



## AUTHOR'S ENDING NOTES

This is more than an Igbo story or an African story. This is a human story, for there is something inherent in a human being that propels him to reach for the ideal—to manifest God—the ultimate goodness. That desire is what creates civility in a human being and in a community. But there is also something that whispers in the ear: “Just survive, you fool! Survive at all costs, you damn fool! Did you create the imperfect world? Why fix it then? God created it, let Him come down from his hiding place to fix it!”

Nri civilization did not build a large empire like other famous civilizations that we know about. They did not build great pyramids like the Egyptians or the Mayans. They did not build large marble temples like the Greeks or the Romans. But they did have what those civilizations had: a desire to be ideal human beings and to inspire the rest of the world around them. One could argue that technology does not make a civilization, but discipline of the mind does. Technology is just the product of a disciplined mind (if that is what was important to the mind at the time). Two very important people in history proved this idea. Einstein was a great scientific genius, more so than any scientist in history. But when we compare him with Jesus Christ, the man, we can see that Jesus, who was an ordinary carpenter, was a far more civilized figure than any human who ever walked on earth because of the fairness he preached and lived.

The Nri set out to create a holy ground where all human beings, dwarves and giants, males and females, light-skinned and dark-skinned, young and old, could walk without fear of harassment, molestation, or intimidation. For to them, all human beings are not only equal but sacred.



## Nri Warriors of Peace

Today, descendants of Nri are called Umu-Nri (Children of Nri) comprising four towns which were founded by four sons of Nri. These towns are Agukwu, Enugwu-Agidi, Enugwu-Ukwu, and Nawfia. The towns make up the former Umu-Nri Local Government Area (district or county) and stretch about twenty square miles in Anambra State in southeastern Nigeria. In fact, each of the four towns, just like other towns in Igbo land today, has its own traditional King or Chief. Also, each town has the Ozo and Nze brotherhoods, but they are no longer priestly or political positions. They are simply a social club of the elite and, at best, operate as a lobby or pressure group in the mainstream politics.

Without getting into politics, I must mention here that the town of Agukwu (aka Nri) has been playing major roles in representing Umu-Nri traditions. She currently has an Eze Nri, Igwe Obidiegwu Onyesoh. Enugwu-Ukwu, through Igwe Osita Agwuna (Igwe Enugwu-Ukwu and Eze Umu-Nri and a former human rights activist) has played major roles in representing Umu-Nri in Nigeria as well. But the four towns mentioned above were the four towns broken out from the original Nri Kingdom and still occupy their original locations. Today they are working together, trying to maintain the ancient traditions.

But these four towns are only a small segment of Umu-Nri. Larger groups of Umu-Nri left Nri mainland over many generations; some founded new communities in Igbo and Non-Igbo areas. And others who moved out simply lived among existing Igbo and non-Igbo towns as spiritual counselors who, over the years, assimilated into those communities. Most Igbo communities today claim some form of relationship with Nri. In fact, it is quite difficult for an Igbo person to say to another, "I am of more Nri lineage than you are," because there was a huge immigration into Nri by Igbo people at its peak. At its decline, there was high migration of Nri people into the Igbo mainland. Today, one can correctly argue that Nri is Igbo and Igbo is Nri, not only because of this cross migration, but because those who founded Nri culture were themselves Igbo people. In turn, Nri gave Igbo its culture and spirituality through the priests. Although some non-Igbo communities in Nigeria will not readily admit it, the movement of Nri priests can easily be traced to most of southern and middle Nigeria.

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But the movement of Umu-Nri did not end in Nigeria. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, many Nri and Igbo people were taken as slaves to different parts of the world. Descendants of Umu-Nri slaves can be found in the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Jamaica, and Haiti. A very large number of Igbo and Umu-Nri are in the state of Georgia in the United States. There is a place in Georgia today called Igbo (or Ibo) Landing where many Igbo slaves were brought to the United States. There is a legend about Igbo Landing; one version states that some Igbo chiefs who were brought to the United States as captives, walked on water back to Africa immediately after their ship landed. It is said that other Igbo slaves who came with them tried to do the same but drowned in the swamp. A more realistic version would be that they all drowned themselves rather than live as slaves. Those who died are still remembered in a yearly ceremony in the state of Georgia.

Also, at the turn of the twentieth century, many more Igbo people migrated from Africa, some to gain higher education and others as immigrant workers to various countries. Today, Nri communities can be found in many parts of the world. The Nri live and work like everyone else. They are bus drivers, nurses, lawyers, educators, stockbrokers, and, yes, even clergy. Just like me (until a few years ago), they had little or no idea of the difference their ancestors made to the world. As I did my research and writing, I could not help but wonder if they would wear their hats differently in whatever trade they found themselves if they knew what their ancestors had done. If they knew their true heritage, would they carry themselves differently? If they knew the true moral beliefs of their ancestors, would it make them better Christians or Buddhists or Muslims? One can only wonder.

## READER'S COMPANION

“The Nri set out to create a holy ground where all human beings, dwarves and giants, males and females, light-skinned and dark-skinned, young and old, could walk without fear of harassment, molestation, or intimidation. For to them, all human beings are not only equal, but sacred.”

-- Chikodi Añunobi, author of *NRI WARRIORS OF PEACE*

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*NRI WARRIORS OF PEACE* chronicles a people whose civilization and immutable spirit have endured and thrived for more than a millennium. This story is a tale of mysticism and commonplace pursuits, of treachery and honor, of actions and their consequences. Though set long ago in a place far removed from most readers' lives, we can still learn many powerful lessons from the Nri people.

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The following topic questions and background information are provided to help inspire your group discussion:

1. The Nri Civilization of the 11<sup>th</sup> century was based on deeply held spiritual beliefs and philosophies. How did these beliefs and philosophies shape the political structure of the Nri community? What were some of the inherent weaknesses of their system of government? What were some of the strengths?
2. Okoye and Erike both had the qualities of a good King, although Erike seemed to possess a deeper wisdom and knowledge of Nri customs. Why do you think Okoye was chosen instead of Erike?
3. Nri civilization incorporated spiritual beliefs and practices into their political and economic systems. Compare and contrast the different interpretations of these beliefs and practices and how they were applied by the leaders of the various Nri sects.

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4. Nri was built to pursue a humanitarian mission—outreach to other communities. Should a community or nation have such a mission, or should it be left to private individuals (like Ichie Idika) and organizations (like Ozo Mkputu priests)?
5. Nri was also built to be a diverse civilization, a place where anyone who shared its beliefs and values was welcome—foreign and natural born alike. What are some of the challenges an “open” society like Nri faces? How do the different factions of the Nri society view the burdens of overpopulation? How does this create conflict?
6. The character Ijego was an independent woman who was in control of her life and destiny. Compared to Enenebe, Okoye’s favorite wife, who do you think best represents the ideal woman of today?
7. Nri culture used parables as a means of preserving and sharing the wisdom of their forefathers, and as object lessons. Re-read the story of Abonoba’s chicken on pg 110. It is recalled several times throughout the book. What is the moral of this story? Does it apply to you, or people you know?
8. As part of the cleansing ritual performed by Akalaka at Umuaku (p. 81-82), he repeats the absolution: “What you do not know will not know you.” What do you think this means? Why do you think it brought comfort to the people of Umuaku village?
9. “The only debt a being owes another is fairness. What is fairness?” This phrase is a universal question in the book, intended to be a “philosophical clue to finding peace”. As with all ideals, the phrase means different things to different people. Examine the concept of fairness. How does it differ from person to person?
10. It can be said that we are not very far removed from the Ancient culture described in this story. Indeed, we share many of the same traits, and are faced with similar challenges and choices in our day to day existence. How does Nri civilization compare to today’s societies? How is it different? How could the tenets and practices of Nri civilization be applied in today’s world? Would they work?

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION:

**TRADITIONS & BELIEFS OF THE NRI CIVILIZATION**

*The Mission of the Nri People*

“It is their first duty to accept anybody who walks into the Nri community seeking to have a new life. It does not matter if their former communities rejected them or if they willingly left their communities as long as those immigrants respect Nri laws. He said that the second duty Nri people owe to their environment is to actively spread the message of peace, tolerance, fair play, and non-violence as Agbala (God -- The Perfect Spirit) and Aja-Ana (Earth Goddess, Mother Earth) had shown them. He reminded them that the third duty of the Nri community to their environment is to prescribe and interpret moral laws according to Aja-Ana (the Earth Goddess) and to cleanse whoever had offended Aja-Ana....the fourth duty Nri owe to the earth is to continue to explore what it means to be a perfect human being and, therefore, a perfect society and then make those discoveries a reality in the world.” P. 118-119

*Belief in the Sun*

“Nri people believed that the sun was the dwelling place of Anyanwu (The God of Light) and Agbala (The Holy Spirit). They believed Agbala to be the collective spirit of all holy beings (human and nonhuman). The Holy Spirit was the perfect agent of Chi-Ukwu or Chineke (the big God or the Creator God). The Holy Spirit chose its human and nonhuman agents only by their merit. It knew no politics. It transcended religion and culture and, of course, gender. It worked with the humble and the truthful. They believed Anyanwu, the Light, to be the symbol of human perfection that all must seek. Anyanwu was perfection and Agbala was entrusted to lead us there. Since both Anyanwu and Agbala dwelt in the sun, they worshipped the sun.” P. 210

*Leadership*

“It had been said that Nri people did not think with their heads but with their hearts. And nowhere was that saying revealed more than in

the way they described leadership. The male quarters, which was also the leadership center of the family, was referred to as the heart (obu or obi) of the compound. To Nri people, one used one's head to survive and one's heart to live a life of purpose and of service and fulfillment. The rest of the body did not serve the heart. Rather, the heart served the rest of the body with life-saving blood. It was the heart that recycled and cleansed any polluted blood and made it usable again. The heart understood how much blood was needed and where and when to send it. To Nri people, a leader must be ruled by the heart....To the Nri, a leader who could not feel with his heart was not worthy of leadership." P. 106

### *The Year Counting Ceremony*

"Igu Aro (the year-counting and -keeping ceremony) was one of the ties that bound Eze Nri [the king] and Igbo families and solidified his influence over their communities. Based on the official years recordings of Ezi Nri and his officials, Igbo people observed special days and communal events. In return, they sent representatives to pay tribute during the year-counting ceremony to show their loyalty and to receive blessings on behalf of their people. It was one of the rare services that Ezi Nri personally performed rather than one of his Ozo or Nze emissaries. It was one, if not the only, regular event at which he could speak directly to all Igbo people. He took this time to reflect on the end of the year or the century, as the case may be, and to count blessings from the past, to reaffirm the Igbo mission and philosophy, and to share his new vision or any spiritual messages he had received." P. 143

### *Scarification*

"In a standard Nri scarification, the artist would carve the first line to run from the center of the forehead down to the center of the chin. They would then carve a second line to run across the face, from the right cheek to the left. The second line met the first at the center of the nose, making it a perfect cross. The second cross was drawn with one line running from the left side of the forehead down to the right side of the chin and another line running the opposite direction. This sequence and pattern was repeated until the pattern looked like the rays of the sun. Altogether

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it took sixteen straight lines, eight crosses, for a full-face scarification that mirrored the rays of the sun. It was their way of honoring the sun that they worshipped. But it was more than that. It was the face of service and another way of losing one's facial personality." P. 203-204

### *Nicknames*

"In Igbo land, people's salutation names or nicknames, which they chose as adults, summed up their personal philosophies about life. They showed how life had affected them or what was important to them. Their regular first and last names were just names. At best, they reflected their parents' philosophy or thinking. But the salutation name was what an individual consciously chose as an adult. They could always change it if their thinking changed, though that rarely happened. So when Igbo men or women told another that they liked their salutation name, they didn't mean that they liked the sound of it, but that they liked their philosophy." P. 256

### *Death*

"The burial, funeral, and mourning for the dead were very serious business in Nri and all of Igbo land, especially if the deceased was a well-established family man or woman. The funeral rites and official mourning for the dead lasted up to seven market weeks, twenty-eight days. Then family members and close relatives would try to ease themselves back into their regular routines." P. 12

### *Additional Discussion Questions:*

Akalogheli offered alliance and promised great strength and wealth to Nri and Nri land. Nri refused, rejecting "metal and metal support" as too high a price and an abomination against the Nri way of life. Knowing what we know now about the downfall of Nri and slavery in Igbo Land generations later, was Akalogheli right? Could Nri have prevented slavery? Could he have prevented the eventual rise of the Uwa men (wilderness robbers)?

Nri was a community with a calling, a mission—that of inclusion and outreach. Ezu and his supporters believed that looking outward caused the community to neglect its own problems. Do you agree?

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Nri culture obviously failed in some ways. What were the strengths and weaknesses of Nri ideals? What changes could have been made to avoid the failures?

Igwe Nwadike said, “As human beings, we are as guilty and uncivilized as the parties fighting each other if we do not attempt to break up a fight.” This issue of civic and moral duty is often debated today. Do you agree with Igwe Nwadike? Are we, as human beings, duty bound to intervene?

To achieve peace, Igwe Nwadike sometimes chose to overlook small infractions and focused on the larger conflicts in order to maintain stability. On the other hand, Okoye felt he needed to expose every wrong no matter what the cost. Whose strategy is better? Is it possible to achieve stability and justice without sacrificing one for the other?

Igwe Nwadike said, “Truthfulness is the foundation of a good person and therefore, the foundation of a good community.” A wonderful ideal, but is it practical? Did it work for Nri people? Would it work for your community?