worth” (1981:73).

INVESTIGATING THE STUDY

This study investigates the meaning Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria attributes to the royal regalia of the Igbo Kings. In the perception of the Igbo people, royal regalia is an aspect of African indigenous cloth which they wear through the mediation of its symbolic functions in order to create meaning for life and general wellbeing (Kaplan, 2004:190). In this regard, the regalia plays a significant role in nurturing, structuring and shaping their society and culture (Olupona, 1991:1). However, the wearing of royal regalia is restricted to only the Igbo Kings and as such it constitute part of the essential tools through which the people understand who they are and maintain Igbo identity. Yet, this indigenous institution continues to be relegated to the background especially as it concerns non acceptance and lack of understanding of its core tenets, and existence (Olupona, 1991:1). The Western man has tried as much as possible confusing themselves especially in the areas of religion and culture making them to see nothing good about the indigenous people, and “this often leads to faulty conclusions” (Idowu, 1973:5). Samuel Johnson affirms that “there are two objects of curiosity, the Christian world and the Mohammedian world – all the rest may be considered as barbarous” (Carpenter, 1913:24). Fanon (1967:42) asserts that as pesticides kill germs so, does Christianity destroy the traditions of the colonized peoples. Young (2003:140) affirms that such hasty conclusion and “translation becomes part of the process of domination, of achieving control, a violence carried out on the language, culture, and people being translated”.

Ohadike (2007:142) argues that during the periods of the Roman and Byzantine, Europeans have tried to use Christianity to establish a pattern of domination over the people of Africa and to exert a deep impact on African cultures and institutions. By and large, the observers of indigenous religion viewed African culture as primitive and associated African attire with paganism (Dube, 1996:106) which Ekeh (1975:97) refers to as “the backwardness of the African past”. Although, “that is not exactly accurate” (Mohawk, 2004:111). Onwudiwe (2001:217) argues that “the policy implication of this uncomplimentary term for Africa is not

frequently acknowledged and the attribution to Africa of the status of such terms damages the image of the continent”. According to Sulaiman Osho (2011:5) “Africa remains a continent that its history, heritage, culture, and customs have been distorted”. He argues that the historical accounts about Africa are mostly incorrect, slanted, and dented to tilt the true account of history from Western perspective (Osho, 2011:5). They branded the symbols as objects of heathenism, a negation which is couched on racial and moral prejudice against the Africans (Nabofa, 1994:5). Insofar as secularization, globalization, and the expansion of dominant world religions affect indigenous peoples throughout the world, in every case, indigenous peoples have developed their responses to the challenges of multi-faceted modernity (Olupona, 2004:1). Pobee (1979:67) asserts that their negative views sometimes due to straight arrogance, often taking the form that anything non-European could not be good. Sofola (1973:60) argues that through “their self-declared superiority of their culture, a declaration which was strongly backed by ethnocentrism and racial arrogance and the points of bayonet and machine guns, they went all over the non-western world and Africa to impose their culture”. He insists that “the result is the cataclysm and the warped mentality in which the world suffers now” (Sofola, 1973:60). However, it is no wonder, then that when Christianity came to Africa, the missionaries banned the use of African drum, and African dresses by a few convertees in their churches (Ayandele, 1996:29). Ekwueme (1974:13) recounts that “early missionaries tagged all indigenous forms of arts as the work of the devil, especially as almost invariably those associated with some religious or quasi-religious ceremonies...The amount of damage done materially and psychologically to the culture of the Igbo by these misguided zealots may probably never be fully assessed”. According to Adelowo:

It is to be noted that a good number of such scholars had over the years, taken appearance for reality, symbol for the symbolized, means for the end with regard to the religious situation in Africa. Reasons for this step are not far-fetched. A lot of them were staying behind the garden and at the same time trying to pontificate on the items in the garden. Some had not even touched the African soil. Rather, they relied on the reports of traders and missionaries in dishing

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out information on the religious situation in Africa (1990:162).

It is on this position that Onunwa (2002:86) asserts that the early Christian missionaries behaved like social revolutionaries, but whole trying to achieve the goal of their mission – the conversion of Africans to Christianity. Nabofa (1994:12) affirms that is the reason why the early Christian missionaries that had contact with Africa, instead of developing, civilizing and educating Africans, they succeeded in under developing, deschooling, and eventually producing half-baked Christian converts. Achebe (2012:54) argues that when the Europeans came to Africa, they knew very little of the history and complexity of the people and the continent which made them to believe that Africa had no culture, no religion, and no history. They equally castrated and brain washed Africans by carrying the propaganda that Africans were savages, and their culture was primitive and barbaric, and cannot cope with the requirements of modern society (Metuh, 2002:239).

Horton (1968:628) argues that this “is an even poorer index which to judge traditional religions in pre-literate culture”. Johann Reinhold Forster (1778) cited in Chidester (1996:18) affirms that Africans were so “degenerated, debased, and wretched” that they had forgotten their “ancient systems”. Pointing to this assertion, Eric Severied laments that “not that Britain really educated these people. Britain gave just enough of them the chance to educate themselves, and what they learned was why they must rid themselves of Britain and how to do it fast (Ndabanigi, 1959:47). Pobe (1979:67) asserts that outsiders misunderstood many of the African ways of doing things, while ignorance of the organizing principles of African attires prevented serious and more accurate study of the costumes. Insufficient research and lack of adequate knowledge of the language coupled in some cases with racial bias, resulted in a number of wild speculations and misrepresentations by certain missionary writers and ethnographers of the Igbo traditional belief and practice relating to wearing of such costumes contributed also to this negative attitude (Ejizu, 2002:114). Sofola (1973:xii) argues that some were either ignorant of the rich values of their African past or were made in their education to look down upon them or shun the values entirely. Ohadike (2007:13) affirms that “one of the aims of assimilation is to achieve political and cultural control by

mounting a vicious attack on the victim’s consciousness and self-esteem. When put in motion, the victim begins to hate the customs of his people, their language, music and religion”.

Nonetheless, by “throwing into the fire and locking into museums the most beautiful specimens in order to silence Africans, a significant access to understanding of African traditional thought was blocked” (Niangoran-Bouah, 1991:82). Nianoran-Bouah (1991:82) again argues that “by so doing, the colonial administrators through their prejudice ignored the fact that the black African has deposited the sum of his knowledge, his religious beliefs, and his attitude and behaviour towards the sacred in this art object”. All these were condemned by Westerners and were looked upon with disdainful eyes and in other to malign various African cultural forms and her rich cultural heritage (Metuh, 2002:236). All these were borne out racial arrogance and discrimination primarily to assert their superiority over Africans (Sofola, 1973:14). Sofola again asserts that:

The cultural adventurism of the white man in the non-western societies was not without some somber reflection on the way of life found in the new places. Yet racial arrogance brought about a development of intellectual blind spot where there would have been clear perception and appreciation. The British social anthropologists, both of the colonial and pre-colonial era, who went to Africa to analyse the society in depth, socially and culturally had among them those who distorted what they found in order to justify an assumed racial superiority (1973:60-61).

This misconception, no doubt, prevented a proper understanding of the symbolism and major role of the royal regalia in the social life of the Africans like the Igbo race. Not minding what this creative expression symbolizes, outsiders are incompetent to decipher. Nevertheless, Sofola (1973:102) argues that “the fact of the existence of this cultural form he is ready to accept and strongly defend notwithstanding the fact that the existence of this peculiar African forms were recently made popular through Picasso who had copied it from Africa only to come and resell the forms to Africans”. Horton (1968:626) posits that “what is required in studying them is not an abstention from intellectualist analysis, but a delicate balancing of intellectualist with political,

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aesthetic and other analyses”. According to Falola:

The intellectual passion to understand tradition can be seen as part of a careful African engagement with the later phases of European expansion. The encounter triggered this passion, creating a stronger sense of awareness of the self and one’s tradition. Western education and ideas supplied many of the key ideas and issues to employ in looking at African tradition. The African elite began to apply concepts such as the nation, state, race progress, and nationalism and to adapt them to local circumstances and old institutions (2003:35).

It is on this development that African elites like Olupona (1991:6) describe African clothes “as a living institution”. Niangoran-Bouah (1991:92) argues that the *Isi-agu* attire is to “Africans what the Bible and Quran are to Christians and Muslims: it is sacred, it is the repository of history, of values, and of the divine word, and it is the preferred mediator between humans and the sacred. He maintains that “he who destroys and burns the Bible cannot know the origins of Christianity. Similarly, he who burns the Quran has no access to an understanding of Islam” (Niangoran-Bouah, 1991:82). Soyinka (1999:ix) idiomatically affirms that “when a griot, or ancestor dies, it is an entire library that vanishes”. Niangoran-Bouah (1991:81-82) argues that symbolism behind the royal regalia among the Igbo people “was judged from the exterior and condemned without an effort to study and understand what it represented in the African traditional worldview”. Carson (1996:230) idiomatically affirms that it is primarily through such symbolism or paradigm in dresses worn by the traditional Igbo Kings that “we enjoy intercourse with superior minds.... In the best books, great men talk to us, give us their most precious thoughts, and pour their souls into ours”. Samovar et al (2009:107) argues that “at the heart of each of the world’s main religious traditions lies a body of sacred wisdom”.

Western Notion on the Indigenous Royal Regalia

For the Western man perspectives, on one hand, the indigenous regalia symbolized the explicit nucleus of the elusive African paganism that is to say the evil that had to be annihilated (Rydving, 2004:100). Soyinka (1999: ix) affirms that “this same breed of intellectuals employ the alien yardstick of their spiritual and intellectual

enslavers to annihilate the spiritual heritage of that same society”. Niangoran-Bouah (1991:81) argues that “the early Christian missionaries found in the indigenous dresses an excuse to wage socio-religious war against African traditional religion. They took away and destroyed thousands of..., convinced that this was the diabolic... that liberated satanic maleficent forces and energies”. Metuh (2002:239) predicts that eternal damnation awaited those who failed to accept this Christian propaganda and soon the propaganda caught on. Guadeloupe (2009:139) affirms that those who wish to go against this prohibition are either not hired or fired.

Today Africans in Diaspora are trying to develop their own culture so that it would be admired by those who labeled the religion and cultural practices of the Africans as idolatry, fetishism, animism, paganism, and occultism (Iwuagwu, 1998:21). Olupona (2004:9) argues that such term serves as an ideological justification for Western hegemony which Long (2004:96) reminds us to be mindful of cultural, ideological, and linguistic parameters, which often conveys our very speech at cross-purposes. Nonetheless, indigenous religious systems of the Africans especially the Igbo are responding by carrying out internal reforms in beliefs and practices to reassert their contemporary relevance (Olupona, 2004:6). Njoku (2007:xxix) asserts that Africans in their spirited efforts and fights with each of these forms of foreign threats, have held strongly to the trilogy of religion, music and dance as a mode of dialogue with their ancestors, a symbol of strength, a means of cultural expression, and idiom of identity. This new development makes it possible to arrive at an enhanced appreciation of African traditional belief system and its concomitant artistic dimension (Fleurant, 2000:417) particularly where the royal regalia worn by the Igbo Kings are concerned.

However, some appreciation from the European and American audiences has been made where people are searching for exotic African images and music among them ‘jungles, drums, bare breasts, sweaty bodies, mysteriousness, spirituality and primitivism’ (Impey, 1992:173). The history of indigenous people like the Igbo would be discovered by referring to its native cloth of *Isi-agu* attire as part of royal regalia. Chidester (1996:218) holds that the symbolic significance of the *Isi-agu* dress like every other cloth therefore, provided evidence for

reconstructing the organic unity and culture like that of the Igbo people. Chidester (1996:213) again asserts that “savage tribe” like the Igbo race existed without sacred totem, whether an animal, a plant, a metal or a star, to which it traced its origin. Hooshmandrad (2004:52-53) writes that cloths like the *Isi-agu* attire is deeply encapsulated with symbolic functions and in the absence of an agreed upon historical origin, it could be seen as an “absolute idea” which was designed and exists externally in “Divine Consciousness” that was only “manifested”.

Onwudiwe (2001:217) comments that “in Africa, anthropology was an instrument of colonial expansion. It could not have been objective in the application terms to Africa. Its term of choice for Africa’s peoples was tribe, a term that although it had graduated from savage still carries fraudulent historical and cultural presumptions”. Chidester (1996:215) argues that drawing upon what has been called the ancient theory of religion; European comparativists would identify a motive in human emotions of awe and terror before the wild, uncontrollable forces of nature. Today, the world religions especially the Roman Catholic Church of the Christian folds have borrowed a leaf from African Indigenous religious ways of communicating to God, by introducing in their own ways of religious practices the use of those African fabrics as their style of religious practices (Arinze, 1973:52). Pobee (1979:66) insists that “no serious student of the subject of costumes can maintain that the indigenous regalia per se is heathen or evil. It is gratifying to note that other churches, like Roman Catholics and the Anglicans, have for years used local fabric at worship. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church Council official declaration popularly known as Vatican 11 according to (Flannery, 1988:283-349), brings out clearly how the church has been using and should continue to use indigenous communication systems to enlighten her members and thereby promote and propagate dialogue among people’s of living faiths. This is because they see the whole process as simple as a two-way process of exchanging ideas or information between human beings (Herta & Herbert, 1991:3).

Apparently, this means that their methods of information dissemination, which are their evangelizing techniques, have been critically, carefully studied, documented and jealously guarded (Nabofa, 1994:vi). Although, the adherents of African traditional religion have

been doing so wittingly and unwittingly since time immemorial, but no study has shown precisely how this is being done (Nabofa, 1994:vi), and this brings us to the discourse of projecting aristocracy, hegemony and symbolism in traditional leadership in Igbo land where indigenous regalia of the traditional African Kings is highly priced as part of the culture, tradition and hegemony of the chosen people “a highly decentralized confederation of clans held together by a common language and a common culture” (Ojukwu, 1998:16). According to Isichei (1980) there is a long history, encapsulated in mythology of the Igbo people that recalled a man called Eri, sent from God, who lived in Aguleri and believed to be the progenitor of the Igbo race (Idigo, 2001:120).

THE KING’S REGALIA

Although, dressed in his full kingly regalia during the festival which has been imitated by other Kings in Igbo land “without any knowledge of their true significance” (Heuser, 2008:46), every element of the costume and dance is significant and symbolic, revealing some aspects of the inner nature of Kingship, for as the remarks of the royal instructors reveal, the Kings frenzied performance is nothing less than the spontaneous self-expression of the kingship within him (Lincoln, 1987:148). According to Perani & Wolff (1999:28) “in any one cultural context, a particular type of cloth or dress item can be a visible sign, clearly signaling gender, social status, political office, allegiance to a deity or personal prestige”. They assert that “cloth and dressing can also convey esoteric symbolic information understandable only to initiates” (Perani & Wolff, 1999:28). Dike (1987:78) argues it is in this kind of ritual festival like the *Ovala* that “the power normally localized in regalia is released to dramatize the monarchy”. He asserts that “symbols like these items of regalia emphasize the place of Kingship in the political system and command obedience and reverence. They ensure social stability by creating a process of elaboration that filters into the minds of those who behold them. In this way, a system of effective authority is maintained in the affairs of state” (Dike, 1987:78). Nabofa (1994:63) argues that the eagle’s feather’s that are used in decorating the king’s crown symbolizes victory, purity and faultlessness. He asserts that he who wears it symbolically is identifying himself with royalty, dignity, purity, faultlessness, gallantry, and

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resounding victory for the community to which he belongs (Nabofa, 1994:63).

According to Gilbert (1993:137) the regalia of “the immortal king reveal him as the holder of the office: their outer form is publicly visible but their inner contents remain veiled, just as the sacredness of the kingship is concealed—though visually represented—within the king’s person”. Perani & Wolff (1999:28) argues that “whether sign or symbol, this ability to transmit information and mediate meaning through shared understandings in socio-cultural contexts is a primary characteristic of cloth”. Schneider (1987:412) affirms that the communicative significance of cloth and dress in leadership contexts where they act as tracers of rank and bolster the visual hierarchy cannot be over emphasized. Buttressing this further, Gilbert (1993:137) argues that the “regalia are public representations of the secret power that lies within and behind the kingship; of the power that holds the state together. He stresses that “the exposure of this power is crucial to the public understanding and legitimization of royal power and authority, yet at the same time it must be kept separate, outside everyday profane life” (Gilbert, 1993:137). This is why Hall (1928:136) argues that “the regalia must be worn correctly and must not be worn profanely”, because it is classified as a “robe of honor” or “coronation cloth” (Perani & Wolff, 1999:124 & 166). This royal ceremonial regalia creates also a symbolic distinction between what Vansina (1978:185) axiomatically refers to as “the elite from the commoner”.

Perani & Wolff (1999:124) argues that it is in this way that, “the king’s body becomes defined and framed by the striped panels of the big gowns and whether standing or seated, the gown ensemble serves to virtually center, stabilize and focus attention on him as a source of energy and power”. In Aguleri paradigm, “the King is imbued with a certain sacredness, but not just by reason of his office” (Dike, 1987:78). According to Akintola:

Before its use, and to get it energised or to imbue it with mystical potency, the regalia must be consecrated in an appropriate ceremony. Also, the allegoric and emblematic figures with which the regalia is emblazoned or adorned conceal the secret formulae for spiritual, moral or mental and physical regeneration, and are used in the same way that the halo, the nimbus and the aureole are used in Christian religious

art and usages; or the rosary in Islamic usage (1992:36).

Hendrickson (1996a:9) writing on the context of Bori devotees argues that as a patron cloth it has a relationship with the supernatural by providing attire for the spirits and such “clothes gives substance to these incorporeal beings...They extend the spirits’ *personae* in space and time. The garments have potency”. Masquelier (1996:74) affirms that such “clothes concretize the conversation between human and spirits by literally providing the connecting threads through which they can relate to each other”. In addition, the multifarious colours of the regalia worn by the King appropriately add so much effect that the regalia becomes totally transformed into what Thot Hermes Trismegistus, the ancient adept and founder of Egyptain learning, describes as the “mystic chemistry of the soul” (Hall, 1928:46). Hall (1928:46) again stresses that the robes, insignia, emblems, jewels and ornamentations of the king “symbolize the spiritual energies radiating from the human body of the initiated users”. Buttressing this further, Hall (1928:136) again in mystical and philosophical form describes the robe of the King as “the garments of glory, for they resemble the regenerated and spiritualized nature of man, symbolized by a vestment which all must weave from the threads of character virtue before they can become high priests after the Order of Melchizedek”. This is why Danfulani (2000:101 & 102) argues that it is mandatory for the King to wear his royal regalia during celebration sessions because “it forms part of his seat” and it symbolizes his “political power and authority”. Weiner (1992:6) affirms that they are imbued with “the intrinsic and ineffable identities of their owners and are not easily given away or sold”. Perani & Wolff (1999:83) argues that “when used to empower individuals and the spaces they occupy, leadership cloth, garments and regalia, in particular, function as inalienable possessions. ...and passed on from one office holder to the next”, as true relic revealed as a typical and repeated configuration (Schopen, 1998:265). Perani & Wolff (1999:83) again asserts that “they are stored in the palace treasury under the care of a specific official who ensures their safety and proper use during state ceremonies”. Weiner (1992:37) opines that “when a leader draws upon these inalienable possessions and put on the robes of office, his body is transformed from its natural form to the body

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politic, conferring the authority of the past to the present incumbent”, thereby fostering values of identity and incorporation (Smith, 1987:28). Apart from the Kings regalia, his headdress is something very symbolic because according to Henderson & Umunna (1988:28-29) “the great crown—*nnukwu-okpu* is worn for the annual *Ofala* festival, when the chiefs and King assemble with their people in the royal palace square and viewed from a distance, it primarily display plumage”. Drewal (1975:18) posits that “the headdress provides a point of contact, a crossroads, and denies the mundane function of carrying load”. Henderson & Umunna (1988:29) argues that “the clustered feathers and intimations of branching of this spectacular crown suggest birds perching on a tree, and therefore a tree itself, an implication made quite explicit in the community like the Aguleri people’s prime metaphor for leadership: the leader is a mighty tree *Oke Osis* — [this is a general term accommodating diverse types of trees], that gives birds perching on its outstretched arms and shoulders a safe abode”. They affirms that one dominant symbol of this headdress is a tree of this kind, while the chiefs head rests under a small depression whose top side is exaggerated to form a mound, out of which rises the central pillar that—in one dimension of meaning—designates the trunk of the tree (Henderson & Umunna, 1988:29-30).

Buttressing this further, Henderson & Umunna (1988:29) again asserts that “in the early 1960s, the use of imported ostrich feathers overshadowed that of the more traditional local birds like the cattle egret, and some feathers were dyed in colors including purple, yellow, red, green, or violet, creating spectacular effects. But among this varied array of feathers must also be those of the vulturine fish eagle, *Ugo*, King of birds. Typically, the large feathers have been stripped except for their tufted tips, lending a strong branch-like aspect to the superstructure”. Idigo (1990:34) affirms that “at long last the *Eze* fully robed in his majestic attire of embroidered velvet silk and muslim of multifarious colours makes his appearance with his cabinet and extended family members”, through his dignified dance moves slowly, trailing a cloth train extending his feet behind to further enhance its beauty and power (Perani & Wolff, 1999:127).

As a point of emphasis, Bosah (1973:36) cited in Hahn-Waanders (1990:88) asserts that the symbology of “the red caps worn by other chiefs

was introduced by Obi Okosi [1901-1931] in order to differentiate the members of the native courts from other title holders and from ordinary citizens”. He affirms that “these red caps are called *okpu ododo*. *Ododo* is a Bini word and it means red. Later on, these red caps were worn by the *Ozo* members all over Igbo land” (Hahn-Waanders, 1990:89). We should not forget the fact that it was Eri the progenitor of the Igbos who introduced the republican and aristocratic institution of *Ozo* title known as *Odoloma* Eri. In Aguleri Kingdom, the *Odoloma* Eri later metamorphosised into *Ozo* title society and its members act or sever as advisers and ambassadors to Eri who were mainly made up of spiritualized fathers (Idigo, 2001:110-119). But according to Onwuejeogu (1981:168 & 67) this group later was transformed into a secret society, which has a highly disguised language that is understood only by its members and such secret language was developed and used before indoctrination and for domination, “so that the head of the ritual groups could send messages backwards and forwards”.

No wonder why traditional red cap popularly called *Okpu Ododo* in Igbo language serves “as the most distinctive symbols of the political elite to identity membership in a royal family or a connection to the aristocracy” Perani & Wolff (1991:135). Perani & Wolff (1999:125) again affirms that “the visual brilliance and textual complexity is enriched by scintillating surface, sparkling and shining in a kaleidoscope of color and light in the appearance of the mounted ruler under an impressive twirling state umbrella”. Also, as the king dances round the King’s square, “his eyes bulge with this surge of energy, and the ordinary affect of his face is lost, becoming a mask for the invisible power within” (Murphy, 2012:87), it shows the captivating rhythm of the swaying and shuffling which according to Aguleri tradition and hegemony represent “a unique way of dancing throughout the world” (Heuser, 2008:48). Nketia (1989:112) argues that as the king dances on an important occasion of public worship, like the *Ovala* festival, he points his dancing sword skywards to acknowledge ‘HIM’ as the power on whom, he and his god depend. McMullen (1987:217) asserts that the ritual occasion enable the King to “affirm the benevolence of the cosmic order and of his own role in mediating between it and the human hierarchy”. Kaplan (2000:117-118) argues that insofar as “the king seats on his throne, he is awe-

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inspiring. He alone possesses the royal coral-bead regalia—the crown, the staff, and the royal coral bead shirt and strip wrapper combined with different colours which have symbolic meanings. He is a living proof of the cogency of Kingship. Nonetheless, he has the ability to control the beneficent and destructive forces of the earth”. However, the colours of his regalia may be combined in significant ways, but their meaning/symbolism is situational and can never be read automatically; one cannot write dictionaries of symbolism in African art (MacGaffey, 2000:233). Kaplan (2004:190) argues that “the clothing the king chooses to wear each day is traditional and symbolic with meanings. It is a statement of occasion, intent, mood, power and all have meanings and evoke memory”.

ARISTOCRACY, HEGEMONY AND SYMBOLISM OF THE ROYAL REGALIA

Clearly in behavioural of human psychology, it is a known fact that ideas simply emanates from experience or revelation (Nabofa, 1994:3). Man being what he is, is always eager or inquisitive to ascribe meanings to each of its experiences and it is this kind of attitude that actually stimulates man’s instinct of curiosity from the known to an unknown, especially as it has to do with his religious awareness (Nabofa, 1994:3). In other words, he uses such religious ideas to elaborate rituals that inculcate decrees and doctrines “concerning the Nature of God, the Universal Being, Fatherhood and Beneficence of God, Eternity and Immortality of the Soul” (Akintola, 1992:2). Nonetheless, among all the things God created, it is only man that possesses that natural tendency or proclivity for creative powers in mental and psychic forms to reflect on his experience and express it with symbols, upon the fact that animals and plants have that power to reproduce themselves through natural methods or otherwise (Nabofa, 1994:4). Nabofa again asserts that:

Man is not only a symbolizing and conceptualizing animal. He is also “meaning-seeking”, but meaning can only be stored in symbols. Hence symbols constitute power resources liable to use and misuse. A society and its religion can only be understood through an analysis of the symbols by which its members communicate, worship, express their faith, evangelise, and manipulate relationships especially those involving religious beliefs (1994:21).

Nonetheless, Nabofa (1994:21) went further again to argue that by studying and learning about symbols in their religious contexts, we can find a kind of back-door approach to a deeper theological understanding of what the Africans actually believe, actually practice and actually say about their faith. The symbols makes you think says Paul Ricoeur (1971:404f). According to the book of Genesis:

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; man and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth (Gen,1:27-28).

From the Psychological Point of View, Nabofa Notes that

Psychologists have often asserted that the only difference between man and the other animals, plants and minerals is that whereas man can engage in abstract thinking and attain to self-consciousness as well as engage in metaphysical analysis, animals follow their instincts and have not yet attained to that self-consciousness that gives rise to various forms of symbolization (1994:4).

Buttressing this Further, Edwin Smith Argues that

*Neglecting this fact, some writers make the mistake of supposing that the untutored Africa is incapable of abstract thinking. By changing *muntu*, ‘human being’, into *bu-ntu* he expresses the ideas of ‘manliness, virtue, humanity’. Yet, while well able to think abstractly, he prefers to put his thought and feeling into vivid concrete terms (Smith,1966:10-11).*

Nonetheless, Nabofa (1994:3) in recognizing the significance of concrete terms as symbols of religions asserts that “the metaphysics of any religion cannot be fully and adequately studied, grasped and appreciated without a fair knowledge of its symbolic forms and processes which normally emerged out of the illumination”. Omijeh (1983:195) laments that “nowhere did early missionaries and Western writer’s misunderstand African cultures and societies as in the rituals and symbolism”. Sundermeier (1998:39) asserts that symbols relate to actual world and always have a material side; they can be heard, felt and imagined. He argues that because of their

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sensory character, they can speak to the emotional nature of human beings. They are satisfying; that is why it is in their nature to be accepted. They have to resonate with the feelings and value of the group and individual (Sundermeier, 1998:38-39). Nabofa (1994:77) argues that every scholar in the study of religion in Africa is aware of the fact that liturgical symbols, especially the non-physical ones, are enmeshed in the totality of African culture and that African Biblical scholarship really appreciates the benefits derivable from the use of appropriate African symbols in interpreting the Biblical message to mediate and suite the African situation. Samuel Abogunrin (1991) asserts in justifying the commentaries and importance of some scholars for the African culture opined that:

While God exists totally free from culture, human beings are totally immersed in culture. But God from beginning has used human culture as the milieu to reveal Himself to mankind. In communicating his revelation to man, God has often submitted to cultural limitations because human beings cannot comprehend supernatural truths outside his own cultural understanding. Therefore, God has always revealed himself (sic) in terms of human language and culture. African religion and culture which shaped the lives of our fathers have continued to exert great influence on life in Africa. It therefore, means that biblical interpretation in Africa must take cognizance of this particular spiritual, cultural and intellectual milieu (Abogunrin, 1991:vf).

However, before we start the discourse on the concept of symbols, Ekeke (2010:6) argues that it is of paramount significance that we align our discussion on the symbolism to a theoretical framework to help us assimilate and understand in full details the orientation we are set to examine and in this wise, one main theoretical view that would be considered very vital would be the symbolic interactionism of George Mead which is a theory synonymous with symbols in social institutions of human interaction. Ekeke (2010:6) again asserts that “once we have conceptualized an object we can now think of that object even when that object is no more invisible. Therefore, the object is thought of symbolically”. He argues further that symbolic conceptions and thought reduces this shortcoming of limited experience of human beings to what we actually see, hear, or fear, therefore concludes that almost all interactions between and among human beings are

dimensions of exchange of symbols by presenting four primary and interrelated levels (Ekeke, 2010:6).

The first level is impulse and that “impulse which involves an immediate sensuous stimulation, the need to do something about it” (Ritzer, 2000:208). The second one is perception, and according to Ekeke (2010:6) “George Mead sees perception as involving incoming stimuli as well as the mental images they create. People do not simply respond immediately to stimuli but rather think about and assess them through mental imagery. They also actively select characteristics of a stimuli and release among sets of stimuli”. Ritzer (2000:208) argues that such a stimuli, may have several dimensions, and the actor is able to select among them.

Buttressing this further, Ekeke (2010:6) asserts that George Mead calls the third level manipulation. He argues that sequel to the manifestation of the impulse with the object perceived, what follows immediately is action-taking with regard to the conceptualized symbol. The fourth and the last level according to George Mead is consummation and at this level that actor in symbolic interaction particularizes the specific objective of his choices of the many possible meanings or interpretations of the object, towards satisfying the original impulse (Ekeke, 2010:6). In another development, Giddens (1997:565) defines symbols as something that stands for, represents a person, idea, letter, figure, or sign that expresses a sound, a number, a chemical substance. The implication here is that, one symbolic form may be capable of several meanings or interpretations and this made Radcliffe-Brown (1969:142) to argue that whatever has a meaning is a symbol and the meaning or interpretation is what is expressed by the symbol, that is to say, the “translation, explanation, meaning or conceptualization of the sign-object would be in relation with a subsequent sign representing the same object” (Partmentier, 1994:5).

Strictly speaking, symbols vary among different class of people and worshippers and we should not forget the fact that the adherents of the diverse religions believe that they are not worshipping or rather venerating images associated with their religions, but invariably they are using them to stimulate the whims and caprices of their imagination to the proper act of

worship (Okoye, 2011:52). This is why Wosien (1992:30) posits that “when a symbol is made to have finite meaning, as opposed to merely being a paraphrase of the mysterious, an approximation to reality, then it becomes an idol”. Those who are in the field of Psychology of Religion will be most concerned with how symbols are used to manipulate, and how they actually influence the mind and behaviour of the believer (Nabofa, 1994:5). In fact, images, emblems or symbols are not end in themselves, but means to an end (Adelowo, 1990:162), no wonder all professions or religious bodies, be it traditional religion, Christianity, Islam and other secular bodies express their experiences through symbols, while these expressions could be articulated and mediated in religious emblems, ideograms, icons, rituals, songs, prayers, myths, incantations, vows, customary behaviour and personifications (Nabofa, 1994:4). In this wise, Ezeanya (1994:8) opines that “one of the important customs of the Igbo people of Nigeria in connection with the birth of a child, is the naming ceremony. For the Igbo people, for the Hebrews, a name is not just a personal label for the sake of identity. It means much”. However, in indigenous religious practices the basic assimilation and understanding of these so called religious symbols makes itself to be comprehensive, rapid and compact to use, it equally assists in understanding and concentration during any kind of religious rituals to achieve divine essence (Nabofa, 1994:4). No wonder, when Christianity and Islamic religions came to Africa, because traditional religious symbols have their ambiguities and these could shroud their true meaning to the unwary, they branded those symbol as objects of heathenism, animism, idolatry, fetishism and so on (Nabofa,1994:5).

Thus, according to Geoffrey Parrinder (1987:127) “such religious symbols are means of expression used by Africans, scriptures of a sort, in the arts which Africans developed and whose originality and power have been recognized by European artists such as Picasso, Epstein and Henry Moore”. He argues that “painting and sculpture, in stone, ivory, brass, wood, clay, cloth and other materials have been used since time immemorial for daily purposes and for important representations. These express people’s beliefs from the inside, though their interpretation by others is not always easy” (Parrinder, 1987:127). Because of the use of

such derogatory terms by the Western and Arab scholars, visionary and articulated religious scholars, theologians and leaders of thought in various endeavours deemed it wise to consider giving this term symbol a definition, today the word symbol means an image, object that suggests or refers to something else (Hornby, 1995:1215). Thompson (1970:9) asserts that symbol is anything which exists for its purpose of pointing people beyond itself. Cohen (1974:26) sees symbols as “objects, acts, relationships or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of meanings”.

This concept of symbol made Clifford Geertz to conceive of culture as a text (Crapanzano, 1986:68-76) which serves as a vehicle for conception (Geertz, 1973:91). Kreinath (2005:102) argues that this implies that any form of ritual action can be seen as a kind of religious behaviour, which is approached through the lens of a broad linguistic model. Here, what this tries to point out is that we have various symbolic forms and that there is every possibility for one symbolic form to be given several meanings and such meanings would equally be given at different segments depending upon the ability and capability of the interpreter’s level of consciousness and intelligence (Nabofa, 1994:6). However, Susanne Langers (1958:174) in her book *Theology and Life*, simply made a distinction between a mere sign and symbol and according to her, a sign merely or probably indicates a thing, while a symbol however represents it. Buttressing this further, Sundermeier argues that:

Symbol should not be confused with allegory. The law of analogy prohibits this. Allegory links up things which do not belong together, adding something to reality. Symbols, on the other hand, make visible the powers which belong together, and participate in each other. Nor should a symbol be confused with a sign. Signs are one-directional, unmistakable. Symbols condemn several aspects which are not fully explainable. Interpretation can change, without the previous interpretation losing its validity, even when its significance decreases. Different interpretations are not mutually exclusive. They have to be understood as supplementary, since each interpretation embraces only one level of meaning, be it social [as in social anthropology], legal, psychological or religious. Synchronising these levels is the essential task of the symbol (Sundermeier, 1998:39).

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In one of his own contributions, to what symbols stands for, Carl Jung (1979:20) asserts that these are meaningless in themselves; they equally have acquired recognizable meanings through common usage or even deliberate intent. He further argues that:

What we call a symbol is a term, a name or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. It implies something vague, unknown or hidden from us... Thus a word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. It has a wider "unconscious" aspect that is never precisely defined or fully explained. Nor can one hope to define or explain it. As the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason (Jung, 1979:20).

Mircea Eliade (1987:861) asserts that symbol reveals certain dimension of reality that would otherwise elude our knowledge and this deeper dimension is disclosed or revealed not only through the reflection of the interpreters of the symbols but in the "internal or innermost logic" proper to the symbols themselves. Radcliffe-Brown (1952:143) argues that whatever has meaning is a symbol and the meaning is what is expressed by the symbol. Nonetheless, Symbol by definition is communal that converts latent power into energy (Sundermeier, 1998:53).

Buttressing this further, Paul Ricoeur (1995:5) explains that "symbol as a multiple-meaning expression characterized by a hidden logic of double reference. Symbols are like signs in that they intend something beyond themselves. But whereas the sign possesses a relatively obvious and conventional set of denotations, the symbol's meanings are polysemic, difficult to discern, and virtually inexhaustible in depth". Benjamin Ray (1976:17) posits that mythical symbols and ritual acts are thus decidedly instrumental and they not only say what reality is, but they also shape the world to conform with, this reality. In this respect, religion plays an enormous role in African societies. He argues that archetypal symbols express a community's past and they structure collective rites for corporate benefit and in the traditional context religion cannot be a purely personal affair; the relation to the sacred is, first of all, a communal one (Ray, 1976:17). According to Sundermeier (1998:38) symbols, unfolds reality in such a way that it communicates reality. He argues that

"there is no other reality than that accessible in the symbol. The symbol lives from unity, even when it is directed at the partial. It does not cry out from within reality, but emanates reality in such a way that participation becomes possible. It comes from the whole and unfolds it before us. The 'whole' is the world around, of which the invisible world is an essential part" (Sundermeier, 1998:38).

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However, this concept of symbol is seen as, a recognition of one thing as standing or representing another thing (Firth, 1973:79). Tillich (1959:54) asserts that "symbols are similar to signs in one distinctive respect: both symbols and signs point beyond themselves to something else" when "it finds acceptance in the group consciousness" (Tovey, 2004:12). On a general note, symbol from the above definitions given would be seen as a hall-mark of an idea, a logo, a sign, a ritual or perhaps a psycho-behavioural pattern that stands out as an overt representation of an inner experience or essence of the unconscious (Nabofa, 1994:7). Symbols themselves represent the continued role of tradition (Gibson & Dunbar-Hall, 2006:396). Symbols always contain something of them, sometimes strongly, sometimes faintly (Sundermeier, 1998:38). No wonder Montgomery (2016: 17) asserts that "most Africans used the symbol of the master as a cloak for their own spirits". To sum up this, in traditional religious practices and systems, the indigenous Kings regalia for an Igbo man's paradigm would be described as a "hallmark of symbol of dignity, royalty, respect" (Nti, 1990:86) in the tradition and hegemony of the people of Anambra State because of various symbolisms it carries. That is why Roberts (1993:65) affirms that the symbolism in *Isi-agu* attire "implies a hierarchy of privilege and dependency"

The lion symbol printed on the *Isi-agu* attire did not become an Igbo mans cultural symbology by mere chance but do to the mere singular reason that lion as a very strong and noble animal which typifies the authentic identity of the Igbo therefore, the Igbo is built strong, bold and courageous and that is why the lion insignia is always ingrained in the Igbo aesthetics. (Eze, 2016:17). From my own interpretation, the symbolism is a complete reflection and

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representation of intrinsic endowment of the Igbo. According to Eze again:

The depictions of this animal span all ancient and medieval cultures in carvings, sculptures, paintings, national flags, contemporary films and literatures. Indeed, the lion iconography has enjoyed a tremendous depiction as king of the Jungle, The Lion King and King of the Beasts in various media. Ancient Egypt venerated the lioness as its war deity. Ancient Mesopotamia adopted the lion as a prominent symbol of royalty. The Marijata of the ancient Mali Empire was fondly called the “Lion of Mali”. In much the same way, most medieval warrior Kings who were reputed from their bravery were affectionately nicknamed “Lion”. Like King Richard of England (Richard the Lion Heart), King Henry of Germany (Henry the Lion) and the Duke of Saxony who was known as William the Lion (2017:17).

Nonetheless, one school of thought believes that it was Chief Dr. Alex Ekwueme, the former Vice President in the first Republic of Nigeria and Rev. Fr. Maduka, a Catholic priest of South-eastern Nigeria that popularized the wearing of the indigenous Kings regalia in Igbo land since early 1970's and as from that point it “became an integral part of civilized behaviour” that is projecting African philosophy (Renne, 1995:182). According to Salamone & Mbabu (1994:215) a Nigerian Catholic priest Rev. Fr. Maduka from Ekwuluobia in particular has come to be regarded as the vanguard and pioneer of this local attire. He preached that Africans did not have to wear Western priestly garments. Asserting that these vestments were the result of the European climate, cultural as well as physical and there is nothing wrong with wearing an African wrapper and dashiki all in trying to Africanize the church. It is very significant to mention here that during the beatification of Rev. Fr. Michael Cyprian Iwene Tansi, now Blessed Tansi, an Aguleri son, a deliberate attempt was made by the Catholic church to show that the church and traditions and culture are not always mutually antagonistic; that the Igbo Kings regalia – a traditional attire with head of lion design does not always make a traditional religious worshipper just as the hood does not make the monk as they always say (Abugu, 1998:15).

An Igbo man is highly fascinated with it and so fascinated that it comes in different broad categories. Apparently, the royal regalia fabrics

especially the *Isi-agu* attire comes in diverse colours to assume or reflect the growth in taste and symbolic style among the Igbo people, it is used to be a creative blend of red, black and white. No matter what colours it comes in, the dominant motif is the head of a lion and sometimes we see the head of a roaring lion and the head is in a contemplative mode but the *Isi-agu* remains the same (Eze, 2016:16). No matter your social standing in the community, there is an *Isi-agu* fabric for an Igbo traditional King or a titled man in order to distinguish him with common people in a specific social, secular or religious convocation. There is the very expensive one that only the very wealthy members of society can afford to buy and there are fabrics of the same *Isi-agu* that are easily affordable to low income class.

Nevertheless, whether it is the high or low income fabric that one can afford, *Isi-agu* attire through the symbolism it utilizes “announces itself in dazzling sparkles” (Eze, 2016:17). Eze (2016:17) again affirms that “it is to the credit of the designers of the fabric that they were able to perfectly transfer the mythical glory of the lion [*ebube agu*] to the *Isi-agu* fabric and endear the cloth to the *Ndigbo*”. On this position, one vividly remembers an Igbo axiom or maxim that says that: “*ebube agu na eche agu*” meaning that the glory of the lion fends off its enemies. In Igbo cosmology, it is believed that one's name speaks volume for a person. This is the more reason why people bear “lion” as a name. For example, the title “*Ogbu-agu*” that is lion killer is conferred on to warriors in absolute reverence to their individual exploits in war or otherwise. It is also very significant to mention here that it is a truism in Igbo paradigm that when a person performs or distinguishes himself exceptionally in any area of endeavours, he is referred to as a “lion”. Politically, that is why (Odikpo, 2017) described the Executive Governor of Anambra State Willie Maduaburochukwu Obiano as the lion of the East due to his maverick and wonderful performances in the political terrain of Nigeria. This is to buttress how passionate the relationship between the Igbo and this special animal called lion.

As a point of emphasis, it is very paramount to mention here that *Isi-agu* dress is put on to match with Igbo native red cap and where necessary with eagle feathers and beads portraying royalty and Chieftaincy in Igbo cosmology. No wonder Bosah (1973:36) cited in

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Hahn-Waanders (1990:88) asserts that the symbology of “the red caps worn by other chiefs was introduced by Obi Okosi [1901-1931] in order to differentiate the members of the native courts from other title holders and from ordinary citizens”. He affirms that “these red caps are called *okpu ododo*. *Ododo* is a Bini word and it means red. Later on, these red caps were worn by the *Ozo* members all over Igbo land” (Hahn-Waanders, 1990:89). Felix Abugu (1998), in his description and illustration of the event, writes that:

The Okanga Royal band of Aguleri came into the scene in measured and articulated steps swaying gently to the sombre rhythms of the traditional sacred drums and the deep bass sound of the accompanying long elephant tusks being carried by one of them. The traditional chiefs wore long red caps and long sleeveless red gowns upon George wrappers, the latter's expertly-tied thick knots pushed to the left hand side of each wear. The long caps care with the all-familiar eagle feathers stuck into their bottom folds to keep the feathers in place” (Abugu, 1998:15).

We should not forget the fact that it was Eri the progenitor of the Igbos who introduced the republican and aristocratic institution of *Ozo* title known as *Odoloma* Eri. In Aguleri Kingdom, the *Odoloma* Eri later metamorphosised into *Ozo* title society and its members act or sever as advisers and ambassadors to Eri who were mainly made up of spiritualized fathers (Idigo, 2001:110-119). But according to Onwuejeogwu (1981:168 & 67) this group later was transformed into a secret society, which has a highly disguised language that is understood only by its members and such secret language was developed and used before indoctrination and for domination, “so that the head of the ritual groups could send messages backwards and forwards”.

No wonder why traditional red cap popularly called *Okpu Ododo* in Igbo language serves “as the most distinctive symbols of the political elite to identity membership in a royal family or a connection to the aristocracy” Perani & Wolff (1991:135). Perani & Wolff (1999:125) again affirms that “the visual brilliance and textual complexity is enriched by scintillating surface, sparkling and shining in a kaleidoscope of color and light in the appearance of the mounted ruler under an impressive twirling state umbrella”. McMullen (1987:217) asserts that the colour

combination of the *Isi-agu* material portrays the symbolism and “the benevolence of the cosmic order and of his own role in mediating between it and the human hierarchy”. Kaplan (2000:117-118) argues that insofar as the King wears the *Isi-agu* cloth and “seats on his throne, he is awe-inspiring. He alone possesses the royal coral-bead regalia—the crown, the staff, and the royal coral bead shirt and strip wrapper combined with different colours which have symbolic meanings. He is a living proof of the cogency of Kingship. Nonetheless, he has the ability to control the beneficent and destructive forces of the earth”.

Symbolism of the Royal Regalia and Projection of African Philosophy

However, the colours of the Igbo traditional Kings regalia may be combined in significant ways, but their meaning/symbolism is situational and can never be read automatically; one cannot write dictionaries of symbolism in African art (MacGaffey, 2000:233). The *Isi-agu* attire to the worldview of an Igbo man reflects the African artistic design and embroideries which unmistakably retains their African character. In fact, in Igbo cosmology, the indigenous regalia worn by some designated people especially the prestige like the Igbo Kings in society express “value of identity and incorporation” (Smith, 1987a: 28). In terms of leadership context, the communicative significance and symbolism of the Indigenous Kings regalia could act as “tracers of rank” and bolster the visual hierarchy cannot be over emphasized (Schneider, 1987:412). He again comments that the “indigenous cloth types and clothing are often used in the performance of sacred rituals of continuity and reaffirmation (Schneider, 1987:415).

As it pertains to the promotion of African philosophy, Kaplan (2004:190) argues that in Igbo cosmology *Isi-agu* attire as one of “the clothing the king chooses to wear each day is traditional and symbolic with meanings. It is a statement of occasion, intent, mood, power and all have meanings and evoke memory”. Through, the symbolism it utilizes and the cultural ethos it invokes, however, the *Isi-agu* attire retains the power to influence the spiritual state of its wearer and to play a role in the socio-religious consciousness of the person by whom or for whom it is worn. This is why Susanne Langers (1942:195) describes object based symbols like the *Isi-agu* attire as an

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“unconsummated symbol, a significant form without conventional significance”. This is why Hall (1928:136) argues that “the regalia must be worn correctly and must not be worn profanely”, because it is classified as a “robe of honor” or “coronation cloth” (Perani & Wolff, 1999:124 & 166). This royal ceremonial regalia create also a symbolic distinction between what Vansina (1978:185) axiomatically refers to as “the elite from the commoner”. Bayero (1981) attested that “to wear these gowns is to be different from other people. When you see them, you know this person is of the royal family”. This cloth called *Isi-agu* attire is more than a book and it is a fundamental institution if studied. Consequently, with the philosophy and ideology of boycott – the boycotable, Mbonu Ojike (1948:2) would not dress in any Western-patterned dress... According to Ojike again:

The human motive for... is one throughout the world. But just as no two human personalities are identical in all respects, so... of nations must be dissimilar one to another. Twenty active years at home, plus eight inquisitive years abroad, have collectively convinced me that our...is a legacy to love, a tradition to uphold, a heritage to revive. It needs no reform. It calls for no apology. It wants no distortion. What our... culture wants is a new zest, a new devotion, a new patronage. It must be strengthened in order to be consolidated, promoted in order to be loved and patronized...[sic]. I have never in my entire Safari seen a country like mine....It is a nation of people who think of progress [and civilization] in terms of imbibing whatever is foreign. It is a

people that have as it rejected its fashion... (1948:2).

Insofar as, this great and proud African nationalist saw and was highly disturbed by the ignorance coupled with insult which Westerners showed on the culture of Africans especially as it concerns indigenous attire, it did not stop many of the African indigenous communication outfits or systems which when used in producing scintillating impressions that are highly impregnated with symbolic meanings (Nabofa, 1994:36).

MEDIATING FUNCTIONS OF ROYAL REGALIA AND IT'S ENSEMBLE AS PART OF DIVINE RITES OF KINGS AND ITS SYMBOLISM

From time immemorial, Igbo people have developed high level of interest in rich textile traditions and distinctive methods of dress to actually communicate and enhance cultural symbolism and meanings. In fact, in Igbo cultural context, dresses like the royal regalia has become a visible symbol apparently signaling gender, social status, and political office, allegiance to a deity or personal prestige (Perani & Wolf, 1999:28).

Buttressing further, Perani & Wolf again affirms that the royal regalia “cloth and clothing can also convey esoteric symbolic information understandable only to initiates. Whether sign or symbol, this ability to transmit information and mediate meaning through shared understandings in socio-cultural contexts is a primary characteristic of cloth” (1999:28). James Eze (2015:1)



Figure1. Here, HRH (Engr) Christopher Nwabunwanne Idigo IV (Ogalagidi II) Eze Aguleri dancing during an Ovala festival in the King's square - Amaeze (Courtesy of Madukasi Francis Chuks). Note the Royal Regalia.

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Asserts that “beyond these totems and profound meanings lies another oasis of symbolisms and unspoken communication”. But beyond the basic functions in protection and warming the body, cloth like the royal regalia have since over-lapping mediating symbolic functions which Perani & Wolf summarized thus:

(1) Expression of self and personal worth; (2). Indicator of occupation; (3). Measurement of social value; (4). Standard of economic value; (5). Identification of gender role; (6). Marker of progression through the life cycle; (7). Definition and negotiation of political powers; (8). Religious signifier and repository of supernatural powers; (9). Delineator of social space; and (10). Indicator of culture change (1999:29).

CONCLUSION

Tackling the study of Regalia of the Igbo Kings from the viewpoint of art patronage recognizes that certain artifacts are to the expression of culture both as aesthetic products and as consumer goods. Nonetheless, beyond the initial production and consumption processes, royal regalia gains symbolic meanings as part of culturally-constituted body make up of complete Igbo man. The clothed body make up is very paramount to the projection of social self by expanding the aristocratic and hegemonic vocabulary of the body and visually reinforcing social roles which invariably projects African philosophy and personality. By extension, royal regalia draw close boundaries between the cultural and symbolic worlds in social and ritual contexts. So the colours printed differently on the royal regalia have been widely adopted by diverse cultures across the world as a symbol of bravery and valour projecting high social status and political power. It is has been storified in different folklore. It is clear therefore that the fulsome adoption of the lion as an iconic totem is a heritage the Igbo race share with many advance cultures across the world. It however says a lot about the advancement of Igbo civilization that only few of these societies, if any, wear royal regalia with divers' colours to show this affinity as the Igbo do. I can say tersely that to every titled Igbo person, what is more profound is the fact that the colourful royal regalia fabric is one of the most revered pieces of clothing among the Igbo and there is a belief that there must be a communicative ritual synergy about the lion and *Ndi-Igbo* in diaspora. In other words, having an identity is not inconsistent with a global or national outlook.

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