Research Article

Symbolism And Symbolic Significance Of Native White Chalk ‘Nzu’ As A Mechanism For Improving Human Conditions And Dignity In Igbo Traditional Religion

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Abstract: The proper underpinning of “Nzu” as a traditional symbol of holiness and purity of the indigenous people of 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 the white chalk “Nzu” to many adherents of African Traditional Religion is seen as a symbol of purity is evidently not limited in its transmission of reality thereby making it to serve as an outward and inward purity and holiness that are required of the worshipper towards improving human spiritual conditions and dignity. This paper investigates how “Nzu” 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, “Nzu” encapsulate so many things which are very distinctive thereby representing so many things and ideologies.

Key words: Cosmology, Evoke, Ideology, Symbols & Symbology.

Introduction:

Apparently, 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 different 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 *mu-ntu*, ‘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 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 expresses 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 (Geertz, 1973:91) which serves as a vehicle for conception (Crapanzano, 1986:68-76). 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 Langer (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).

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).

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, Nzu would be described as a “hallmark of symbol of dignity, royalty, respect” (NTI, 1990:86) in the tradition and hegemony of the people because of various functions it performs.

Through the symbolism the sacred white chalk Nzu utilizes and the sacred ethos it invoke, however, it retains the power to influence the spiritual state of its performers and to play a role in the religious consciousness of the Igbo people “by whom or for whom it is performed” (Dunbar-Hall, 2006:59). According to Roger Blench (2009:1) “those who are wedded to European notions of music, in particular regular time signatures, and the key system, find this music hard to interpret and it is thus often ignored in scholarly accounts and other types of anthropological description”.

Buttressing this further, Adegbite (1991:45) posits that such sacred object to the traditional African peoples may be described as “the vehicle for articulating an abstract idea in concrete form – for communicating thought as matter”. He argues that on the one hand, Nzu as an aspect of sacred items in Igbo cosmology, is regarded in traditional African societies as the most immediate expression of Eros; a bridge between ideas and phenomena (Adegbite, 1991:45). Polak (2006:163) argues that sacred ritual items like Nzu “has become an integral part of a supra-ethnic, local culture” of the Igbo tradition which “owe a great deal to the African religious heritage” (Behague, 2006:97). The style and its presentation in any socio-religious gathering in Igbo land is quite unique due to its “clarity of thought and communication”, and its “original instructions” (Jocks, 2004:141&142).

No wonder Sophie Arkette (2004:160) asserts that during the ritual presentation of the Nzu each pronunciation “is imbued with its own lexical code: sound as sign, symbol, index, as ostensibly defining a personal territory”. In fact, the style of presentation of the Nzu actually represents a tradition of its own because it is “a prayer, a recognition, a mark of solidarity and a symbol of unity amongst our people” (Ojukwu, 2002:v). Ballard (2006:1) affirms that “oneness, community, unity, and harmony are the very heartbeat” of every Igbo person. Presentation of the Nzu as a sacred object actually demonstrates and dramatizes the totality of culture, tradition and hegemony in Igbo land which marks complete Igbo identity – a great race that has lived together as one people, in peace and harmony under different kingships, even before the turn of the 19th Century (Nnamah, 2002:7). Ojukwu (2002:v) affirms that presentation of the native white chalk Nzu “symbolizes our comings in, and our goings out, our joy and our sadness. It symbolizes our positions in the society and our achievements and our failures”. He argues that it “remains as a door through which our individual Igboness passes in to an assemblage of Igbo community” (Ojukwu, 2002:v). It is very paramount to mention that in
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Aguleri cosmology the repertoire and style of presentation of Nzu as a sacred paraphernalia represents a tradition of its own because “it is a new development that actually builds on, fuses and recreates different sources” (Polak, 2006:163), which constitutes what Ayu (1986:9) refers to as profound “epistemology”. Ayu (1986:8) again posits that items or objects like the Nzu have become an important genre. He argues that it is on this genre of popular tradition that a whole critical edifice was erected (Ayu, 1986:9). Buttressing this, James Eze asserts that “beyond these totems and profound meanings lies another oasis of symbolisms and unspoken communication” (2015:1).

Ritual Symbolism and Significance of Nzu:

Strictly speaking, nobody can say for sure how Nzu came about, but one can speculate that it was through the geographical formation that it emanated from. Nonetheless, the origin and place of Nzu in the present Igbo tradition can be traced to Eri, the ancestral father of the Igbo nation. Eri was the descendants of the tribe of Gad (one of the twelve sons of Jacob) in the land of Isreal (Genesis, 46:17). Through Eri’s subsequent relationship with Kola-nut [Oji-Igbo] history revealed that it was Eri who introduced the use of Nzu in Igbo cosmology in his shrine “Obu-gad” in Aguleri the ancestral home of the Igbos (Idigo, 2001 & Eyisi, 2011). Native White chalk[Nzu]: This is a regilio-cultural symbol of happiness (Onimhawo & Adamu, 2011:37). It symbolizes the purity and holiness of the object of worship and the idea is that, to the believers

Figure 1: MAMALETTE. 2015. This is a picture of some blocks of the native white chalk(Nzu).

the white chalk is not an-ordinary white clay but a powerful spiritual force or entity (Nabofa, 1994:57). According to Mamalette (2015) “different names have been ascribed to this chalk depending on which part of the world it is found. It is known as La Craie or Argile in French, Nzu and Ndom by the Igbo and Efiks/Ibibios respectively of Nigeria, and Mabele by the Lingala of Congo. It is sold in blocks, pellets and powder forms”.

According to Ogwezzy (1999) cited in NOUN (2009:44) “in African traditional belief system by using the native white chalk during rituals, it is believed that people telephoned; send cable and postal messages to the spirit world. It is equally believed that native chalk powder thrown outside or blown into the air would attract blessings to the people from God, ancestors and the spirit world”. This is why Onimhawo & Adamu (2011:37) affirms that after divination the white native chalk is given to the client signifying that the venture would be successful. Nabofa (1994:56) argues that “when people travel to their places of origin for festivals, especially
the traditional ones, such as the new yam festivals and those held in honour of some divinities, some of them return to their places of work with some sacred materials obtained from the priests in-charge of the community shrines. White chalk is one of such sacred things given them to carry to their places of sojourn”.

It is has been observed that such sacred items serves as a “psychological devices for communicating and personalizing religious ideas” (Nabofa, 1994:46) and the idea is that the carrier of such items believed that “he has been insulated against all possible unwholesome external influences” (Nabofa, 1994:51). In this form, Nzu serves as a protective mechanism that protects people. Also, it acts as a spiritual food for traditional devotees Igbo cultural milieu. No wonder Nabofa posits that: “It is often narrated that those devotees, especially mediums who are divinely mounted can live on the chalk alone for several days without eating any other food and that they will not feel hungry. Such is believed to be possible because the divine power that has infused the white chalk has transformed it from an ordinary white chalk to a divine and a very nutritious food” (1994:57).

According to Nabofa (1994:57) again:

Thus to the believer the white chalk is not an ordinary white clay but a mighty spiritual force. In fact, in some places the is a relationship between the white chalk and the divinity from whose shrine it was obtained and they are so inter-related that sometimes the chalk itself is regarded as the divinity itself or the food of the ancestors, with the result that certain taboos observed in the presence and honour of the divinity are equally seen or noticed while trying to use it

Buttressing this further, Nabofa (1994:57) again affirms that “it is often narrated that those devotees, especially mediums who are divinely mounted can live on the chalk alone for several days without eating any other food and that they will not feel hungry. Such is believed to be possible because the divine power that has infused the white chalk has transformed it from ordinary white chalk to a divine and a very nutritious food”. Illustrating further, the native white chalk ‘Nzu’ is believed to have that therapeutic power by the adherents of African Traditional Religion to protect. Here, Nabofa explains that:

All acts of worship and healing ritual among the members of Igbe Ubiesha in Urhobo are performed with their sacred chalk hence the colonial administrators referred to that Urhobo indigenous religion as white chalk juju. Thus the white chalk to many adherents of African Traditional Religion symbolizes outward and inward purity and holiness that are required of the worshipper (1994:57).

Scientifically, native white chalk as a conventional food though consumed by a wide range of communities in Nigeria by pregnant and breast feeding women has been discovered to be dangerous. This chalk is a natural element made up of fossilized seashells and prepared artificially from clay and mud. According to Mamalette (2015)

This combination may then be mixed with other ingredients including sand, wood ash and sometimes salt. The resulting product is molded and then heated to produce the final product. While not many people know this, local chalk is composed of Aluminum silicate hydroxide from the kaolin clay group with the possible formula: Al2 Si2 O5 OH4. This has been tested to contain lead and arsenic. Exposure to lead can result in a number of harmful effects, and a developing child is particularly at risk of effects on the brain and nervous system. Arsenic is a carcinogen, and excessive long-term exposure to it has been associated with a range of adverse health effects, including cancers of the urinary bladder, lung and skin.

Functions of Nzu as it Applies to the Ritual Reception Ceremony:

It is very important to mention here that in Igbo belief system, in the absence of Kola-nut, Nzu could play a significant role in taken the place of Kola-nut. In other words, through the sacred ordination of Nzu, it stands to say that Nzu represents a symbol of goodwill, friendship and hospitality. It is on this position that Nabofa (1994:60) asserts that it “symbolizes sacredness consequently it is used for expressing hospitality, breaking fast,
for establishing trust, sincerity and everlasting friendship and socialization. The role it plays in divination and oath-taking are in consequence of its sacred qualities”. Idigo (2002:44) opines that when Nzu is presented alone without Kola-nut “the difference is that the prayer over Nzu, four short lines corresponding to the four market days of the native week – eke, orie, afo and nkwo are drawn on the bare floor with the Nzu. This is so, because each market day has a duty to perform over man’s existence”. Nzeako (1982:101) affirms that these are done before prayer commence”. The number of times, an Nzu is drawn on the ground can be varied to convey different symbolic messages/meanings either religious or secular.

During such a gathering, the Nzu is rolled on the floor from the feet of one person to the other until the ritual ceremony of passing the Nzu is completed. Each person makes some symbolic signs on the floor, and takes a pinch from the lump and puts on his eyelids, on his foot either left or right and finally puts some in his mouth. It is after these rituals that prayer begins. No wonder Nabofa (1994:37) affirms that “these kinds of rituals are rigidly and meticulously followed so that they can retain their ancient, ritualistic and spiritual values as revealed and decreed by the divine in order to avoid sacrilege”.

When the Igbo prays with the mediation of Nzu, he has five major things in mind for God, gods and ancestors to do for him and at the end of these demands the people around will respond by saying Ise an equivalent of Amen in Christian religion. These five major things contain in its chronological order the needs of man on earth. According to Idigo, their orders of significance as perceived by the Igbo man are: “Ogologo ndu – (Long life), Ife ndu jì aso uso – (Wealth), Azu – (Offering), Udo – (Peace), Mee madu ka ichoro ka madu mee gi – (Do unto others as you would like to be done unto you. This also means justice and fair play)” (2002:32). At the end of the prayers, some quantities of Nzu would be thrown outside for the deities and ancestors. The meaning of the native white chalk thrown out for the deities and ancestors symbolizes that “the divinity is summoned to attend and be a witness to the worship, festival, celebration and also, with it prayers are directed to the deities and ancestors” (Nabofa, 1994:57).

Emeka (1998:390) asserts that “nzu is also a symbol of mystical power and so of the dibie – the healer, mystics and diviners of the Igbo society”. In this position, Emeka (1998:390) again argues that “a dibie paints the region of his eyes with nzu to symbolize his ability to see beyond the visible”. Uwah (2011:89) affirms that “the spirit world is seen as part of the human world and the mediators between these worlds are culturally called the chief priests [Dibia] in Igbo language and [Babalowo in Yoruba]”. Nzeako (1982:102) explains that these are done to showcase clean mind in order for the devotees to be able receive their heart desired prayers from God. According to Idigo (2002) there four stages of ritual presentations of Nzu to a stranger in Igbo cosmology:

(a) “Ani-Ground – the sign made on the ground explain that the ancestors have seen that the stranger is well received into the house with his heart as pure as the colour of the limestone.

(b) Ikuanya- Eyelids – the quantity applied to the feet is done to help him walk into fortunes that day and in the days to come.

(c) Onu-Mouth – the quantity put in the mouth is to help purify the person’s heart and mouth so that nothing impure can be said or thought by him” (Idigo, 2002:44-45).

Writing from the perspective of the Urhobo and Isoko people respectively, Nabofa (1994) posits that:

Many shrine dedicated to important community or family divinities among the Urhobo and Isoko have plenty of such white chalk in their holy of holies. Some their sons and daughters living in diaspora obtain such blessed and consecrated white chalk from the priest in charge of the shrines and carry them to their places of sojourn believing that such chalk could protect them and their property as well as prosper their ways (1994:56).

In fact, Nabofa (1994) clearly stated that all acts of worship and healing ritual among the members of Igbe cult as a classical religious movement are basically performed with their sacred white chalk because it is believed that the white chalk is not an ordinary white chalk but a mighty spiritual force that has the power of exorcism
and purification imbued in it via the hand fan as one of the accoutrements used during the ritual dance and drama. The devotees believe that breeze produced by the fan can blow off impurities.

**Conclusion:**

From the foregoing, I can tersely, say that the native white chalk “Nzu” to many adherents of African Traditional Religion especially the Igbo symbolize outward and inward purity and holiness that are basically required of the devotee to enhance or improve his human spiritual conditions and dignity. The emblematic rituals that are attached to the expression of hospitality, love, strong affinal relationships and above all holiness and purity usually demonstrated in Nzu rituals and usage in Igbo race. They are highly impressive and ritually filled heart-warming ceremonies enveloped in classical idiomatic religious expressions and gestures packed with a rich wisdom. It is in the aspects of metaphysical applications and practical performances of magic and medicine in African religion that these symbols feature most prominently.

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