



*A Review of African Culture, Identity and Aesthetics: The Igbo Example* by Dr. Uche Ugwuere

Let me begin by congratulating Dr. Uche-Lynn Ugwuere on her timely publication of “African Culture, Identity, and Aesthetics, the Igbo Example” which is born of her rootedness in African cultural traditions and her international experience. This is her fifth published book, but the first theoretical work, coming after four novels. Culture and identity are themes that have engaged Dr. Ugwuere’s imagination most, are among the most debated topics in academia today. Scholars challenge and compete with each other to produce intellectual frameworks and paradigms that best explain and speak to issues of identity and identity formation, change and continuity in knowledge systems, especially in the diaspora. In this book, Dr. Ugwuere challenges us to go back to the basics, to culture. She reminds us of some basic truth, that it is culture that gives people their identity and dignity. She defines culture, not as an artifact frozen in some remote past, but as a living manifestation of people’s creativity, the sum total of their spiritual and moral heritage. Above all, as she tells us, culture is the essence of a people’s teachings about how to survive as a collective entity and of the guidelines for running their institutions. Seen from this perspective, culture is, thus, a fundamental source of principles and motivation necessary for development. These values and principles are manifested through material and symbolic forms like arts, rituals, ceremonies, dances, literature, sculpture and many other forms of representation.

What the book brings to the dialogue about African and African diasporic communities is the understanding and recognition that African people have not “fully recovered from the traumatic effects of their first confrontation with Europe and the Arab world, that Africa’s children throughout the globe still suffer the disabilities, insecurities and traumas of their social, economic and political dislocation. Slave and colonial mentalities, practices, and structures still exist in the post-slavery and post-colonial periods. This recognition defines the role of African culture in the imperatives of decolonization, restoration and reconstruction of African humanity. The book identifies and re-interprets African metaphors, myths, legends, story-telling traditions, rhythms of life, wisdom, proverbs, communication styles and techniques to enable them to speak to current African and African diaspora experiences. She identifies enduring strands and trends of African culture and makes them an intricate part of African people’s processes of being and becoming. Dr Ugwuere’s concern with and commitment to recovering and reconstructing African communities from the subordinating tendencies of other cultures is informed by the

urgent quest for self-definition, material and cultural repossession, and the need to critique and correct distortions of African humanity.

Dr. Ugwueze's book calls all those concerned with African people's recovery from years of traumatising and abuse to frame their efforts through the idiom of African and African diasporic experiences, the vocabulary and values of their cultures, and the styles of their sensibilities. She, thus, provides us with discursive space for dialoguing about African past and present historical and cultural experiences in the context of new and potentially threatening experiences. What she brings to this dialogue are the specific regenerative and healing values and strategies that connect personal and individual experiences to social process and collective goals.

Finally, she calls us to use African cultural principles to transform African people from being passive objects that only react to Western representations, into self-affirming subjects who are in charge of their destiny; and to mobilize an African collective conscience for the collective use of talents, resources and potential in order to guarantee continuity and survival.

Thank you Dr. Ugwueze for work well-done.

Thank you.