

1 **Amidst Western Influence: A Study of the Post-Colonial Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival**  
2 **(*Oke Aku*)**

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6 **Abstract**

7 The Ezza New Yam Festival (*Oke Aku*) is a significant cultural heritage and event that projects  
8 the identity and values of the people in the area. The event marks the end of planting yam, and  
9 the beginning of harvest and new year in Ezza indigenous calendar. With the increasing  
10 influence of Western culture however, the festival's traditional practices and significance are  
11 faced with various challenges. Using the Cultural Imperialism Theory and Cultural  
12 Hybridization, the study examined the impact of Westernization on the festival's cultural  
13 heritage and its enduring relevance in the post-colonial Ezza. Using the theories, qualitative  
14 approach and content analysis, the study explores the perceptions of the people regarding the  
15 festival's significance, the changes that have occurred as a result of Western influence, and the  
16 ways in which the Ezza are adapting to these changes while maintaining its cultural identity. The  
17 findings of the study reveal that the resilience of the Ezza people's cultural heritage and the  
18 essence of preserving traditional practices in the face of globalization. This study contributes to  
19 the understanding of the complex dynamics between cultural tradition and modernity,  
20 highlighting the need for cultural preservation and promotion in the face of Western influence.

21 **Keywords:** Western influence, Post-Colonial, Ezza Ezekuna, and New Yam Festival

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## 35 **Introduction**

36 The Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival (*Oke Aku*) is a significant cultural event in Nigeria,  
37 marking the end of yam planting, and beginning of the harvest season and New Year. As a result  
38 of the increasing influence of Western culture, the festival's traditional practices and significance  
39 are faced with challenges. The festival is deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the Ezza. Ezza  
40 is a part of Northeastern Igbo in the Southeastern Nigeria. The unmitigated distortions suffered  
41 by the festival's traditional practices and significance made it vulnerable to destruction. The fact  
42 that the festival is as well, a symbol of identity, peace, unity and cooperation, and a cultural  
43 heritage was considered immaterial to the Western Culture.

44 In the post-colonial Ezza, the festival has undergone certain changes resulting from  
45 Westernization, Christianity, and modernisation. Despite these changes, the festival remains  
46 strongly and essentially attached to the Ezza culture, attracting people from far and near,  
47 including tourists. The impact of Western influence on the Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival is  
48 explored in the study, pointing at the extent to which the traditional practices and essence of the  
49 festival have been affected. By so doing, the dynamics of the culture and modernity would be  
50 laid bare and it will establish the need for preservation and promotion of cultural heritage of the  
51 Ezza.

## 52 **Theoretical Framework**

53 Cultural Imperialism Theory and Cultural Hybridization are adopted in analyzing the  
54 study, *Amidst Western Influence: A Study of the Post-Colonial Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival*  
55 (*Oke Aku*). According to Herbert Schiller, Cultural Imperialism Theory suggests that Western  
56 cultures exert a dominant influence over other cultures, leading to suppression of other cultures  
57 and traditions (Zhang, 2016). Anchoring the research on this model indicates imposition of  
58 Western cultural values, norms, and practices on non-Western societies, such as Ezza in the  
59 Southeastern Nigeria. At first, it opens for cultural assimilations which results in replacement of  
60 certain local cultures with the Western cultures. This fundamentally, presents a new background  
61 and cultural form, enabling blending of the Western and the local cultures.

62 This framework is used to analyse the extent to which Western cultural values, norms,  
63 and practices have influenced the Post-colonial Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival. It would  
64 further, investigate how cultural homonisation is exerted on the seeming weak culture (*Oke Aku*)  
65 of the Ezza. Through the process of cultural assimilation, a local culture as that of the Ezza  
66 cultural heritage is combated for displacement, suppression, and replacement. At a long run, the  
67 theory helped to uncover the fact that the processes to suppress and replace the culture of New  
68 Yam Festival in Ezza opened the area to cultural hybridization. It is on the basis of this, that the  
69 Cultural Hybridization becomes relevant in the lens of analyzing the study. This framework  
70 upholds the process of blending different cultural practices, values, and traditions to create a new  
71 cultural form in a given place (Tuncer, 2023). In this regard, the Western culture, and local  
72 culture of Ezza developed blending attributes that created a new cultural form in the sphere of  
73 Ezza New Yam Festival.

#### 74 **Statement of Problem**

75           The Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival is a cultural and traditional heritage of the Ezza in  
76 the Northeastern Igbo, Nigeria. With the arrival of Europeans of different groups of traders,  
77 British officials, and Christian missionaries, and their consequent colonization of Nigeria,  
78 Western influence on the indigenous cultural heritage became increasingly conspicuous in  
79 various parts of the country, including Ezzaland. Be that as it may, the festival took its share of  
80 the challenges posed by the Western influence. Its traditional practices and significance were  
81 being eroded, and there arose the risk of losing the cultural heritage. This became patent through  
82 altering the festival's cultural identity, leading to a loss of traditional values and practices up to  
83 the post-colonial era. It is however, the take of this study to investigate the impact of Western  
84 influence on the Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival, exploring the nature, changes, continuity, and  
85 the means of sustaining the cultural heritage in the realm of modernity.

## 86 **Research Methodology**

87           In conducting this research, historical sources, consisting of primary and secondary  
88 sources were explored. The primary source material utilized is oral evidence. The secondary  
89 source materials utilized include books, and journal articles. Really, there are very few scholarly  
90 works and local commentaries on the Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival. The study depended  
91 mostly on the oral evidence drawn from a number of elders, and critical stakeholders from Ezza  
92 and Ebonyi State, at large.

93           During the research, some interviews were phone-recorded while in some, notes were  
94 taken down. Some of the interviewees were left to exhaust themselves on each question asked;  
95 before they were asked certain questions structured in such a way to expatiate more on any part  
96 of the topics which was either left out or scantily discussed. On the part of secondary sources,  
97 such as the books, and journal articles the researchers derived ideas from related and relevant

98 works on the area and topic of study to improve the quality of the work. Generally, this study  
99 relied on thematic approach and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. By skillfully  
100 employing the Cultural Imperialism Theory and Cultural Hybridization, the study explored and  
101 analyzed **Amidst Western Influence: A Study of the Post-Colonial Ezza Ezekuna New Yam**  
102 **Festival (*Oke Aku*)**, unfolding the nature of the festival, changes and continuity over times,  
103 alongside the means of sustaining the cultural heritage in Ezza.

#### 104 **The Nature of Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival (*Oke Aku*)**

105 Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival is as old as the days of Ezekuna and his family  
106 members. The festival is meant to monumentalize yam as the leading crop and symbol of  
107 agriculture in Ezzaland. Agriculture however, was the main sector of the local economy that  
108 employed almost the entire people of Ezzaland, and provided them with means of survival.  
109 Recognizing the role of yam, among other crops, the people chose to capture yam as a symbol  
110 for celebrating all crops that sustained people in the area. The Ezza are people that believe in the  
111 power of God and His agents in all about their culture and civilization (Chukwuma, 2003). So,  
112 they believe in the power of nature or God in success or bountiful harvest in agriculture,  
113 especially in growing of yam. To that effect, the progenitor of Ezza, Ezekuna designed the period  
114 as when to appreciate God for productivity and richness of crops, and good health and protection  
115 for farmers (the Ezza). During the period, the people demonstrated thanksgiving to the agents of  
116 God (gods and goddesses), such as god of yam (*Nja Ji*), and god of hunting and war (*Obasi*).  
117 These agents of God were fed with cooked and grated yam with a mixture oil only. Apart from  
118 the oil, no other ingredient is traditionally and religiously allowed to be added to the food for the  
119 said-agents (Ongele & Anyigor, 2025).

120           The annual festival usually occurs within the month of July. This month is captured by  
121 the Ezza Calender as the month of the Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival (*Onwa Oke Aku*). It is  
122 during the month that the council of elders (*Ochi Mkpuru*) gathers at the home of Ezekuna  
123 (*Okpoku Ezekuna*) and fixes the date of the festival, using the Ezza Calendar. One thing certain is  
124 that the concerned people fix it, one week (four days) to the Eke Market day for preparation (*Eke*  
125 *Azuta* or *Eke awha du ebo*). At the mid-night, nature passes and ushers the people to the New  
126 Year with a loud voice. This is when people echoed in prayer; let a bad year go in vain (*ejo awha*  
127 *gbaru eka la*), while drumming or beating gongs. The Orié Market day following the *Eke ahwa*  
128 *du ebo* becomes the main day for the celebration. Before day-break to give Ezza the main day,  
129 the oldest elder of each home in Ezza cuts unripe palm head, a chick, and four fruits of pepper  
130 and mount them at the yam compost (*Ishi neswhe*) at the beginning of a farm and entrance of the  
131 compound. For the Ezza, the manner, the living celebrate the festival, so the dead celebrate it. To  
132 that effect, the items mounted at the yam compost (*Ishi neswhe*) are meant to be used by the dead  
133 that died childless for the celebration. Those that had a child or children before death are  
134 believed to have their spirits celebrating with the living during the event (Njoku & Nworie,  
135 2010). At the yam compost, peels from yam only, are traditionally allowed to be disposed there.

136           Before the main day for the celebration, people tidied up their homes and village square  
137 as a part of the preparation. The Orié Market day after the Eke Market day for preparation (*Eke*  
138 *azuta*) is the actual day for the celebration of the festival (*Oke Aku*). It commences with  
139 pleasantries and compliments, such as *Anyi Aboo*, meaning we have survived, Response: *Awhaa*  
140 *laburu awha oma*, meaning this year shall be good for us. Contextually, the compliments depict  
141 the fact that the festival marks the end of planting year, and the beginning of harvest and a new  
142 year. It further conveys the people's prayer for favours and fruitfulness of the year (C. Ugota,

143 personal communication, 24th, 2025). In this regard, the Ezza started with prayers and  
144 appreciations to God for His care and protection in their various homes.

145 Before morning, the women folks would have finished preparing pepper-oil (*uza ukpara*).  
146 The pepper-oil is usually hosted for the celebration in a covenant plate (*ukpara*). Other  
147 significant items include cola-nut, alligator pepper, bitter cola, cocoa-nut, groundnut, palm  
148 kernel, and yam. On presentation of these items, the oldest male elder among the family  
149 members led prayer session as others responded, *isee* (Amen) at different stages of the prayers.  
150 At this point, one of the kinsmen that have traditional and customary knowledge of sharing items  
151 starts sharing of the items with the cola-nuts. By the custom, the cola-nut or a lobe of cola-nut  
152 that is used for the prayer belongs to the leader of the prayer session. An additional lobe or part is  
153 usually attached to it. The attached part of the cola-nut is usually and customarily used to  
154 appreciate the person that shares the items (C. Ugota, personal communication, 24th, 2025).

155 In sharing the assorted presents for the celebration, the yam and palm kernel were shared  
156 on bare ground while others were shared on the covenant plate that must be placed on the ground  
157 as people made their choice accordingly. Where the covenant plate is perceived to be inadequate  
158 for the sharing, additional tray could be of support. As the sharing is completely done, members  
159 of the gathering or assembly are to choose accordingly. During this celebration, visitors are  
160 welcomed and given some parts of the items shared. This demonstration and procession are  
161 observed in all families of kinsmen. This implies that the assembly of elders, youths, and  
162 children moves from one compound to another, observing the celebration of the festival.

163 During this period equally, people visited their relatives with gifts of prepared food, cola-  
164 nut, old yam tuber, pepper-oil, cocoa-nut, banana, plantain, among others. It marks a time for

165 renewal of family bond, friendship, and relationship for peaceful co-existence in Ezzaland  
166 (Njoku & Nworie, 2010). Many people of Ezza dissent and non-residents of Ezzaland returned to  
167 their ancestral homes in Ezza. The Ezza in diasporas send delegations to represent them in the  
168 celebration at the ancestral home of Ezza (*Okpoku Ezekuna*). Among the people that gathered for  
169 the celebration at the ancestral home include the Ezza from Ezza North and South, those from  
170 other local governments of Ebonyi State, those from other states of Nigeria, alongside oversea  
171 delegations. In this regard, all communities of Ezza are represented. As communities bring the  
172 presents for the celebration, individuals or groups supported the programme voluntarily.

173 One week (four days) later, the grand-finale of the festival is observed to mark the  
174 completion of the annual festival. As the event ends ceremoniously, new yam tubers begin to  
175 appear in markets in Ezza. The first Eke Market day in the unacquired calendar year is known as  
176 *Eke Okpobe ochita* (the day farmers bring their new yam tubers to market without the intention  
177 to sell them). They bring and display them as wares, but cannot sell them to any customer. It  
178 marks opening of markets in Ezza for distribution of new yam tubers (H. Nwanga, personal  
179 communication, 24th, 2025). At this point, increasing harvest of new crops is witnessed among  
180 the Ezza.

### 181 **Changes and Continuity in the Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival**

182 The fact is that the people and their cultural heritage, new yam festival faced challenges,  
183 emanating from Western influence. This influence and Christianity could not wholly obliterate  
184 the cultural heritage, Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival as attempts to harvest yam or introduce it  
185 (yam) to Ezza markets before the festival were always visited by mysterious eventuality. At first,  
186 those who were converted to Christianity abandoned the cultural heritage completely, alleging  
187 that it was idolatrous. Bearing in mind that mysterious forces unleash disaster on defaulters of

188 the tradition, the Christians waited uninvolved until it was observed before going to either  
189 harvest their yam or introducing it to Ezza markets (Odey, 1986).

190 To accommodate the people in all religions, and meet up with the pace and need of  
191 modernity, the period under discussion witnessed the festival undergoing some changes. Some of  
192 the changes are conspicuous in the areas of offering sacrifices to gods and goddesses during the  
193 festival. Inasmuch as the people are mainly known as traditional worshippers and Christians,  
194 modification of some of the rituals of the festival remained unavoidable (Odey, 1986). Some  
195 Christians, especially members of the orthodox churches of Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian,  
196 and Methodist among the people resorted to observing the festival in their churches by bringing  
197 those similar items to Church, and organizing mass or prayer session in honour of the event. The  
198 traditional worshippers on the other hand, celebrated theirs, observing the usual rituals  
199 holistically.

200 The return of civilian rule to the government of Nigeria in 1999 availed more  
201 opportunities for mobilization of people to make the event more colourful. Some of the  
202 politicians in Ezza and other parts of the state supported the programme to attract the people's  
203 supports to their political ambitions. Others saw it as their cultural and customary obligation that  
204 must be strictly observed. So, involvement of political office holders, and wealthy people of  
205 Ezza Ezekuna in the event, alongside efforts of some church priests to facilitate blending of the  
206 Western and local cultures promoted the modernisation of the event (R. Ujebe, personal  
207 communication, 24th, 2025). Currently, politicians, businessmen and women, teachers, farmers,  
208 and priests of different religions with their adherents are deeply involved. The event developed  
209 to become all-people's affair. Both non-Christians and Christians celebrate the event together in  
210 their homes and churches. Cultural dances and music, and masquerades are as well involved in

211 the celebrations in either churches or homes (Ongele, 2024). The fact is that churches insist that  
212 such cultural dances and masquerades should not be attached to shrines, but could be blessed in  
213 churches as parts of the symbols of culture, and identity in Ezza.

214 Fundamentally, certain practices of the cultural heritage could not be neutralized.  
215 Examples include, no one could dismiss the fact that it is an annual event, the Council of Elders  
216 (*Ndi Ochi Mkpuru*) maintains the right of fixing the date the festival, using the Ezza calendar, it  
217 must be observed during *Onwa Oke Aku* (July in the modern calendar), the festival must be held  
218 on Orié Market Day which precedes *Eke Azuta*. The event lasts for one indigenous week (four  
219 days), and ends with a grand finale. The people of Ezza and or their representatives reconvene at  
220 *Okpoku Ezekuna* (home of Ezekuna). While the elders gather and pray with cola-nut at *Nchonu*  
221 (Sacred Altar of Ezekuna). Young people and politicians organize and close the ceremony  
222 ceremoniously at the Ezza civic centre. The first Eke market day after the event endures as the  
223 new yam introduction day (C. Ugota, personal communication, 24th, 2025). The introduced yam  
224 to the market is not meant to be sold or bought. It is however, important to note that most of the  
225 rituals of the event as identified above are strictly conducted or led by the Council of Elders.  
226 Many from far and near, including tourists observed the ceremonies at different stages in  
227 happiness. All these are observed in response to the essence of the dynamics of tradition and  
228 modernity in efforts to preserve and promote the cultural heritage.

### 229 **Sustaining the Cultural Heritage (Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival)**

230 To sustain and promote the Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival in the post-colonial era and  
231 amidst the influence of Christianity and modernity, various measures are required. It is obvious  
232 that the festival is a significant cultural heritage in the area, projecting the richness of Ezza

233 culture, and upholding its image, identity and values. A period that is meant for celebrating  
234 harvest, survival, achievements, peace, unity, and thanksgiving is indeed, worthy enough to be  
235 preserved through community involvement. Local farmers, community leaders, such as  
236 traditional rulers, leaders of town development unions, women leaders, youth leaders and their  
237 respective groups should be encouraged to participate actively to ensure preservation and  
238 promotion of the festival's values (U. Utobo, personal communication, 20th, 2025). Engagement  
239 of these groups in the communities of Ezza would equally support passing down this cultural  
240 heritage and values from generations to generations.

241 Ezza should engage in cultural documentation. This exercise would enable effective  
242 collection of various festivals in Ezzaland. Their respective significance and relationship with  
243 one another toward sustainable socio-cultural growth and development would be unveiled. The  
244 new yam festival for example, is one of the festivals in Ezza. Its development to emerge as all-  
245 important event in Ezza underscores its essence. Of course, its history, traditions, and cultural  
246 significance should be traced, and documented to strengthen preservation and promotion of its  
247 heritage (C. Mgbada, personal communication, 19th, 2025). This document will avail  
248 researchers, foreigners, Christians, among others the opportunity to comprehend the real nature,  
249 practices, and significance of the festival, thereby dispelling wrong notions of people about the  
250 cultural heritage.

251 The festival should be designed to develop sustainable economic models that can  
252 accommodate and favour entrepreneurs of various categories in the area. No doubt, yam is  
253 identified in the event as a symbol to monumentalize crops. The essence of the festival should be  
254 broadened to shape economic models that would be potentially supportive to the growth and  
255 development of all the sectors of economy in the area (C. Mgbada, personal communication,

256 19th, 2025). In this regard, entrepreneurs, such as farmers, artisans, and traders could be  
257 empowered to contribute more significantly toward economic development. This could be  
258 achieved through engagement of extension services for local farmers, subsidisation of farm  
259 inputs, introduction of new and rich breeds of crops and animals, provision of storage facilities in  
260 Ezza, and establishment of hybrid skill acquisition centre at Okpoku Ezekuna.

261 Development of eco-tourism initiatives in the area to demonstrate the festival's cultural  
262 significance, local cuisine, and natural attractions would support to raise the festival to become  
263 economic-oriented (Honey, 2009). In this regard, it would develop more employment  
264 opportunities and increase revenue generation through cultural exchange. Shaping the festival to  
265 develop eco-tourism attributes would attract more tourists to Ezzaland. To strengthen this, the  
266 cultural heritage, consisting of traditional music, dance, and art should be developed and strongly  
267 incorporated in the rituals of the festival. This would however, promote harnessing of the festival  
268 for economic growth and development.

269 The people should be adequately educated on all about the event through, among other  
270 things conducting of enlightenment campaigns, seminars, workshops, and introduction of  
271 heritage studies in schools (Bello & Garba, 2022) in Ezzaland, and Nigeria at large. It is through  
272 these means that visitors, and people of the area would be helped to acquire knowledge of the  
273 festival's history, and cultural values. This approach is important because many were already  
274 misinformed about the godliness and purity of the cultural heritage. Even as some, especially  
275 Christians, and visitors that are re-informed about the cultural, social, economic and political  
276 importance of the festival are beginning to embrace it enthusiastically, many are still skeptical  
277 about the essence of the programme.

278           The people of Ezza should seek partnerships and collaborations with government, Non-  
279 governmental Organisations, companies, international organizations, groups, and individuals to  
280 facilitate access to resources, expertise, and funds for supporting growth and development and  
281 sustainability of the festival. These key factors would energize the people to introduce new ideas  
282 in the rituals and practices of the festival, thereby making it both creative and innovative in all  
283 fronts. Indeed, creativity and innovativeness in conducting the events and its rituals will broaden  
284 the scope of its promising potentials and participation of people in the area. On the part of  
285 government for instance, the ministry of culture and tourism should facilitate enactment  
286 favourable policies to cultural growth and development. The designed policies should be  
287 enforced efficiently to attract government investment in the rich cultural heritage. Wherein the  
288 people of Ezza open and lobby for such collaborations, the cultural heritage would be potentially  
289 sustainable.

## 290 **Conclusion**

291           Ezza Ezekuna New Yam Festival is one of the cultural heritages of Ezza in the  
292 Northeastern Igbo, Southeastern Nigeria that suffered distortions from Westernization,  
293 Christianity, and modernity. Of course, the festival is a vital part of Ezza culture, symbolizing  
294 hardwork, tradition, identity, and thanksgiving. Despite the distortions, the festival continues to  
295 thrive defiantly, adapting to changing times while preserving and retaining its core values. Its  
296 character of unleashing mysterious destruction on defaulters sustained it, and its adaptability is  
297 promoted more strongly by the civilian rule since 1999. The politicians are baited to its  
298 promotion as a means of attracting peoples supports to their political ambitions. In this process,  
299 other critical stakeholders, such as businessmen and women, religious and community leaders  
300 queued, supporting the annual festival. Measures to preserve and sustain the festival are

301 necessary, and are not limited to documentation of Ezza culture, partnerships and collaborations,  
302 community engagement, and education and awareness campaigns.

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