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**Book Review:** *TRADITIONS OF IGBO ORIGIN: A Study of Pre-Colonial Population Movements in Africa*

**Title:** *Traditions of Igbo Origin: A Study of Pre-Colonial Population Movements in Africa*

**Author:** John Nwachimereze Oriji

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**Introduction:**

*Traditions of Igbo Origin: A Study of Pre-Colonial Population Movements in Africa* by Professor Emeritus John Nwachimereze Oriji presents a comprehensive historical account of the origins and migrations of the Igbo people of Nigeria. Utilizing a variety of primary and secondary sources, Oriji meticulously analyzes and synthesizes different accounts of Igbo origin. Although

the book is not exhaustive, it offers crucial insights into Igbo, African, and global population movements. It stands as one of the pioneering efforts in documenting the Igbo's historical journey.

### Critical Analysis:

Oriji's work is well-structured, with 13 chapters spanning 212 pages. The book includes a comprehensive bibliography and index. The opening chapters provide an overview of the Igbo, their origins, settlements, and migrations, addressing controversies surrounding the etymology of "Igbo." Oriji asserts that the Igbo people recognized themselves as such before European contact, evidenced by legendary traditions and community names like Igbo-Ukwu and Ama-Igbo.

Chapters 3 through 12 track various migrations and expansions of Igbo sub-groups across different regions. The final chapter encapsulates the book as an expository analysis of major pre-colonial population movements in Africa. Oriji asserts that Igbo origins date back to the commencement of human habitation in West Africa, about a million years ago, attributing Igbo movement and expansion to various ecological, environmental, agricultural, social, economic, and political factors.

As a standard text, *Traditions of Igbo Origin* has a title page (p. i), dedication page (p. iii), table of contents (p. iv), a detailed and well-referenced endnote at the end of each chapter. In addition, it has standard bibliographical listing of abbreviations, intelligent reports, books, articles, dissertations, theses and monographs (pp. 187 – 200). It equally has a detailed and well-arranged index of maps and figures (p. v), as well as a chronological index of names, places, villages, communities, towns and subjects (pp. 201 – 212).

Surprisingly, the book does not have any acknowledgement page. This is not to say that the author did not acknowledge anyone in the book. The curious thing here is that our revered author, Emeritus Professor Oriji, ingeniously sandwiched his acknowledgements in the Preface to the Second Edition. Again, one had expected to see the Preface to the First Edition included here, and precedent to that of the second edition, but it is not. Could it be for reasons of brevity?

A few minor errors which are, most probably, typographical could also be seen on p.7, line 4; p. 9, paragraph 2, line 3; p. 15, lines 4 and 7; p. 45, paragraph 3, line 3; p. 46, line 4; p. 67, paragraph 2, line 4; p. 69, paragraph 3, line 2; p. 95, paragraph 4, line 4; p. 116, para. 3, lines 2

and 8; p. 153, para. 3, line 7; p. 159, para 2, line 5; p. 163, line 5; p. 164, para 2, line 3; p. 172, para 3, line 6; p. 175, para 3, line 2; p. 180, line 9; p. 183, para 2, line 14; p. 184, para 2, line 9; etc.

However, these typographical errors are minor. Hence, they pale into insignificance given the rich ideas, sound logic and fascinating discoveries contained in this book.

While Oriji's assertions are robust, it is crucial to critically appraise his contentions using the views of other scholars in the field, such as Professor Adiele Afigbo, Elizabeth Isichei, Dmitri van den Bersselaar, and G.T. Basden.

### **Adiele Afigbo's Perspective:**

Professor Adiele Afigbo, a prominent historian, critically examines the migration theory of Igbo origin and supports the autochthonous theory, aligning with Oriji. Afigbo uses archaeological, linguistic, and ethnographic evidence to argue that the Igbo are indigenous to their current region in West Africa, dating back to prehistoric times. Sites like Igbo-Ukwu provide significant insights into early Igbo civilization, revealing a sophisticated society with advanced metallurgy and extensive trade networks. This view supports Oriji's contention that the Igbo have a long-standing presence in their current region, reinforcing the autochthonous theory.

### **Elizabeth Isichei's Perspective:**

Elizabeth Isichei offers a more nuanced view, synthesizing archaeological, linguistic, and oral evidence to suggest that Igbo origins are likely a mix of indigenous development and interactions with neighboring cultures. Unlike Oriji, who leans towards an autochthonous narrative, Isichei's hybrid approach recognizes the limitations and potential biases of a single-origin theory. Her perspective encourages a broader understanding of Igbo history, acknowledging the complexities of cultural and population interactions over time.

### **Dmitri van den Bersselaar's Perspective:**

Dmitri van den Bersselaar agrees with Isichei's hybrid approach, emphasizing the interplay between ethnic identity, historical events, colonial and post-colonial influences, and internal and external interactions. Van den Bersselaar's view challenges Oriji's focus on an autochthonous origin by highlighting the dynamic and multifaceted nature of Igbo history. He traces the Igbo's origins to a blend of language, culture, and politics, suggesting that their history cannot be confined to a single theory of origin.

### **G.T. Basden's Perspective:**

G.T. Basden subscribes to the migration theory, positing that the Igbo might have migrated from the north or northeast. Basden's view contrasts sharply with Oriji's autochthonous theory,

suggesting that many African ethnic groups, including the Igbo, had origins in central and northern regions of the continent. Basden bases his argument on linguistic similarities and cultural practices, which he believes indicate a common origin with other groups around the Niger-Benue confluence. This perspective provides a counterpoint to Oriji's contention, advocating for a migration narrative.

### Conclusion:

While *Traditions of Igbo Origin* provides a detailed and significant account of Igbo history, it is essential to critically engage with the diverse perspectives offered by scholars like Afigbo, Isichei, van den Bersselaar, and Basden. Oriji's autochthonous theory is compelling, supported by archaeological and linguistic evidence, but it is equally important to consider the hybrid and migration theories that acknowledge the complex and multifaceted nature of Igbo origins. This comprehensive approach enriches our understanding of Igbo history, recognizing the intricate interplay of indigenous development, migration, and cultural interactions over time.

Emeritus Professor John Nwachimereze Oriji deserves commendation for his invaluable contribution to Igbo, Nigerian, and global historical scholarship. *Traditions of Igbo Origin* is an indispensable compendium for anyone interested in the historical, social, economic, and cultural journey of the Igbo people.

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