**NAME: OKPU AGỤ (LEOPARD CAP)**

**ORIGIN: EKPE LEOPARD SOCIETY**

**CULTURE: IGBO/EFIK/IBIBIO (NIGERIA**)

**OVERVIEW:**

The Okpuagu dates as far back as the early 18th century. The Ekpe (Leopard) secret society, a locally-formed institution of law enforcement and order, was the first to use it. Their functions ranges from checking the excesses of the ruling council, to credit bureaucracy, and most importantly, a spiritual cult of noble and wise individuals, bequeathed with the duty of preserving the most important knowledges of the community as passed down by ancestors.

It is almost impossible to gain a total understanding of African Indigenous Knowledges without an assessment of her secret societies. It is also worth noting that the term ‘secret’ can have different meanings in different contexts. While some practices may be hidden from the mainstream or require certain levels of initiation or knowledge, this does not necessarily make them malicious or sinister. In many cases, this secrecy is simply a way to protect the privacy and safety of practitioners or to preserve and protect the integrity of certain teachings and traditions.

The Okpuagu, amongst many other things is one of the regalia used in identifying members of this society. As time passed, other secret societies within the region also started using this cap, as a means of identification. One of such groups who made this gear highly symbolic is the Nze na Ozo society.

Just like the Ekpe society, the Nze na Ozo is the highest socio-religious group in the Igbo society, who are strongly and solely responsible for shaping the social structures, norms, and values in a community. They also serve as a governing body that mediates between the living and the dead (ancestors). Members are chosen by divinities because of their fostered wisdom, decency and uprightness.

The members of this society wear a special regalia, amongst which is the Okpuagu. It should be emphasized that only members of the higher Ozo level of the Nze na Ozo society are the ones allowed to wear the Okpuagu. Although members of the lower Nze level occupy a significant position in the society, they are not entitled to wear it.

This cap can also be adorned with eagle feathers and this really depends on one’s level of seniority in the society. Overall, for the members of the Nze na Ozo society, the Okpuagu serves as a symbol of authority and prestige, it is what announces their identity in public.