

INSPIRATIONAL MOTION OF AN AFRICAN INTELLECTUAL GIANT-EMEKA NWABUEZE

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Abstract

This work x-rays the life of an academic doyen, Professor Emeka Patrick Nwabueze. He is a scholar, a guru of Theatre and Film Studies, an intellectual giant and a gentleman to the core. He is seen to belong to a special group of outstanding human beings (homos) that ever existed. This work views his life from varied angles, including comments from biographers, internet sources, associates, childhood friends, and the researchers' personal encounters/ experiences with him. He is found to be a good man of multi-dimensional capacities who positively affects the life of many people across board. He is an academic colossus, an "Ijele" that encompasses so many qualities and attributes. He holds the title of "Ezedioranma" which means the beloved king. He is the "people's professor" and an embodiment of theatrical overtures.

Keywords: Intellectual, theatre, homo, academic.

Introduction

Man as a being that is complex, unique, and intelligent is posing a lot of difficulties to unravel. All generations have studied man and yet man cannot be fully comprehended. Even the very being called "man" cannot fully understand himself or herself. Philosophers, Psychologists and their like, all have tried to unravel the very being called man. Man is an enigma. One of the common phrases of popular magicians was, "the more you look, the less you see." This can be said of man, that the more you try to know and understand him, the more you discover how complex he is and how elusive the journey to understanding him could be. Otherwise, how does one explain the fact that people born in the same generation and around the same environment will have different capabilities? While some will be performing at a very low level, some will be at average performance, while some others will be giants in varied fields of human endeavor, a group the Greeks would tag "Philosopher Kings." "The man of the moment," the great professor belongs to this group of giants. This is a group of great men of letters, intellectuals, and academic irokos. In this group are human beings who win laurels and accolades in national and international levels. It houses Nobel Prize winners, Dr David Prize winners, Erasmus Prize winners etc. These are men and women who have very high IQ. They invent automobiles, aircrafts supersonic jets, spaceships,

drones, electricity, mobile communication systems, internet, computers, etc. They propound theories, test hypotheses and make laws out of them. Some go beyond the physical and invent in the abstract or conceive abstract notions which metamorphose to concrete reality. They go beyond the planet earth looking at the cosmos and trying to identify the dimension of the universe and its associated complex motions. For instance, Crane (2019), reports the way astronomers are struggling to track how fast the universe is expanding. They describe it by a number called the "Hubble Constant and the Distance Ladder" Though, according to the astronomers involved with the research, the two methods of calculation disagree, a third recent method using independent measurement making use of gravitational Lensing instead of Cepheid have confirmed the distance ladder number. Also, Next Tech in its advertorial reports that the latest translation device built in Japan allows one to communicate in thirty-eight languages in seconds. This genius device hitherto has been used by world leaders but now has been made available for the common man in the street. The TerraSpeak, as it is called, breaks all barriers when travelling, working, or learning (<https://www.newscientist.com>). These are works and achievements of great men of which the academic doyen, Emeka Nwabueze, belongs.

Chelsea White exploring the exploits of that being called man and his "interaction" with the heavenly bodies, reports that the moon looks pristine from our vantage point, and that there have been six crewed moon landings and about twenty successful Rover and Lander missions on its surface. Stuart Clarke earlier reported about 70 successful missions to the moon: fly-bys, orbiters, Landers, and 12 moon walkers. These missions according to him have unlocked the moon's geological history, determined its internal structure and measured its surface composition. The conclusions of the explorations according to Stuart stretch well beyond the barren lunar surface. The first man that set his foot on the moon, the historic Senator Neil Armstrong made a very significant statement when he put out his foot from the spacecraft to touch the moon's surface in Apollo 11 mission. He said, "The step of a man, a giant leap for mankind." It is indeed a giant leap for mankind for no one could have imagined this fit some decades before then.

Chelsea White also reported that China's Change's 4 landed on the moon bringing with it the first moon garden. According to him, in a sealed biosphere, cotton, oilseed rape and potato became the first plants that we know of to germinate on another world. After the probe lost power, White opined the plants probably died as the freezing lunar night fell on them. Chelsea White confessed that it was a landmark step towards building a flourishing lunar base where humans can farm their own crops (White, 2019). The above breakthroughs, achievements, and successes were made by human beings of no mean caliber. They were great intellectuals and personalities of very high IQ. These are "special human beings gifted with wisdom and understanding. They are people and scholars in the likeness of Professor Emeka Nwabueze, the great

literary icon, an uncommon achiever, and quintessence of academic excellence and cultural beauty.

Prof. Nwabueze belongs to the group of “homos” who think beyond the present and look towards the future for better times. They perceive the problem of humanity and research to get it solved. They are eager to improve the way things were done. They sacrifice their comfort to improve humanity. “The man of the moment” is an offshoot of these gifted beings. Few of them are found in every generation. They are found as “Man Mountain” (to borrow words from *Gulliver’s travel* written by Jonathan Swift in 1789). In different spheres of life, they excel and make indelible marks. They are in many countries. They are found in many generations. They are Divine gifts to mankind. They possess rare qualities not found in majority of the people. They make great sacrifices to keep the flag of human successes flying. They are great men of letters and hub of future accomplishments. They are authors of books, writers of book chapters and publishers of articles in National and International Journals of great repute. They develop theories, formulate hypotheses, carry out experiments and establish laws. Their names ring in the world of academics and of discoveries. Their gigantic footsteps are outstandingly seen in Literary Works, Business Management, Architecture, Music, Engineering, Arts, Sculpture, Painting, Medicine, Astronomy, Jurisprudence, Education, Theology, Philosophy, etc.

The Rise of Man

To understand the modern man that produced the “giant,” Professor Emeka Nwabueze, it may be necessary to go back a bit into the history of man’s existence. Archeologists, toeing the line of Charles Darwin, the author of the *Origin of the species* written in 1859, make us believe that man’s existence on earth spans over millions of years. These years saw man undergoing changes and transformation both in his nature and the way he does things. Ashley Seehorn wrote that Darwin used his keen observation skills and logic to develop a comprehensive theory that describes the process of evolution. While admitting that some controversy surrounds evolution as it applies to human population, Ashley stated that Darwin’s theory applied to all organic species (Ashley Seehorn, 2018). Ashley Seehorn summarized Darwin’s evolution theory into four points. They are: individuals of a species are not identical, traits are passed from generation to generation, and more offspring are born that can survive, and only the survivors of the competition for resources will reproduce. Ashley explained that the variations of individuals give some members of the species advantages in the competition to survive and reproduce. Those advantageous traits are passed to the next generation. Our “guru” is among the “survivors” and “producers” of his generation. He is not only outstanding in his generation; he is an asset also. Darwin’s work projects that life is old. According to him, life started with one or few living things which over millions of years created millions of species. There was a force of nature that created new species. This force was what Darwin called ‘force of natural selection’

(Darwin, 1859). Darwin's observation opened a new page of enquiry in understanding man and his place in the universe since he is the king of all creatures. The issue of evolution has from since the time of Darwin occupied the mind and efforts of archeologists and paleontologists. Research and studies on evolution have been ongoing from the time of Darwin to the present day.

There are many theories about why early hominids evolved. For instance, the Aridity hypothesis was of the opinion that early hominids were more suited to dry climate and evolved as Africa's dry savannah regions expanded. The savannah hypothesis suggested that early tree dwelling hominids may have been pushed out of their homes as environmental changes caused the forest regions to shrink and the size of the savannah expanded. According to the savannah hypothesis, these changes may have made them to adapt to living on the ground and walking upright instead of climbing. As time went on, hominids continued to evolve, developing special features and characteristics which included increase in brain size and functionality. It is opined that about 2.3 million years ago, a hominid known as *Homo habilis* began to make and use simple tools (<https://www.google.com>). Around a million years ago, some hominid species especially *Homo erectus*, started leaving the African soil to move into other parts of the world particularly Eurasia. Here, they made further progress such as management of fire. It was speculated that humans might have developed language around 50,000 years ago. The development of language was a major breakthrough in human progress since language enhanced everything. It allowed humanity to communicate and organize themselves for various activities such as building of houses, construction of dams, culverts and bridges. It enabled man to express his inner feelings and ideas that metamorphosed into gigantic strides. The development of language allowed human beings to have more meaningful settlement and greater harmonious living. Society started growing in leaps and bounds. Language shaped a whole lot of things that today one could imagine the fortune of a society without language. Our literary icon, Professor Emeka Nwabueze is among those that utilized language to an utmost advantage to the extent of being creative and innovative with it.

There is no doubt that many hominids have existed and roamed the planet earth at one period of history or the other with remarkable human characteristics and impact. Some Paleontologists suggested that the earth has witnessed 17-19 human species or homos. Some others disbelieve it and peg it between 9-12 human species. Among them, only one remained and survived extinction, the *Homo sapiens*. The great Professor Nwabueze is the product of this "*Athanasius Homo*". Archeologists and Paleontologists state that between 70,000 and 100,000 years ago, *Homo sapiens* began migrating from the African continent, populating parts of Europe and Asia just as the works of Professor Nwabueze permeate the nooks and corners of the global earth. Many studies have been carried out and fossils dug up for investigation since Darwin's "provocative" publication on evolution. However, some scholars express some reservations over a number of the claims. Critics such as Malcolm Bowden in his

book, *Ape men*, doubts some of the fossil evidences stating that in the particular field of the fossil man, he questions the very speculative assumptions made and the far-reaching conclusions based upon very meager evidence. He, however, admits he was not a specialist in the field but his conclusion is based on the principles of scientific investigation which includes: the presentation of all the relevant evidence, that the interpretation should encompass all the available evidence and the rejection of any hypothesis which is contradicted by any of the evidence. Malcolm claimed that the interpretation, which has been superimposed upon many fossils remains, does not comply with one or more of the basic criteria given above (Malcolm Bowden, 1981). Some paleoanthropologists are of the opinion that homo heidelbergensis evolved into our own species in Africa. Homo heidelbergensis is reported as an extinct species or subspecies of archaic humans in the genus Homo. They spread in the Middle Pleistocene from about 700,000 to 300,000 years ago as recorded from fossils found in South Africa, East Africa, and Europe (<https://en.m.wikipedia>). In Europe, the Neanderthal emerged as separate species (Pickerel, 2019). It is not in doubt that each human species, whether it is Homo erectus, Homo habiles, Homo heidelgensis, "Homo sapiens," Homo florensiensis, Homo antecessor, Homo rhodesinsis, or modern humans, all evolved some special humans among the species. These were/are special breeds that distinguished themselves or/are distinguished physically, mentally, intellectually etc. "The man of the moment" belongs to that special stock of the "homos".

From the biblical account of creation in Genesis, God molded man out of dust and breathed on him and thus he received life and become an image of God. By this singular act, man turned out to be a "special being" far above other living creatures both of animals and plants, some of which are far bigger and physically stronger than man. Since the creation of man, God has been raising special human beings among his created lot. The "man of the moment" is rare "man among men," meaning, he is special." The place of man in the universe and his control of it cannot be over-emphasized. God, the creator emphatically told Adam after his creation, to increase and multiply and subdue the earth. Man has carried out this injunction since then at different rates. There are outstanding humans that have really conquered the world in various forms. Man has broken the law of gravity and that of floatation. Man has also broken the law of distance, "law of obstruction in vision, etc. In search of the truth concerning the universe, names like Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates ring out. In Arts and Sculpture, one cannot go far without mentioning Michael Angelo. Newton is a great name in Physics. Hippocrates is famous in Medicine. Florence Nightingale and Virginia Henderson are indispensable names in nursing history. Noam Chomsky, David Crystal, Nolue Emenanjo, Philip Anagbogu, etc. are great names in Linguistics. In this part of the world, the name, Kenneth Dike is a household name in History. In psychology, B.F Skinner's operant conditioning has made an indelible mark. The list can go on and on.

The "man of the moment: belongs to this stock of great achievers. He is a sounding name in theatre Arts and Literary Studies.

Some psychologists believe that man has not been able to utilize up to 10% of his capabilities. This means that everything in man has not been seen. The potentialities of man continue to unravel every day. The psalmist in psalm 8 could not grasp this potentiality by just looking at the diminutive physical nature of man in comparison to his capabilities that he asked God, "What is man that you consider him?" The psalmist also answered the question when he said, "you made him a little less than the angels. "This means that he has been elevated far beyond all other created things in the world. The psalmist further said "thou maddest him to have domination over the works of thy hand, thou have put all things under his feet (KJM). Commenting on this question, "What is man"? John A. Widsoe stated that it is the second greatest question of life. According to him, in importance, this query is next only to that concerning the nature of God. He said that the correct answer had enabled men and nations to build their fortunes securely. "The man of the moment" belongs to that group of men that securely built their fortunes, for according to a 1936 conference report, "the way out of the world's tragic chaos, the terror of poverty, sickness and war must be eliminated by a comprehension of man's nature and destiny (<https://int.search.myway.com>). For one who understands "the man of the moment", he directly and indirectly shows the way out of tragic chaos, way out of terror, of poverty, sickness, quarrels and wars by his writings, researches, and life.

Profile

To understand who Professor Emeka Nwabueze is, is not an easy task for he is a man of multi-dimensions. It is a difficult journey to profile him or to talk about him. The authors in this dilemma decided to peep into the way some others who have written about him started. They logged in on the web to have a glimpse of how he is perceived. Precisely, they asked the question, "Who is Professor Emeka Nwabueze of University of Nigeria?" A "catalogue" of answers covered the computer screen under seconds. When one of the websites was opened for detail, the first statement that appeared is, "Emeka Nwabueze is an internationally renowned scholar, Professor of Theatre studies, a playwright, a critic and an Afro-logiest" (<https://www.unn.edu.ng>). That is just an opening part of so much that is said about a man "whose person" cannot be written in few pages of a book.

Professor Nwabueze hails from Awka, in Anambra state of Nigeria. He is a Professor of Theatre Arts and was the Director of Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria for five years before his retirement and ascension as an Emeritus Professor of University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His academic achievements, publications, membership of professional organizations, administrative positions etc. are so numerous and well mentioned in websites to make repetitions here unnecessary. However, for the sake of this article and those who might not know, we may mention

few things about Professor Emeka Patrick Nwabueze's publications and public life. He is a great academic, an iroko whose robust and gigantic physique can be placed side by side his gigantic academic prowess and achievements. He is an academic colossus, a literary guru, a giant in the sun, a goal getter, a kingmaker, a moralist, a philanthropist, an innovator, an actor, organizer, administrator, supervisor, adviser, a playwright, a "humorist," a knight, etc. The list of his qualities could go on and on. One of his profiles on the web states that Professor Emeka Nwabueze belongs to so many professional bodies which include:

- i. Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists
- ii. Association of Nigerian Authors
- iii. Actors Guild of Nigeria
- iv. American Theatre Association
- v. African Studies Association etc.

He has over 80 publications in books, main line book chapters, journal articles etc. Professor Nwabueze has a flare for writing. His plays and writings ravage the nooks and crannies of Nigeria and the International Community. His plays are performed in big theatres both in secondary schools and tertiary institutions. *This Day Newspaper Online* reports of 'A Satirical Challenge of an Anomaly' performed by students of St. Francis Secondary School, Idimu, Lagos State, at Nigeria's 58 Independence Anniversary. The performance was on the *Parliament of vultures* written by renowned Professor Emeka Nwabueze. This is a good example of how much the professor's works touch humanity and how wide they spread. (<https://www.thisdayline.com>). *This day newspaper* also described Professor Nwabueze as a renowned playwright and author. Analysing some of his plays, Canice Nwosu of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and Emeka Nwosu of Imo State University, Owerri, state that Nwabueze plays provide a suitable platform for appraising quality assurance in the creative enterprise in Nigeria because his stylistic creative approach which is hinged on the marriage of theory and practice is self-appraised mechanism that guarantees production of quality plays (<https://www.ajol.info>). Nwosu and Nwosu further opine that Nwabueze's inclination to theory also enables him to create within the critical attitude of each era in Nigeria's theatre history because the theory is conditioned by the prevalent worldview; hence, high quality of his plays is reflected in thunderous audience reception (<https://www.ajol.info>). Google scholar in a statement on Professor Emeka Nwabueze stated that he has been cited more than 150 times by writers and authors all over the world since 2014 (<https://www.google.com>). Professor Emeka Nwabueze is in the blerf's *WHO'S WHO IN NIGERIA* (online) (2017), edited by Nyahmo Osso. The Editor stated that Professor Nwabueze attended University of Nigeria, Michigan University and Bowling State University and has lectured in more than six universities and colleges across the globe.

...In the Ijele Dance

'We call our celebrated icon, an Ijele. Who else can fit more in the Ijele dance more than the Ijele in Igboland? The Ijele is regarded as the king of all masquerades, embracing so many things. According to legend, in distant past, about 45 masquerades performed on top of the Ijele. Presently, the 45 masquerades are represented by the 45 figurines on top of the Ijele (<https://www.google.com>). Among the costumes and symbols found in Ijele are: Ijele trees, animals, white men, carved human activities etc. All these depict wholeness as every aspect of human life is depicted on Ijele masquerade (<https://www.wikipedia.org>). In the Igbo worldview, the Ijele aggregates the world of humanity just as our icon is an epitome of successful humanity. Ijele is crowned with mermaid objects which puts the Ijele as the greatest of all masquerades. The Ijele horse represents majesty and greatness which also are attributes of the erudite professor.

Recently, a book was published titled, *A Lion on the Ijele Dance*. This book is a festschrift in honor of Professor Emeka Nwabueze and is edited by Dr. Ngozi Anyachonkeya who is described as one of Africa's most responsible dramatists. The forward is written by Professor Sam Ukala. In his remarks, Professor Ukala explains that the book is well deserved in view of the super activity of Professor Nwabueze big physique. This book of 13 chapters and 337 pages put the great professor as a theorist, a literary and social critic, a playwright, owner of words and master craftsman. Professor Ukala stated that the great iroko deserves to be studied in more than one full-length book. He described him as an enigmatic prodigy, a prolific professor, a scholarly and creative octopus whose tentacles is everywhere in his chosen discipline. Professor Ukala praised Uche Nwozuzu for his 2011 edited work titled, *Theatre and New Horizons: Selected Essays on Emeka Nwabueze*. The book indeed is a well-deserved one. In his introduction, Ngozi Anyachonkeya praised the literary colossus calling him the scholar-masquerade on the Ijele dance whose immense literary output, has said, and still says, all there is to be said without being challenged (Anyachonkeya, 2015:4). This compilation covers essays on Nwabueze *A Dance of the Dead, Guardian of the Cosmos, A Parliament of Vultures, The Dragon's Funeral, Echoes of Madness, When the Arrow Rebounds, Lachrymose* etc. There are other expositions on socio-political life, and nation building. This work and that of Uche Nwozuzu *Selected Essays on Emeka Nwabueze* are worth reading for one to gain more insight and swim in the ocean of Nwabueze literary bank.

Personality

Professor Nwabueze is humorous and easy going. He is open-minded and with him, there are no dull moments. His humility accommodates all and sundry and, in his intelligence, he can use every situation and circumstance to teach. He has much flare for academics and stays long hours in office writing and researching. He is often forced home by the inception of dusk. He is able to comment intelligently on almost all

spheres of life. He is indeed an "Ijele" as Ngozi Anyachonkeya described him. He is always ready to assist and render help to both young and old, the rich and the poor. He makes a lot of sacrifices to help people in solving their problems and improving their state of life. In the Institute of African Studies, where he was the director, he organized high class conferences that attracted reputable academics and personalities from within and outside the Nigeria. He made sure that the Institutes' Journals are current, regular, and of high class.

His oversea academic trips made it possible for the institute to have linkages with some reputable American and African Universities. The linkage with the Pontifical Urban Universities Rome reached advanced stage in his tenure. We were wondering how his childhood days, could have been, considering his great height and towering achievements. It proved difficult to link with his childhood days until luckily, we discovered one of his childhood associates and relation, Mr. Chinweuba Nwakalor who gave us some insight of his childhood life. He made us know that Professor Nwabueze in his childhood was like most children but radiated great intelligence. Because of his eloquence, he was frequently appointed Master of Ceremony in many 34public functions especially those involving students where 'who is who' in the command of English is often the order of the day in an unofficial and gentle competition. Professor Nwabueze, then Emeka without the current academic titles would normally excel.

As a result of his vibrancy and good command of English Language, he was nicknamed "Lord Harmattan". He was very popular among his peers. Those who knew him as a child are not surprised at his great academic and intellectual attainments for the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria would say, *Okuku ga-abuokena-esin'uju* which means that the chick that would become cockerel shows that early enough. So is the case with Professor Emeka Patrick Nwabueze, Ijele, and Ezedioranma, "the people's lecturer". One of his outstanding attributes is his love for fellow intellectuals whom he constantly admires. He has a natural liking for any human being who makes himself an achiever or is stupendous in his area of specialization or life endeavor. He admires and appreciates other people's work and worth. The passion he employs in organizing Chinua Achebe's annual international conferences is a testimony to this. Here is a Christian in nomenclature and indeed who is found worthy of conferment of the prestigious Knighthood of the Catholic Church – Professor Patrick Emeka Nwabueze (KSM).

Having viewed greatness, one question still remains to be answered. Are great men born or are they made? Your guess may be as good as ours. The answer lies with you.

...In His Own Words

The answer to the question above can partly be elicited from the professor's own words and his views of life based on experiences. The authors were privileged to be granted audience by the professor in his United States residence. The interview with him took place on 25th January, 2025. He was happy to answer all the questions posed to him. The interviewers asked him about his hobbies as a youth and his hobbies now if

it has changed. They also asked him of the secret of his growth. Finally, the interviewers asked him to advise the younger generation on the line they can toe to be great. The erudite professor responded to the questions and entreaty this way:

My determination and my dreams were the major things that pushed me and have kept pushing me even when these dreams are not realized

I did not attend a five-star secondary school in my youth because my parents could not afford it. Attending a nearby school was imperative because proximity was necessary in economics when attending secondary school was concerned

My major hobby, right from primary school was drama, particularly acting. I took part in Concerts in primary school and this made me to become the director of plays in secondary school. There were many areas of cultural arts in school but people rushed to drama because of me.

I was also a good Master of Ceremony in school events and inter-school activities. Because of that, I read literature books continually to improve on my language and identify quotable statements that would embroider the beauty of my speech.

During my final year in the secondary school, I was made the senior prefect and this gave me the opportunity to learn how to relate with people without abusing your position.

At UNN I read English. Drama was a stress area of English Studies, and I stressed Drama and took part in major campus productions.

In Michigan I did my M.A in Drama, and proceeded to Ohio, where I did my PhD on Theatre and came out tops, all from my determination to succeed from a mere Drama stress degree in English. I was always called back for sabbatical leave.

Most importantly I helped to design Theatre programmes both in Imo State University in Nigeria, and the University of Swaziland in Southern Africa, and University of Trinidad and Tobago in the West Indies. You can see how passion and hobby can become a passion through determination, effort and dreams

My passion for drama still exists with the result that even here in the United States where I am supposed to be resting, I still add my ideas to Theatre departments here. But the bulk of my time is spent writing new plays. My preoccupation at present is to write a play on Igbo landing.

My advice to the youths is to start early to create a dream and back it up with determination. Dream is not complete without the determination to achieve it. Along the line, there will be failures. Failure is not permanent. Like our sages say, our problem is not in never falling but in rising whenever we fall. The economic power of your parents should not impair your dreams or lead you to inferiority complex. You are the master of

yourself and dreams and determination are the vehicles to achieving greatness' (Emeka Nwabueze, 25th January, 2025 at USA).

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