

**Igbo Caste Practices:
Persistence and Public Attitudes in the Media**

By

Obinna Charles Okwelum

A Thesis Submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Centre of West African Studies
College of Arts and Law
The University of Birmingham
November 2009

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

Abstract

For over a century, several minority caste groups have suffered discrimination in eastern Nigeria. They include former slaves and servant groups known as *osu* or *ohu* as well as other names and are generally referred to as caste groups. Forbidden to associate freely with the freeborn, these groups still maintain their stigma. The origins of the caste groups lie in the past. However, after 1900, they started to struggle for emancipation. Since then, discrimination against them has been abolished many times. Yet the practice remains persistent. At the same time, the discrimination against the caste groups continues to exercise the public and private imagination and it is depicted and discussed in various ways in the media, from newspapers to films and even in internet forums.

Using oral sources and commentaries in the media, this thesis argues that Igbo socio-political life has continued to sustain this practice even as it pretends to reject it. The general attitude to discrimination against the caste groups has been that it is barbaric. Yet, the freeborn still find it difficult to embrace them. Reasons for this include a range of fears, but most importantly fear of social ostracism. The thesis argues that the media has engaged in the struggle to change the situation by providing a platform for debate about the practice. However, this has had little impact because of the nature of Igbo socio-political life.

Dedicated to Professor Adiele E. Afigbo who I had met briefly in
2007 and hoped to meet again but passed away while I was at the final stages of this
research

Acknowledgements

This study was possible because of many individuals and institutions and I must thank them for the moral, financial and academic support given to me during the preparation of this thesis. Firstly, Chief & Mrs. Onwuzulike C. Okwelum have a high place in my regard because of their valuable guidance – almost in all ramifications and as my parents – and support for my research. My gratitude also goes to Professor Karin Barber and Dr. Insa Nolte both of the Centre of West African Studies at the University of Birmingham for their guidance and suggestions through the stages of this research, especially through the final stages when I had to analyze and interpret my findings. I have learnt a lot from their timely intellectual interventions and I appreciate the knowledge that I have gained under their supervision.

Thanks also are due to those who assisted me in one way or another during my fieldwork in 2007 and 2008. In particular I must thank the staff of those archives, libraries and institutions where I collected the relevant information for this work. These are the Kenneth Dike Library and the African Studies Institute, both at the University of Ibadan; the National Archives at Ibadan and Enugu; the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library and the Institute of African Studies, both at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Champion Newspapers, Abuja, Enugu and Lagos; Bigard Memorial Seminary; Nigerian Television Authority; Cosmo FM; Government Press; Enugu State Library, all at Enugu; Imo State Library; Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri; Whelan Research Centre, Owerri; Centre for Igbo Studies at the Imo State University, all in Imo State; the Iwene Tansi Seminary, Onitsha; the Catholic Institute of West Africa at Port Harcourt; Abia State University, Uturu; the National Library of Nigeria in Abuja, Enugu and Owerri; and the Church Missionary Society Archives at the University of Birmingham.

In collecting views and experiences from people in the field many people had direct impact on my understanding of the realities in eastern Nigeria; none was more helpful than the

traditional rulers and local elders of the towns I visited. I express gratitude to HRH Igwe Kenneth Orizu III, CON, of Nnewi; HRH Igwe Christopher Okonkwo Ezeagu of Nnokwa; HRH Igwe Julius U. Nnaji of Enugu and HRH Igwe Dr. Tony Ojukwu, JP of Ogui Nike. Also to Professor Anthony John-Kamen of Ihembosi; Dr. Dozie Ikedife, formerly of the Ohaneze Ndigbo; Professor John Umeh of the UNN, Enugu Campus; Chief Pete Edochie; B. B. O. Emeh of the National Population Commission of Nigeria; Professor Adiele E. Afigbo and Chief Ezeobianumba Ajaghaku. And to Happiness Furo Jaja, Ukamaka Obiagwu, Chiemenam Umeh and all those I relied on to assist me in facilitating my focus group discussions and interviews particularly Mary Ejim of Cosmo FM, Emeka Okpala of the Nigerian Television Authority, Anthony Okpalaeke of the Anambra Broadcasting Service, Nnewi Palace Staff and others, thank you. Most of all, I thank other members of my family, especially my siblings - Chioma, Ogonna and Ugochukwu, who have been tremendously supportive during this time. They are always there to remind me of what really matters in life.

Abbreviations

ABADIST – Aba District Office

ABS – Anambra Broadcasting Service

AFIDIST – Afikpo District Office

AIT – African Independent Television

ARODIV – Aro Divisional Office

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

BEN – Black Entertainment Network

CALPROF – Calabar Provincial Office

CMS – Church Missionary Society

CSE – Civil Secretariat Enugu

CWO – Catholic Women Organization

DO – District Officer

EFCC – Economic and Financial Crimes Commission

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

ESUT – Enugu State University of Science and Technology

HRC – Human Rights Commission, Nigeria

ITU – International Telecommunications Union

MAMSER – Mass Mobilization for Self Reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery

MFM – Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries

NAE – National Archives Enugu

NDDC – Niger Delta Development Commission

NFVCB – National Film and Video Censors Board

NGO – Non-governmental Organization

NTA – Nigerian Television Authority

NWO – Nnobi Welfare Organization

OBE – Original Black Entertainment

ONDIST – Onitsha District Office

ONPROF – Onitsha Provincial Office

ORLDIST – Orlu District Office

RCCG – Redeemed Christian Church of God

TREM – The Redeemed Evangelical Mission

VCR – Videocassette Recorder

UAD – USA Africa Dialogue

UDDIV – Udi Divisional Office

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNN – University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Glossary

Igbo terms and their meanings as used in this Study

Afo. It is the first day of a four-day native week.

Agbala/Agbara. A deity at Awka.

Agwunsi. The deity of divination and healing.

Ahiajoku. The deity of agriculture.

Ala. May refer to the soil/earth or the earth deity. Also called *Ana* or *Ani* - the difference is only of dialect.

Alu. A sin or taboo against the custom.

Alusi. Spirit forces that manifest themselves through carved objects like wood or clay and are usually personal gods and guardian spirits.

Amadi. A freeborn. See *diala* below.

Amadioha. Igbo deity of thunder and lightning.

Angulama-nom-awo. A deity in the Owerri area.

Ani-Ajukwu. A deity around Udi in Enugu State.

Anike. The earth deity at Nike.

Anyanwu. Igbo sun deity.

Atama. A deity's priest in Nike, Enugu.

Azu Igwe. A spiritual food, believed to be the first food of humanity according to some narrations of Igbo history.

Chukwu/Chineke. Refers to God, the Supreme Being.

Diala. A freeborn - a full citizen usually free to attempt to gain the *ozo* title and participate in other ceremonies or activities where the outcast may be barred. Also known as *amadi*, *nwafo* or *nwadiani* in some areas.

Dibia. A deity's priest or traditional medicine man.

Efuru. A local deity that existed at Ukehe in Enugu State before it was destroyed in 1987.

Ego Mgbasa. Money used to perform or obtain materials needed for a cleansing ritual.

Eke. The third day in a four-day native week.

Ibu Ihu. The act of paying homage. This is done when someone kills an animal such as a chicken, a goat or a cow/horse either in his house or for a ceremony. Some parts of the meat are now sent to the head of the family of the person paying the homage. This action still happens in Igboland today. In most Igbo towns, when there is a festival or ceremony or sacrifice, this act is done and parts of the meat are sent to Nri to pay homage. However, Nnobi does not participate in this ritual.

Ibinukpabi. Aro Long Juju. An oracle that was prominent around southeastern Nigeria and beyond before the 20th century and after.

Ifajioku. Yam spirit or deity – could also be used to refer to the yam festival.

Igba Ibe. Term for pawning or pledging.

Igbasa. A process of abomination cleansing as used in Igbo-Ukwu especially.

Igwekaala. An oracle around Owerri. It is the deity of the sky.

Ikenga. The deity of fortune and industry.

Ikpu Alu. Also the act of cleansing a town or person of abomination.

Ikwaozu. Term for burial rites.

Ikwu Ahu or Odinke. This is a traditional festival in Nnobi where animals such as cows, goats and chickens are killed and prepared for everyone in the village/family to participate in the eating irrespective of financial status. It is often referred to as the town's 'local Christmas.'

Isi. The leader of a group or organization.

Izu Ato. Term for three weeks.

Kamalu Ozuzu. A deity around Owerri.

Mbatako. The deity of wealth.

Ndi Aha. Translates to 'those people' and is often used to refer to the caste groups. Most people think it is polite to call the caste groups *ndi aha* than call them *osu*.

Ndi Awbia/Obia. A name used by the *ohu* groups in Nkanu. It translates to 'those from elsewhere' or strangers.

Ngulu. Ankle cords.

Nkwo. The second day in a four-day native week.

Nnayi. A term used to address older or respected men.

Nso. Sacrilege or abomination – same meaning as *alu*.

Obi. A meeting avenue or a special room where some Igbos welcome their visitors.

Ofo. A cult-stick often used to symbolize ancestral office or some ritual authority.

Oguji. Yam medicine.

Ohu/Oru. A slave used to perform certain functions that are often domestic in some areas (like Nnobi and Owerri) and ritual in fewer areas (like in some parts of Nkanu and Nike).

Onye Amoma. A fortune teller at Nike, Enugu.

Onyili Ora. A deity at the Agu-Ukwu Nri area in Anambra State.

Orie/Oye. The last day in a four-day native week.

Osu. An outcast who is the opposite of a freeborn and is barred from taking part in certain activities or relationships. Discrimination against them like the *ohu* as well may vary in different towns and village groups. All other caste groups as the *ohu* and *ume* may usually be called *osu*.

Otonsi. A metal (often ritual) staff.

Ozo. A traditional and distinct chieftaincy title.

Siwa-siwa/Kokoliko. The act of gossiping or just spreading rumours.

Tufia. Short for *tufiakwa*. It is an exclamation used to express disapproval. It could translate to 'God forbid', 'wonders shall never end', etc.

Ubochi. Term for day.

Ugwuabazi. A deity around Udi in Enugu State.

Ugwuagboko. Another deity around Udi in Enugu State.

Ukwa. Bread-fruit. A local delicacy in Igboland.

Ume. A distinct caste group as the *ohu* and *osu*, known particularly in some areas in Abia and Imo States. This group does not exist outside these areas.

Umuada. Married-out daughters of a woman's husband's lineage.

Umunna. Members of one's patrilineage – the kindred.

Umuokpu. Used in most areas like Nnobi and other Idemili towns to designate the married-out daughters of a woman's patrilineage.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

Abbreviations

Glossary

INTRODUCTION 1

IgboLand: Aspects of Traditional Life and Customs 19

Methodology 28

Structure of Thesis 38

CHAPTER I: HISTORICAL NARRATIVES OF CASTE PRACTICES IN IGBO LITERATURE AND ETHNOGRAPHY 40

1.0 Introduction 40

1.1 Nri Spiritual Supremacy 41

1.2 Juju, Slavery and Caste Practices: The Case of Aro 49

1.3 Oracular Origin 59

1.4 Igbo Caste Practices: Past and Present Situation 66

1.5 Conclusion 85

CHAPTER II: CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO: THE EMERGENCE OF AGITATIONS, CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENTS AND THE EMANCIPATION OF IGBO CASTE GROUPS 86

2.0 Introduction 86

2.1 The Education and Christianization Advantage, Before 1900 and Beyond 88

2.2 The First Era: Missionary Activity and Political Upheaval, 1900-1925 91

2.3 The Second Era: Economic Conflict and Indigenous Abolition, 1926-1960 99

2.4 The Third Era: Local Abolitions and Redefinition of Identity, 1965-1980s 105

2.5 The Fourth Era: Advanced Urbanization and Christianity, 1990s-Present 114

2.6 Conclusion 121

CHAPTER III: PERSISTENCE OF IGBO CASTE PRACTICES: ARE THE GODS TO BLAME? 123

3.0 Introduction 123

3.1 Highlights of the Efurū Case and the Commission's Inquiry, 1987 124

3.2 The Fear of Local Deities 130

3.3 The Problem of 'Backsliding' Christians 133

3.4 The Underlying Segregation Gap 137

3.5 Apathetic Attitude of Regimes to the Caste Practices 141

3.6 The Conflation and Misconception Discourse 145

3.7 Waiting on 'Time' 147

3.8 Rebuff of Regular Calls to Join the Caste Groups 150

3.9 Conclusion 151

CHAPTER IV: CRITICAL QUESTIONS WITHIN THE NEWS MEDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLISHED REPORTS IN THE NEWS MEDIA, 1973-2009, AND ATTITUDES TO THESE REPORTS	153
4.0 Introduction	153
4.1 Brief Overview of the News Media in Eastern Nigeria	156
4.2 Media Reporting on Igbo Caste Practices	159
4.3 Public Debates in the News Media	162
4.4 Searching for a Middle Ground for the Media	189
4.5 Obstacles to the Media Role	196
4.6 The Media Role: A Theoretical Matter	201
4.7 Conclusion	206
CHAPTER V: INTERPRETING THE CASTE DISCOURSE ON CYBERSPACE: INTERNET COMMUNICATION AMONG IGBOS IN THE DIASPORA	208
5.0 Introduction	208
5.1 Narrations of Igbo Caste Practices on Internet Forums	211
5.2 Too Much Talk, Not Enough Action – Critique of Empty Rhetoric	219
5.3 “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”	222
5.4 Cyberspace and the Message of Change	226
5.5 Conclusion	228
CHAPTER VI: DEPICTION OF IGBO CASTE PRACTICES IN NIGERIAN VIDEO FILMS	232
6.0 Introduction	232
6.1 The Emergence of Nigerian Video Films	235
6.2 Critique of Igbo Caste Video Films	238
6.3 Structural Narratives Customary in Igbo Caste Video Films	252
6.4 Conclusion	271
CHAPTER VII: MAKING CONNECTIONS: CASTE PRACTICES IN IGBO LIFE AND THOUGHT	273
7.0 Introduction	273
7.1 The Family	278
7.2 Local Associations.....	282
7.3 Public Meeting Spheres	287
7.4 Conclusion	296
CONCLUDING REMARKS	299
Implications for Research	303
Areas for Further Research	306
Concluding Words	308
Appendixes	310
I. Osu System Abolition Law of 1956	310
II. Newspaper Publications in Eastern Nigeria - 2009	315

Bibliographical References	318
Published Books and Articles	318
Unpublished Theses	328
Newspaper and Magazine Articles	328
Archival Sources	332
Reports and Other Official Documents	335
Electronic Sources	335
Filmography	337
Interviews	338
Informal Discussions	339
Focus Group Discussions	340

List of Illustrations

FIGURES

1. Idemili Shrine, Nnobi, 2007	27
2. Nnayi Isi Idemili – Chief Priest of Idemili Shrine at His Personal Shrine in Nnobi, 2007	28
4.1 Typical Headlines and Pictures as Portrayed in the News Media	169
4.2 – 4.5 Iconography of Igbo Caste Tradition as represented in the News Media	174
6.1 – 6.3 Jacket Covers of Some Igbo Caste Video Films	241
7.1 Sources of First Time Knowledge of Igbo Caste Practices	275

TABLES

4.1 Representation of Respondents States of Origin	156
4.2 Ownership of Major Media Institutions	159
4.3 News Media Publications on Osu by Journalists and the Public, 1973-2009	161
4.4 Frequency of Published Materials on Osu in the Print News Media	163

MAPS

I.1 Map of Southeastern Nigeria	18
2.1 Map Highlighting Nri and Aro Spheres of Influence in Igboland	45
2.2 Map Highlighting Some Igbo Towns/Village Groups where Caste Groups Co-exist with the Freeborn	67

INTRODUCTION

I would never have anything to do with an *osu* because they are spirits. I will never touch one. They are dangerous people. They will set you back. I can't eat out of the same plate with one.

Ijeoma Amechi, *Newswatch*, 1989.¹

No I[g]bo family wants his son or her daughter to marry an outcast – *osu*. If you see anybody that claims it is nothing it means that person is a slave or *osu* also.

Tony Eze, *Sunday Sun*, 2007.²

After giving out three daughters in marriage in 1999, 2004 and 2007, Mazi Ogbuawa was shocked in August 2009 when his sons-in-law who had married these three daughters came back to Igbo-Ukwu to return his daughters and demand their bride price back. Ogbuawa had married a supposed *osu* woman the previous year. "It is a taboo for a freeborn to marry an *osu*," most elders in his extended family openly said. But Mazi Ogbuawa was unwavering in his desire to marry his new sweetheart, Ngozi, who had stayed by his side for the nearly two years he had been a widower. Ogbuawa's daughters have now returned to his house, shuttling between Igbo-Ukwu and Lagos in the hope of saving their marriages and reuniting with their children. As things stand now, Ogbuawa is caught between breaking up with his new wife and performing a 'cleansing' ceremony to rid himself of the stigma or watching the marriages of his daughters disintegrate.³ Ogbuawa's case tells us the story of many others in eastern Nigeria who have been discriminated against or denied love because they are *osu*, or who have attempted to ignore warnings against the taboo.

¹ Ely Obasi, Akpa Edem, Janet Mba and Sam Smith, "The Gods Are to Blame," *Newswatch*, Lagos, September 18, 1989, p. 16.

² Tony Eze, Letter to Juliana Francis, "Crazy Osu Caste: Reactions" *Sunday Sun*, Lagos, September 23, 2007, p. 43.

³ Remy Chukwukaodinaka Ilona, Private Discussion, October 2009. Ilona is the author of a forthcoming book titled *From Ibri to Igbo: Forty Million More Jews in West Africa*.

Long before the 20th century, the Igbos, now one of Nigeria's largest ethnic groups, participated seriously in the ritual of human sacrifice;⁴ a tradition that continued in some parts of the Igbo⁵ hinterland up till the late 1900s, irrespective of all abolition attempts. Before the 1900s, most human sacrifices were normally killed for pacification purposes,⁶ while others – especially those consecrated after the invasion of the British missionaries to the territory – were offered to the deities alive and were allowed to live within the precincts of deities' shrines. These episodes of sacrificing human beings to deities, on the one hand, and the practice of keeping 'domestic slaves', on the other hand, left a permanent stigma on several minority caste groups in

⁴ Sacrifice for the Igbos, especially before the 1900s, was "the highest form of prayer," and "what cannot be obtained by sacrifice, cannot be obtained otherwise." As a result, it was an imperative action for any Igbo. Just as in conventional modern Churches today, offerings were made to deities and spirits regularly in expectation of their incessant guidance. At times, annual expiation was required for the accumulated evil of a village group. And, the weight or amount of sacrifice offered often depended on the enormity of evil committed or action omitted or blessings received or expected. Thus, the quality of offering depended on the nature of the prayer; the greater the need was, the bigger and more significant the offering. Sacrifices, "may be small and quickly executed or elaborate and time-consuming; they may be given grudgingly or joyfully; and they may range from a piece of kola nut or a splash of wine, to a cow or a human being." (See Herbert M. Cole, *Mbari: Art and Life Among the Owerri Igbo*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 67). Human sacrifices however were offered in extreme cases – it was the highest form of offering to any deity. And, though not all deities in Igboland accepted human sacrifice, there was no object of sacrifice bigger than this. And in the old days when living sacrifices were offered, they were slaughtered and the blood was sprinkled on the altar of the deity. The process changed later, probably as a result of the quantity of offerings received at some point, animals offered were only sliced on the ear or other visible part of their body and then allowed to move freely, usually within the precincts of the shrine. Where this was done, the blood was sprinkled at the deity's altar and the animal carried the mark of identification as a property of the deity. This mark was to protect such an animal from a hunter's gun, literally. In this same way, human beings were spared and instead cut on the ear or a part of the toe or arm as a sign of possession to the deity. These individuals so dedicated, henceforth became *osu* thus, belonging to the deity they were offered to and were only redeemed in very rare circumstances. See generally, S. N. Ezeanya, "The Osu (Cult-Slave) System in Igboland," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 1, Fasc. 1, 1967, p. 36.

⁵ Pronounced EE-gbo, it is used to mean the language the people speak as well as the name of the ethnic group. Some authors, especially non-Igbos and those who prefer to avoid the 'gb' phoneme may choose to spell as Ibo. But the correct spelling as we will use throughout this thesis is Igbo.

⁶ It was the custom in the past in Igboland to offer human sacrifices to deities for wrongs, omissions and thanksgivings. We must note that human sacrifice did not necessarily mean taking a life, where there was need to take a life, it was usually only in connection with funeral and memorial ceremonies and more rarely to deities' cult. The intention of the offerer may be the desire to avert an impending misfortune, or to obtain a long desired favour from tutelary spirits. However, the action transfers the misfortune and diseases from the offerer to the individual so sacrificed. Moses Uzokwe, Interview, Nnobi, July 26, 2007.

Igboland. The Igbo caste groups⁷ are dominated by two major groups. The first were those dedicated to deities and preserved to live to offer some form of duty to a deity and the deity's priest. They wholly belonged to a deity and were called *osu*. The other group was made of domestic slaves and they were called *ohu*.⁸ The *ohus* were those kidnapped or captured, or bought by often wealthy individuals or pawned to them for an unpaid debt. Today, both groups are generically called *osu*. And, because there were no exit points from their status,⁹ they remained in the group for life and were only freed in very rare circumstances. This stigma barred them from marrying outside their groups. No freeborn was free to associate with them; doing so meant becoming one of them. They could not take chieftaincy titles or hold high political offices. Today, while the rituals of consecrating human beings as sacrifices to deities have ceased and the practice of preserving domestic slaves has stopped, the discrimination against the descendants of the earlier caste groups has continued to persist. This is why Mazi Ogbuawa, the freeborn whose story we narrated in the first paragraph, has suffered discrimination since he married an *osu* woman. Now and then, incidents of discrimination against the caste groups generate serious discussions, make newspaper headlines, and often draw the attention of governments in the eastern region. Throughout the 1900s, many analysts, including colonial officers, indigenous administrators, religious personnel and writers,

⁷ The whole of Igbo society is not placed in hierarchical caste categories. Most people are freeborn and do not belong to any caste group. The term 'caste' in this thesis is used to refer to the *osu* and *ohu* groups in keeping with popular Nigerian usage, rather than as an analytical category.

⁸ While the *osu* are slaves of deities and gods, people sacrificed or dedicated to such deities, the *ohu* is a mere slave owned by an individual, a group or a village and the *ohu* may live with his master's family while the *osu* lives at the shrine or at its precincts to perform certain functions that may be required of him/her around the shrine. We must also note that the 1956 Osu Abolition Law defines the *osu* to include other Igbo discriminatory practices as the *ohu* and *ume* (practiced in parts of Imo and Abia States). This thesis however notes this but because of the varying discrimination across Igboland, we at times differentiate both practices. But we will use 'caste practices' and '*osu* practice' interchangeably. See Abolition Law in Appendix I.

⁹ See G. Ugo Nwokeji, "Caste, Slavery, and Postslavery in Igboland," Conference Paper, German African Studies Association 17th Biennial Conference, Leipzig, March 31- April 1 2000, p. 4.

predicted that Igbo caste practices would fade away with the advancing westernization that brought Christianity and education to Igboland. In 1987 for instance, Dureke, a newspaper commentator, admonished Igbos to adopt a wait-and-see attitude in anticipation of 'time,'¹⁰ that the caste practices would die naturally. And, like Dureke, Amadi Ikwechegh who was Governor of Imo State in the late 1980s, said: "I believe that education and time will solve this problem."¹¹ But as it stands today, the practice persists.

The persistence of Igbo caste practices is the nucleus of this thesis. Thus, this thesis is about the continued relevance of Igbo caste practices to Igbo life and thought and the persistent discrimination against the caste groups despite all approaches that have been taken by different parties to abolish the practice. In 1956, the Eastern House of Assembly in what seemed as 'the straw that broke the camel's back,' abolished Igbo caste practices and enacted a law to ensure that the caste groups enjoy equal rights to the freeborn.¹² It is now fifty years later and the attitude remains the same even while the law impotently adorns statute books. The law which then prescribed a £50 fine for any person that falls foul of it has not really had much impact. Nobody has been convicted under the law. As one Theophilus Anomnachi confesses, "Magistrate courts and even the high courts are complacent, lukewarm and insensitive because most of those who are looked upon under the law to enforce the provisions are the so called freeborns." Where cases of discrimination against the caste groups get to the court, the court always submits that such person has not suffered legal or social disability, Anomnachi said.¹³

¹⁰ C. O. Dureke, "Persistence of Osu Caste System in Igboland," *Sunday Times*, Lagos. January 13, 1985, p. 5.

¹¹ Ely Obasi, Akpa Edem, Janet Mba and Sam Smith, "The Gods Are to Blame," p. 19.

¹² See Appendix I. The move to first abolish the *osu* practice was spearheaded by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Onitsha indigene and Nigeria's first president. We shall discuss the abolition in detail in subsequent chapters. See also, Chapter II, 2.3.

¹³ See Bayo Onanuga and Babafemi Ojudu, "Apartheid: A Nigerian Version: Laws of Nigeria Can't be pleaded against the System," *African Concord*, Lagos, June 30, 1987, p. 18.

Thus, legislation appears to be a palliative and is ineffective because cases of discrimination have continued to be reported around Igboland. Besides, since the 1956 abolition put the persistence of the practice on the front burner of the then government, discussions on the practice have continued in the Nigerian mass media. Many newspapers have continued to host debates on the issue by publishing opinion articles and letters concerning the practice. Filmmakers too are beginning to dedicate more efforts to making films that preach against the continuance of this 'bad' practice. Even internet forums now host large discussions on the persistence of Igbo caste practices, and these discussions in the media not only tell that people are concerned about the continuance of this practice, but they show us how persistent the problem has been and how tough it could be to overcome an old custom. Hence, this thesis examines the debates on Igbo caste practices in the media to furnish the reader with the common attitudes of Igbos to the practice and to dispel assumptions that Igbo caste practices have become an 'insignificant' issue.

The persistence of caste practices in Igboland has remained one of the most controversial and persistent subjects for discussion since the beginning of the last century and this underscores the significance of this research. However, the failure of the law and agents of government to ensure that the discrimination against the caste groups is reduced by whatever means is obvious. Cases of discrimination against the caste groups have continued to remain in the media since the 1970s especially. Yet, the problem remains; caste groups continue to suffer discrimination in different forms across Igbo village groups. For instance, after two decades of the existing abolition law, in 1977, Naze autonomous community near Owerri chose one Chief Edwin Ihezue to lead them, as a newspaper reported. He was recognised by the state government and issued with a certificate of recognition. After six months, his opponents in

Naze mounted a campaign against him, insisting he belonged to the caste group. This sparked off a crisis in the community and a panel was set up to look into the problem. A learned judge who headed the panel observed that though the abolition of the caste system was in the statute, it is an un-enforceable law. And with this judgement, the panel dethroned Chief Ihezue.¹⁴ A different newspaper reported the case of another chief in Anambra who in the late 1970s accepted the abolition law, summoned his people, read out the legislation to them and declared the system abolished. Expectedly, his people challenged him to lead the crusade by giving one of his daughters in marriage to an *osu*. He obliged and was deposed and exiled by the people because he had now become *osu* himself.¹⁵

Furthermore, a social rights activist, Jude Ezeala, documented over seventy incidents of *osu* discrimination in Imo state alone in 1979.¹⁶ Yet, in 1983, in the same area, a traditional ruler who was repelled by the thought of marriage between his son and an *osu*, said publicly: "God forbid that to happen to me. If my son makes the mistake of bringing such a curse to my family, I will denounce him, and he will never enter my house again."¹⁷ In the same way in 1986 a clergyman reportedly suspended the wedding arrangements of his daughter to ascertain "the genealogical background of the suitor." He dispatched emissaries to the village of the would-be son-in-law to find out if he belonged to the caste group.¹⁸ Another anxious lady was reportedly shocked to the bone in 2007 when her parents cancelled her marriage to her long-time lover because he was

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁵ May E. Ezekiel, "Osu: The Untouchable Igbo Caste System," *Sunday Concord*, Lagos, June 12, 1983, p. Mag. V.

¹⁶ See J. O. L. Ezeala, *Can the Igboman Be a Christian in View of the Osu Caste System?* Orlu: B. I. Nnaji & Sons Press, 1991, p. 17.

¹⁷ May E. Ezekiel, "Osu: The Untouchable Igbo Caste System," p. Mag. V.

¹⁸ Bayo Onanuga and Babafemi Ojudu, "Apartheid: A Nigerian Version: Laws of Nigeria Can't be pleaded against the System," p. 18.

osu.¹⁹ All these incidents were reported in several newspapers. Besides, in 2008 alone, at least three video films were produced on the Igbo caste issue drawing the significance of the persistence in contemporary times.

The catalogue of Igbo caste woes is inexhaustible as we will see in this thesis. True, the institution did not originate out of wickedness on the part of the people as we shall see especially in the following chapter, but from the people's desire to maintain good relations with divinity. After all, as we agree with Onwubiko,²⁰ the root of the tradition is "in the practice of human sacrifice" and is wholly religious with a background of an ancient ritualistic cult. Hitherto, one would have thought the practice would lose its significance since the shrines formerly inhabited by the ancestors of the *osu* are now barely existent; most of the idols of the deities have been moved to the homes of the deity's priest and paganism is now on its last legs in Igboland, at least on the surface.²¹ Yet, the practice continues to persist and the freeborn groups, most of whom are Christians, persistently express fear of associating with the caste groups. This is not to say that the practice has remained as intense and significant in the life and thought of the Igbos as it was a hundred years ago. Various changes have occurred over time. Today, for instance, some village groups in Igboland grudgingly tolerate social intermingling between the freeborn and caste groups but not such a close relationship as marriage.²² But the

¹⁹ Juliana Francis, "Does the Osu Caste System still Exist?" *Sunday Sun*, Lagos, September 16, 2007, p. 43.

²⁰ Oliver Onwubiko, *Facing the Osu Issue in the African Synod: A Personal Response*, Enugu: Snaap Press, 1993, p. 25.

²¹ In Igboland, acts of paganism may still be conducted by Christians, but they usually do so in secret as such actions are viewed by the majority as bad.

²² This modification may have been caused by the urbanization. Because people now live outside their villages, it is possible for a freeborn to be involved in a long relationship with an *osu* without knowing it. He/she may only find out when it comes to the point of marriage when their families start investigating their family backgrounds. Thus, when it is discovered, the freeborn is not called *osu* because of the involvement. If it was in the past, such association was enough to make one *osu*, then of course, most people lived within their villages and it was easier to know ones background even by the surname or village at times.

persistence has remained strong with the same old force in other areas such as social intermingling. And, while some are hopeful that the practice will die naturally with time, others are not. Consider the case of Obi, the protagonist in Achebe's novel *No Longer At Ease*, where Obi's hope in the purge of the *osu* system was expressed: "But all that is going to change. In ten years things will be quite different to what they are now." Okonkwo's response is most revealing: "The old man shook his head sadly but said no more."²³ It is this inexorable character that Nwosu, an Igbo social critic, considered "a sociocultural phenomenon," judging the persistence of the practice after all was said and done.²⁴

This thesis will present an analysis of several debates and issues that come up in the media concerning Igbo caste practices. The thesis examines the views of respondents who publish articles and letters in the newspapers, respondents who use blogs and other internet forums to discuss the subject and other respondents that participated in interviews and focus group discussions for this research. The thesis will use the debates by these respondents to argue and show that while most respondents think the continuation of Igbo caste practices is 'barbaric' and 'bad', they continue to maintain the practice because of the fear of inheriting the stigma. Obviously, there is still some fear in many areas that mingling with the caste groups could bring misfortune upon a freeborn person because the caste groups are still associated with the influence of the deities. And all these views are expressed in the media and depicted in video films. The media itself has made some efforts to tackle this problem of persistence and convince those who discriminate against the caste groups that there is no harm in mingling or marrying

²³ See Chinua Achebe, *No Longer At Ease*, London: Heinemann, 1960, p. 121.

²⁴ Nwosu was not at all optimistic on legislative attempts to abolish Igbo caste practices. He lashes attempts by the East Regional Government to impose legislation on the people on a matter that is religious and cultural which of course seem not to work in any circumstance. See Okenwa Nwosu, "Controversy Over Osu Caste System: Laws Can't Terminate That Social Cancer," *Sunday Times*, May 10, 1985, p. 9.

the *osu*, but this has not been very successful because the local institutions in Igboland, such as the extended families and town unions, have not been reformed to embrace a different status quo, one that is free from the caste practices.

What is responsible for the persistence or longevity of this practice? Our answer is that the structure of Igbo social life and thought forces individuals or groups who may wish to disregard the practice to discriminate against the caste groups even when they may not want to do so. While most respondents say that the practice is 'barbaric' and 'bad', they find it difficult not to discriminate against the caste groups. The main reason for this is that the socio-political structure in Igboland has not changed much, even though the area has gradually been Christianized and most of the people are educated. For instance, the influence of extended families on the affairs of nuclear ones is still great, particularly in the area of marriage which is the primary area of discrimination.

Marriage in Igboland is not just between a man and his wife, but also between close kin. Before marriage, a young man would speak to his parents. The parents would now approve or disapprove. But before they take a decision, if the girl or her family is unknown to them, they send 'spies' to visit the girl's village to investigate her background. The investigation could take a day or more depending on the distance or the issues that come up. The reason for this is to learn if the girl or her parents have a suspicious background or are social outcasts, *osu*.²⁵ They may also want to know, in some cases, the status of her parents whether rich or poor. In the

²⁵ Only few months ago, in 2008, during the last leg of our fieldtrip, we visited a girlfriend at her father's house. Momentarily, after she introduced us to her father, he hurriedly called her to a private room upstairs where he warned her to be careful of getting involved with someone without knowing his status. He particularly told her that marriage to an *osu* for him was taboo, and that, on no condition would he accept such for a family member. Our friend was shocked when this happened, because she thought the intensity of the discrimination had faded. Our family too speak against the practice, and they regularly warn that marriage to an *osu* is not possible. It is still a vivid reality in every sense.

meantime, before the man's parents dispense emissaries, they first watch the girl. This is the first hurdle, and the second stage of going into family background is only done where this is successful.

On the other hand, the girl's family also carries out similar investigations on their would-be son-in-law and his family, at times concurrently, though without informing their daughter or her husband's family. The act on both sides is done quietly. Before now, the boy would have visited the father of the girl in the company of his father and a few males in his extended family to do a little asking – for the bride's hand in marriage. It is this official 'ask' that now prompts the bride's parents to do their investigation. Where there is a problem – like if the individual belongs to the caste groups, they quickly warn their child in a simple phrase: 'no road leads to that place.' The child is now expected to look elsewhere for marriage. Children may however accept or reject the decisions of their parents. It is indeed rare to find parents who give reasons for their decisions but usually when the child is stubborn a parent may be forced to spill the beans. But it is difficult where the lovebirds reject parental advice because no customary marriage in Igboland can happen without the involvement of both families and the traditional ceremony is of course the nucleus of Igbo marriage rites. It is only when these enquiries are satisfactorily complete that both families work towards the settlement of the bride-wealth which must of course include the members of the extended family.²⁶ The roles of extended

²⁶ Negotiations for bride price could take many forms today as different towns now have different rules and methods and in certain occasions a man could pay in parts. Chinua Achebe described the processes of bride price settlement as it was done in the past. His description still obtains today, though with little modifications. In his *Things Fall Apart* for instance, Ukegbu went to Obierika's hut to marry Akueke for his son, Ibe. Obierika offered Ukegbu "a small bundle of short broomsticks." Ukegbu counted them and Obierika nodded in agreement to confirm the number. But it did not end there. Ukegbu exited with his son and his brother to 'whisper together.' They returned abruptly and Ukegbu handed the bundle of sticks back to Obierika. Obierika now counted the broomsticks which now numbered fifteen instead of thirty. He passed them to his brother who counted them and said, "We had not thought to go below thirty. But as the dog said, 'if I fall down for you and you fall down for me, it is play.' Marriage should be

families have become increasingly significant today. They must participate in all ceremonies and of course, they practically accept the bride price from a would-be son-in-law in concert with the bride's father. Thus, even if the bride's father intends to give her away to an *osu* (which is rare), the kindred may refuse to take part in the marriage rites. This of course means no marriage has taken place.²⁷ It is for the participation of extended families in marriage rites especially, that most cases of discrimination described in this thesis have been against freeborn marriage to *osu* and as will be obvious in the thesis, the media too have been overwhelmed with discussions surrounding marriage discrimination. Every adult family member, even when married, participates in 'approving' or 'disapproving' a marriage because everyone belongs to one extended family. Thus, we find even a married couple talking about this practice. So, while

a play and not a fight; so we are falling down again." He added more sticks to the fifteen and gave the bundle back to Ukegbu. And in that way, Akueke's bride price was settled at twenty bags of cowries. (Achebe, *Things fall Apart*, p. 68). In many village groups today the bridegroom is given a long list of gifts to buy and present to the bride's extended family members as well as her parents. His family could negotiate but all the requests must be fulfilled.

²⁷ Interestingly, marriage in Igboland may not just happen between two different sexes but could be between two women. This does not imply homosexuality in the common sense, because they are not expected to have any sexual relationship. Moreover certain issues could cause marriages as this. For instance, in Nnobi, where a woman lacks a male child even after the demise of her husband, she may decide after consulting family members, to pay the bride price of another woman on behalf of her late husband. Now, she looks for a willing girl who of course must be fertile. She then invites her kinsmen who now follow-up the process of marriage and bring the new wife home. The new wife is allowed to go out and get pregnant and when the child is born, it belongs to the woman or family who married the young lady. Because of the patriarchal nature of Igbos, it is essential to have a male child who is now expected to inherit his father's house at his demise. In other words, the marriage is done to seek a male who would inherit and live in the house. The other method is where a man had only daughters and no sons; he may inform the *umunna* that he intends to retain one of his daughters to bear children for the family. Where this is done, and the daughter bears a male child, that male child inherits the family assets. In both cases, either where a wife is married or a daughter is retained in the family, it is usual for the family elders to meet and decide the man to approach to be meeting with the woman. This is to avoid having children for the family from an unwanted man like an *osu*, if the woman is left alone to find a lover. The idea in the past was that when a family lacks a male child, the house falls several years after the demise of the man of the house. Before now, Igbos lived in mud huts. When these huts are left unattended, grasses grow around them and they soon collapse. And because female children marry out of their fathers' home, they rarely leave their husband's houses to maintain their fathers'. This contributed to the famed quest for a male child amongst the Igbo. Egodi Uchendu looks at this kind of marriage in her chapter, "Woman-Woman Marriage in Igboland," in Ada Uzoamaka Azodo and Maureen Ngozi Eke (eds.), *Gender and Sexuality in African Literature and Film*, Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 2007, pp. 141-154.

other discriminations against the *osu* like the inhibition against breaking kola nuts in public gatherings persists only in some areas, marriage continues to remain the strongest aspect of persistence in all areas where the caste practices persist.

Moreover, another reason we attribute to the persistence of Igbo caste practices is the fear people have of the stigma, which has resulted from the past of the caste forbears where deities were feared and dreaded. Before Igbos embraced Christianity en masse, their traditional religion involved two main activities, namely, invocation and atonement. These activities essentially maintained harmony between the spiritual realm and everyday life. Then, Igbos attributed every circumstance in their lives to a deity or spirit. When there were epidemics or widespread deaths, for example, it was assumed that the deities were angry and needed to be appeased. When famine loomed, the deities called for pacification. Even in good times, when the people enjoyed bountiful harvest, victory in war and good health, the deities were appreciated by offering sacrifices to the deities in different forms that ranged from the least important crops to human beings. These spirits, too, when offended quickly took revenge on the offender by visiting the culprit with sickness, misfortune or even death. Such an offender was punished severely, here on earth and not in the next world. Calamity could visit an entire village when the evil committed was enormous. When a whole village was afflicted with such misfortune, or the population suffered an epidemic, the diviner was consulted to unravel the mystery. He alone interpreted the message of the deity and gave conditions for sacrifice.²⁸

²⁸ Also, in the past no village could head to the battle ground without consultations with the deity of war. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* depicted this obligatory act when Umuofia, known to be very powerful in war and in magic, had to visit the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves to determine whether or not it should head to war. Conferring with the deities and spirits was always a condition for victory. Again, the significance of propitiation in Igbo religious past shined in Achebe's narration of Okonkwo's anger at Ojiugo, his youngest wife, who annoyed him by failing to cook his afternoon meal. Okonkwo's anger led him to beat Ojiugo heavily, forgetting the sacredness of the week which was a supposed "Week of Peace" and was to be free from harsh words and unwonted behaviour, and was evil against the deities.

Moreover, Igbos greatly believed in the existence of powers, invisible spirits and angry ancestors, and even human spirits of wicked people that hovered around. Some of these spirits, Arinze suggests, “do so little good and so great harm.”²⁹ Up till today, no one dares to annoy or swear falsely on these deities. They are envious and jealous, and at the least provocation could inflict unwonted agony. Therefore, to be protected against the anger of deities, people feared tampering with objects of the deities’ sacrifice. The majority of the first generation caste groups were consecrated to deities as sacrifice and to tamper with them in any way was to bring misfortune upon oneself. Even doing so with the present generation of caste groups is believed in many quarters to bring the same old misfortune.

Besides, one other significant reason for the persistence of Igbo caste practices today is that authorities have lacked the political will to deal with the problems of discrimination against the caste groups since the colonial era up till now. In short, some past and current government officials have been known to publicly discriminate against the caste groups. For instance, Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Biafran leader who was to lead the Igbos in a secession attempt against Nigeria in 1967, argued rather pointedly at a political campaign in Owerri that, “There is now a mixture of Igbo species leaders. Every Igbo man knows that some of them should have

Notwithstanding Okonkwo’s lofty status in Umuofia, Ezeani, the chief priest did not mince words in enumerating his sacrifice: “You will bring to the shrine of *Ani* tomorrow one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries.” The priest also emphasised the weight of Okonkwo’s sin after his rendition of flimsy excuses: “Your wife was at fault, but even if you came into your *obi* and found her lover on top of her, you would still have committed a great evil to beat her.” See Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London: Penguin, 1958, p. 11. See figure 2 below, a recent photograph of the chief priest of the Idemili deity at his personal shrine in Nnobi.

²⁹ Francis A. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970, p. 14.

no claim to leadership because their forefathers were objects of rituals and do not qualify for public glare. I mean the *osu*.”³⁰

Persistence and Public Attitudes in the Media

The main objective of this thesis is to show that Igbo caste practices are persistent today and this thesis offers an explanation of the persistence by use of the expressions and attitudes of respondents in newspapers and on cyberspace, to video films and on the field. That enterprise involves three particular tasks.

Our first task is to show that Igbo caste practices persist, and to challenge the understanding in some quarters that it has disappeared. Many respondents have argued or reckoned that Igbo caste practices have ceased to exist or have become an insignificant issue in Igbo discourse, and so many have suggested that Igbos should keep quiet about it and let sleeping dogs lie. But as Afigbo, a historian, asked, “are the dogs really sleeping?”³¹ It is misleading to assume that the practice is silent. This problem forms the basis for questions we will examine: Have there been significant efforts to dampen discrimination against Igbo caste groups? If so, who are the players and what are the challenges? What accounts for the persistence of Igbo caste practices after several abolitions and campaigns?

We begin this thesis by laying out the key features of the Igbo caste practices. We examine a number of narrations to enable us understand the connection of the practice with slavery and oracle worship. This will be helpful especially in understanding why the practice has persisted.

³⁰ Several political and chieftaincy rivals in Igboland to date discredit themselves over the suspicion of being *osu* or *ohu*. This has continued in many areas across Igboland especially in Imo and Anambra States and in parts of Enugu State. The mere mention of this suspicion could ruin ones chances of occupying such positions! This thesis will focus on the discrimination against marriages which is rife in most areas. However, this will not prevent us from talking about other forms of discrimination. See Ely Obasi, Akpa Edem, Janet Mba and Sam Smith, “The Gods Are to Blame,” p. 18.

³¹ Professor Adiele E. Afigbo, Interview, Abakaliki, August 29, 2007.

Besides, we look at the activities and ascendancy of two legendary cultural areas in Igboland – the Nri and Aro. Although their connection to the origin of Igbo caste practices does not spell out actual dates to when the practice started, their relation to ‘hows’ is obviously helpful. We describe how the Nri developed spiritual supremacy in much of Igboland and how this supremacy earned them the authority to cleanse tabooed lands and consequently also declare people taboo. We also show that the Aro developed a slaving oligarchy and contributed to the rise of the number of slaves sacrificed to deities. Moreover, we argue that Igbo caste practices resulted from the pacification of oracles for the good of humans even though we agree that the actual origin of the caste practices is not known.

This thesis also draws up chronological events that have modified Igbo caste practices since 1900 especially to the present time. We focus on these events to draw our attention to the fact that several efforts have been made by the caste groups themselves and others, including the media, to change the status quo. Yet it persists. These episodes are indeed pointers to the challenges and progress that lies ahead. We also attempt to explain the reasons behind the failures of these struggles which have largely been connected to fear and the obvious lackadaisical attitudes of regimes (government and local administration) that have failed to deal with offenders that have publicly discriminated against the caste groups. We do not posit that the laws put in place were entirely unhelpful, but there have been glaring cases of discrimination where the government has either failed to act or acted nonchalantly. For example, the caste groups in Nkanu have suffered violent discrimination from the freeborn in their area since the early 1900s. But to date no government has offered a permanent solution to their problems. We do not just mean dealing with the stigma, but dealing with those who physically harass the caste groups or burn their homes. Our examination to this point will have

established without doubt that the practices persist, but the attitudes of respondents in the media are helpful in pushing this point further.

Hence, our second task in this thesis is to examine public debates in the media. This examination will show that the debates tell us a lot about the level of the persistence of discrimination against the Igbo caste groups. The ultimate test of the persistence is to see how respondents react to media messages concerning the caste practice. We will go to considerable lengths to show how the news media, the internet and video films have shaped the Igbo caste discourse and encouraged debates on the contentious issue. Some of the important questions we attempt to answer include the following: Has the media encouraged or shaped the debates on Igbo caste practices? Has it been helpful in changing attitudes of respondents to the caste practices? What kinds of attitudes are portrayed in the media? In other words, what kinds of issues come up during public discussions concerning Igbo caste practices on the news media and cyberspace? Are there differences in the attitudes of respondents in Nigeria and those in the Diaspora? What has been the role of filmmakers particularly in bringing the discourse to limelight?

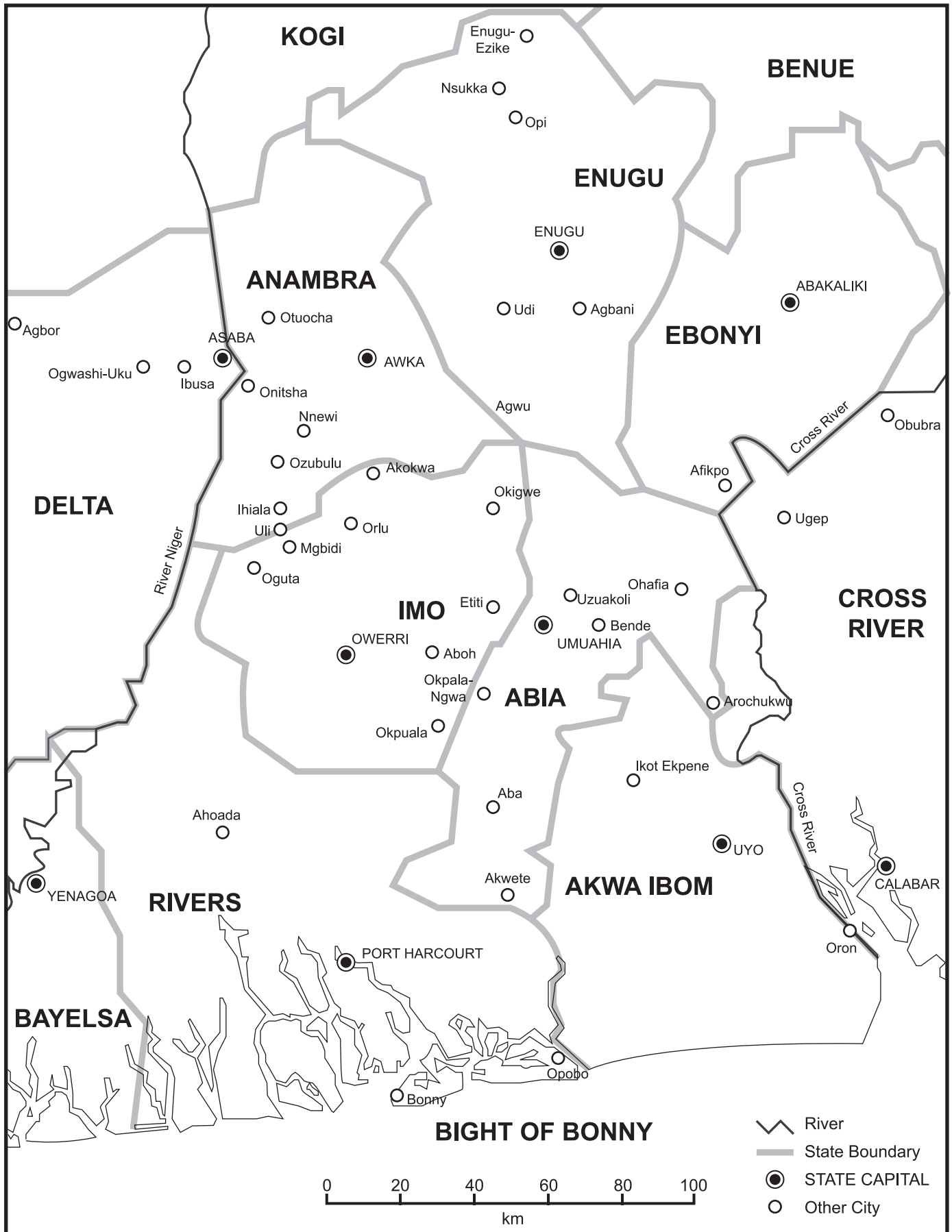
Our analysis of the debates in the media will show that the role of the media concerning this practice is enlightening. But while most newspapers have refused to be involved politically with the Igbo caste issue, they have managed to host debates by other commentators on the issue from time to time and the internet which allows greater responses of people's views have been building up debates on the issue, especially for Igbos in the Diaspora. However, filmmakers unlike their news media counterparts are beginning to make statements against the practice with their films. All in all, these forms of the mass media have continued engaging with

the *osu* caste issue and the expressions in all the media signify the persistent nature of the practice.

Third, our discussions on the persistence and our examination of public attitudes to the caste practices in the media will have clearly shown that Igbo caste practices remain a contemporary problem in eastern Nigeria. Accordingly, we attempt to shed light on the connectedness of Igbo caste practices to Igbo life and thought. We do this primarily with our observations and experiences of interacting with Igbos on the field.

As a result, we will round up our argument by noting that Igbo caste practices persist and continue to co-exist with the struggles by the caste groups and the attempts by governments to impose legislations. However, certain structures of Igbo socio-political life do not provide an enabling environment for the caste groups to be totally integrated into the freeborn groups. Our conclusion will be helpful to understanding amongst other things the reasons for the persistence of Igbo caste practices in the face of widespread Christianity and development. This thesis contributes meaningfully to solving a string of problems that have survived the legal abolition of slavery in Igboland. We must now look at certain aspects of our area of study. The map (I.1) below shows our area of study.

MAP 1.0: Map of Southeastern Nigeria



SOURCE: Obinna Okwelume

Igboland: Aspects of Traditional Life and Customs

The Igbo region lies just above the neck of the Bight of Biafra. The people, occupying an area of about 15,800 square miles,³² and extending between 4°55'-7°05' N and 6°30'-7°45' E,³³ are traditionally farmstead dwellers, scattered in village groups. Colonial Igboland consisted of provinces and districts that were demarcated for administrative reasons. As it would appear now, the creation of more states from the old Eastern Region splits the area into five states – Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo – as can be seen in map I.1 above, but the people occupy a compact area spreading across Rivers and Delta States.³⁴ With a population of roughly 16,381,729 people – 4,182,032 in Anambra, 3,934,899 in Imo, 3,257,298 in Enugu, 2,833,999 in Abia and 2,173,501 in Ebonyi – , a small percentage of the 5,185,400 people in Rivers and 4,098,391 in Delta States are Igbos.³⁵ Many of the people today live in other parts of Nigeria – Port Harcourt, Lagos, Abuja and Kano especially – and in the Diaspora, while they still maintain close ties to home. The area is however, bounded by a throng of smaller ethnic groups which form the minorities, at times, sharing linguistic affiliations with most of the tribes – Ekoi, Ibibio and Efik to the southeast, Ijaw, Opobo and Ogoni to the south, Bini, Isoko and Urhobo to the west, and to the north Tiv, Igala and Idoma.

In the past, Igbos maintained a precarious existence by agriculture, hunting – which is now done on a small scale since forests are fast disappearing because of urbanization – and in some river-dwelling areas, fishing. Farming in the area has been disturbed by erosion which is rife in Anambra especially. Others practised juju, and were medicine-men, a position they often got by

³² Victor C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, p. 1.

³³ See Axel Harneit-Sievers, *Constructions of Belonging: Igbo Communities and the Nigerian State in the Twentieth Century*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006, p. 15.

³⁴ It is this general area – Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, and parts of Rivers and Delta States – that we will refer to as Igboland in this thesis.

³⁵ The Nigerian Population Commission published these figures after the last census organised in 2006. May see details on: <http://www.population.gov.ng/>

inheritance after a relation's demise. Lately, the demand for skilled artisans is high; thus, most men in the village are locally trained in occupations such as carpentry, plumbing and bricklaying. These days, the utter lack of adequate employment and illiteracy and all the accompanying difficulties encourage many people to combine farming and business. The bulk of the women in local areas are peasant farmers who sell their produce daily. They cultivate such root crops as yams, cassava, cocoyams, maize, palm produce,³⁶ garden eggs and vegetables. Some have small poultries behind their houses. Others prepare local tobacco. Moreover, in whatever way we look at the people, trading is a vocation in which a vast majority of them participate, though for some, on part-time basis. Before now, in 1884, Taylor described the people in the Onitsha area as a "business-like nation, keen in trade – expert in money matters, intelligent and very industrious."³⁷ Onitsha today and other towns like Aba and Nnewi, continue to remain the trade centres of Igboland. Nevertheless, the majority of the people living in the cities today are professionals in white collar occupations and traders in diverse areas.

The Igbos have no common traditions of origin.³⁸ Their histories, mostly oral, and often local, vary with each telling. At times the tales of where they came from or how they may have occupied their present location are in opposition with each other. Their quest to understand

³⁶ Palm produce is greatly appreciated in Igboland. They often say that every part of a palm tree is useful in some way. Palm wine is gotten from the tree. The seeds provide palm oil and kernel. The leaves are used for rituals and carving mats. Others use it to make local brooms. When burnt, the residue of the big branch that holds the palm seeds is used to make soap and to cook a local delicacy, *ukwa* (bread-fruit), one that is loved throughout the area.

³⁷ Rev. John Christopher Taylor, II, "A Report on the Political and Spiritual State of Onitsha", 1864, University of Birmingham, C A3/0 37/57.

³⁸ Igbo origin is still a subject of much speculation, though most prominent historians - Prof. Elizabeth Isichei and Prof. Adiele E. Afigbo especially - have tried to construct acceptable theories of origin. Don C. Ohadike in his book tells us of significant attempts in the 1950s and 1960s to "scientifically rehabilitate the Igbo past." These attempts, he records, failed after most of the valuable materials collected were destroyed during the civil war of 1967-70. See his book, *Anioma: A Social History of the Western Igbo People*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994, p. 5.

their history is undying. For, as Isichei has pointed out, "No historical question arouses more interest among present-day Igbos than the inquiry, 'Where did the Igbos come from?'"³⁹ According to her, the efforts by the people to trace their histories appear to be a problem of Igbo identity, that is, the history of their forefathers in the centuries before the European interruption and invasion. Afigbo too, like many writers, considers Igbo origin a problem. The problem he describes "is indeed 'a very maze within a maze'," continuing further, he insists, "it boggles the mind."⁴⁰ Despite the interest of all inquiring minds, the people may have migrated from neighbouring tribes and core Igbo areas or from further regions.⁴¹ However, three demographic theories of origins appear to emerge - the oriental, Niger/Benue and the Igbo homeland theories as classified by Ijoma, a latter day Igbo historian. His first hypothesis speculates that Igbos were a migratory bunch, one of the last tribes of Israel or Egypt that wandered off to their present location. Exponents of this suspicion base their thoughts especially on certain resemblances between the Igbos and the people of the Near East.⁴² The similitude between them is of culture, "circumcision, system and manner of naming children, sentence structure and similarity in some words, religion and ritual symbols, love of adventure and enterprise."⁴³ The other theory, Niger/Benue confluence theory which sprung up after the rich NOK archaeological finds and discoveries connected with the area, suggests that Igbos migrated from the Niger/Benue confluence area. This premise relies mainly on the importance of yam in Igbo culture and the linguistic connections between the Igbo area and the Kwa sub-family of

³⁹ See also, Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, London: Macmillan, 1979, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Adiele E. Afigbo, "Traditions of Igbo Origins: A Comment," *History in Africa*, Vol. 10, 1983, p. 1 (1-11).

⁴¹ Adiele E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*, Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1981, p. 6-7.

⁴² Many historians including the Igbo ex-slave, Olaudah Equiano, G. T. Basden and M. D. W. Jeffreys express these views in their respective writings. See generally, J. O. Ijoma, "Igboland: A Historical Perspective" in G. E. K. Ofomata (ed.), *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, Ibadan: Africana First Publishers, 2002, pp. 40-42.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

languages spoken by the Ijaw, Edo, Yoruba, Idoma, Nupe, Igala, etc, and it supposes Igbos dispersed from the general area of this confluence region.⁴⁴ The final idea of Igbo migration is that the people moved from the areas considered core Igbo settlements in the northern Igbo plateau – Nri and Akwa, Orlu and Owerri, and parts of Okigwe – to other contemporary Igbo locations. This thought is built on the knowledge that people seemed to have existed in these areas before the others. Evidence thus provides reasons to believe that the vegetation of these regions were over-utilized, hence, “giving rise to the greater deterioration of the soil than most parts of Igboland except the river valleys.”⁴⁵ In other words, the problem of soil depletion and a progressively unrewarding agricultural activity provoked the people of the core to move to more favourable locations. And, in retrospect, the internal dispersion of the people throws up the question of whether the people of the core area were earlier settlers than the immigrant Igbos, and where the people of these core areas might have emerged from. For instance, it is assumed that the Nri, which will be considered later, migrated from Benin or Igala while maintaining their traditions of kings and chiefs.⁴⁶ Irrespective of all speculated narrations of the origins of the people, however, a good deal of uncertainty still hovers around these theses of Igbo origin. Thus, it is our business to circumvent these contestations of origin; it is not our immediate ambition to provide an answer.

Like most ethnic groups in Nigeria, Igbos speak a common language, yet, dialects are very numerous and diverse. Dialectal differences may vary even amongst small groups and numerous divisions resulting from geographic differences, and they are often delineated in

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See Cyril Agodi Onwumechili, “Igbo Enwe Eze: The Igbos Have No Kings,” Ahiajoku Lecture, 2000.

accordance with clan, ancestry, and village ties.⁴⁷ Throughout the area, local proverbs form a vital ingredient for speech and “to speak very often without the use of proverbs is to talk like inexperienced, little children.”⁴⁸ Their houses in the past and in some areas today, consist simply of mud and thatch, erected slightly above 6-7 feet. Large brick buildings now surround most villages in Igboland,⁴⁹ while some allow mud huts, built in sun-baked clay, or in cement bricks, burnt or sun-dried, for relaxation and as cooking rooms. Most buildings now have a corrugated iron roof and a concrete floor to prevent the devastating onslaughts of soldier ants.

Igbo political authority is uniquely decentralised; “ultra-democratic,”⁵⁰ according to Arinze. Before the 1960’s especially, each town remained fragmented and reasonably independent with groups, often social, maintaining law and order. Meek was particularly fascinated by the political structures of the people. Igbos, he observed then, in 1937, more or less existed without any form of higher authority or any centralized chieftaincy or kingship, as can be found amongst their neighbours.⁵¹ Instead, leadership rested traditionally on a council of chiefs or elders which was usually the final ‘court of appeal’, and also involved town unions, lineage heads, titled men, women’s associations, age groups and secret societies. When people had

⁴⁷ While we were at Nnobi in 2007, we rode on a bus with a cousin to Asaba. Before we got to Onitsha, a passenger who sat beside us spoke Igbo to the conductor. Our cousin heard her dialect and told us the woman was an indigene of Ngo, a quarter in Nnobi. We wondered how she knew that, and she told us that there was a dialectal difference between the three quarters that make up Nnobi village group, Awuda and Ebenesi being the other two. Thus, one with basic knowledge of the Igbo language may easily observe these differences. We may also want to note for the purpose of this study that village group and town will be used interchangeably. Village groups in Igboland are a combination of two or more villages.

⁴⁸ See Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, p. 3.

⁴⁹ After the civil war in the late 1970s, most Igbos preferred to build bigger and better houses at the village even when they live in smaller ones in cities. This is because a lot of people, who had huge investments in the cities before the war, lost everything to destruction. Some of them never had houses at their villages. This turned them to refugees in their own homes and as a result, was embarrassing. One can easily notice the rapid speed at which new buildings are erected in several Igbo villages; it is fast and indeed growing.

⁵⁰ Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, p. 74.

⁵¹ C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study of Indirect Rule*, London: Oxford University Press, 1937, p. 3.

cases, they “were mainly argued and settled in the houses of the leading chiefs, and they were liable to be transferred from one compound to the other according to the ascending or dwindling status of the chiefs.”⁵² This is no different today. Despite this apparent democracy however, the polity in most local areas is headed by a traditional ruler, a position often almost ceremonial. This head, called *Igwe* in most areas and *Obi* or *Eze* in others,⁵³ sits with a council of elders at regular intervals to converse and take decisions. The members of the council are usually *ozo* titled men. Membership of the *ozo* is a great rise in social status and only bona fide members are allowed to wear a red cap or shake hands the traditional way. Taking the title is usually expensive, often demanding elaborate feasting in some areas and offering animal sacrifices in others. Initiation fees are high, and in the past the process was intensely competitive. Age groups also make up the polity. They are formed by men of about the same age. They contribute to community development, maintain law and order, organise ceremonies and contribute financially or otherwise to events of members. Women have always been an indispensable part of the Igbo polity. They, too form various groups within their town or kindred. They could suspend or expel members who commit taboos such as adultery, and they play special roles during funerals and in assisting the planning of ceremonies of members of their group - which usually is in the form of cooking or cleaning specific areas. Furthermore, because there is a great respect for success and seniority,⁵⁴ some form of authority is allowed to those who become success stories in their endeavours.

⁵² Basden made this observation in 1915. See G. T. Basden, “Denationalizing a Primitive People,” *The Church Missionary Review*, Vol. LXVI, London: Church Missionary Society, 1915, p. 599.

⁵³ ‘Igwe’ is used in more areas than ‘Obi’. Areas like Onitsha for instance have got an Obi, while some areas in Imo and Abia States use the Eze title.

⁵⁴ Most Igbos often attach success to wealth; thus, a man is considered successful when he is wealthy and has got material things, usually houses and cars, and at times more wives to show for it.

Religion and culture were, of course, always closely interwoven and most important in Igbo daily life as with most African areas. Even well into the twenty-first century, Igbos continue to possess certain cultures that define their behavioural patterns. If we take a bird's-eye view of the area today, we see some aspects of their culture that are still tied to their old forms of worship - traditional religion. One's first assumption may be that most of these traditions would have lost relevance amongst the people since most of them have embraced Christianity, but in certain areas, certain traditions which most Igbos consider barbaric and evil continue to be of importance. The persistence of individuals' affiliations to certain aspects of their culture is key to this thesis because the *osu* practice has widely been condemned by Igbos, the majority of whom still engage in discrimination against the *osu*.

Before Christianity became widespread in Igboland, three significant features defined Igbo spiritual life: the belief in more than one deity, the representation of objects as deities, and ancestor worship.⁵⁵ In the old days, Igbos believed in more than one deity. Even today, this belief lingers around most Igbo speaking areas. One can observe today that the ordinary Igbo worldview is dualistic; belonging to two worlds and unhesitatingly juxtaposing traditional religion and Christianity when the need arises. As Metuh rightly observed, "he [an Igbo person] draws from the one or the other according to circumstances, and easily combines them."⁵⁶ This does not however imply confusion, especially of faith, amongst the people. In fact, no deity is as powerful as the Supreme; they are only agents of the High God. Moreover, not all the local deities are of equal significance and power to the people. While a lot of local variation exists in names, categories and details of belief in and worship of these divinities, a number of them are

⁵⁵ P. Amaury Talbot, *Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages with an Abstract of the 1921 Census*, Volume II, London: Frank Cass & Co., 1969, p. 14.

⁵⁶ Emefie Ikenga Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion: A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981, p. 49.

believed to be major deities and are widely acknowledged. There is a deity of thunder and lightning, *Amadioha*; *Anyanwu*, the sun deity; *Igwekaala*, the deity of the sky; *Ala*,⁵⁷ the earth deity; others include *Ahiajoku*, the deity of agriculture, *Ikenga*, the deity of fortune and industry and *Agwunsi*, the deity of divination and healing.

Furthermore, Igbos believe in the existence of living ancestors. At death, a man's spirit wanders until it is fit to be received into the company of his forbears. The condition for this fitness is the completion of a full funeral rite on earth. Until these rites are performed his spirit stays around and could harass the relatives refusing to perform the necessary rites. Under certain circumstances, such an individual must have lived a good life on earth; if not, the individual must be cleansed in some ritual manner before passage to the forbears is ensured.⁵⁸ A typical family does not only include living family members, but dead ones who also make up the ancestors of the *umunna* – the kindred. A visitor to a typical Igbo family will barely escape witnessing reverence to the dead. As a matter of goodwill and traditional welcome, the guest is offered kola nut and, or, palm wine. However, before eating and drinking, the man being visited breaks a kola nut and splits a portion of it which he throws to the ground for the ancestors. Also, palm wine is poured on the floor in form of a libation to express joy and gratitude to the spirits and ancestors. These actions are performed before drinking and eating, with some form of prayers, usually in reference to the visitor's mission, in worship of the ancestors. Up till now, this ritual is rampant in most Igbo speaking areas and is also performed by Igbos in the Diaspora.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Ala* is also called and written as *Ani* or *Ana*; dialectal difference.

⁵⁸ Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, p. 17.

⁵⁹ The ritual of breaking kola nut and pouring libation was strictly reserved for the freeborn in most areas. It was sacrilege for an *osu* or *ohu* to perform such act. However, they may be allowed to perform these

However, most of these aspects of the people's lives are tied to their pagan past. And the past continues to shape their present customs. Moreover, the majority of the people are Christians. The Anglican Communion and particularly the Roman Catholics are the largest denominations in the area, but lately, since the late 1980s especially, Pentecostal and other evangelical denominations have also become strong. Only a few people hold on to traditional religion. But because most people in the Christian fold will, depending on the circumstance, mix both Christianity and traditional religion, we cannot speak of the people's religion today without reference to their traditional religion. See figs. 1 and 2 below for the photographs of a deity's shrine.

Figure 1. Idemili Shrine, Nnobi, 2007.



functions today if their host is lenient. Usually, when it involves a large group of people or a gathering, it is rare to find an *osu/ohu* perform these rituals.

Figure 2. Nnayi Isi Idemili - Chief Priest of Idemili Shrine at His Personal Shrine in Nnobi, 2007.



Photographs by Obinna Okwelum.

Methodology

Before we delve into methodology properly, it is important to note that the sensitive nature of this subject limited the collection of data for this thesis. The hitches in collecting basic information on the practices were dramatically tied to the 1956 Abolition Law which overtly makes “Words spoken and published which impute that a person is Osu” criminal.⁶⁰ Respondents in many cases refused to speak to us on this subject. Most of them were afraid to appear to incite hatred. For instance, we tried to conduct two separate FGDs at the Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), but some of the respondents refused to take part in the FGD. And because others saw the fear in those that declined, they refused to participate as well. One must also emphasize the difficulty

⁶⁰ Supplement to the Eastern Regional Gazette, 1956.

in speaking to members of the caste groups. By merely approaching them to talk about the caste practices, they could immediately suspect that one assumes they belong to the caste groups and they may not tolerate it. Moreover, it is this same “fear and mystery,” which Leith-Ross observed, “surrounded the subject” in 1937 that “make[s] accurate information difficult to obtain.”⁶¹ The attitude is as discernable today as it was then, over seventy years ago. This may be the reason why there are only a few published documents on the practice by academics.⁶²

But these handicaps notwithstanding, the subject remains one of some historical interest, and still is, in many respects, contemporary and significant in Igbo study. The problems in obtaining information did not hinder our enthusiasm to collect as much information as possible as we used our knowledge of the area and personal relationships with some respondents to encourage more participation.⁶³ However, at some points respondents asked not to be mentioned by name so we quoted them anonymously.

This research was conducted in eastern Nigeria and Birmingham. The study was limited to the Igbo speaking areas of Nigeria, today found in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, and in the Diaspora, as well as in parts of Delta and Rivers States. Although we tried to speak to respondents from all these areas, specific attention was given to Anambra, Enugu and Imo

⁶¹ S. Leith-Ross, “Notes on the Osu System Among the Ibo of Owerri Province, Nigeria,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April, 1937, p. 207.

⁶² Professor Afigbo, for instance, who had taught Igbo history and the history of southeastern Nigeria for more than four decades, decried the unavailability of evidence on the *osu* system blaming the situation on the fact that researchers were afraid of looking into it for fear of being labelled an outcast. He narrated an ordeal of one of his students in 2007: “One thing that struck me is that in the early part of this academic session which we are just trying to conclude and going into the second semester, a student who was supposed to provide his BA project (dissertation) came to me and said he could not pursue, continue the project he chose which had to do with this *osu* thing because he was just not getting any information about it.” Adiele E. Afigbo, Interview, Abakaliki, August 29, 2007.

⁶³ Because we are Igbo and we belong to the freeborn group, we made every effort to be as objective as possible during this study. We made attempts to speak to both the freeborn groups and caste groups in the areas we visited, but more individuals in the freeborn groups participated in our FGDs and interviews. However, both groups participated in the debates on the newspapers and internet.

States. While Anambra and Imo have got the highest numbers of the *osu* groups, Enugu and some parts of Anambra, particularly the Onitsha region have got the highest number of the *ohu* groups. These have remained the core areas for the caste discourse from the beginning of the 1900s.

This study has been based mainly on oral information and observation of respondents and the media. However, we have used a wide variety of sources for the study. These include focus group discussions (FGD) in Nigeria and Birmingham, formal and informal interviews in Nigeria and the United Kingdom, archives in Nigeria and Birmingham, published official documents, contemporary newspapers and video films, internet communication and electronic surveys, radio communication and published secondary literature. We will briefly introduce the different types of primary sources used for this study and explain the nature of the collection process.

(a) Interviews

We conducted oral interviews during two trips we made to Nigeria in 2007 (April – September) and 2008 (March – April). We made attempts to collect oral traditions, such as traditions of origin, but because most respondents were unsure of the origins of Igbo caste practices we dwelt more on getting information about things that happened during their lifetime and which they witnessed or were told in person. Questions asked covered a whole lot of issues ranging from the persistence of the caste practice in respondents' areas to their interaction with the caste groups. For the caste groups themselves, even though we didn't get to speak to a large number, we asked questions on their challenges and how they had managed to deal with the practice and lead normal lives. The first batches of interviews were recorded in the first instance, but after we realized the influence of the recorder on some of the respondents' answers, we

switched to having more untaped discussions. The length and shape of the discussions depended on the individual. With people who had official functions, our questions targeted their personal lives as well as the office. However, we had in-depth interviews with historians, clerics, journalists, civil servants, traders, students, traditional rulers and chief priests of shrines.⁶⁴

We also benefitted from many informal conversations in public areas. These conversations gave us more insight into the real attitudes of respondents to the practice. However, we had in 2001, published and staged a play on Igbo caste practices.⁶⁵ Since then, we have interacted with people on this issue. Thus, we have also drawn from these personal experiences on the caste practices.

(b) Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

We conducted two focus group discussions in Nigeria and one in Birmingham. The first FGD was with a prominent traditional ruler in eastern Nigeria, Igwe Kenneth Orizu of Nnewi and two members of his cabinet, Dr. Dozie Ikedife and Prince Anene Nwosu. This FGD was beneficial to this thesis because all respondents that took part belong to the decision making body of the Igwe's cabinet, a cabinet that has abolished the caste practices in the region more than three times. Also, Dozie Ikedife was coincidentally the president-general of the pan-Igbo group, Ohaneze Ndigbo worldwide, at the time of this FGD. The FGD however, took place in 2007 at the Igwe's palace. Seven respondents participated in our second FGD which took place in Okija in Anambra State. Participants in this discussion were all undergraduates at Madonna University, a private university in Nigeria. All of them were from villages where the caste

⁶⁴ The Bibliography behind includes a comprehensive list and description of those interviewed.

⁶⁵ O. Charles Okwelum Jnr., *Ogurigwe*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2001.

practices are persistent. It was particularly beneficial to speak to young adults to determine the quantity and quality of information they know about the practice and to know if their attitudes to the practice will be different from their elders. This FGD also happened in 2007.

Another FGD was conducted in Birmingham to examine attitudes to Igbo caste video films. This was scheduled to take place in Nigeria in 2007 and later 2008; but for the unavailability of video films on Igbo caste practices it took place in 2009 in Birmingham after we collected three particular video films produced in December 2008. We used two video films - *World of Tears* and *Soul of a Maiden* for the purpose of this FGD. Nine individuals from eastern Nigeria participated in the FGD;⁶⁶ they watched both films and responded to informal questions concerning their reactions to the thematic content and the Igbo caste practice generally. This discussion was helpful. It exposed certain implicit attitudes to the representation of the practice in the media and we observed the respondents as well as listened to their views. This was complementary to other methods as observation.

(c) Attending Meetings, Private Visits and Informal Discussions

During the first fieldtrip in 2007, we benefitted from attending local meetings and ceremonies particularly around Nnobi.⁶⁷ We attended a number of *umunna* meetings, a women's (August) meeting, Church meetings and harvests, town union meetings and a brief meeting at the Igwe of Nnewi's palace where he settled a dispute that involved one of his subjects concerning our subject area.⁶⁸ We also made private visits to some individuals to informally discuss the Igbo

⁶⁶ All nine respondents except one had been in the United Kingdom for less than a year.

⁶⁷ We lived in Nnobi while conducting fieldwork in 2007. Thus, Nnobi is mentioned at more often than not in instances given throughout this thesis. Nnobi is a village group in Idemili South Local Government Area and it is bounded by Nnewi, Nnokwa, Awka-Etiti and others. It is the headquarters of the prominent Idemili deity.

⁶⁸ The complainant involved a man in the caste group who had brought a case against a freeborn. We won't get into the details of this case, but it exposed some useful attitudes to us.

caste practices. At all places and events we participated actively in discussions and cultural practices like sharing palm wine and splitting kola nuts. These visits and discussions were helpful as we will see in subsequent chapters of the thesis because it equipped us with understanding some hidden reactions which respondents may show when not being recorded.

We also had private discussions between 2008 and 2009 with individuals concerned with the Igbo caste practices. We talked at length with three filmmakers who had produced and directed films on Igbo caste practices; films we discussed in Chapter VI. We also had informal discussions with seven other film actors and producers that had taken part in Igbo caste film productions at one time of their career. This was helpful in getting their objectives and motivation in making such productions. They also shared their views on the feedback they had received from their audience.

(d) Direct Observation

Besides just participating in meetings and visits, we participated in the settlement of bride price during two local traditional weddings at Nnobi and Enugu. This was indeed helpful because we followed the process from the point of investigation where their would-be in-laws sent emissaries to the village of the bride. We also made visits to local shrines around the Idemili area to know if the caste groups still actively performed functions in these areas. We also visited shrine areas at Nike and Nkanu to monitor the activities around the shrine. Although most of these shrines were quiet, some actually had petty offerings like eggs and fowl around them early on some mornings. We actually spoke to the chief priest of a prominent shrine in eastern Nigeria – the Idemili deity.⁶⁹ At this venue, we observed some ritual activities and spoke to the

⁶⁹ The chief priest of the Idemili deity in Nnobi presides over all activities at the shrine which is situated in the middle of Eziora village – the village predominantly inhabited by descendants of *osu*. At the time of our interview, the chief priest claimed to be 117 years old and he had witnessed/participated in many

chief priest about the functions of the caste groups and their position in contemporary Igboland. He happened to be our oldest respondent as he claimed to be aged 117, so we briefly sought his ideas on the origins of Igbo caste practices. We also visited the local markets at Enugu, Nnobi, Nnewi and Owerri, where we spent some time to interact with some respondents and watch the behaviours around the venues. Observing respondents this way was helpful in explaining some implied attitudes to issues as the caste practice.

(e) Media Survey

National Library of Nigeria, Abuja, Enugu and Owerri Branch

The National Library of Nigeria has a huge collection of old and contemporary newspapers. They house most of the state owned publications in Abuja, Enugu and Owerri and we visited all three to collect materials for this study. The Enugu branch was particularly helpful because it housed most of the old publications that was published by the state before 1991 when Enugu was split to become Anambra and Enugu States. However, besides other newspapers we looked at, we particularly looked through all Champion newspapers published between January 2000 and December 2003; and because of limited time, all weekend (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday) publications published between January 2004 and December 2005. The choice to look at the weekend publication was due to our observation that more space was dedicated to culture and local matters in the weekend editions. Moreover, we selected Champion newspapers for this detailed study because it is the oldest National Daily that is still published in Nigeria by a proprietor from eastern Nigeria. Because of its ownership, its focus has primarily been on the southeastern region.

rituals, those that happened long ago before the 1960s and even in the present. See figs. 1 and 2 above for photographs of the deity's shrine and the chief priest.

University of Nigeria Library, Enugu and Nsukka Branch

The University of Nigeria Library, Enugu and Nsukka branch had a huge collection of newspapers in its newspaper archives. It was most helpful in getting old magazine publications. These collections also enriched our analyses of the news media.

Cosmo FM, Enugu

We participated in a morning drive time radio talk programme to discuss the Igbo caste practices on Enugu's Cosmo FM. It lasted for 45 minutes. The purpose of doing this was to reach a wider audience to get their personal experiences on the caste practice and also understand their attitudes to the discussions on the radio. Cosmo FM was an intelligent choice because it has a very wide reach, covering the entire southeastern and middle-belt states of Nigeria. Collecting information by this means was not totally a success because the audience responded by telephone, and on the morning of the programme, the telephone network was not working very well. However, some responses in the form of calls and text were recorded and they give us some helpful information for our discussion.

Internet Survey

The internet was really helpful to this study. We used it in a number of ways. First, we monitored online forum discussions on Igbo caste practices that began in 2007 and continued till 2009. The essence of this monitoring was to observe the reactions of Igbo respondents, particularly those in the Diaspora, to the Igbo caste discourse. Three forums were observed in this regard. They included: Nairaland, a prominent Diasporic forum for Nigerians; Naijablog, an online journal where Nigerians particularly discuss issues; and the USA Africa Dialogue (UAD), a large forum hosted by historian Toyin Falola, where academics and professionals discuss issues relating to Africa and the world.

Secondly, questionnaires constituted the main research instrument for the purpose of collecting data. A random sample of 150 Igbo respondents were selected from Nigeria and across the world for the purpose of this survey in 2008. The questionnaires were sent through SurveyMonkey, a web based survey tool. A sample newspaper article on Igbo caste practices was attached to these questionnaires to allow respondents to react to it. 117 respondents completed the questionnaire.

We also sent another set of questionnaires relating to the depiction of Igbo caste practices in video films to forty randomly selected Igbo individuals in Nigeria and the Diaspora. Twenty-one respondents completed the questionnaire. The questionnaires provided a link to two Igbo caste films – *World of Tears* and *Soul of a Maiden*. Respondents watched these films before completing the questionnaire. This complemented our FGD on video films. And it was very helpful in getting further responses from a large number of people on our case films.

(f) Archival Sources

National Archives of Nigeria, Enugu Branch (NAE)

The Enugu branch of the National Archives of Nigeria contains most of the official documents relating to the colonial administration's activities in the southeastern region of the country. It contains the files of several departments; the Provincial and District Offices in the former Eastern Provinces. Although this study is not purely historical, we dedicated some time to collecting documents on slave dealing and human sacrifices in Igboland so as to contribute particularly to our historical chapter and understand the efforts that were made by the colonial administration to eliminate *osu* discrimination in Igboland. Documents collected were published between the 1900s and 1960. However, archival study in Enugu took place in 2007.

Archive of the Church Missionary Society, Birmingham

The missionaries of the Church Missionary Society arrived in Igboland in the mid-1800s and they were mainly active in documenting events connected to slavery and human sacrifices in the area, particularly in Onitsha. Most of the CMS documents are kept at the University of Birmingham where we were primarily based, thus, we briefly relied on a few documents to understand the nature of human sacrifice at the 1860s when the practice was rife in Onitsha especially. All documents collected at the CMS archives were published before 1900. Archival study at the CMS took place in 2008.

(g) Reports and Other Documents

We also extracted some useful information from official documents such as the Abolition Law of 1956 and the Debates of the Eastern House of Assembly on the abolition. We got three important reports from the family of an Igbo judge who investigated and recommended the *Efuru* deity in Ukehe (Enugu) for destruction in 1987. This document will be helpful for our discussion on the persistence of the caste practices in Igboland.

Finally, we found some existing literature and documents to be really useful. Much secondary material was collected from university libraries and Catholic seminaries and institutions across eastern Nigeria.

Structure of Thesis

This thesis is structured in seven chapters, all of which are concerned with answering the questions about the persistence of Igbo caste practices and the attitudes portrayed by respondents in the media which we identified earlier. While the first three chapters will set up the historical and sociological background of the thesis, the following three will look at how the various media have engaged with the caste issue. The last chapter will now take us through the daily life experiences of Igbos as they engage with the caste issue on the field.

However, in order to provide a context for our discussions on the persistence of Igbo caste practices, Chapter I looks back at the origins of Igbo caste practices and explains their features. We also illustrate in this chapter certain efforts made by the colonial government to get rid of traditions that changed the magnitude of caste practices in the region. In Chapter II we chronologically describe events that accompanied the efforts of regimes and groups from the 1900s up to the 2000s to abolish the caste practices. The next Chapter, III, deals directly with the problems associated with the persistence of the caste practices. Our starting point in this chapter is to look squarely at the case of the *Efuru* deity of Ukehe in northern Igboland which clearly is a contemporary case of persistence of caste practices in Igboland. This helps us understand some related issues with fear against local deities.

However, in order to highlight the role of the news media in hosting the Igbo caste discourse, Chapter IV analyses in detail news reports and articles published in the news media by journalists and contributors in the public. We use these reports, especially rejoinders, to examine the attitudes of respondents to published materials in the media. Chapter V continues with a similar mandate by looking at the discussions on Igbo caste practices on internet forums. This chapter will particularly illustrate the views of Igbos in the Diaspora. Chapter VI

examines the nature of video film depiction of Igbo caste practices. Specific attention is given to those video films with the caste practices as their themes. And we discuss the feelings of respondents towards the images portrayed by filmmakers in these video films.

Chapter VII then looks at the real life nature of dealing with the practice in Igboland. We look at how the practice is tied to their daily life and thought. Finally, this will lead us to conclude that Igbo caste practices remains a contemporary problem in Igboland and the socio-political structures of the people still encourage the problem to persist.

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL NARRATIVES OF CASTE PRACTICES IN IGBO LITERATURE AND ETHNOGRAPHY

1.0 Introduction

The origins of Igbo caste practices are obscure. Neither oral traditions nor written records provide definite answers to it. Informants seldom claim to have knowledge on when, where and how it came about; for as our oldest respondent –, Moses Uzokwe, the chief priest of the Idemili deity who claimed to be aged 117 in 2007 and had participated in several rituals, - said, attempting to construct an authentic history of Igbo caste practices with precise dates especially, is like “chasing the Harmattan wind.”⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the practice is certainly old and has its roots in local slavery and superstition. Although no exact date can be ascribed to this practice, various versions of origin, often oral, suggest imprecise times which are worth looking at.

Amongst the several versions, two are widely acknowledged and often narrated across diverse Igbo areas. The first is the general claim that the practice was a consequence of traditional religion; the request for human sacrifice by deities and dedications which were often penalties for serious crimes. This was essentially founded on the Igbo cultural belief and worship system where human beings interacted directly with deities to seek favour, to influence or pacify nature. Interestingly, the ritual of human sacrifice was greatly influenced by the Aro slavers and their cohorts who gained prominence with the influence of the Aro Long Juju during the era some scholars consider “the most tragic” for the Igbos.⁷¹ After all, this period when human life was cheapened witnessed the heaviest evils of slave trade and slavery among the Igbos, and of course, a lot has been said and written about it. There were perhaps half a dozen oracles of

⁷⁰ Moses Uzokwe, Interview, Nnobi, July 26, 2007.

⁷¹ This era was before the 1850's when the Aros and agents of their Long Juju manipulated a huge chunk of the Igbo population into believing the escapades of their Long Juju. See especially Oliver A. Onwubiko, *Facing the Osu Issue in the African Synod: A Personal Response*, Enugu: Snaap Press, 1993, pp. 27-28.

significance as the Aro Long Juju, like *Igwekaala* of Umunoha, northeast of Owerri, *Agbala* (or *Agbara*) at Awka, and *Onyili Ora* near Agu-Ukwu, Nri,⁷² but they were not as influential and widespread as the Aro; and they lacked mercenary forces and extensive settlements away from home. The other thought results from the overwhelming spiritual hegemony usually attributed to the Nri people, which was established over certain areas of Igboland and beyond. This was based on the premise that through religious beliefs human beings were disciplined into obeying a higher supernatural authority that was believed to dwell physically in Nri. Nevertheless, most historical accounts agree that the *osu* were highly revered people at some point and their origin cannot be discussed outside traditional religion.

This chapter recounts some versions of the hazy origins of Igbo caste practices and illustrates certain aspects of the practices that may have contributed to today's persistence. Specifically, we explore some narrations of 'hows' and then describe the patterns of joining the caste groups and the variations of the practices in Igboland. To achieve this we depend on archival sources, oral sources and basically, secondary literature. This chapter is fundamental to understanding the arguments of persistence and other problems surrounding the caste practices.

1.1 Nri Spiritual Supremacy

Nri culture is one of the many sub-cultures that developed in Igboland. As a result of their profound influence around the Igbo area it is almost impossible to isolate the talk of their culture from other Igbo cultures, particularly around the Anambra area. It is generally accepted

⁷² See Edmund Ilogu's article, "Worship in Ibo Traditional Religion," *Numen*, Vol. 20, Fasc. 3, Dec. 1973, p. 234 (pp. 229-238).

by most Igbos that the distinctive features of Nri traditions was their religious pre-eminence, political clout and their ideology of abomination.⁷³

Nri historical myth starts with Eri,⁷⁴ the father of Nri. Eri was believed to be sent by *Chukwu* from the sky to the earth, where he sat on an anthill because the earth as he saw it was watery and marshy. Eri complained to *Chukwu*, who now sent an Awka blacksmith with his fiery bellows and charcoal to dry up the earth. After the assignment, the Awka blacksmith was given an *ofò*, a traditional mark of authority for his metalwork profession. While Eri lived, *Chukwu* fed him and his people with *azu igwe*, a substance from the back. This special food ceased after the death of Eri. Nri his first son complained to *Chukwu* for food. *Chukwu* then ordered Nri to sacrifice his first son and daughter and bury them in separate graves. Nri complied with it. Later, after three Igbo weeks (*izu ato*), yam grew from the grave of the son and cocoyam from that of the daughter. When Nri and his people ate these, they slept for the first time; later still, Nri killed a male and female slave burying them separately. Again, after *izu ato*, an oil palm grew from the grave of the male slave, and a bread fruit tree (*ukwa*), from that of the female

⁷³ M. D. W. Jeffreys did significant research on the Nri people and their influence on neighbours; see his writings on the Ozo and Eze Nri Titles in the Awka Division, Onitsha Province, NAE, CSE 1/85/4510.

⁷⁴ In the ancestral line, Eri had four male children- Nri, Aguleri, Igbariam and Amanuke in that order of seniority who founded the various towns bearing their names. These four towns are collectively called Umueri, the children of Eri. Nri had five sons and a girl. Four of these sons founded Agukwu, Enugu-Ukwu, Nawfia, and Enugu-Agidi communities in present day Anambra. Iguede, the only daughter, after marriage, had four sons who all founded Awkuzu, Umuleri, Nando and Ogbunike towns which together are known as Umuigwedo and form a sub-clan of the Umueri group. Other villages like Nteje, Nsugbe and Umunya are believed to belong to the Eri clan, even as Oguagha suggest their genealogical connection with Eri is not clear. (See P. A. Oguagha, "The Beginnings of Igbo- Igala Relations Up to C. 1650 A.D.," *Nigerian Magazine*, No. 149, 1984, p. 48 (pp. 47-60)). However, according to Nri migration history, members of the clan spread across several areas along the Niger. This large migration was then to cause a spread of their territorial influence as we shall soon see. Today, Nri lineages are found on both sides of the Niger, at Nsukka and in Udi area of Enugu State; the Awka area, Abatete, Agulu, Adazi, Nnewi and Ihiala all of Anambra State; Orlu area, Owa, Ute, Kwale, Illah, Ibusa, Ogwashi-uku, Abala, Issele-uku of Delta State. Other towns like Enugu-Agidi, Enugu-Ukwu, Nneofia and Orieri were founded by descendants of the first Nri. See especially, M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu, *An Igbo Civilization: Nri Kingdom and Hegemony*, London: Ethiope Publishing, 1981, p. 8.

slave.⁷⁵ With this new food supply, Nri and his people ate and prospered. *Chukwu* asked him to distribute the new food items to his neighbours but Nri refused. After all, he had acquired them dearly at the cost of sacrificing his own children and slaves. Accordingly, Nri and *Chukwu* entered into a contract. This contract, as Jeffreys reports, was to give Nri the sole right of cleansing every town of abomination, crowning the *eze* at Aguleri and tying the ankle cords of a man who takes the *ozo* title. Nri and his successors were also to have the sole privilege of performing the yam sacrifice which was then necessary to ensure bountiful supply. This was to make surrounding towns dependent on Nri if they must harvest yams.⁷⁶ And consequentially, this meant that Nri and descendants could travel unharmed across regions where they held sway.⁷⁷

However, the importance of Nri's indisputable influence at this instance of origin is clear in the notion of their hegemony which developed alongside a highly ritualized and symbolic culture.

Leonard,⁷⁸ Thomas,⁷⁹ Basden,⁸⁰ Afigbo⁸¹ and more recently, Harneit-Sievers⁸² reported that Nri

⁷⁵ Emefie Ikenga Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion: A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981, p. 4-6.

⁷⁶ Another tradition claims that because Nri would not sell yam to his neighbours, he demanded seven fowls, chalk, a pot and goats, with these he made medicine, *Ifejioku*, the yam spirit, which he gave to the applicants. They took this home with the new crops and sacrificed to it. Reciprocally, they were bound to entertain Nri priests and agents whenever they travelled through their lands without request of any form of payment. Where they failed to do so, the Nri man was then to plant his ritual staff (*Otonsi*), on their soil briefly. When he pulled out his *Otonsi*, all yams planted were believed to go with him. If the applicants again requested yams, they would have to begin afresh another bargain with the Eze Nri. This tradition has some variation but basic facts still remain similar. See Adiele E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*, Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1981, p. 42.

⁷⁷ M. D. W. Jeffreys, "The Umundri Tradition of Origin," *African Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1956, p. 123.

⁷⁸ A. G. Leonard, *The Lower Niger and its Peoples*, London: Frank Cass & Co., 1906, pp. 34-36.

⁷⁹ Northcote W. Thomas, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria: Part I – Law and Custom of the Ibo of the Awka Neighbourhood, South Nigeria*, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1913, p. 48.

⁸⁰ G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos: A Description of the Primitive Life, Customs and Animistic Beliefs, and of the Ibo People of Nigeria by one who for Thirty-Five Years, Enjoyed the Privilege of their Intimate Confidence and Friendship*, London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966, p. xx.

⁸¹ Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, p. 34.

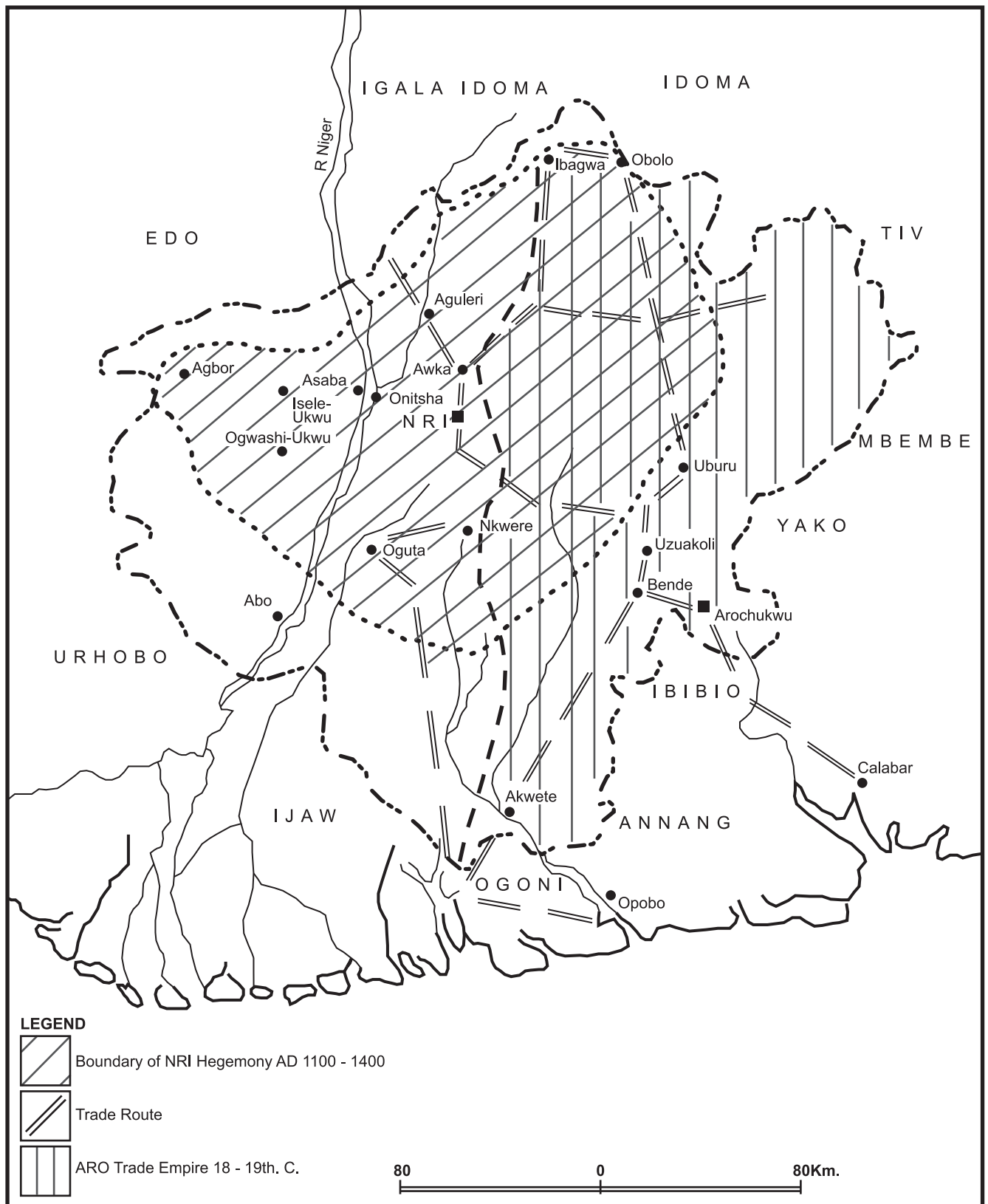
⁸² Axel Harneit-Sievers, *Constructions of Belonging: Igbo Communities and the Nigerian State in the Twentieth Century*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006, pp. 48-55.

occupied a place of eminence in Igboland. In fact, Nri practically ritualized many aspects of their lives from the political system to the domestic economy especially. They ritualized trading activities by associating markets with supernatural beings – *Eke, Orié, Afo* and *Nkwo*.⁸³ The *ozo* title emerged from the Nri ritualization of leadership. Also, in the area and other neighbouring colonies, it was forbidden to spill human blood in violence on the surface of the earth. This was as a result of the ritualization of the earth, *Ala*. Withal, Nri religious and political influence spread over much of Igboland (see map 2.1 below) as they travelled unmolested from one Igbo settlement to another as agents of Eze Nri to perform political and ritual functions associated with cleansing abomination, ordaining ritual and political officials, crowning chiefs, settling disputes and creating markets and shrines.⁸⁴

⁸³ Igbo calendar and days (*Ubochi*) are individually called in these names - *Eke, Orié* (or *Oyé*), *Afo* and *Nkwo*. To date, markets are associated with these days and they derive their names accordingly. Each town in Igboland chooses one of these dates as its main market day and does not fix ceremonies like marriages and funerals on that particular date. For instance, Awka-Etiti uses *Eke*, Nnewi uses *Nkwo*, and Nnobi uses *Afo* and so on as their main market days. Moreover, babies are often named according to the date they were born. For instance, male children use names like - Okonkwo, Okeke, Okoye or Okorie and Okafor, or Nweke, Nwoye or Nworie, Nwafor and Nwankwo to signify the day of their birth; and females use Mgbankwo, Mgebeke, Mgboye and Mgbafor or Nwayi-eke, Nwayi-oye, Nwayi-afo or Nwayi-nkwo. These entire names end with one of these days, thus, someone can immediately tell from another's name – Nwafor – that the person was born on *Afo* day. Again, please note that Igbo day starts at close of market, say around 6pm to the following day say 6pm and does not follow the usual English calendar that starts from 12 midnight.

⁸⁴ Onwuejeogwu, *An Igbo Civilization*, p. 11.

MAP 2.1: Map Highlighting Nri and Aro Spheres of Influence



SOURCE: Modified based on Map by T.O. Okoye, "Urban Life and Urban Development in Igboland," in G.E.K. Ofomata (ed.), *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, Onitsha: Africana First Publishers Limited, 2002, P. 184

With significant functions like these, one can understand the grounds for Nri spread and influence in different parts of Igboland, especially in older Igbo settlements where Eze Nri wielded some degree of political and spiritual authority.⁸⁵ Apparently, many Igbo village groups came under their sway.⁸⁶ And most of these areas enjoyed protection as colonies of Eze Nri in many ways, especially politically and against mystical forces, hence, hegemony based on spiritual ascendancy was established.

Furthermore, Nri spiritual and political clout was largely a source of power and influence which made them, more often than not, demand gifts from people who usually were clients. The demands as it were, were consulting fees and often included a little amount of money, *ego mgbasa*, and a ram or sheep, sometimes goat but certainly not a cow.⁸⁷ Okeke,⁸⁸ Onanuga and

⁸⁵ By 1910, missionaries had entered the interior of Igboland. One of them, Rev. Father Duhaze, between 1907 and 1910 referred to Nri as "the headquarters of juju and voodoo and pagan priesthood for the whole of Igbo tribe."⁸⁵ And, on their influence he reported: "The religious influence of Nri once extended over the whole Igbo country. The Nri's were the high priests of the idols and from their hands the chiefs loved to receive the insignia of office. They regulated even the building of huts for fetishes... the arrival of the king was preceded by the ringing of bells and by a storm of clapping." See Onwuejeogwu, *An Igbo Civilization*, p. 15.

⁸⁶ But areas like Nnobi – the seat of the Idemili deity – , for instance, "claim a ritual dependency of Nri kings." This, Amadiume writes, "is implied in the Nnobi saying: *Nshi wukaa, oja ejelili Nnobi* – 'No matter what his fame, an Nri must make a spiritual trip to Nnobi'." The Late Igwe Ezeokoli of Nnobi who witnessed a similar episode as this, narrated: "In 1924, after the official outing parade of Eze Nri Oreri, Eze Okonkwo, who died in 1944, visited the River Niger. On his return journey via Nnewi, he called at Ani Nnobi shrine and worshipped. He received a metal staff from the head of a village in Umuagu in Ngo called Ikpuotutu village." Of all Igbo settlements Amadiume asserts, "It is only Nnobi people who claim that they do not pay ritual homage, *ibu ihu*, to Nri. They also claim that they are the only other people who perform the *ikwu ahu* or *odinke* festival performed by the Nri people." Again, "Nnobi oral traditions, and recent history, claim that Nri kings worshipped at the Idemili shrine before proceeding to the Niger." See Ifi Amadiume, *Afrikan Matriarchal Foundations: The Igbo Case*, London: Karnak House, 1987, pp. 39-44. Henderson and Onwuejeogwu also named Nnobi as one of the villages that candidates for Nri kingship passed through on their ritual journey to the throne before stopping at the Niger River in Onitsha. See Richard N. Henderson, *The King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972, p. 64. Also see Onwuejeogwu, *An Igbo Civilization*, p. 87.

⁸⁷ F. Chidozie Ogbalu, *Standard Igbo: Path to its Development*, Onitsha: University Publishing Company, 1974, p. 63.

⁸⁸ Igwebuike Romeo Okeke, *The Osu Concept in Igbo Land: A Study of the Types of Slavery in Igbo-Speaking Areas of Nigeria*, Enugu: Access Publishers, 1986, p. 14.

Ojudu⁸⁹ imply in their writing that the consequence of not meeting these demands was an Nri curse; that was, a situation where the Nri priest directed other communities or individuals to reject any form of contact with the cursed person or village group. This direction was almost always obeyed. And where the people acted otherwise, blight and misfortune was bound to visit them. This was why a sacrificial request by a priest from a community often called for contribution from every member of the village group. Sacrifice was imperative if the deity was to continue its believed task of protecting the community. When such sacrifice is directed towards security or economic prosperity, each living individual in the community, often adults, and at times irrespective of age, contributed to the general purse of the community, and the money so collected was used to purchase the offerings. Explicitly or otherwise, by this act, everyone was involved in the sacrifice. Those who failed to meet demands were ostracised; they henceforth remained outcast; and in time, their descendants inherited the stigma and became *osu*. This is one narration of the origin of the practice.

Though the truth in the narration of Nri dumping a people to the fate of ostracism is difficult to establish at this point, they certainly performed ritual functions across diverse Igbo areas and it was possible that some village groups failed to meet their demands, at times. And, normally, ostracism or banishment in Igboland would have caused some sort of discrimination against the descendants of the person so banished. But as far as we know, there are no villages or groups yet, to be known to have suffered discrimination as a result of Nri curse. In fact, Edochie who is of the Nri stock, told us that Nri definitely cleansed villages and groups of abomination in the

⁸⁹ See Bayo Onanuga and Babafemi Ojudu, "Apartheid: A Nigerian Version: Laws of Nigeria Can't be pleaded against the System," *African Concord*, Lagos, June 30, 1987, pp. 15-16.

past, and in the course of it, certain groups may have been tabooed, but stated that he was “not aware of any village or group today” that suffered such fate.⁹⁰

However, we must note that the Nri people have no status differentiation based on class - freeborn and slaves or ritual slaves. In fact, in the days of slavery, “slaves were neither bought nor sold in Nri markets or the markets of the Nri colonies.”⁹¹ The people rejected human sacrifice and the *osu* system, and they prohibited slave markets within their territory. Moreover, all through the era of slavery and colonial invasion, “it was on record that for once in Nri history an Nri king took up arms to fight a war...” which was to be against “the Abam mercenaries who were hunting for slaves for the Aro group.” A historian, Uzukwu, “called the action of the king ‘a mushroom attempt’;” for after all, “it is an abomination to kill any human being even in war.”⁹² This was part of the covenant, earlier stated, as ritualized by the Nri. Throughout Nri, slaves were welcomed and incorporated into the society as freemen and women without limitations to their rights and this included large numbers of slaves and wrong doers. This does not however mean that no Nri person or member colony participated in slave trade. What was abhorred was the practice within their territories. Onwuejeogwu suggests this may have been a ritual and diplomatic way of fighting the Aro who encroached on Nri sphere of influence.⁹³ His argument may be farfetched, but the sacredness of Nri area obviously caused the total rejection of ‘clean’ or ‘unclean’ persons in the land; they were all free.

⁹⁰ Chief Pete Edochie is a prominent Nigerian film actor who played the lead role of Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* movie in 1987. Interview, Enugu, August 21, 2007.

⁹¹ E. Elochukwu Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language- Introduction to Christian Worship; An African Orientation*, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997, p. 102.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 102-103.

⁹³ Onwuejeogwu, *An Igbo Civilization*, p. 26.

1.2 Juju, Slavery and Caste Practices: The Case of Aro

Igbo oral and literary history is full of references to Aro ritual manipulations. The Aros formed a significant group in Igboland, establishing over time a combined religious, judicial, and economic supremacy over a huge chunk of the Igbo area and surroundings. In the pre-colonial period, between 1680 and 1710 when the new pattern of trade emerged,⁹⁴ Aros were prominent slave dealers and slave owners. Actually, they had acquired more slaves than any of their neighbours who too were basically slave dealers and owners. They needed as many slaves as they could get as they travelled long distances with goods to sell, so these slaves were expected to carry their merchandise. The rights of these slaves were restricted in forms that they could not perform some functions allowed a freeborn. For instance, they were banned from holding political office or participating in the business of *Ibinukpabi* – Aro's famous Long Juju. They were to be called *ohu*, a name and stigma their descendants were to live with for life, though with exception in areas where freedom was regained.

With the alliance of their warlike neighbouring clans - Abam, Ohafia and Edda, and at times, Ada and Abiriba, Aro enjoyed economic and oracular influence. Their mercenaries would attack and sack villages for the Aro, keeping the heads of the dead for ritual and those captured alive, sold or turned over to the Aro as slaves. The *Ibinukpabi* was the primary source of Aro influence. Even in areas where the Long Juju was not worshipped, it was seen as a supernatural agency that helped resolve land disputes, the problem of barrenness, and then, a means of communicating with a prominent dead. This thought of their juju became a means of exploiting

⁹⁴ Perhaps, Aro agents dominated much of the trade in Igboland because they were able to move freely along certain trade routes without fear of being attacked. See A. O. Nwauwa's article, "The Dating of the Aro Chieftdom: A Synthesis of Correlated Genealogies," *History in Africa*, Vol. 17, 1990, pp. 227-245; and particularly, "Integrating Arochukwu into the Regional Chronological Structure," *History in Africa*, Vol. 18, 1991, pp. 297-310, (see especially, p. 307).

the ignorance of their neighbours.⁹⁵ Aro neighbours had no idea that the *Ibinukpabi* affair was a mere hoax; a commercial escapade – where the oracle declared a verdict and the guilty vanished. Aro cleverly deceived the complainants with a red stain on the water which was thought to be blood. It is said “that the stain was a fraud, and that in fact the victims were reserved for sale as slaves.”⁹⁶ Only those within the exploitive clan were aware of these antics.⁹⁷ Their wealth grew beyond imagination and the ascendancy of their oligarchy was based on the slave trade they honed; and with their expertise and position as middlemen in the slave trade, they resented its stoppage at all cost. And when palm-oil had largely taken the place of slaves, they opposed any attempt to ruin their business by opening up trade within the interior by way of the Abam and their allies. For some four centuries they exchanged slaves in large numbers, obtained by deceit through the Long Juju, inter-tribal wars, raiding and kidnap, or by sale of criminals from visiting complainants, for European goods – firearms and spirits especially – and for a long time, remained resilient in their quest to build a commercial empire.

The collapse of the oligarchy was expected after the abolition of the slave trade to the New World by the British in March, 1807. This threatened the socio-economic and political institutions associated with the Aro Long Juju and other Igbo oracles. It cut off foreign demand for slaves, and most of the slaves kept by the Aros were largely for export. But their machinery for procuring more slaves was still in place and they acquired continuously as much as they could, causing a glut in the slave market. This happened because the trade in palm oil was still heavily in place; more slaves were needed to harvest, process, paddle canoes and transport the palm produce. The market was therefore able to absorb more slaves irrespective of the

⁹⁵ Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, p. 240.

⁹⁶ Margery Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1937, p. 29.

⁹⁷ No wonder an Aro proverb says ‘an Aro does not tell a fellow Aro that *Ibinukpabi* asked of him.’

abolitionist movement. Even so, the venture was not entirely unshaken from the new episode. The abolition caused a fall in the local price of slaves. Before now when export was encouraged, only affluent local families could afford slaves, who were slaughtered to accompany their prominent dead in the journey to the other world. From the 1850s, Afigbo reports, even the averagely rich or the not-so-poor were able “to purchase slaves for their funeral rites or for those of their relations.” The result, however, was “most certainly an increase in the incidence of human sacrifice for funeral and general propitiation purposes.”⁹⁸ This was responsible for the survival of Aro slave trading even while all export channels seemed to have been dismantled.

Britain’s forceful entry into the region was resented at all cost by the Aro for fear that the British could break their monopoly of trade. But after 1857 when the Church Missionary Society (CMS) touched Onitsha, its first location,⁹⁹ the British authorities showed a determination to quench the practice.¹⁰⁰ They were however, successful in stamping out human sacrifices on funeral and

⁹⁸ Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, p. 242.

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Isichei, “Seven Varieties of Ambiguity: Some Patterns of Igbo Response to Christian Missions,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 3, Fasc. 2. 1970, p. 211, (pp. 209-227).

¹⁰⁰ Their mission in short was to Christianize and generally westernize the surrounding areas because long after their entrance into the region, the practice was still prominent across Igboland and continued in broad daylight. (See Rev. Francis Langley’s letter, University of Birmingham, C A3/025/1). In fact, according to Simon Ottenberg, “Slaves were sold openly in the Ibo markets until European influence brought the practice to an end, beginning about 1870 in the Onitsha area and extending to all of Ibo country by about 1920.” (See his article, “Ibo Oracles and Intergroup Relations,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Autumn, 1958, p. 305 (pp. 295-317)). Rev. J. C. Taylor’s account of an incident at Onitsha in May 1865 gives us a clear picture of what it was like in the mid 1800s: “I have seen canoes from the upper part of the River brought down to Onitsha with slaves of both sexes ranging from the age of one, twenty, or thirty years. The boys are purchased with salt, etc. and are trained by the Aro people as puller boys. Since my return to my station, often times my heart aches to see canoe load of human beings down in the landing place. During the years 1862 to 1864 not fewer than 100 of these wretched creatures landed here and are sold and bought for the purpose as above mentioned [manual labour and funeral sacrifice]. The wealthy purchase them and keep either for their own funeral rites or for any of their deceased relations. Others are purchased and tortured again from hand to hand until they unfortunately meet with their fate. One sad morning, a member of my church came up to me with tears in her eyes begging me that a chief is trying to purchase two little girls from a canoe which just landed here to offer as sacrifice to his deceased son. She earnestly begged me to rescue them from such atrocious deed, that it was no use telling them to desist from such diabolical practice, but break at once into the thing and rescue the children... I sent the woman to go and fetch the girls to me, she had scarcely reached... when a chief

ritual occasions to an extent, right through the region by the abolition of internal slavery. And, as one would expect, it caused a decline in the demand for slaves. However, efforts to clip Aro excesses did not stop at this point. Before, if after consulting the oracle and a person was indicated to be a witch, a murderer or a thief, such person would generally be either sacrificed or sold into slavery. The oracle was the final court. The British government introduced a new system of administration in the area late in 1902, establishing Native Courts and administrative districts, managed by District Commissioners.¹⁰¹ These establishments seem to have been motivated by a deliberate desire to curtail Aro influence. The Native Courts, like their counterparts in neighbouring areas, were to provide an avenue for “the regular and equitable administration of the law” so as to maintain law and order and fight the ‘baneful’ influence of *Ibinukpabi* and its agents.¹⁰² This turned out to be effective in some measure because it provided an alternative means for securing redress against disputes and other matters that were often taken to the Aro and their Long Juju for settlement. And it was of course cheaper to seek redress in the Native Courts than to run to the altar of *Ibinukpabi*; a few shillings were enough to do this whereas it took several months to consult an oracle.¹⁰³ The Native Courts were scattered across the districts so it was easy to reach one in a short time, at most a day. Unlike the Long Juju, the Native Courts also allowed adversaries to argue their cases face-to-face instead of the usual juju

had purchased one of them and she met the other just at the fingers of another counting her cost. She without haggling paid off her price and brought her to me. Oh what a sight to behold, she was an object of real pity, shivering with cold, in perfect nudity and emaciated through hunger. She is about seven years of age. I of course thanked her and returned her money which was 62,400 cowries equal to £3.18.0 at 15 a thousand. She is now amongst the living, and placed in school under the fostering care of the “Coral Fund” a valuable auxiliary to missionary exertion in foreign lands. And was baptized by the name of “Amelia Westcott.” The other was sacrificed at the grave of the deceased son, ushered into the presence of her Creator by the hand of violence.” See Rev. John Christopher Taylor II, “A ‘Report on the Political and Spiritual State of Onitsha’ 1864,” University of Birmingham, C A3/0 37/57.

¹⁰¹ See “Anthropologists Papers on Aro Origin, Discussion and the Basis of the widespread Aro Influence,” NAE ARODIV 20/1/15., p. 13.

¹⁰² Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, pp. 246-7.

¹⁰³ Onwuka Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria 1650-1980*, Ibadan: University Press, 1990, p. 152.

method where happenings were shrouded in mysteries and hidden spins. Well, the Native Courts were not entirely an alternative. They could not perform certain spiritual functions *Ibinukpabi* achieved. For instance, the courts did not have “the ability to look far into the past, the present and the future as well as predict events.”¹⁰⁴ Of course, *Ibinukpabi* did not only settle disputes, but also problems such as barrenness, poor crops, continued illness, epidemics, unwanted deaths and many others which were certainly not within the jurisdiction of the Native Courts.¹⁰⁵

As the British gained more control of areas in the territory the Aros devised new ploys and tactics to deal with the new situation,¹⁰⁶ causing more problems in the region. After the British

¹⁰⁴ Ichie P. A. Ezikeojiaku, “Eradication of Osu Caste Practice in Igbo Culture Area,” A Lead Paper at the Conference on Osu Caste Practice in Igbo Race Organised by the Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), Nigeria, on August 6th, 1998 at Rapour Hotel, Amakohi, Owerri, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ For instance, during the British investigations of the revival of the Long Juju, Ugoji, a native of Aro Chukwu who was contracted by the chiefs of Akpanwudele to lead some people to the Long Juju confessed that he was asked by the people to ask *Ibinukpabi* what their people must do to (a) stop people from dying in their town; (b) stop their women from aborting; (c) improve the quality of their crops and (d) make their cattle breed better. We will notice that the juju performed more spiritual functions that were not at all within the Native Court’s jurisdiction. See “Re: Revival of Long-Juju (1921-1922)” NAE, CALPROF 4/10/31.

¹⁰⁶ See T. N. Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: The Southern Phase, 1898-1914*, London: Longman, 1972, p. 10. In fact, in 1899, between February and March, a group of 136 refugees escaped the detention of the Long Juju to the Government for protection. They were survivors from a large number of slaves of about 800 who had gone from Aboh and Aseh to consult *Ibinukpabi* in 1894 or 1895. The remaining 664 may have been sold into slavery or used for human sacrifice. It is totally unlikely however, that these people went to consult *Ibinukpabi* in such large groups. They may have done this in fewer numbers over a period of time. Thus, one may argue that they were condemned to be sold into slavery by the Long Juju but could not be disposed because of the decline in the exchange and sale of slaves. This episode caused a severe damage to the reputation of the Long Juju because the escapees were privileged to have seen through the hoax of the *Ibinukpabi* oracle and the British government, who had become acquainted with the patterns of the Aro, encouraged smear campaigns against the juju. (See Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, p. 248). However, it would appear from the foregoing that the Aro, desperately seeking to preserve their commercial hegemony, devised a ploy to discourage other communities from dealing directly with the British when trading. This was to enable them continuously hold monopoly as middlemen in the trade of oil-palm. (See F. K. Ekechi, “Aspects of Palm Oil Trade at Oguta (Easter Nigeria), 1900-1950,” *African Economic History*, No. 10, 1981, p. 36). By this time, however, most Igbo women, who naturally “dominated the local markets, while men dominated the long-distance trade...,” especially those from Oguta, Onitsha, and Azumini, “had beg[u]n to act as “middlewomen,” dealing in the new exports...” and performing “tasks of bulking and breaking bulk in the produce trade.” (See Gloria Ifeoma Chuku, “From Petty Traders to International Merchants: A Historical Account of Three Igbo Women of Nigeria in Trade

tried several means to reduce Aro notorious influence, the Protectorate resolved to deal with Aro and their Long Juju militarily. The Aro Expedition of 1901-2¹⁰⁷ was the biggest blow to the economic hegemony and unchallenged military prestige the Aro enjoyed generations after generations over the Igbo, the Ibibio and other neighbouring clans.¹⁰⁸ They paraded themselves as agents of the Supreme, his manifestation on earth; “they had also claimed that it was this High God, *Ibinukpabi*, whose special protection made it possible for them to deal directly with the white man whom they portrayed to their neighbours as an evil being whom these neighbours should avoid direct dealings with at all cost.”¹⁰⁹ The expedition which took place in the dry season was “the biggest single effort made by the government to bring much of the

and Commerce, 1886 to 1970,” *African Economic History*, No. 27, 1999, p. 1-3). According to Afigbo, Aro relied on the terror inspired by their oracle in 1899 “to disrupt the trade of the Niger Company in palm oil and kernel.” (The Royal Niger Company was a mercantile company chartered by the British government in the colonial era). And, “as a result of their counter strokes the palm oil available for purchase by the Company’s agents fell from 250 to 110 puncheons a month at Atani.” The effect on the kernel trade Afigbo goes further to say “was even more drastic.” The Aro “stopped the women from cracking the nuts by the simple process of ‘placing’ on them ‘a juju’ which they said would strike with sterility any woman who cracked kernel for sale to the Company.” See Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, p. 250.

¹⁰⁷ The expedition achieved its purpose. On 24 December 1901 Aro Chukwu was captured with little resistance, “the Aro power was smashed, ‘Chukwu’ was totally destroyed” (NAE, ARODIV 20/1/15, p. 13.), and on 3 January 1902, the Officer Commanding the expedition which engaged 1,745 officers and men, Lt. Colonel A. F. Montanaro, wrote triumphantly “I have blown up the Long Juju and utterly destroyed all traces.” See Report No. 12, by the Officer Commanding the Aro Field Force, attached to Despatch No. 3 of 3.1.02 from Moor to C.O. in C.S.O 1/13 of 1902, as quoted by Afigbo, see *Ropes of Sand*, p. 257.

¹⁰⁸ The Aros used their warlike allies – the Abam, Ohafia and Edda to protect villages who sought their protection. When such services were required, they collected fees from the weaker clan. Also, when they had scores to settle with rival clans they never resisted using their allied force against such people. See N. Uka, “A Note on the “Abam” Warriors of Igboland,” *Ikenga: Journal of African studies*, Nsukka: University of Nigeria, Vol. 7, No. 1 & 2, 1985, pp. 76-81 and, Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, p. 251.

¹⁰⁹ Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, p. 252. The Aro even mounted a counter propaganda after the military attack on their Long Juju by the British. On this propaganda, Afigbo has written that the Aro claimed to have “had prior knowledge of the plans of the British against it and had left the cave just before the troops converged on Aro Chukwu.” See Afigbo’s book on the history of the campaigns and wars waged by the British from about 1885 onward, to abolish internal slave trading in Igbo hinterland – *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006, pp. 64-65, 75-82.

I[g]bo hinterland under its control..."¹¹⁰ and it was aimed at the abolition of slave dealing which was to affect the number of humans offered to deities as sacrifice.¹¹¹ The Protectorate Government subdued the whole area and carved administrative divisions and districts even in the interior. Again, Native Courts were established at strategic points. And wherever they established these units, they held meetings with the natives, warning them against dealing with the Aro or falling prey to their tricks.¹¹² They specifically warned against the revival of the Long Juju which they believed had been destroyed to the ground.¹¹³

However, after the expedition many freed slaves most of whom were grateful to the British for their liberation turned to Christianity. This local success by the protectorate contributed to the reduction of slave dealing in the area even though not all converts were sincere in their new proclamation.¹¹⁴ Besides, not long after the expedition, the Aro revived slave dealing on a large

¹¹⁰ This expedition certainly embarrassed Aro. It proved their boast of military might wrong, after all, they were unable to protect themselves, what more, neighbours and traditional friends. But Aro had never really been militarily strong; their power was exclusively built on their spiritual resources and the military resources of their allies. Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State*, p. 39.

¹¹¹ The destruction of the Long Juju at Ibun, and "the opening up of the Aro territory to 'civilisation'" (Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State*, p. 36), was prominent amongst the reasons for the expedition which happened after several delays and postponements. In short, the British Protectorate intended to force the people to engage only in legitimate trade. See in detail, A. E. Afigbo, "The Calabar Mission and the Aro Expedition of 1901-1902," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 5, Fasc. 2, 1973, pp. 94-106.

¹¹² Each time the Protectorate had meetings with surrounding village groups, they ensured that the people treated the Aro as guests or travellers in their midst and not as 'members of a conquering race'. Formerly, part of the goodwill the Aro enjoyed because of the imposing fear of their *Ibinukpabi* was that they were treated with respect and as agents of the Supreme each time they travelled through any village. Even those who had settled permanently in other villages were reminded of their status as temporary tenants not as full indigenes. All these the British did to check their dominance and make them realise the change of circumstance.

¹¹³ These actions affected the Aro business; "many more of the primary producers came to deal directly with the white men and the coastal traders only to discover that not only were the white men not evil spirits as they had been made to appear in Aro propaganda, but that it paid better to deal directly with them and the coastal middlemen face to face." Apparently, "This fact made the advent of the British and the overthrow of the Aro monopoly welcome in many places." Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, pp. 253-4.

¹¹⁴ For instance, by 1904 many of these new Christians had contributed materials and money to build a Church. The head chief of all the Aros, Chief Kanu Okoro, who was formally in charge of the Long Juju professed Christianity and even called on the missionaries to come and establish a Church in Aro. He promised to build a house for them if and when they did. What was now to be determined was the

and organized scale. The expedition came to a close about the first quarter of 1902 but by June the British officers attached to the Aro area started complaining of the revival of slaving activities.¹¹⁵ It was only through the use of paid local spies that the Protectorate was able to discover that the Aro slave cartel was not destroyed in entirety.¹¹⁶ In fact, in 1912, after the Long Juju was “smashed again by the colonial administration,”¹¹⁷ the oracle was re-established, “as

sincerity of his conversion; because, “it was only the previous year (1906) that he surfaced after going into hiding in 1901 during the Aro Expedition, and was reinstated on the condition he was prepared to conform to the requirements of the new situation.” In point of fact, “he probably ‘embraced’ Christianity as a tactical move in the game rather than out of conviction.” (Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, p. 256). It was only after a few years that he was convicted for reviving the Long Juju. An atmosphere that was only charged with suspicion and distrust was worsened by British propaganda. One factor that contributed to the failure of the revival of *Ibinukpabi* was trust amongst the Aros. There was a split amongst them, the traditionalists and converts to the new ways, and it was difficult to tell who was sincerely on one side. Indeed, it was an Aro who gave away the secret to the British that the Long Juju was being revived under the direction of Chief Kanu Okoro.

¹¹⁵ The Protectorate in fact considered mounting another expedition against this centre of slaving interest. On April 11 1902, after a meeting that was held at Bende with Uzuakoli representatives in attendance where Leslie Probyn warned the people against the continuation of human trafficking, slave dealing commenced there and Uzuakoli and Aro traders were implicated in it. They moved slaves either through Enna, Edda, Biakpan and the Cross River to Calabar or through Ibeku, Olokoro and Ikwerre to New Calabar (Degema). Even with the government’s anti-slavery policy, there was still some demand for slaves in these areas. See Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, p. 258. Also see the book written by Students of the Methodist College, Uzuakoli, under the direction of A. J. Fox, *Uzuakoli: A Short History*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964, see especially, pp. 5-10. The second chapter of the book, pp. 11-21, gives an account on the *Agbagwu* market which was dominated by the Aros. Chapter 3 too, pp. 22-26, gives a brief and concise account of slave trading and slavery in Uzuakoli.

¹¹⁶ Slave trading continued, though underground, after 1906; of course the Aro had to modify their methods and tactics. They had hoped on the relaxed vigilance of the colonial officers who then used paid spies to expose slave dealers. *Ibinukpabi* was revived and re-established on a grand scale. As the District Commissioner in charge of the Aro area confessed “it was practically as strong and as far-reaching a juju as it was before the Government took over the country” in 1902. Then again, destroying the Long Juju had become an imperative concern after these several attempts. Many suggestions came up. First, it was thought to deal openly with those caught red-handed in the act. It was expected that this will scare others from continuing. Three boys were caught and they were sentenced to death for murder. Chief Kanu Okoro was sentenced to three years. And the four sites of the oracle were razed to the ground. After continuous warning against the re-establishment of *Ibinukpabi* in any “shape and form,” on January 15 1911, people came from the Onitsha District to consult the Long Juju at Ibun, after which, Mr. Chamley, the District Commissioner reported: “the juju had been discovered in active working order.” About seven men, three who came to consult the juju, and four who worked for the juju, were caught and arrested red-handed at the scene after Chamley’s men watched them from a distance performing the act. They were brought before Chamley, who after eleven days wrote to the Provincial Secretary “to stop the juju once and for all.” See “Proposal by Mr. Chamley for the Suppression of Aro Long Juju (1911),” NAE, CSE 1/86/91

¹¹⁷ Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, p. 264.

strong as it had ever been.”¹¹⁸ By the following year, 1913, information reached the Government that the Long Juju had been revived again, this time not in Aro district, but in the Okigwi Division.¹¹⁹ Only two years after this, “Okoroafo Akakpo, one of the men who let on the secret of the oracle to the administration in 1912, reported another move to re-establish the oracle in Aro Chukwu.”¹²⁰ Again, by late 1922, it was reported that the Aros were conducting people to the Long Juju very secretly. It was revived in Ogoja Province,¹²¹ Bende and Afikpo¹²² between 1920 and 1922.

However, the reasons for the longevity of Aro ritual and political dominance can be understood generally in many aspects. Firstly, most of the slaves they kept were not always acquired in harsh circumstances like kidnap. They were often people sold off by their own family or clan as punishment for wrongdoing. Igbos in the past banished evildoers; this helped purge their villages of crime and the wrath of their local deities. But when the colonial administration introduced Native Courts, the worst the court did was to sentence a person to several years in prison where they only grew ‘fit and fat’, and after these years, the individual was released, more hardened with better skills and new tricks. This of course did not help the communities get rid of criminals; it was too lenient. So most resorted to either selling the criminal or consulting *Ibinukpabi*. Also, after the British mounted checks to prevent the buying of slaves the Aro got children by offering them sweet things and irresistible goodies. They grabbed these children in daylight and moved through checks, pretending they were the parent. As a matter of fact, all of the slaves that were liberated after the 1912 expedition were children between the

¹¹⁸ NAE, ARODIV 20/1/15, p. 14.

¹¹⁹ “Long Juju of Arochukwu – Revival of the Worship and Invocation by Aros Resident in the Okigwe District,” NAE, ABADIST 7/1/1.

¹²⁰ Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, p. 264.

¹²¹ “Revival of Aro Long Juju (1921-1922),” NAE, CALPROF 4/10/31.

¹²² “Long Juju of Aro and Okonko Society (1920),” NAE, ABADIST 13/4/54.

ages of three and nine years.¹²³ In many ways too, there were loopholes in the checks of the colonial administration. Most of the roads they constructed did not pass through the interior of the Aro area. The Aro used this to their advantage by transporting their merchandise via their bush paths and this saw them through for a long time. But after six decades or so, in the 1960s,¹²⁴ human trafficking became a thing of the past and Aro had retreated to the sale of palm produce.

The decline of slave dealing did not, of course, mean the cessation of the practice in Igboland, for a few oracles - mostly offshoots of *Ibinukpabi* and others, as powerful and as dreaded as the Long Juju - continued operations even up to the late 1980s. It was not until 1988, for instance, that *Efuru*, another prominent juju in Enugu that embraced human sacrifice, was destroyed to the ground.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, *Ibinukpabi* and others, if we must add, had profound influence on Igbo caste practices. This influence came in two forms. First, it encouraged the introduction of domestic slavery through human trafficking, and as we have shown from the narration above, they caused the increase of slave ownership by localizing and popularizing the practice around Igboland and its neighbourhood. This consequently heightened the number of slaves sacrificed to deities and those used for funeral rituals. Other oracles within Igboland such as the *Agbala* of Awka also had tremendous influence on slavery and human sacrifice. In fact, *Agbala* was marked for destruction by the British in 1904, but by 1921 the activities of its agents resurrected in full bloom. Rumours of its revival were heard even up till the 1940s, even though it was difficult to trace. Evidence was lacking.¹²⁶ The point however, which should be very strongly

¹²³ Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, p. 267.

¹²⁴ See Felix K. Ekechi, *Tradition and Transformation in Eastern Nigeria: A Sociopolitical History of Owerri and Its Hinterland, 1902-1947*, Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1989, p. 10.

¹²⁵ We discuss *Efuru* in detail in Chapter III, 3.1.

¹²⁶ "Restoration of Agbara Ude Juju to the People of Obunka-Awka Division - Petition Re," NAE, ONDIST 12/1/137; and Annual Report - Nwa-Chukwu (Juju), NAE, ONDIST 19/6/1.

made is the fact that the influence of these oracles, especially the *Ibinukpabi*, was partly, if not totally responsible for the rise in the use of domestic slaves (*ohu*), particularly between 1740 and 1820, and “far into the twentieth century”;¹²⁷ consequently, as we will also observe in more detail below, this also increased the use of slaves for sacrifices to deities.

1.3 Oracular Origin

The beginning of the sacrifice of human beings¹²⁸ to deities may have been a watershed in the socio-religious life of the Igbos, considering especially the fact that life was held in uttermost regard in many quarters. To a vast majority of Igbos, to shed blood, particularly that of a guiltless person or kinsman, is an abomination.¹²⁹ In short, to kill was a sin against *Ala*, and this was a crime enough to kill the culprit who was expected to run into exile immediately such an act was committed – as an Igbo proverb indicates, when a fowl pollutes the air, it runs away from the soil on which it is standing. It is because of the importance of life that those offered to deities as sacrifices were often criminals and strangers.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Ezikeojiaku, “Eradication of Osu Caste Practice in Igbo Culture Area,” p. 4.

¹²⁸ Three forms of human sacrifice were popular in Igboland before Christianity. The first was the sacrifice of atonement which was normally called-for when extreme abomination to the land had led to a breach of harmony and peaceful coexistence between the spirit world and the community. Nevertheless, this was of rare occurrence. The second situation arose when the funeral of a great man or *ozo* titled man was planned; they then, were normally buried with their slaves partly to ensure a smooth passage to the land of the spirits where they joined the restful bliss of the ancestors. At that time the belief was that such a slave would serve the master in the life after death, thus, they were buried with as many slaves as was required for various functions which traditionally varied from cooking, bathing and running errands. The third occasion was the use of human sacrifice by priests and manipulators of secret cults, oracles and shrines to appease the deities, for instance, the *Ibinukpabi* of Arochukwu as we have seen, the *Igwekaala* of Umunoha in Owerri and *Agbala* at Awka and many, many others. See Francis A. Arinze’s *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970, p. 85-91. Also see Edmund Ilogu’s *Christianity and Ibo Culture*, Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1974, pp. 65-66.

¹²⁹ This is because life is the greatest gift to mankind. The translation of a popular Igbo name - Ndubuisi would mean ‘life goes first’. Igbos treasured life and would only have taken one when it was in fact necessary.

¹³⁰ It is not clear when human sacrifice begun, but traditions recorded by Isichei suggests that it “almost certainly existed in Igboland before the era of slave trade - as the bodies buried with the Eze Nri in the Igbo-Ukwu excavations bear witness.” Gailey agrees with this claim. See Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People*

Many writers have suggested general statements on the origin of the *osu* practice, which in all narrations, as far as one can judge, seem to have only been a consequence of servitude to deities. The works of early ethnographers like Leith-Ross, Basden and later, Okeke, eloquently spelt out some principal sources of origin. In separate writings, the trio suggests the *osu* system may have started at the point where the services of an Aro man was needed to perform a special sacrifice. As they all recount, the practice started in the Okigwe region in the present Imo State when a certain chief was killed during a tribal war. The Long Juju was consulted. The oracle asked that they performed a special sacrifice at the grave of the dead chief. This sacrifice was to be performed by an Aro. It was a condition for the sacrifice to be accepted. Then, as the narration goes, there was some delay in securing the services of an Aro, 'Chukwu' thus sanctioned a non Aro, who must be consecrated with authority to serve as a proxy for an Aro priest. This individual was to be a stranger to the town. And he must be worthy of reference and lead a chaste, humble life. He was now to mediate between the people and the deity.¹³¹ Henceforth, he became *osu*.

and the Europeans: *The Genesis of a Relationship- to 1906*, London: Faber and Faber, 1973, p. 57. Also see Harry A. Gailey, *The Road to Aba: A Study of British Administrative Policy in Eastern Nigeria*, London: University of London, 1971, p. 25.

¹³¹ Another writer, Dureke, who made bold attempts to date the origin, gives a similar narration. He states assertively that the system may have been introduced sometime in the 14th century. According to his account, a chief priest was informed by a powerful deity that the land was defiled and needed purification to avert calamity. The deity, *Kamalu Ozuzu*, instructed that a slave be sacrificed on its altar. The people got a slave and this slave was to go through certain rites of consecration. Abiding by *Kamalu's* instruction, the slave was taken to the shrine and on Afo-Ukwu day, the people gathered at the shrine to witness the rites. While six able-bodied men held the slave, the chief priest chopped off a part of the slave's ear, a mark he was to have for identification. His blood was sprinkled at the altar and his face painted with charcoal. Around his body was palm fronds used to hide his nakedness. He was to be dragged on the ground through the villages in the community and back to the shrine, with chants of war songs and pleas to Ezeala, the king of the deities, to cleanse the land and accept their sacrifice. This slave was to be called *osu*. Hereafter, he was to build within the precincts of the shrine, marry a wife and live in the shrine. See C. O. Dureke, "Persistence of Osu Caste System in Igboland," *Sunday Times*, Lagos. January 13, 1985, p. 5. Also see S. Leith-Ross, "Notes on the Osu System Among the Ibo of Owerri Province, Nigeria," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April, 1937, p. 210; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, p. 250; and Okeke, *The Osu Concept in Igbo Land*, pp. 17-18.

Basden gives another similar account of *osu* origin. According to him, the practice may have sprung up from Uratta near Owerri, its largest zone of persistence. Chieze entered into a conflict with Ndumoha, the founder of Umunaho, a part of Uratta. Chieze lost a relative during this conflict and sought to revenge the loss through several unsuccessful attempts. He resorted to seeking redress from *Ibinukpabi* and was directed to perform certain sacrifices through *Okitankwo*, the deity of the spring. Chieze, it is said, consecrated his son, Iwuala, and called him *osu*. He was to stand-in for an Aro priest. After doing this, Chieze went to battle again and succeeded in killing two men of the rival village. By this virtue, Iwuala usurped the authority to mediate whenever the Umunaho folk were in need of priestly assistance. The position gained him prominence and wealth, and to this day, it is only descendants of Iwuala that holds the *ofo* of Owala, one of the ancestors of Uratta.¹³²

Uchendu agrees with Basden that the *osu* system must have originated around the Owerri area and then moved to Okigwe region.¹³³ The narration of Leith-Ross, Basden and Okeke however make one suspect the efficacy of the Long Juju, in any case, if the oracle was able to see beyond reality, it should have detected the operations of sacrifices which were performed by a non-Aro, in defiance of its request. As we know already, the role of a deity's priest is a special one and "not everybody can offer sacrifice." "The offerer of sacrifice," Arinze reckons, "needs to be a proper person." Any intruder or charlatan he adds "is heading for quick punishment."¹³⁴ So, the actions of a substitute Aro were enough to cause anger and rage on the deity's side. Thus, the spiritual might of the oracle is suspicious and doubtful, if not the narration. We can however argue that the itinerant nature of the Aro caused the general swelling of rituals that

¹³² Basden, *Niger Ibos*, p. 250-1.

¹³³ See Victor C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, p. 89.

¹³⁴ Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, p. 112.

involved human sacrifice around their neighbours because an Aro agent was never out of reach and at every village their agents visited, they often went away with captives who later became *ohu* or *osu*.

According to local opinion as well as literal and oral evidence which abound in every Igbo area or library, Aro agents were found or at least were represented all over Igboland and beyond (see map 2.1 above), going as far as the Ibibio speaking areas,¹³⁵ and in Owerri where Basden and company base their findings. Ottenberg, who suggests the people “were found at Bende, Uburu, Aba; in the Owerri, Okigwi, Ohafia, Ada, and Afikpo regions, and elsewhere,” implies that Aro settlements may have scattered along all Igbo speaking areas somewhere between 1650 and 1850.¹³⁶ Moreover, the power of the Long Juju was great, “and the ability of the Aro to raise armies of mercenaries to fight their battles for them was well known, hence it was relatively easy for them to establish settlements wherever they desired.”¹³⁷ A careful perusal of the literature concerning Aro escapades leaves us in no doubt that they were literally at every nook and cranny of what was then southern Nigeria. “There was hardly any part of Igboland where the Aro could not penetrate.”¹³⁸ Evidence from virtually every historian, ethnographer, anthropologist, or Christian missionary who worked in Igboland also indicates that the Aro were nearly everywhere, at least few miles apart.¹³⁹ Northrup for instance, referred to the Aros

¹³⁵ See David Pratten, *The Man-Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, pp. 50, 76, 90-1.

¹³⁶ Ottenberg, “Ibo Oracles and Intergroup Relations,” p. 299, 301.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 299-301.

¹³⁸ Ekechi, *Tradition and Transformation in Eastern Nigeria*, p. 9.

¹³⁹ Orji amongst others, acknowledged Aro spread through diverse areas. (John N. Orji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin: A Study of Pre-Colonial Population Movements in Africa*, New York: Peter Lang, 1994, p. 153). Even H. R. Palmer, a Colonial Officer who was to become Lieutenant Governor of Northern Nigeria in 1925, after a tour of the Southern Provinces, had doubts of the origin of the Aros which he regularly professed had “superior intelligence,” for dominating “the entire southeastern Nigeria for almost two centuries.” See A. O. Nwauwa, “On Aro Colonial Primary Source Material: A Critique of the Historiography,” *History in Africa*, Vol. 19, 1992, p. 378 (pp. 377-385).

as “remarkable,” while acknowledging the emergence of series of Aro settlements, markets and fairs “throughout the central part of the Igbo territory.”¹⁴⁰ Because of *Ibinukpabi*, which developed into the supreme arbitrator of disputes, various communities offered land to the Aros to settle in their territories. And in return, the Aro was to offer them protection from inter-tribal attacks which were rampant in those days, and also escort them to the Long Juju whenever they wanted to consult the oracle.

The fact of their spread is discernible today. In eastern Nigeria alone, for instance, there are still village groups and settlements whose inhabitants are descendants of Aro and still have the name ‘Aro’ as prefix.¹⁴¹ Ekechi’s study reveals that Aro and the agents of *Ibinukpabi* frequented the Owerri market. This market was a major “staging centre for the Aro slave trade.”¹⁴² In fact, he talks about Oratta¹⁴³ – the same village where the first *osu* was suspected to have been consecrated –, and according to his findings, Oratta was a close ally of the Aro. They had between themselves, a “reciprocity treaty,”¹⁴⁴ agreeing that the Oratta were free from Aro slavery and kidnap. So if they were this close, and if Oratta was a popular route for the Aro to the Oguta area where oil palm was produced in large scale, how then was it possible to miss an Aro? Even though it appears safe to tolerate the conclusion that the *osu* practice started as a consequence of oracular worship, it is difficult to accept the tale of ‘Aro substitute’ which

¹⁴⁰ David Northrup, “The Growth of Trade Among the Igbo Before 1800,” *Journal of African History*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1972, p. 234-235 (pp. 217-236).

¹⁴¹ Most of the villages include Aro Okporoenyi, Aro Isuochi, Aro Izombe and Aro Ngwa, all in Abia; Aro Ndi Ikerionwu, Aro Ajali and Aro Abagana, all in Anambra; Aro Amokwe, Aro Ezeagu and Aro Achi, all in Enugu; Aro Isiokpo, Aro Kalabari and Aro Opobo, all in Rivers; and Aro Nzerem in Ebonyi, Aro Oru and Aro Ndizuogu in Imo which happens to be the largest of their settlements and of course, it is only few miles away from Owerri. See NAE, ARODIV 20/1/15.

¹⁴² Ekechi, *Tradition and Transformation in Eastern Nigeria*, p. 8-9.

¹⁴³ Take note of the difference in spellings: while Basden and others spell “Uratta”, Ekechi uses ‘O’ instead of ‘U’. Uratta and Oratta is the same, and the name the people used in the post-colonial days was Oratta, thus, we will stick to Ekechi’s spelling.

¹⁴⁴ Ekechi, *Tradition and Transformation in Eastern Nigeria*, p. 8-9.

Basden and others must have gotten from oral sources. But then it is pardonable when we consider the problems of Igbo histories which have never been without inaccuracies and doubts.

On the other hand, Ottenberg who basically studied the Afikpo group narrates a tale of the origin of the *osu* system in the area. According to his source, a woman was found in the bush by some hunters from Afikpo. They asked her identity and where she came from, "but she could not say." The hunters now made her public property and took her to the Aro Long Juju, "where a ceremony was performed to protect her." The men took her to the important shrines at Afikpo and performed some rites for protection against harm or oppression by any man. These hunters "began to sleep with her, she bore children, and the clan developed."¹⁴⁵

Irrespective of the variations in all narrations, the *osu* then occupied a special place in the land, performing certain duties, both domestic and sometimes spiritual. Also, during the old days, there was involuntary inclusion into the system as a result of a range of difficulties. Many people sought protection by local deities to prevent the killing of twins, molestations, and especially kidnap from slave raiders amongst other reasons. The trans-Atlantic slave trade was highly responsible for the involuntary dedication of a large chunk of people into the *osu* system. The trade spurred inter-clan wars which often led to kidnap and raid of slaves and booties. The *osu* ran to deities to avoid attack from superior invading forces. Defenceless small village groups were often the worse hit and they joined the *osu* ranks en masse. This contributed to the increase in their numbers and the fact that they, in some areas, occupy large masses of lands, usually at the boundary of a larger village, at the market areas or at the precincts of a major

¹⁴⁵ Simon Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society: The Afikpo Village-Group*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971, p. 106-107.

shrine. This is the case of the Eziora people in Nnobi, whose ancestors were *osu*.¹⁴⁶ They presently live around the Idemili shrine, extending down to the boundary between Nnobi and Nnewi. The case is similar in Nnewi and in some areas around Owerri.

Unfortunately, while evidence of the origins of the *osu* institution is scanty, the evidence has not been sufficiently researched.¹⁴⁷ But, however unsatisfactory these traditions may appear, they point to earlier *osu*-oracle contacts and for over a generation, the historiography of the *osu* tradition has suggested that the institution began with the dedication of human beings to deities. Leith-Ross,¹⁴⁸ Achebe,¹⁴⁹ Ezeanya,¹⁵⁰ Ezekiel¹⁵¹, Ezikeojiaku¹⁵² and Ubah¹⁵³ among others uphold this position. However, the question of the ultimate origin of the *osu* system may never be successfully resolved especially if we continue to look beyond the beginnings of internal slavery amongst the Igbos. One thing is clear from the foregoing: by whatever means we trace the origin, the traditions differ across different village groups. But the majority of the narrations have got oracular backgrounds. Thus, in every respect, it is discussed within the scope of Igbo traditional religion.

¹⁴⁶ Most village groups in Igboland whose ancestors were *osus* like the Eziora people, do not deny today that their ancestors belonged to the caste groups. However, the narrations on why most caste groups live around a shrine or a particular area may vary from place to place. But the general view (both by the freeborn and *osu* groups) is that the caste groups live at village boundaries to protect their communities from sudden attack by strangers from another village or more often, they live around a shrine to provide services (ritual or servile) to the deity they belong to.

¹⁴⁷ We had already explained the problems associated with obtaining evidence on the *osu* practice in our methodology section.

¹⁴⁸ Leith-Ross, "Notes on the Osu System Among the Ibo of Owerri Province," p. 207.

¹⁴⁹ Chinua Achebe, *No Longer At Ease*, Oxford: Heinemann, 1960, p. 120.

¹⁵⁰ Ezeanya, "The Osu (Cult-Slave) System in Igboland," p. 37.

¹⁵¹ May E. Ezekiel, "The Untouchable Igbo Caste System," *Sunday Concord*, Lagos, June 12, 1983, p. I.

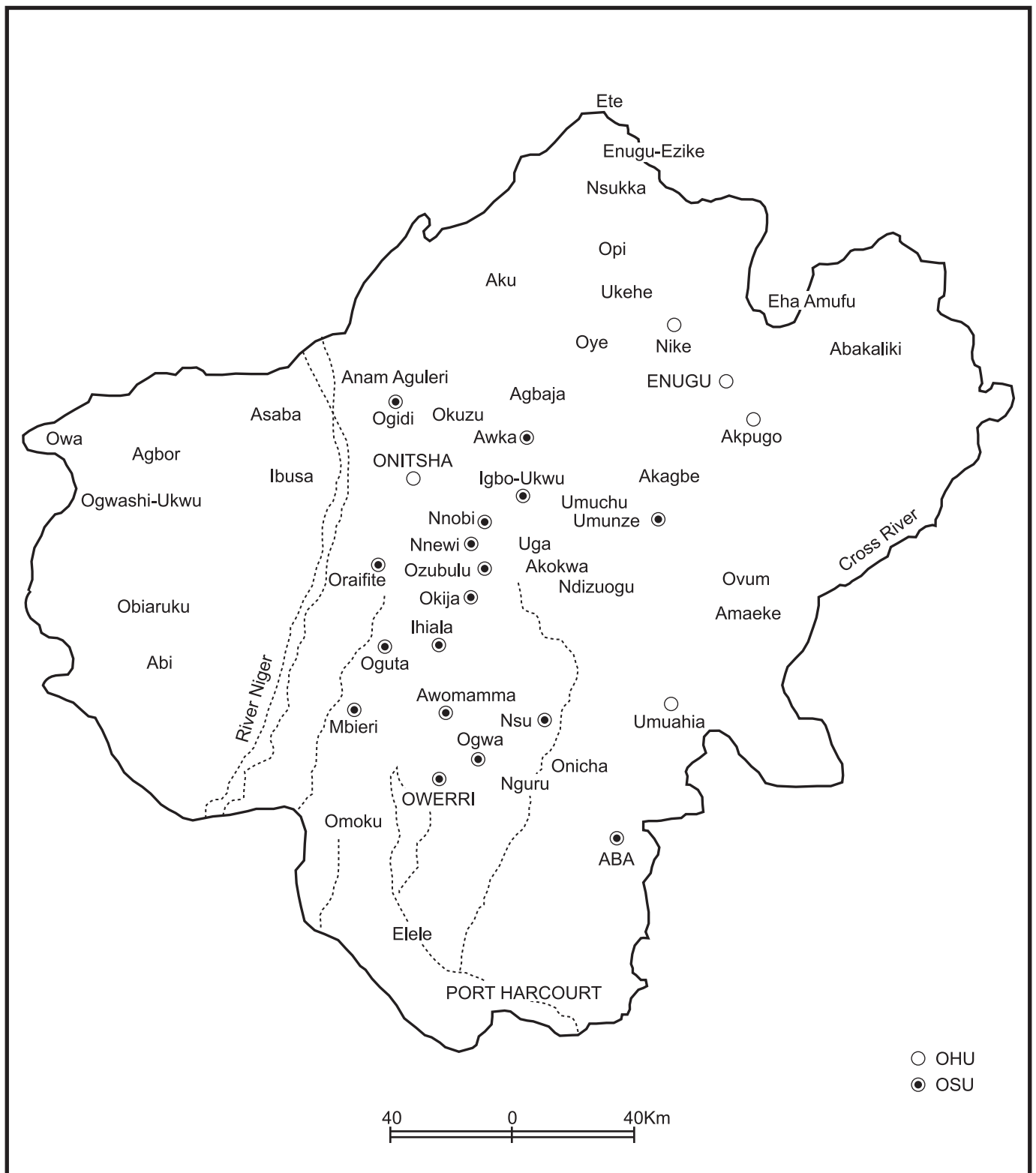
¹⁵² Ezikeojiaku, "Eradication of Osu Caste Practice in Igbo Culture Area," p. 4.

¹⁵³ C. N. Ubah, "Religious Change Among the Igbo during the Colonial Period," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 18, Fasc. 1, Feb. 1988, p. 74.

1.4 Igbo Caste Practices: Past and Present Situation

Most Igbo caste narrative as we shall see below and in the chapters that follow, present us with a number of paradoxes. First, the caste groups were revered in some areas and on certain occasions and they were dreaded in others. However, there are likely and explainable reasons for these differences, but we will explain these below. Then again, the *osu* and the *ohu* mean different things to many people. We will observe for example that while the *osu* alone is dreaded in some areas where both classes exist, the *ohu* is considered as terrible as the *osu* in the Onitsha and Nkanu areas. This is why we must carefully note the differences, because an *ohu* at Nnobi is not ashamed to point to the homestead of his former master. No stigma is attached to it there. Thirdly, the exact role the *osu* played has varied in different narrations and areas. While it is generally believed that they were objects of sacrifice, it is also assumed in some quarters that they performed priestly functions. This, we can observe from the Okigwe and Oratta narrations where they were needed to act as proxies for an Aro in performing ritual sacrifices. However, we will in this section discuss the distinct features of Igbo caste practices; this is fundamental to understanding subsequent chapters since it equips us with the background of the problem and helps us grasp the issues that arise when the subject is discussed in the media and in other public fora. See map 2.2 below for the areas where caste groups exist.

MAP 2.2: Map Highlighting Some Igbo Towns / Village Groups Where Caste Groups Co-exist with the Freeborn



SOURCE: Obinna Okwelume

NOTE: The existence of a mark in these communities do not mean that the entire population of these towns / village groups belong to the caste groups. This is only an indicative map of towns / village groups that have caste groups and the freeborn living together. In fact, the caste groups only make up a small percentage of the population in most of the village groups marked above. However, caste groups exist in more communities than those marked above. Because of limited time we could not confirm the presence of caste groups in every village group in Igboland. So we have only marked the areas we were able to confirm during fieldwork.

1.4.1 The Osu Caste System

From the missionaries' standpoint, the *osu* was a 'cult slave.' And, understandably, these outsiders described the people this way because of their consecration as human sacrifices to deities. In 1937, for instance, Meek refereed to the people as "cult slaves" who are "despised and feared."¹⁵⁴ Leith-Ross, another foreign anthropologist, called the *osu* "cult slaves"¹⁵⁵ and "slaves of juju"¹⁵⁶ in two major writings. Green likewise, a colleague of Leith-Ross, described the people as "religious slaves."¹⁵⁷ Ottenberg who concentrated his study of the African society on the Afikpo village group wrote of the *osu* as a cult slave who belonged "to a special, low-status matrilineal grouping."¹⁵⁸ Following these descriptions, latter indigenous historians like Uchendu,¹⁵⁹ Isichei,¹⁶⁰ and lately, Olisa,¹⁶¹ referred to the system as "cult slavery", "*osu* system of slavery", or like the others, "cult slaves." Even Ilogu's opinion was that the people were slaves of the deities "dedicated to perform some menial functions, which may include sacrificial functions."¹⁶² Nwokeji, who suggested isolating "slavery" and the "*osu*" as distinct institutions, may not pardon us if we join the others to call the *osu* slaves. His recent paper dwelt on the persistence of the system, which he generally blamed on the "prevailing misconceptions" and lackadaisical attitude to the institution which started as a result of the colonial and missionary

¹⁵⁴ C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule*, London: Oxford University Press, 1937, p. 203-204.

¹⁵⁵ Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965, p. 187.

¹⁵⁶ Leith-Ross, "Notes on the Osu System Among the Ibo of Owerri Province," p. 208.

¹⁵⁷ M. M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs: Chiefly with reference to the Village of Umueke Agbaja*, London: Frank Cass & Co., 1964, p. 23.

¹⁵⁸ Ottenberg's comment on "matrilineal grouping" of caste groups may be true for Afikpo village group, but this is not true of the whole of Igboland. See Simon Ottenberg, *Leadership and Authority in an African Society: The Afikpo Village-Group*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971, pp. 9-10, 26.

¹⁵⁹ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, p. 88-90.

¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, London: Macmillan, 1976, p. 57.

¹⁶¹ M. S. O. Olisa, "Igbo Traditional Socio-Political System," in G. E. K. Ofomata (ed.), *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, Onitsha: Africana First Publishers, 2002, p. 227.

¹⁶² See Ilogu's *Christianity and Ibo Culture*, pp. 53-54.

misunderstanding of the practice. According to his thesis, most outsiders who commented on the *osu* system “misdefined and misrecognized it [the *osu* system], invariably regarding it as a form of slavery.” Moreover, as we will discuss his thesis in Chapter III, “This perception trivialized the institution.”¹⁶³ However, it is pertinent at this point that we accept the system as one which resulted from oracular and local divination practices and was, as it were, slavery, particularly to deities.

Even so, the *osu* practice in Igboland was by and large widespread, at least in core Igbo areas and their surroundings. It did not exist in all parts of Igboland, for instance, Umuahia, Nike and Nimo areas are free from it. But as we earlier noted, the system was a fundamental part of Igbo traditional religion and while it may have ceased to exist in theory, the stigma remains in much alive, even in varying conditions. Because of the connection to deities, the caste groups were viewed with mixed feelings; fear and at times, reverence. They suffered disabilities; in Owerri for instance, the DO reported in 1937 that marriage to a freeborn was taboo and discouraged throughout the area.¹⁶⁴ Associating with the *osu* was rare in those days. To do so was to instantly join their fold.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ See G. Ugo Nwokeji, “Caste, Slavery, and Postslavery in Igboland,” Conference Paper, German African Studies Association 17th Biennial Conference, Leipzig, March 31- April 1 2000, pp. 1-6.

¹⁶⁴ “International Slavery Convention,” NAE, CSE 1/85/2926, p. 182-183.

¹⁶⁵ A chief at Nnewi, Dozie Ikedife, practically recalled the awful side of associating with an *osu* in the early 1960s. By demonstrating physically, he narrated: “When we were in elementary school we use[d] to in physical training do what we called leap frog. Students stand in the line and you run and jump over one and jump again and run over another, then when you get to the end you stood and they will come and jump over you. You will be in line and you will be watching who is coming to jump over you. If it is an *osu* man you keep standing and you insist that they don’t jump over you because then if an *osu* jumped over you or crossed your leg you become *osu*. It was that bad,” (FGD, 18 June, 2007). Another informant, an old principal from Igbo-Ukwu, recalled that, “As recently as 1980, a young female graduate was seen when she came back from Enugu and stopped at the market square, and a relation of hers who happened to be an *osu* carried her back to her father’s home on his bicycle. That girl remained unmarried till date.” This still happens in many areas in Igboland. When freeborns openly associate with the caste groups, they may join the fold of the caste group. Cyril Ike, Interview, Igbo-Ukwu, 24 June, 2007.

Moreover, people became *osu* in many ways. In the past, the most common way was by consecration as sacrifice to a deity and this could happen for many reasons as we have mentioned earlier. Apart from the traditional way of offering a human sacrifice to a deity, some people naturally became victims of sacrifice. In the old days, it was forbidden to have twin children, after all, "God allowed mankind one at a time, and animals two or more."¹⁶⁶ Where this happened the twin children were either killed at an evil forest or offered as living sacrifices to deities. It was also a taboo to have infants come out legs first out of their mother's womb. Likewise, children with disabilities were natural taboos and were immediately offered to deities. Any maltreatment of the *osu* was fraught with disastrous consequences. As it was an abomination to injure human beings dedicated to deities, the same was true for animals that were consecrated likewise.¹⁶⁷ To kill an animal that belonged to a deity was forbidden and the punishment of course was to replace the dead animal with a human sacrifice after some rituals have been performed. In most cases, the culprit was expected to offer a member of the family who may be young or willing to take that place. If not, the culprit was to be the sacrifice. In certain areas where the culprit was a little child, such a child was immediately given as a replacement without much ado. Also, it was customary in many Igbo areas to offer stubborn children, thieves and nuisances to deities to free the land of trouble. Criminals also took refuge

¹⁶⁶ See Rev. John Christopher Taylor II, A 'Report on the Political and Spiritual State of Onitsha' 1964, University of Birmingham, C A3/0 37/57.

¹⁶⁷ In fact, only recently, in 2007, while around the precincts of the Igwe's palace at Nnewi, we came across a fat goat that loitered sluggishly. We asked a local market woman who sold tomatoes and garden eggs, who had the obviously smelly goat and she said it belonged to a deity. She insisted that it was an abomination to kill it. When we asked how long the goat had wandered around the marketplace, she could not say but told us that it had been there for more years than she had had a stall at the market, probably more than six years. Now we asked her why people were afraid to tamper with the goat and she said people would rather steal from the Church than steal belongings of a deity - it was this same way the *osu* enjoyed immunity from harm. The rationale behind this will be the fact that God was merciful and kind and was not likely to strike anyone with illness or misfortune because of common theft. But around Igbo area, the thought is that deities take immediate action and are at times unforgiving. Fieldwork Notes, 2007.

at shrines of powerful deities to escape punishment or death. The worst anyone could do to them after their voluntary dedication into the system was to insult them from a distance.¹⁶⁸

A debtor could spontaneously drive himself to servitude to dodge the payment of his debt or “to escape the unscrupulous molestations of evil neighbours.” Even in some areas, “the mere fact of crossing the innermost sanctuary of a shrine” could bring one into the fold.¹⁶⁹ Hunger and frustration made people surrender themselves to the fold of the “eaters of he-goats” as Leith-Ross calls the *osu*,¹⁷⁰ to feed of gifts and sacrifices offered to deities. Because the *osu* belonged to the deities, they farmed on the lands of deities; and they owned domestic animals offered to the deities.¹⁷¹ In fact, it is for these gains they enjoyed amongst many other things that

¹⁶⁸ Deities did not only absorb evil people. It is important to note this because when most people speak of the *osu* descendants today, they do so as if all of them had criminals as parents. Professor Umeh, a foremost traditionalist in Igboland, implied this in his comment: “if you [*osu*] commit a crime and you run into the shrine why shouldn’t the crime remain with the children?” He based his judgement on the common knowledge that most of the first people to belong to the caste had committed taboos that necessitated their escape to cult houses. But, in fact, deities served as safe havens for a number of innocent Igbos that may have been killed for reasons which may be considered today as barbaric. The birth of twin children as we have noted before was a taboo in many Igbo areas, and when a woman realized she had committed this natural taboo, to save her children, she took refuge on her own volition at the closest shrine. And of course, once this was done, they became free, but only had the stigma to deal with. Also, in old days when it was traditional for a man’s brother to inherit his wife and entire home after his demise, it was commonplace for a woman in such condition to run to a deity to protect herself, her children, and all properties and lands that belonged to her husband. The tradition that called for a man’s family to inherit his estate at his demise was rampant in many Igbo areas, even though it still is today in certain areas, the intention was for the husband’s brother to protect his interest. And normally, when a widow allowed this to happen, it was usual for her brother-in-law turned husband to bring his own family into her late husband’s house, especially where the late husband was wealthier and had a more comfortable house than his brother, the traditional next of kin. In cases where the man was wicked, he could turn the children to domestic slaves and starve them of food. Thus, the fear of things like this made more women choose the *osu* path. For Professor John A. Umeh’s comment, see Interview, Enugu, 22 July, 2007. Umeh’s mother is from the family which supplies the *Nnanyi* Isi Idemili, the priest of the Idemili deity. Ifi Amadiume, herself an indigene of Nnobi, writes of the Idemili deity in her *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, London: Zed Books, 1987, pp. 99-105.

¹⁶⁹ See Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, p. 91.

¹⁷⁰ S. Leith-Ross used this phrase to describe the people because of the speculations that the *osu* could share in the sacrifices offered to deities. See her article “Notes on the *Osu* System Among the Ibo of Owerri Province,” p. 219. Also see Ilogu’s *Christianity and Ibo Culture*, p. 51.

¹⁷¹ Some scholars have the impression that some people voluntarily joined the *osu* group to get wealthy because of these freebies they allegedly enjoyed. But, undoubtedly, they enjoyed in varying forms. We know already that in war times, they could not be dragged out in battle except in some areas where they

some argue that the *osu* population swelled in many areas.¹⁷² The gains as is believed, stimulated many less privileged to join the *osu* group out of their own volition, many times out of frustration. Because, according to Uchendu, “the social disabilities of the *osu* are the sources of their ritual privileges and legal protection.” In short, “they are protected by their deity from being sold or killed, or expropriated.” Simply put, “they are not economically exploited.”¹⁷³

Even petty mistakes relegated several individuals to the group. In fact, a freeborn might be sentenced to the eternal servitude of a deity by mere walking across the out-stretched legs of an *osu*, one respondent – Ikedife, said.¹⁷⁴ At times when an *osu* picked up a crying baby whose mother was absent, such child and his/her descendants inherited the stigma. In certain areas,

were used as shields to protect the freeborn from bodily harm or capture. It would seem as if combatant clans too feared spilling *osu* blood. Also, in most land-hungry parts of Igboland, the *osu* enjoyed farming on huge acres of lands owned by deities and this of course improved their economic status and prosperity that can still be observed today. They were also exempted from communal labour and taxation in most areas. See Mba Idika’s “Osu” in E. A. Ade Adegbola, *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, Ibadan: Sefer, 1998, p. 24.

¹⁷² However, partly because of its oracular origins, and to another degree, because of the influx of hatred as some writers suggest, most of the *osu* traditions speak of entrance into the cult, not out of it, suggesting in some way that it was difficult or impossible to regain freedom; instead, we know that domestic slaves, *ohu* and pawns, as we will observe later, gained freedom at some point. Nwokeji’s paper suggests that the *osu* population grew rapidly because “there were no exit points from the *osu* status, so that individuals who were born *osu* or became so at any stage die as *osu*.” He also blamed their immunity from harm for the growth; after all, “while other lineages could lose their members to slave raiding or warfare,” the *osu* communities were normally free from these dangers. This meant that they “could only lose their population by natural means and to epidemics, both of which faced the larger community as well.” And, as we rightly argued above, “the incidence of dedicating people to osuhood increased exponentially by the mid-19th century, following the suppression of the Atlantic slave trade and rechanneling internally persons considered undesirable in society.” This factor also increased the traffic into the cult. See Nwokeji, “Caste, Slavery, and Postslavery in Igboland,” p. 4.

¹⁷³ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, p. 90. In many areas weaker people enrolled for life in the service of the deity to escape harassments and humiliation. Even during inter-communal conflicts which were widespread in the past, people took shelter at shrines and forfeited their liberty. We have already discussed the days of slave trade when slave raiding and child stealing was rampant. Many weak people too voluntarily became *osu* to prevent such fate from befalling them. This was of course, a major incidence that increased the *osu* population. Besides, individuals joined the *osu* rank by fetching water from streams dedicated to deities or areas especially meant for the “cult slaves” to fetch from. In villages where streams were shared by the freeborn and *osu*, certain dates were preserved for each group. No freeborn was allowed to fetch from the stream on prohibited days. This was enough crime to bring-on the stigma. See Paulus Belonwu Akpu, “An Anthropologico- Theological Investigation into the Caste (Osu) System in Igboland,” BA (Divinity) Dissertation, Bigard Memorial Seminary, 1979, p. 31-34.

¹⁷⁴ Dozie Ikedife, FGD, June 18, 2007.

children born out of marriage were called *osu*, especially when no marriage rites was performed on the child's mother.¹⁷⁵ Even a child who was born at the shrine or by its side became *osu*. But as Ezikeojiaku argues, a father could free such a child by offering another human being as a replacement.¹⁷⁶ Today, what is common is to naturally inherit the stigma by being born to at least one *osu* parent. Certainly, even with existing laws, marriage between a freeborn and an *osu* remains a taboo today.¹⁷⁷ But in villages with very lenient laws, when a man mistakenly marries an *osu* girl without knowing, he may be pardoned but will be made to go through certain ritual cleansing (*igbasa*) to appease the angry deity.¹⁷⁸

The association of the *osu* groups with deities from the narratives of origin has given rise to two dominant attitudes towards their descendants. The thought of the *osu* is always followed with a mixture of fear and reverence¹⁷⁹ on the *diala's* (freeborn) side.¹⁸⁰ To many, the *osu* meant various

¹⁷⁵ Okeke, *The Osu Concept in Igbo Land*, p. 31.

¹⁷⁶ Ezikeojiaku, "Eradication of Osu Caste Practice in Igbo Culture Area," p. 7.

¹⁷⁷ Generally, any form of association between a freeborn and an *osu* was prohibited. The *osu* could not join the freeborn in social activities like dancing or masquerading or taking titles. It was forbidden to see an *osu* corpse. When their corpse was carried through any village, palm fronds were placed around to warn the people before hand of the action. It was also forbidden for a freeborn to eat from the same pot or drink from the same cup with an *osu*. Sexual intercourse between the two groups was unimaginable. The mere thought of intermarriage between a *diala* and an *osu* was of course horrible.

¹⁷⁸ Again, Principal Ike narrates a case which took place at Igbo-Ukwu: "The last *igbasa* was performed in 1975 in this town by somebody who was a doctor and married *osu* by accident and after getting two or three children it was discovered. He sent the girl away and performed the ceremony of *igbasa* before he was able to marry another wife." Cyril Ike, Interview, Igbo-Ukwu, 24 June, 2007. See also, Joseph Therese Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 95-96, 103.

¹⁷⁹ The connection to the deities obviously caused the fearful and loathsome attitude of freeborns towards them. It is likely that they were feared and respected before, until the sudden emergence of hatred towards them. Because as Basden argues, "the *osu* held an honourable position until the slave trade brought it into degradation, and caused it to denigrate to its present unhappy condition." (See Basden, *Niger Ibos*, p. 249). Following this argument, many writers have thought that the influence of the European outsiders in Igboland generally reduced them to mere slaves. Okeke blamed Christianity for the stigmatization which the people suffered; arguing that the western religion undermined Igbo traditional religion and brought the status of the *osu* to the level of degradation it suffers today. (See Okeke, *The Osu Concept in Igbo Land*, p. 44). Again, it is often argued that the many privileges the *osu* enjoyed in the past and "the honours and benefits compatible with their claims as the servants of 'Chuku'," made them become "subjects of envy." (See Basden, *Niger Ibos*, p. 251). It is difficult to give credence to the thoughts that the *osu* was despised and discriminated against by the freeborn who

things; good and evil. This resulted largely from the speculations on their former role or that of their forbears. As a matter of fact, several scholars suggest “that the *osu* may originally have been a position of high spiritual office.”¹⁸¹ To date, no unambiguous role has been ascribed to former *osus*; the disputable claims have always been that they were slaves to deities who merely performed domestic roles as cleaning the shrine area, while most writers and respondents argue that they also performed direct ritual functions, often assisting a priest or undertaking the priestly job themselves. According to Leith-Ross, for example, the people “engaged in particularly menial or degrading tasks; yet one finds their chief duty is to offer certain sacrifices on behalf of their masters and to tend the shrine of the *jujus*.”¹⁸² For Uzokwe, the chief priest of the Idemili deity, this is true, and because of this participation in both ritual and menial functions in some villages, “some people feared them while others scorned them.”¹⁸³ The ongoing argument that the *osu* were once revered is definitely a spill-over from this background. It was believed in some parts of Igboland that the people occupied an

became envious of their growing wealth. True, descendants of the *osu* gained some wealth, but many freeborn disagree with the suspicion. Most of our respondents, for instance, argued that they would rather be poor than join the *osu* ranks. Hence, we can argue that the social stigma may have resulted from the fear of harming the *osu*. As one may still observe in most Igbo villages today, residential segregation exists and this was logical at the beginning to protect the freeborn from violating the social ethics. We know, as we have already suggested, that it was a taboo to spill the blood of an *osu* or cause any form of bodily harm to them. Thus, segregation was prescribed in many parts of Igboland, since no freeborn imagined paying the maximum price of placating the deities with another human sacrifice. It was expensive to do so.

¹⁸⁰ Igbo stratification system distinguishes between two groups: the *diala* (also known in some areas as *amadi*, *nwafo* or *nwadiani*) and non-*diala*. The *diala* is a freeborn, who usually must be able to trace his or her descent to the town, and must at times have a land that belongs to his family by inheritance. In the past, to be a *diala* required more than tracing bloodlines, for instance, the umbilical cords of a freeborn was required to be planted in the earth below an oil palm tree, and anybody who could not point to the burial place of his naval chord was not a *diala*. To be a *diala* was to have full rights to titles and chieftaincy stools, lands and social positions, membership of cult societies and marriage to any freeborn. There were hardly any restrictions posed to a *diala*. See Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, p. 59.

¹⁸¹ Nwokeji, “Caste, Slavery, and Postslavery in Igboland,” p. 3.

¹⁸² Leith-Ross, “Notes on the *Osu* System Among the Ibo of Owerri Province,” p. 207.

¹⁸³ Moses Uzokwe, Interview, Nnobi, July 26, 2007.

“indispensable and jealous” position in the Igbo traditional religious circle. Some people speak of their position as “altar boys” to a traditional priest as in the Catholic Church.¹⁸⁴

Moreover, speculations about the role the *osu* actually played seem to have varied from place to place. Amongst the Umueke village group where Green studied, he pointed out that the *osu* only “helped in the service of the cult.” He implied that the *osu* served “the deity, taking part in the offering of sacrifices or observing the taboos of the cult.” Green goes on to argue that “Their anomalous position of being ‘horrible and holy’ in the eyes of society does not necessarily make them into people of authority, but it does not mean that they are or may be part of the mechanism whereby law and order are preserved.”¹⁸⁵ He indicated later, that the *osu* performed domestic functions when he observed that “The ground immediately in front of the shrine” at Umueke, “was cleared by a large *osu* woman.”¹⁸⁶ This concurs with Basden’s argument that “The duties of ‘ndi-osu’ consist of cleaning the compound of the god which, as a rule, is the market-place.” “They must cut the bush and grass, and keep the precincts tidy; they are permitted to farm the land assigned to the god and they, alone, may eat of the fruits thereof,” Basden continued.¹⁸⁷ Onwubiko, relying partly on Basden’s judgement, argued that the *osu* had “no sacred function to perform, except the servile work he did.” Besides, they run “errands for the priest of the deity, especially as messengers of the god, to someone sued before the court of the deity, and in this capacity, they could collect debt.”¹⁸⁸ It is difficult to establish what role the *osu* performed before the 1900s. The reason for this is the diverse traditions of origin which all seem to differ in various areas but have one common factor, namely human sacrifice or some

¹⁸⁴ Emeka Onuorah, Private Discussion, August 22, 2007.

¹⁸⁵ Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 190. See also Ogbu U. Kalu, “Poverty and its Alleviation in Colonial Nigeria” in *The Foundations of Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola*, Edited by Adebayo Oyeboade, US: African World Press Inc., 2003, pp. 430-431.

¹⁸⁷ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, p. 249.

¹⁸⁸ Onwubiko, *Facing the Osu Issue in the African Synod*, p. 33-34.

form of dedication. But findings on the *osu*'s role suggest that in some areas they performed both ritual and domestic functions, while in others they were practically domestic vassals.

Lately, no new *osu* was dedicated in Igboland, but discrimination against their descendants persists today in an insidious manner. As a matter of fact, the almost sacrosanct marriage demarcation between the *osu* and the freeborn, which was the most common discrimination against the group in the past, is as stiff today as it ever was. However, most other forms of inhibition that *osus* faced in the old days are less relevant today. Several factors, especially urbanization, have worked in their favour. Traditionally, it was forbidden to have any form of association with an *osu*, or even to give them chieftaincy titles. But in most parts of Igboland today, some *osu* hold titles even though it still appears to be rare, though it is not certain if any have risen up to the position of Igwe in any village with a mix of freeborn and *osu*. It may be possible in autonomous *osu* villages. Association with them now is rampant, but still risky when it becomes a daily affair. As we observed in the Nnobi area and surroundings, one of the most common ways of gaining the status is by speculation which often results from association. Okigbo tells us of this 'new generation' pattern of stigmatization often called *siwa-siwa* or *kokoliko*,¹⁸⁹ which naturally conferred the *osu* status on anybody merely suspected to be one or to have associated indecently with one. In one situation that happened in Owerri, for instance, where two women fought in public and one was able to shout aloud that the other was in a secret affair with an *osu* man the mere 'announcement' of this affair made the woman an *osu*. It was only a speculation, but it is hardly ever verified or confirmed, and the woman did not know of her automatic *osu* status until she was willing to either get married or give a child out

¹⁸⁹ *Siwa-siwa* or *kokoliko* may mean gossip or the act of just spreading rumours.

in marriage, then she learned of her status.¹⁹⁰ From the foregoing it is clear that the stigmatization of the *osu* has been longstanding, but it was not until the beginning of the 1990s that the discrimination against them declined to include mainly inhibitions of leadership and marriage, in most parts of Igboland. This could equally be said of core Igbo areas such as the village groups along the Idemili river in Anambra. However, a number of areas in Imo, particularly around Owerri, still enforce old taboos on *osu*-freeborn interaction.

1.4.2 The Ohu System of Slavery

Some writers like Horton¹⁹¹ and Harneit-Sievers¹⁹² made sincere attempts to describe the basic social and political systems that they encountered in the northern Igbo area of Nike, which was populated with a huge mass of the *ohu* groups who were traditionally domestic slaves as in most parts of Igboland. Unlike the *osu* who were dreaded in all areas where they existed, the *ohu* system differed fundamentally in various areas. This seemed to have caused some misunderstanding of who they really were, especially from the beginning of the 1900s onwards. However, the practice was by no means straightforward, but for the mix-up which often emerged from the diverse levels of discrimination they suffered throughout Igboland; their status varied from group to group. For instance, in the northern Igbo area, Onitsha, Nkanu and Nike particularly, the *ohu* suffered a more serious kind of discrimination while in most of Owerri and Orlu they were merely called strangers.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ In most parts of Igboland today, this mode of stigmatization have become popular. In fact, the mere gossip that a freeborn is *osu* makes him one. And as rumour mongering progresses, the first tells it to another and it builds on that way making a freeborn an *osu*. John S. C. Okigbo, Interview, Nnobi, 24 June 2007.

¹⁹¹ See entirely, W. R. G. Horton, "The Ohu System of Slavery in a Northern Ibo Village-Group," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Oct., 1954, pp. 311-336.

¹⁹² See especially, Harneit-Sievers, *Constructions of Belonging*, pp. 258-279.

¹⁹³ As we noted earlier, a man can point at his fathers' *ohu* in public without fear at Nnobi because they were completely free. But in Onitsha and Nkanu areas, to do so was to provoke considerable conflict. The

The *ohus* lived their lives undisturbed, except when required to work for their masters. They were 'economic commodities' used for domestic work in the home and on the farmlands. Even when they worked on their own, they were required to render a good part of the proceeds to their owner who also had the right to give back what he considered was sufficient for his slave. According to Nzimiro, slaves could purchase another slave for their masters to take up the former domestic role and farm labour. Where this was done, the old slave was free to work "and accumulate wealth which could be inherited by his sons and other heirs,"¹⁹⁴ though he and his sons remained his masters' slave. But they were acquired by different means. The majority of them were inter-tribal war captives taken alive and sold off or distributed to serve their new owners. It was also a means of getting rid of 'good-for-nothing' or undesirable members in the society.¹⁹⁵ Also, a good number of *ohus* were kidnapped by expert mercenaries, just by the same means as the Aro. In fact, all those captured by the Aros were *ohu*, but they became *osu* the moment they were offered as living sacrifices to deities. Thus, an *ohu* could become an *osu* but an *osu* could no more become *ohu*. The *ohu* could be redeemed, whereas the *osu* lived with the status even in death. A person, who is pawned as we shall observe soon, is an *ohu* and can be redeemed when the debt is paid. The *ohu* was free to marry a freeborn in some areas and could be married as well by a freeborn. This was however a taboo in other areas like Onitsha and Nkanu. In most areas however, *ohus* were integrated as individuals into families and formed separate lineages at times, and often too, separate villages. But it was common to pick slaves from within the *ohu* ranks when human sacrifice was required, as a slave could "fall

conflict or intensity of discrimination against the *ohu* does not make them *osu* in anyway. They were a distinct group of individuals; whereas the *osu* were slaves to deities, they were merely vassals of man.

¹⁹⁴ Ikenna Nzimiro, *Studies in Ibo Political Systems: Chieftaincy and Politics in Four Niger States*, London: Frank Cass, 1972, p. 26.

¹⁹⁵ An adulterous or quarrelsome person could be sold by his people to slavery. A disobedient child too, and a thief or sorcerer could be expelled from society the same way just like in the case of the *osu*. It was also usual to give away children with natural birth defects to slavers.

a victim to an act of human sacrifice at his master's burial,"¹⁹⁶ to provide the needed service in the other world.¹⁹⁷ Missionary reports covering the period from 1857 down to the beginning of the 1900 are filled with tales about the use of slaves for funeral rituals. Hence, the *ohu* did not really experience freedom in this sense. But they did not suffer the terrible isolation which the *osu* were subjected to in many areas. Apart from the sanction on intermarriage which many of them suffered, and the denial of certain political, social and religious right, the *ohu*, particularly those of the second generation and beyond had been integrated into their master's lineage and they are perfect kith and kin, only that their status as strangers is remembered when certain issues of rights come into play.¹⁹⁸ Even so, they may only have suffered discrimination on a large scale when it came to becoming the ruler of a village. This does not arise as a result of isolation as in the case of the *osu*, but as a result of their status as 'strangers' in the village. As stated earlier, most of them were captives from other villages, and it was rare in most parts of Igboland as it still is today, to allow a stranger who could not trace his descent to a known family line to become an authority over the people.¹⁹⁹

The practice was significantly different in most northern Igbo areas. Horton's thesis on the *ohu* in Nike which confirms that Nike formerly secured supplies of slaves for the Aro, describes a practice which seemed more comparable with the *osu* in other areas. Most of the slave communities in Nike served defensive purposes. Just like the *osu* in some areas, they were a

¹⁹⁶ Harneit-Sievers, *Constructions of Belonging*, p. 28.

¹⁹⁷ The *osu* though enjoyed immunity from being used as funeral sacrifices. Numerous narrations also suggest that they used their privileged status to snatch petty things, especially edible items from people around whenever they felt hungry. No one could harass them for this act for they belonged to the deities.

¹⁹⁸ B. B. O. Emeh, 82, an Nnobi elite, was quick to point at a homestead beside his house where former slaves of his father who were integrated into their family's lineage lived. He did that openly and aloud. In fact, the people who lived in the compound heard him and didn't show any form of regret or shame. This alone was a pointer to the extreme integration of the *ohu* people into society, in some areas. B. B. O. Emeh, Interview, Nnobi, June 16, 2007.

¹⁹⁹ Though some authors like to make reference to slaves like Jaja of Opobo who became kings in their slave communities, this was indeed rare in core Igbo areas.

fighting group, positioned at strategic ends of the villages where they established settlements to guard the core areas against sudden intrusion. Unlike the *ohu* in other areas who were merely domestic slaves, Horton indicates that they even held prominent ritual positions in Nike. According to Horton, the office of *Atama*, or cult-priest has always been held by an *ohu* and “Apart from the performance of his sacrificial duties,” the *Atama* was “accorded little respect.” Also, the *Anike* cult, Nike’s Earth-Goddess, was “similarly administered by an *ohu Atama*.” The *ohu* also appeared to have held the office of *Onye Amoma*, a position that allowed them to look into the spirit world and tell the future as willed by the Earth-Goddess. In fact, the *ohus* were not allowed to occupy these positions deliberately as a derogatory group, though the Nike people always explained that they made the *ohus Atama* because the freeborn did not like such ritual work.²⁰⁰ Nevertheless, this feat was barely achieved by the *ohu* group in other parts of Igboland; apart from the northern Igbo area. Instead it was associated with the *osu* group. But for marriage, Horton notes, “they exercised free choice in the selection of mates so long as the choice was confined to persons of *ohu* status.”²⁰¹ Again, we will observe these differences in the traditions of this group which is of course different in many areas like Nnobi or Owerri where marriage is allowed between a freeborn and *ohu*. Even more recently, Harneit-Sievers reported that in Nike and Nkanu “slave descendants carry a persistent, significant stigma because of this ancestry.”²⁰² In 2007, a respondent from the *ohu* group in Nike also told us of the harsh stigma attached to them. According to him, in Nkanu, “No freeborn contemplates marriage to an *ohu*.”²⁰³ The case is the same in Onitsha today, where no freeborn dares to talk of marriage with an *ohu*. In two extensive media reports published in 2000, Agbaegbu narrates the prolonged tale

²⁰⁰ Horton, “The Ohu System of Slavery in a Northern Ibo Village-Group,” pp. 319-322, 324.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 317.

²⁰² Harneit-Sievers, *Constructions of Belonging*, p. 259.

²⁰³ Chidiebere Chukwudi, Interview, Enugu, August 9, 2007.

of the people of Umuode in Nkanu who in the colonial days protested against the infringement of their rights by the freeborn.²⁰⁴ Today, the problem persists so deeply and numerous attempts by several governments to relocate the sufferers have failed. We will look at this problem in subsequent chapters because the discourse on the *ohus* in Nkanu and Onitsha also sparked considerable debates in the news media and other public fora.²⁰⁵ Notwithstanding, the mention at this juncture is to emphasize the overbearing differences of the practice amongst different village groups.

1.4.3 Pawns in Igbo Society

Pawning or *igba ibe*²⁰⁶ in Igboland is an old custom but its origin remains unknown. Like in many other African countries where the system seemed to have been widespread, it involved the pledging of a person “on account of a debt or in return for a loan.”²⁰⁷ The system formed part of the traditional life of the people and was a lawful practice within Igbo territories.²⁰⁸ As Ekechi first demonstrated, it “developed as a result of economic hardship,”²⁰⁹ and more often, out of the desire for chieftaincy or special status in the society. In the days of old, people pledged their farmlands, economic trees, domestic animals, and children as collateral for loans.²¹⁰ Even in the absence of these, people pawned themselves to creditors. Usually when

²⁰⁴ Tobs Agbaegbu, “Slavery in Igboland: The Osu take their Case against the Diala to the Human Rights Commission,” *Newswatch*, Lagos, January 10, 2000, pp. 23-26; ---- “Moves to Stop Slavery in Igboland,” *Newswatch*, Lagos, February 7, 2000, pp. 16-17.

²⁰⁵ See especially, Chapter IV.

²⁰⁶ Igbo term for pawning or pledging.

²⁰⁷ Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, p. 205.

²⁰⁸ Ownership of pawns and slaves, like extensive yam barns, numerous wives, children and a number of traditional titles also contributed to boosting ones status in pre-colonial Igboland. See generally, “International Slavery Convention,” NAE, CSE 1/85/2925, pp. 109-110.

²⁰⁹ Felix K. Ekechi, “Pawnship in Igbo Society,” in Paul E. Lovejoy and Toyin Falola (eds.), *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*, Trenton: African World Press, 2003, p. 165.

²¹⁰ Down through the centuries and until the British strongly condemned pawning in the 1930s, the system was greatly associated with domestic slavery. The act of conceding to borrow naturally put the pawn’s rights on the palms of the lender. And, in many cases then, several people pledged themselves

this transaction is sealed, it involved the debtor and the creditor as well as a witness or witnesses as the case may be. In some cases, it called-for a mini ritual, where kola nuts and palm wine is offered and an oath taken by the borrower. This oath was to help later, after several years when the debtor was ready to settle the debt. In circumstances where there was a dispute over lies especially, those involved were made to swear on a deity that was usually powerful and deadly.²¹¹ The guilty party must die within a specified period or must witness some form of misfortune for the guilt to be exposed.²¹²

'voluntarily' to meet pressing needs, often for payment of bride wealth, chieftaincy titles, funeral purposes and farming on extensive acreage of lands. Strictly speaking, a man could pawn one of his children 'for a very small loan' to a wealthy man to raise money to send a son to school or even to marry another wife. Such a child now lives as a pawn until the debt is paid. See Basden's statement: "For a couple of pounds a man may be plunged into servitude for as many years, while a child may find no way of escape and remain unredeemed for life." He describes further, a man who "had given his son as security for a loan of fifty shillings value." And, "Ten years later the youth was still a pawn." (See Basden, *Niger Ibos*, p. 254). True, as we agree with Ekechi, pawning was basically provoked by economic hardship. As we have stated earlier, some local sacrifices in Igboland were annual and contributory in various villages. The effect of not meeting a ritual obligation by one family or individual who was too bankrupt to contribute to the purse of the village sacrifice was dreadful. An oracle could strike such family with death and epidemic of unusual degree. Such individual could even face banishment or be 'cast aside.' But to prevent such threat of evil, it was wiser to pawn a child for a loan to pay such indispensable debt.

²¹¹ The most common means of obtaining loans in the past and in most areas today was to offer lands and economic trees such as oil palms to lenders. In recent years, unredeemed lands especially have become a source for social conflicts among families in many parts of Igboland. In fact, by the 1990s till date, the Nigerian film industry which is flooded by the Igbo dominated Nollywood, has continuously portrayed the importance of lands as collateral for loans. In 2008, at Nnobi, one respondent confirmed this in a discussion. He emphasized the importance of the phrase - "my father told me" to cases that involved pledging of lands. His argument was that, when a case was brought to the courts of law or to a family group for settlement, it was necessary to listen to both sides. As is often the case, most details of such transactions as these were forgotten because it "is sought many years after it is alleged to have been pledged, often not within living memory." (See L. T. Chubb, *Ibo Land Tenure*, Second Edition, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1961, p. 33). The lender, his debtor and even the witnesses may have even died. So the case relied solely on testimonies provided by their descendants. Where a case is dependent on testimonies, a child who says, for instance, "my father told me that the land at Nnobi was given to his father by Mr. 'A' as collateral for a loan" was bound to be heard. This was so because a man, as is believed, may lie to his wife but never to his son (Fieldwork Notes). And, because the rights in a land "may be re-pledged, given, bequeathed or inherited," Chubb argues, "A man will ensure, before his death, that his sons know which land he holds on pledge and also that out on pledge to others," (Chubb, *Ibo Land Tenure*, p. 32). All the same, numerous cases of pledged lands, according to Ekechi, "clog Nigerian courts" today. See Ekechi, "Pawnship in Igbo Society," p. 167.

²¹² The terms of agreement were normally stated in the presence of the witnesses, and if the lender was to demand for interest, it was to be mentioned there and then.

The status of pawns and slaves differed differently in practical terms. Most Igbo areas classify pawns “under the generic term *ohu*.”²¹³ However, unlike the *ohu* in some areas like Nkanu who suffered ill treatments, pawns, “were scarcely treated badly as they were not isolated and discriminated against at all.”²¹⁴ In short, pawns mingled freely with members of their masters’ family, and even shared rooms with their masters’ children.²¹⁵ By contrast, where slaves lost most independent rights, pawns retained all independence, civil and political rights. Their status was only temporary until the loan was repaid while the slave was held permanently and could not go back home. Moreover, a slave may forget his or her ancestry, but a pawn never lost lineage connections. He or she cannot be sold for cash, whereas, a slave can.²¹⁶ The pawn, even after several decades, could be redeemed when the debt is settled. In some villages, Talbot indicates, “a limit of several years was imposed, after which the person was bound to be released whatever the amount of the debt and whether it had been paid or not.”²¹⁷ And, unlike slaves, Ekechi quotes Talbot, “A pawn could always change his employer by pledging himself to another, whom he preferred and paying off the original creditor.”²¹⁸ Mere slaves were offered for human sacrifices to deities or for funeral sacrifices of their dead master. After all, they were “entirely at the disposal of” their owner, “even to life itself.”²¹⁹ This was not true of a pawn.

²¹³ Ekechi, “Pawnship in Igbo Society,” p. 169.

²¹⁴ Okeke, *The Osu Concept in Igbo Land*, pp. 92, 96.

²¹⁵ There was hardly any difference between the master’s children and his pawn, since they even ate from the same plate. Because, pawns performed functions as running errands, working on farmlands and other domestic services, they did this often together with their host’s offsprings.

²¹⁶ Okeke, *The Osu Concept in Igbo Land*, pp. 92, 96. See also, Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, p. 88.

²¹⁷ P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southeastern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages with an Abstract of the 1921 Census*, Volume II, London: Frank Cass & Co., 1969, p. 698.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 698. Also see Ekechi, “Pawnship in Igbo Society,” p. 169.

²¹⁹ Basden, *Niger Igbos*, p. 255.

The status of pawns was at times embellished by its connection with title taking which according to Uchendu, and later Ekechi, was the foremost cause of pawning in Igboland, after *ikwaozu* – second burial rites.²²⁰ Because title taking²²¹ conferred high social and political status, members enjoyed sharing the fees paid by new entrants. And too, the initiation ceremonies involved large feasts and entertainments; this benefitted all members, old and new. As a result, a large number of Igbos hungered to get titles before their deaths. Occasionally, these enticed men to either pawn themselves or their children to raise money needed to take the expensive title. This would mean that there was ‘nothing disgraceful’ in pawning oneself. Thus, pawns did not suffer the ‘social stigma’ the *osu* experienced. In fact, a girl who was pawned to a man could be married by the man or any of his sons. Where this happened, her pawn status was terminated but it was obligatory for the lender to inform the girl’s parents before such act was performed,²²² and the “difference between the bride-price and the amount of the loan” will be settled by the lender.²²³

²²⁰ Ekechi, “Pawnship in Igbo Society,” p. 169; Ekechi quoted Victor C. Uchendu’s “Slaves and Slavery in Igboland, Nigeria,” in Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (eds.), *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, Madison, 1977, p. 126.

²²¹ Especially the *ozo* title.

²²² Ekechi, “Pawnship in Igbo Society,” pp. 173-174.

²²³ See Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, p. 205. All pawns became free when their debt was settled. This would happen in many ways and circumstances. For instance, a girl could be given to a lender for marriage to his household “in satisfaction of a loan.” (See Northcote W. Thomas, *Anthropological Report on Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria, Part 4, Law and Custom of the Ibo of the Asaba District*, New York, 1969, p. 167). In the Owerri district for instance, a colonial officer reported that: “Usually the pawn is a young girl and the process is disguised as a marriage transaction. The parent being in need of money anticipates the dowry of his daughter by getting an advance from the future husband and leaving the girl with him as security.” (See the “International Slavery Convention,” NAE, CSE 1/85/2925, p. 207). The creditor was to complete the dowry and marry the girl after she had grown up, if he wanted to; otherwise another husband will be found for her and the loan repaid from her dowry. Also, acknowledged Ekechi, “a female pawn could be redeemed by a suitor, meaning that the creditor could, in effect, give a pawned girl in marriage.” This of course, must be “made with the concurrence of the girl’s father. For under no circumstances could a pawned girl be given in marriage without her father’s permission.” (Ekechi, “Pawnship in Igbo Society,” p. 174). Customarily, to mark the termination of her pledged status, her relatives presented the master with a goat that was killed and eaten by both sides. When it involves an unmarried man who pledged himself, he was bound to live with and work for

Like elsewhere in West Africa nevertheless, pawning persisted in Igboland during the colonial period, continuing until the 1930s, “despite government insistence that ‘any form of servitude, even if described as ‘voluntary’ cannot be acquiesced indefinitely’.”²²⁴ But the practice declined in the late 1930s and finally disappeared by the early 1940s.²²⁵

1.5 Conclusion

In sum, the narratives of Igbo caste practices in eastern Nigeria vary from place to place, but the main element of the practice has been the connection to oracles. However, as we will observe in subsequent chapters, this connection to deities has been the most prominent cause of the persistence of the practice even after the emancipation struggles outlined in the following chapter and the efforts by foreign and indigenous parties to lessen the discrimination against the caste groups.

the creditor everyday while the master provides him with food. But where the debtor is married, he and his wife must work for the master for three days and they are provided with food on these days. Within the debtor's free days he was allowed to work and make money to repay his loan. And when he was ready to do this, he presented his creditor with a goat, a hen, twenty yams, a jar of wine, a pot of palm-oil, seasoning leaves, and four kola-nuts. The master too was expected to celebrate the occasion by sacrificing a chicken to *Anyanwu* – the sun deity or *Mbatako* – the deity of wealth, as an appreciation offering for the repayment of the loan. However, the debts of pawns were paid by their relations in many circumstances, especially where it was evident that they worked hard enough to redeem themselves. See generally, J. S. Harris, “Some Aspects of Slavery in Southeastern Nigeria,” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Jan. 1942, p. 43 (pp. 37-54).

²²⁴ Several reports of kidnap and pawning of children for the purpose of paying colonial taxes reached the colonial administration and provoked debates amongst members of the Nigerian Legislative Council in 1931. In this year, the DO at Onitsha reported that men in Ihiala, “who could no longer pay their taxes, gave their daughters to creditors as wives.” The tradition was for the lender to assume all debts as the bride-wealth he would normally have paid; and, in such situation, the bridegroom was expected to continually shoulder the payment of annual taxes for the bride's parents. At Aba also, “the local DO reported a ‘large number of cases’ involving the Aro, who allegedly brought girls ‘from Bende and Okigwi or further north’ to Bonny and Opobo, where they were either sold or pawned,” in the 1920s. At these times, child stealing was very rampant. In November 1933, an Assistant Commissioner of Police who was detailed to investigate slave dealing and child stealing in the South-Eastern provinces found evidence that children were occasionally kidnapped in parts of the Owerri province. Cases of pawning were also reported in the Orlu region. See Ekechi, “Pawnship in Igbo Society,” pp. 174, 178-179; he quotes Don Ohadike, “The Decline of Slavery among the Igbo People,” in Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa*, Madison, 1988, pp. 454-455. Also, see in detail “International Slavery Convention,” NAE, CSE 1/85/2924 and NAE, ARODIV 20/1/55 - pp. 45-46.

²²⁵ Ekechi, “Pawnship in Igbo Society,” p. 182.

CHAPTER II

CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO: THE EMERGENCE OF AGITATIONS, CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENTS AND THE EMANCIPATION OF IGBO CASTE GROUPS

2.0 Introduction

After the nineteenth century caste practices in Igboland started attracting stiff resistance from the caste groups who had begun to experience Christianity, education and general Westernization. For most of the colonial period, the campaigns for their emancipation to secure equal rights and privileges took various forms in many areas, as recorded by colonial officers. Several actions by freeborn individuals and village groups continued to provoke strong protests from these caste groups. And between 1916 and 1956, two prominent abolitions of the caste practices, firstly by the British Protectorate and later by the government of the Eastern Region, took place as a result of these protests.¹

Because of the huge population of *ohus* in northern Igboland which outnumbered the *osu* at any one place, it was difficult for any regime to ignore any form of protest against their status. However, their crusade seemed to achieve very little, firstly because the colonial administration, “for reasons of political expediency, was ambivalent and pragmatic in its approach to social reform,” and secondly, since “legislation, however well-intentioned, is often ineffective against attitudes and prejudices which cannot be easily reduced to specific grievances amenable to legal or administrative remedy,”² it was difficult to expel the problem which in itself was somewhat complex. It was in short true that the colonial regime tried to avoid mishandling cases that

¹ Moreover, as Nwaka recorded, “Igboland experienced overt threats to civil disobedience, violent protests and riots, large scale resettlement of the *ohu*, and sustained agitation by the *osu* for a separate state.” “At one point,” in fact, “the campaign posed a real threat to the attainment of self-government for Eastern Nigeria,” and it attracted the attention of the colonial administration in far away Britain. See Geoffrey I. Nwaka, “The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1985, p. 474 (pp 473-485).

² *Ibid.*, p. 475.

involved the people's culture. For instance, in 1864, Taylor wrote on missionary tolerance of human sacrifice in Igboland, noting that they could not "isolatedly pull down long habits of traditional air handed down to posterity," without gravely implicating themselves in the politics of the area. Then, he writes further, missionaries "may warn and lift up" their voices "against the madness of the people, and placing their sad state in the eyes of the Christian public." "Beyond that," he continues, a missionary couldn't do more, it required "a high hand of Authority to subjugate and suppress such inhumanity."³

The social history of the emancipation of the caste groups in Igboland spanned four historical periods, each coinciding with one of four major experiences and our objective in this chapter is to describe these episodes so that the reader is furnished with the series of events that led to contemporary struggles which have largely continued in the media and other public fora; and, to achieve this, we rely on archival and oral sources but make references to very helpful secondary sources. Nevertheless, in the early decades after 1900, the colonial administration merely engaged itself in military campaigns and expeditions against slaving oracles and oligarchies as it tried to gain entrance into most parts of the Igbo hinterland.⁴ By doing so, it conquered a huge mass of slaving oligarchies who before the arrival of the colonial

³ See Rev. John Christopher Taylor II, "A 'Report on the Political and Spiritual State of Onitsha' 1864," University of Birmingham, C A3/0 37/57; and F. K. Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, London: Frank Cass, 1971, p. 13. Also see S. Crowther and J. C. Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger 1857-1859*, London, 1859, p. 34, where they recorded that on his first interview with King Akazua of Onitsha, Crowther got the King to promise to abolish human sacrifices, even though it was a mere promise that did very little, it signalled the missionary determination to see that the practice came to an end. See also, K. Onwuka Dike, "Origins of the Niger Mission 1841-1891: A Paper read at the Centenary of the Mission at Christ Church, Onitsha, on 13 November 1957," Ibadan: Published for the CMS Niger Mission by the Ibadan University Press, 1962; this paper is available at - http://anglicanhistory.org/africa/ng/dike_origins1957.html. (Accessed July 2008)

⁴ Between 1900 and 1914 there had been more than a dozen British military expeditions into Igboland. Many reasons have been suggested to have caused the increase of expeditions in this era but it was prominent amongst the diverse reasons that gaining control over the interior of these areas was necessary to strengthen the stronghold of the British regime.

administration attained a high level of sophistication in the slaving business, and had established a “fearsome religion that had a developed, stylized and systemized cult, a shrine and some forms of liturgy under a hierarchical priesthood,”⁵ around the Eastern Region. By this time of course most slaves had begun to protest their status – demanding for equal rights with freeborns. The second period, between 1926 and 1960, witnessed more aggressive fallouts between the caste groups and the former masters and a number of protests against the colonial administration which seemed to have treated their matter nonchalantly; this finally resulted in a second legal abolition, this time by the indigenous government of the Eastern Region in 1956. The third era, from the latter to the late 1980s, experienced strong crusades which were a result of the 1956 abolition, culminating in several local abolitions which were of course encouraged by the prevailing media propaganda at the time. The last period, covering the period from the 1990s until today has been the most recent. It witnessed full-blown Christianization in a radical manner with the growth of Pentecostalism around the Igbo area. This period was eventful for the media, especially the broadcast media which had developed a robust film industry that was later to be called Nollywood. However, the caste groups benefitted greatly from education and the general Christianization of Igboland in the early 1900s, and their exposure to education and Christianity increased their quest for emancipation.

2.1 The Education and Christianization Advantage, Before 1900 and Beyond

The Church Missionary Society’s attempts to convert the Igbos to Christianity began in 1857 when the first Christian mission in Igboland was established at Onitsha. It was for some village groups an invasion; for others, a status symbol, and for most an advantage in trade. For most of the colonial period the Church shaped the emancipation discourse. It was obvious that as

⁵ David Asonye Ihenacho, *African Christianity Rises: A Critical Study of the Catholicism of the Igbo People of Nigeria*, Volume One, New York: iUniverse, 2004, p. 13.

diehard conservatives revolted against missionary attempts to establish new ways in place of the former by insisting that "it is the custom of our ancestors and we their children will be regarded as denigrated ones if we should either swerve or depart from that which was being done from countless ages back,"⁶ most of the caste groups, who had nothing to lose by the change of the status quo, grabbed the opportunity to become Christians and consequently, the educated elite. Ekechi has rightly observed that "those who embraced Christianity prior to 1900 were mainly people who, perhaps, were alienated from the traditional society; or suffered from certain social disabilities; or experienced certain natural misfortunes."⁷ The new doctrine preached equality of all men and the message was gratifying to the caste groups. The Church was the only place where they were regarded as human beings and they formed the bulk of the early converts while the freeborn groups mainly engaged in opposition against the new ways.⁸

Even well into the colonial period, until the 1920s and particularly between the 1930s and the 1940s,⁹ Igbos continued to protest against the new laws and systems, and as Basden reports, "the natives were very conservative, and allowed little scope for any departure from primitive

⁶ University of Birmingham, Church Missionary Intelligence, 1879, p. 239.

⁷ F. K. Ekechi, "Colonialism and Christianity in West Africa: The Igbo Case, 1900-1915," in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1971, p. 103 (pp. 103-115).

⁸ This had effects on the missions' evangelization because most freeborn people who sincerely appreciated the new gospel and considered embracing it preferred to stay away from the Church for fear of getting in contact with the caste groups. This chased away most freeborn people out of the congregation. Those who managed to remain stayed as far as they could from the caste groups. The missionaries however seemed to have concentrated their work on getting the youths who eventually formed the bulk of the congregation. Older people in their sixties and above especially did not attract much missionary effort, after all, they continuously proved to be elders and custodians of the Igbo culture and so "it was unbecoming for them to give up the religion of their ancestors." (See C. N. Ubah, "Religious Change Among the Igbo During the Colonial Period," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 18, Fasc. 1, Feb., 1988, pp. 83-84 (pp. 71-91)). There was also a feeling of shame amongst heads of lineages and priests of shrines who knew they had ritual and religious functions to perform in the villages to identify with the Christian religion. This, as well, made them hold back their wives and not-too-stubborn children from joining the Church. First sons of course were strictly restricted in families where the head of the home was considerably lenient since such child was expected to inherit his father's role in the future.

⁹ It was during this period that Igboland experienced a phenomenal expansion of Christianity. See again, Ubah, "Religious Change Among the Igbo During the Colonial Period," pp. 71-91.

ideas,”¹⁰ while the slaves continued to embrace Christianity en masse. On their part, the British – both colonial officers and the missionary agents – believed strongly in the use of the gospel as an agent of change against the traditional status quo. From the missionaries’ standpoint, “More is accomplished by persuasive measures, and by pointing out the obvious absurdities of this or that article of apparel, than by contemptuous attitude, which arouses the ire and stimulates every ounce of the innate obstinacy of the native.”¹¹ Basden like many others cautioned against completely condemning those resisting change whom he labelled ‘lovers of darkness’, preferring instead, to diffuse the good news gradually into the hinterland.¹²

The missionaries introduced Jesus Christ as a Saviour and this was to be the major attraction for the former slaves who would now be called unto His bosom. As Reverend Langley reported in 1862, “The natives previous to my arrival, offering human sacrifices, we spoke to them of its evil and pointed them to Jesus Christ who taketh away the sins of whole world, and I am glad to say, that since the last happened on the 25th of August this horrid scene never again happened.”¹³ In fact, records show that more acts like this were repeated in and around the Onitsha region where Langley based his judgement; for instance, in December 1871, a young man was killed for sacrifice.¹⁴ But, the Church realizing the importance of the ‘Saviour’ influence ‘who taketh away the sins of the world’ entered into a treaty with the Onitsha people through its chiefs, for the suppression of slave trade, prevention of human sacrifice and the opening and encouragement of legitimate trade, in 1864. In the Treaty, the kings and chiefs of Onitsha respectively stipulated “that they will not permit any slaves to be bought or sold or

¹⁰ G. T. Basden, “Denationalizing A Primitive People,” *The Church Missionary Review*, Vol. 66, London: Church Missionary Society, 1915, p. 601 (pp. 597-603, 726-732).

¹¹ Ibid., p. 731.

¹² G. T. Basden, “Fifty Years Work Among the Ibos of Nigeria,” *Church Missionary Reviews*, 1907, p. 145 (pp. 139-148).

¹³ University of Birmingham, Rev. Francis Langley, C A3/025/1 Letter 1862.

¹⁴ University of Birmingham, C A3/025/4 Annual Letter 1872.

shipped from their country, that they will not offer up human sacrifices, that they will allow the free exercise of the Christian Religion..."¹⁵

It was obvious by the beginning of the twentieth century that "the missionaries drew their converts mainly from the rejects of Igbo society – those like slaves, or accused witches, who had no prospect for happiness in Igbo society and therefore nothing to lose by attaching themselves to another one."¹⁶ Their admission into the new religion had an obvious benefit of education. However, one thing the new religion and Igbo traditional religion had in common was the belief in the existence of one Supreme God, his goodness, and so on. The missionary relied on this while it "warned the Igbo of the dangers of hell, and tried to depict the joys of heaven."¹⁷ The scares of hell brought a few into the Christian fold, but for the caste groups, it was for salvation which the Church agents had told the slaves was given by Jesus Christ freely without bias or traditional consecration. The former slaves started embracing the new teachings of Christian theology and most of them soon became Reverends and Priests. And because they were the first to also embrace western education, a good number of them became classroom teachers. By this time, it had become obvious that their former masters had lost standing under the new dispensation. Consequently, the caste groups around most Igbo village groups seized the opportunity of this change to form associations and civil rights groups to fight for equal rights and the total emancipation of their people.

2.2 The First Era: Missionary Activity and Political Upheaval, 1900-1925

The Aro Expedition of 1901-02 which opened the conquest of Igboland started off this era, even though the military invasion failed to fully achieve its purpose until later in the 1940s when the

¹⁵ University of Birmingham, C A3/037/58.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Isichei, "Seven Varieties of Ambiguity: Some Patterns of Igbo Response to Christian Missions," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 3, Fasc. 2, 1970, p. 212 (pp. 209-227).

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 216.

Aro Long Juju - the main target of the expedition - finally lost its pre-eminence. Britain had abolished slavery at the beginning of the 1800s, and this led to the liberation of slaves and the abolition of other practices that resembled slavery. However, it was only after the 1900s that abolition formed part of the colonial political discourse.¹⁸ The Long Juju, which became the bug-bear of the Protectorate during the closing years of the nineteenth century and beyond, was involved in large scale slavery and had markets and associates throughout Igboland and its surroundings. To curb this practice it was inevitable to begin with the destruction of the juju and the arrest of its soldiers. The expedition did not only aim at breaking the Long Juju's influence in the area, but also at freeing the slaves captured by the allied forces of the juju. But, the British Protectorate also relied on indigenous allies who were slave dealers for a lot of their activities as trade and governance in and around the area, thereby compromising incredibly their abolitionist policy.¹⁹ Because of the widespread belief that Aros possessed uncommon intelligence and experience in the trade of European consumables around the area, for instance, the British relied on their expertise to promote trade. Even in the northern part of Igboland, the foreign administration relied heavily on the support of 'big men' - prominent slave merchants - during the violent conflicts and slave insurrection in the area.²⁰ Britain's abolition agenda for the area thus seemed unsuitable and lenient. The administration rarely dealt with kingpins of slavery; rather they focused on stopping the slave-trade. As a District Officer (DO) in Igboland

¹⁸ G. Ugo Nwokeji, "The Slave Emancipation Problematic: Igbo Society and the Colonial Equation," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 40, No. 2, Apr., 1998, pp. 318-355 (see especially, pp. 318-322).

¹⁹ The Bonny and Opobo traders for instance, in 1896, secured "British acquiescence in their capture of slaves!" In fact, indigenous mercenaries like the Nguru, in Mbaïse who reputedly "helped the white men in the fight against Ahiara and captured many people" who were later "sold immediately," assisted the British in their expeditions and forceful access into the interior during the Ahiara Expedition of 1905. See Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, London: Macmillan Press, 1976, pp. 124-125.

²⁰ Carolyn A. Brown, "Testing the Boundaries of Marginality: Twentieth-Century Slavery and Emancipation Struggles in Nkanu, Northern Igboland, 1920-1929," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 1996, p. 69 (pp. 51-80).

observed in 1927, “slaveholders ‘never get punished and so the traffic goes on obeying the economical law of supply and demand, there being nothing done by the government to lessen the latter’.”²¹

This era also witnessed general administrative changes in the political structure of Igboland. Between 1874 and 1916, the colonial administration had introduced a good number of proclamations and ordinances aimed at the abolition of the legal status of slavery. By 1901, a Native House Rule Ordinance had come into existence and the creation of this document which Nwokeji called “a triumph for the slave-owning classes,” only “abolished the legal status of slavery, not the institution of slavery.”²² It clearly placed the responsibility of emancipation on the Native Courts. Interestingly enough, the new law specified punishments for resistance to slavery, stipulating a fine of £50 for such hard-headed slaves. It also stipulated a fine for anybody who employed the services of a slave without prior consent of the master. Because the Ordinance was short of the expectation of the abolitionist movement, a number of slaves escaped to neighbouring areas, especially to the western Igbo area where Nwokeji indicates they found refuge.²³ However, in 1916, the colonial regime had established a stronghold in the area, and an Emancipation Decree that seemed more sympathetic to the abolitionist movement was enacted. And, recognizing a slave’s right to freedom, this decree “provided that no court could enforce slavery.”²⁴ According to Nwokeji, “the implementation of this law would have

²¹ See generally, Nwokeji, “The Slave Emancipation Problematic,” p. 330. He quotes D. S. Cook, 1927. Asst. D. O., Agwu, to Resident, Owerri Province, 23 May. NAE Conf. C4/45 – AFIDIST 6/6/5: “Slave Dealing.”

²² Ibid., p. 331.

²³ See *ibid.* It was not at all easy for slaves to attempt flight. Most slaves feared being kidnapped by other slavers while escaping and they were not even guaranteed better treatment from the new captors and masters. Also, the fear of being recaptured by the former master was high; it could send such slaves to brutal deaths after being beaten and starved. G. T. Basden, *Niger Igbos*, London: Frank Cass & Co, 1966, p. 256.

²⁴ Nwokeji, “The Slave Emancipation Problematic,” p. 332.

eliminated the legal underpinnings of slavery,” but for “Lugard’s obligation to the indigenous ruling classes” which “compelled him to give safeguards.”²⁵ Lugard’s apologist attitude was born out of his fear that “a state of anarchy and chaos would result” if slaves were allowed to assert their freedom indiscriminately.²⁶ This was in effect a setback for emancipation hopefuls. In fact, the second section of the document which stated that “the institution of domestic slavery is not hereby abolished as would be done in a general decree of emancipation,”²⁷ only proved the decree to be another paper tiger of the colonial administration. While the administration tried to maintain the traditional status quo, most of its officers failed to appreciate the intensity of the practice “in order to avoid having to do anything about it.”²⁸ The reports by most colonial officers from the various districts merely proved this, and they often claimed that slaves, both the *osu* and *ohu*, only exaggerated their difficulties.

By the early 1920s the defunct League of Nations had become greatly interested in matters of slavery around the world. The League began to make investigations into the question of slavery around member nations and Nigeria. The colonial government then acknowledged in a report to the League that slavery, traffic in slaves, kidnapping and other offences against liberty was forbidden by law in Nigeria, insisting further that administrative officers on all possible occasions impressed the law on the people while making them aware of government determination to enforce it at all cost. According to their judgement, this fact was “known even in the most remote village of the least sophisticated tribe,”²⁹ and it was necessary to diffuse their abolitionist agenda since most slave dealers claimed ignorance of the law when these cases got to the Native Courts. While the government bragged of accomplishing a complete abolition of

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Nwaka, “The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland,” p. 478.

²⁷ Nwokeji, “The Slave Emancipation Problematic,” p. 332.

²⁸ Nwaka, “The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland,” pp. 477-478.

²⁹ “International Slavery Convention,” NAE, CSE 1/85/2924.

slave-raiding and the practical abolition of slave dealing on an extensive scale, they admitted that the practice was not entirely suppressed but gradually dying out. In fact, a colonial officer reported that the slaves in the Southern Province had merged into the general population and lost their servile status. The officer suggested that the free inter-marriage between the former slaves and the freeborn was the most significant 'outward and visible sign' of the fusion.³⁰ But in some areas the abolition of slavery had grave effects, especially in land-hungry villages where the conflict amongst freed slaves and their masters ensued over what rightfully belonged to them – the freeborn groups and the caste groups. Most of the slaves had farmed and cultivated on these lands for several years and their masters who had suffered financially and in most cases both in prestige and authority by the change of circumstances, refused to forfeit their lands as well as lose their 'slaves' removed from them by the forceful abolition. This led to a certain amount of trouble and occasional local fracas; one of such prominent conflicts that defined this era was the Nkanu slave resistance and disturbances of the early 1920s which has received some academic/media attention.³¹

2.2.1 The Ohu Uprising and Civil Rights Movement

Nowhere, perhaps, did the colonial administration confront more formidable opposition and resistance than in the northern Igbo area. The rebellion of slaves in Nkanu was eventful and indeed an eye-opening conflict for the Protectorate which had expected the matter to be resolved by education and gradual urbanization. The situation was more complicated than the British realized. Nkanu had a huge number of Aro settlers and it was notorious for its exceptionally 'rigid and oppressive' ownership and dealership of slaves. The area had a vast

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See especially Brown, "Testing the Boundaries of Marginality," pp. 51-80; and Tobs Agbaegbu, "Slavery in Igboland: The Osu take their Case against the Diala to the Human Rights Commission," *Newswatch*, Lagos, January 10, 2000, pp. 23-26.

expanse of land³² and slavery was more restrictive than in other parts of Igboland where self-redemption was attainable and intermarriage encouraged amongst the freeborn and *ohu* slaves. Nkanu slaves were forced to work for their masters and, according to Brown, the slave status in Nkanu was permanent and inherited “without provision for emancipation and marriage into the *amadi* [freeborn] community.”³³

The uprising of slaves reached its peak at the beginning of the 1920s when most of the slaves stopped working for their masters – the slave-holding ‘big men’. Though the disputes had begun long before this time, it was “accelerated by the opening of the railway and the colliery at Enugu after 1916.”³⁴ The expansion of labour activities for the railway, the mines and construction of Enugu encouraged slaves to explore more opportunities in these new employment areas. They began calling for equal rights to marriage and land ownership. Land and exploitative labour formed the nucleus of the revolt. The slaves were reluctant to leave the lands they had occupied for generations. All freeborn had full rights to land while slave access to land depended on loyalty and service to the master. On very many occasions slaves

³² Nkanu developed as a prominent slave depot and by the nineteenth century most wealthy elites in the area had accumulated large numbers of slaves to cultivate their lands and assist the business of slavery. The large expanse of land at Nkanu encouraged slavery as slaves were required to work on the farms. In fact, Nkanu notably became the breadbasket of Enugu by 1920.

³³ See Brown’s comprehensive study of the emancipation struggles in Nkanu in detail: Brown, “Testing the Boundaries of Marginality,” p. 55.

³⁴ The increase in the influence of mission schools in the area also increased the quest of slaves for freedom. (See Nwaka, “The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland,” p. 479. Also see Ogbu U. Kalu, “Primitive Methodists on the Railroad Junctions of Igboland, 1910-1931,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 16, Fasc. 1, Feb. 1986, p. 62 (pp. 44-66)). On the agitation of slaves in the Nkanu area, Brown notes that “There were some six strikes from January 1919 to early 1921, followed by a second wave in 1924-1925, and a final crisis in 1929.” Throughout South Nkanu area especially, her records indicate that there were a couple of unrests by the *ohus* during this period that agitated to be treated as equals. (See in detail, Carolyn A. Brown, *“We Were All Slaves”: African Miners, Culture, and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery*, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003, pp. 139-175). The people’s grievances had grown over time with the ‘evil’ meted out to them by their freeborn masters. In fact, by 1916, Ede Ani Chikiri, a wealthy business merchant in Nara, South Nkanu, was caught supplying slave women from Nkanu to the Aro for sacrifice at funerals of prominent men throughout Igboland and the Delta. This was among the reasons that vexed the caste groups who had watched members of their families carted and sold away for ritual activities as this. For this still see Brown’s *“We Are All Slaves,”* p. 35.

complained of exploitation by their wealthy slave masters who were commissioned “to supply workers for the railroad and the mines,” and would demand compensation from those sent to work in the new establishment for the loss of their services. They would also demand “recruitment fees and a portion of their mens’ wages as a form of tribute.”³⁵ Slaves were also banned from taking titles even when they could afford it. They were required to offer a huge portion of their animal sacrifices to their lords annually or as frequently as such sacrifices were made. Moreover, it would seem that the grievances of slaves had grown over several years as they watched their native folk being routinely kidnapped, sold and more often used for ritual sacrifices at funerals and title-taking ceremonies by their masters.³⁶ Such ill treatment would have provoked slaves to justifiable anger. Slave owners rejected calls for an equitable slave-master relationship and called the liberation exercise senseless, noting that it only made the slaves “more resentful, assertive, and aggressive.” As a matter of fact, a freeborn in the area petitioned the colonial administration against encouraging the slaves to “threaten and endanger progress” or even upsetting the customs of the town. The petitioner mocked the request of the former slaves to invariably join the freeborn in being “initiated into the Igede title dance,” enjoying the privilege of becoming “initiates of the *ozo* title” and even establishing marriage relationships with freeborn girls.³⁷

The colonial administration tried to tread softly on these issues. And, because “Customs are stronger than laws imposed by government,”³⁸ as a senior colonial officer acknowledged, the

³⁵ Brown, “Testing the Boundaries of Marginality,” p. 63.

³⁶ Slaves in this area were restricted from passing properties to heirs; rather whatever they had was inherited by their master. Even at the master’s death, the slave and entire household is transferred to the master’s heirs.

³⁷ See ONDIST 12/1/103, “Elders of Ngwo Native Court to Resident, Onitsha, 17/3/50, as cited in Nwaka, “The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland,” p. 479.

³⁸ OG 301/1922 RIVPROF, “Status of Alleged Slaves,” Memo of D. O. Degema, 11/12/22, as cited in Nwaka, “The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland,” p. 479.

administration was confused on how to grant the request of the rights movement without alienating the former masters. While the administration thought of a way to address the situation, "tension erupted in sporadic outbreaks of violence – in 1923, 1928, 1936, and throughout the duration of World War II," involving looting, raids, burning of settlements and child kidnapping across many parts of northern Igboland, especially in the Old Onitsha Province, Nkanu and Ngwo where former slaves and their descendants sought to break the old customs.³⁹

Further riots continued and in the midst of all the wrangling and confusion the government tried to resettle the ex-slaves or pay for their freedom.⁴⁰ But all these attempts failed to solve the problem as the wrangling over land and chieftaincy has continued even to the present and the

³⁹ The government continually boasted that it had done enough to quell the uprising by the slaves by making laws to recognize their rights, appointing them to colonial positions as warrant chiefs and tax collectors and employing most of them in the colliery and railway amongst others. At this time, they argued, it was left to time and education to do the rest. But they seemed wrong. See Nwaka, "The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland," p. 480.

⁴⁰ The colonial government adopted two approaches in ending the conflict. First, it imagined that a nominal rent introduced at the beginning of 1922 and lasting up till 1924 would resolve the conflict, but by 1925 the violence in surrounding areas suggested failure. The Lieutenant-Governor of the Southern Provinces, Colonel Moorhouse, in the same year stopped the annual rent and imposed a one-time redemption fee of twelve shilling on the Nkanu slaves. Most of the slaves accepted the proposal and made quick payments to their former owners through the Native and Provincial Courts. The pitfall of this approach was the confusion it created for the freeborn who still assumed the twelve-shilling payment to be an annual rent in lieu of the customary services of the *ohu*. The government did not make attempts to clarify this misunderstanding. The second option the government considered was resettling the ex-slaves on barren land. As a local resident argued, "once having separated the *Awbias* from the *Amadis* redemption will not be necessary." (See "International Slavery Convention," Vol. II, NAE, CSE 1/85/2925, p. 199). This scheme was carried out and most of the former slaves were moved, but they only occupied a smaller section of a land which was relatively not as much as the colonial government had promised. This caused more friction between the ex-slaves and their former masters; after all, they had lost the services of their slaves and now, more parts of their land. It caused more disaffection amongst the people and as was expected, the colonial administration noted that the ex-slaves "must now act as freemen. They cannot be spoonfed forever by government. Other people who suffer from land shortage rent land, and they must do the same." Also see Nwaka, "The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland," p. 481.

conflicts and stigma of being slave descendants still persist in an irrefutable manner in “so many dimensions of life” across the Nkanu area.⁴¹

2.3 The Second Era: Economic Conflict and Indigenous Abolition, 1926-1960

By the beginning of 1926 the British administration had not established a firm grip on the conflicts and resistance that started in the northern Igbo region and spread to other areas. The colonial armed forces were still engrossed in maintaining peace around Enugu before the introduction of tax was to cause further disturbances like the prominent Aba women’s riot of 1929 which sparked off other debates on caste groups and tax.⁴² Moreover, in the Owerri and

⁴¹ Axel Harneit-Sievers, *Constructions of Belonging: Igbo Communities and the Nigerian State in the Twentieth Century*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006, p. 259-260.

⁴² In 1914, Lugard had proposed the imposition of direct taxation in the Eastern Provinces but for some reasons it was ignored until about fourteen years later in April 1928 when direct taxation was introduced for the first time in the Province in accordance with the provisions of the Native Revenue Ordinance of the previous year. Before then, in 1926, the government had instructed the administrative officers in the province to count the male population. The local people were ignorant of the purpose of the urgent census. And by 1929, rumour had spread around the southeastern Igbo areas that the recently introduced taxation of men was to be extended to women who often claimed dependence on their husbands who were already made to pay taxes. In December, the same year, serious conflicts and riots had erupted in Owerri and parts of the Calabar Provinces. It was a massive revolt of local women that was never encountered before in Igbo history. Women had spread palm fronds across villages summoning their counterparts in surrounding areas and by the morning of the 9th in the same month, about 1,000 women had gathered in Owerri to disrupt activities of the Native Court where they destroyed and looted records, embarrassed local chiefs and raided the clerk’s and messengers quarters. The riots had spread to the second week of December to the trading nerve of Aba where over 10,000 women had gathered from the township and surrounding villages to protest with green leaves and sticks. They attacked European trading stores, government offices, the local Magistrate’s house as well as the Aba Native Court and Prisons where they freed 34 prisoners, most of whom were women. The riots spread across different areas and looting and destruction of properties continued to take place in these areas. Particularly, the Native Courts in Owerri – Ngor and Nguru – and Aba – Asa, Azumini and Obohia – were destroyed. In areas where court buildings were pardoned, the chiefs were merely chased out while prisoners were released. The same happened in the Calabar Province and in Opobo particularly, the riot was sustained for four days leading to the death of 32 persons – a man and 31 women – murdered by the guns of troops commanded by Lieutenant Hill. This was later condemned as unjustified. The government however restored order by placing troops at certain locations and disbanding illegal gatherings of large groups of women around the area. In February 1930, the government constituted a commission of inquiry to look into the disturbances and their findings was later to define government policy and actions as regards taxes. There are many published books and articles on this riot. See the following especially: J. E. N. Nwaguru, *Aba and British Rule: The Evolution and Administrative Developments of the Old Aba Division of Igboland 1896-1960*, Enugu: Santana Press, 1973, pp. 99-110. Also see other detailed reports on the Aba Riots as Judith Van Allen’s chapter, “‘Aba Riots’ or Igbo ‘Women’s War’? Ideology, Stratification, and the

Aba region where the riot concentrated, several crusades for the emancipation of the caste groups continued, leading to threats of civil disobedience in these areas. An Anglican missionary, Basden, had warned the Legislative Council in 1935 of the dangerous social conditions and unambiguous prejudice the *osu* particularly were exposed to, noting that they were “already discussing civil disobedience by refusing to pay tax to force the matter to a head.”⁴³ He canvassed for the introduction of some form of legislation to amend the slavery laws that was already in existence. Basden’s judgement presumably resulted from the attitudes and judgements of Native Courts towards cases that involved the *osu* which they merely treated on the basis of customary beliefs and local traditions. In Ihiala for instance, a man was sentenced to two terms of 18 months incarceration for proposing marriage to a ‘slave’ woman. Also the father of the bride-to-be was fined £5. This case and two others were heard by the Ihiala Native Court who ruled similar judgements on November 16, 1927. The charge read against the defaulters was an alleged breach of native customs and this aroused considerable feeling from both sides. The DO at Onitsha who reported the three cases noted that the grievances were of a social nature, and were unconnected to land rights.⁴⁴ Barmby, the Acting DO of Nsukka Division, reported in 1935 slave dealing in the area, where those caught in the act were acquitted by the judge on the “grounds that there was no evidence that the children were to be held or treated as slaves, and no proof that the children could not run away if they wished

Invisibility of Women,” in Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (eds.), *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976, pp. 59-86; D. C. Dorward, *The Igbo Women's War of 1929: Documents Relating to the Aba Riots in Eastern Nigeria*; and Nina Emma Mba's *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*, Berkeley: University of California, 1982, pp. 68-97.

⁴³ NAE, OP 1322 ONDIST, “Osu System: Dedication of Children to Juju Priests: Legislation Against.” See memo of Ag. Secretary of the Southern Provinces to Resident Owerri, 27/12/1935 on Archdeacon Basden's submission to Legco, as cited in Nwaka, “The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland,” p. 479.

⁴⁴ The British government later suspended the sentences and later quashed the judgement. See NAE, ONDIST 12/1/1987, “Position of Slaves and Free Born (1928-1950).”

to.”⁴⁵ In another case that came before the Native Court in Owerri, “a man charged in 1936 with dedicating a girl to a local deity as *osu* was discharged by the presiding judge on the grounds that there was no evidence to show that the girl could not run away if she wished, or ‘that she was held and treated like a slave’.”⁴⁶

The *osu* persistently complained of “ignominious insults, open disgrace, molestations and maltreatment” by the freeborn to the colonial officials who had initially ordered the transfer of all cases involving the *osu* to the Protectorate Courts.⁴⁷ From all indications, it would appear that the *osu* group was not satisfied with the handling of their affairs by the colonial administration. In 1936 the *osu* group in Owerri Division complained that they were denied their civil and political rights having been “shut out and excluded from Native Court and Clan Council affairs.” In a petition signed by their representatives from different towns in the Division, the group cried out against the determination of the freeborn to keep them and their “children under everlasting serfdom, while and whereas the liberation of slaves under British Flag has been pronounced.” In fact, they argued that they were deprived of their “birthright and liberty.” They accepted their condition as being living human sacrifices to idols, but they labelled the persistence of the shameful and disgraceful practice “inhuman, brutal, tyrannical and oppressive,” while calling on the British administration to intervene. The group threatened: “we shall be obliged to refuse the payment of ... taxation which appears of no use to us,” unless the government took the following measures:

- (a) to stop the act of buying, selling, and sacrificing a human being to idols, while cows, goats, sheep, dogs, fowls and eggs can serve the same purpose; (b) to grant us and our children freedom and liberty

⁴⁵ “Dedication of Children to Juju Priests (1935),” NAE, CSE/1/85/5537.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ NAE, OP 1322 ONDIST, J. B. Barmby, Ag. D. O., Nsukka to Resident, Onitsha, as cited in Nwaka, “The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland,” p. 482.

as freemen, so long as we all are under the British Flag; (c) to make us represent our various families['] interest[s] in the Native Councils and in Judicial Clan Courts; (d) to grant us the advantage of collecting tax from our own men by those our family heads.⁴⁸

It is unclear if these requests were granted or if there were any revolts afterwards, but certainly similar calls for emancipation erupted in many other areas like Orlu in 1939, where the *osu* agitators claimed the government neglected them in favour of the freeborn who dominated most of the Native Courts in the area and also tried cases that involved the *osu* and freeborn.⁴⁹ Moreover, more revolts followed from other caste groups who constantly called for abolition.⁵⁰

2.3.1 Abolition of the Osu System Law

Nigeria was on the verge of gaining independence from British colonialists in the 1950s. And by this time the Igbo dominated East Regional Government was disturbed by the high rates of bride-wealth which had become prevalent in Igboland. A commission was constituted in 1954 to investigate the matter of bride-wealth and then to consider the social implications of the payment of bride price amongst the people of the region. The Balonwu Commission on Bride

⁴⁸ Felix K. Ekechi, *Tradition and Transformation in Eastern Nigeria: A Sociopolitical History of Owerri and Its Hinterland, 1902-1947*, Kent: The Kent State University Press, pp. 188-190.

⁴⁹ NAE, ORLDIST 8/1/136, Anyiam Anyadoh and others to Senior Resident, Owerri Province, April 17, 1939.

⁵⁰ One notable agitation was by the Madubuotu Welfare Association (Madubuotu literally translates to "all men are equal") and the Osu Abolition Society. The duo in 1955 petitioned the colonial governments to act against the prejudice meted to them by not appointing members of their group to Native Courts as judges, court clerks and other enviable positions which seemed to have been strictly enjoyed by the freeborn. In their petition they protested that "our tax is paid without representation," and "When independence is granted to the Dialas, they will make a meal of us we assure you." This fear led to their stern proposal to the administration that: "(a) *Osu* descendants should continue to remain under British Protection and have no legal obligation to the *diala* government; (b) A region or sub-province in Owerri to be allocated to *osu* descendants where they would live together and manage their own affairs. Let the *dialas* free their *osu* before they themselves are freed by the colonial government. If they love freedom, which they seek through independence, why do they still hold us in bondage." Agitations as these were typical across Igboland and by 1956 a new indigenous abolition law was to come into existence. See NAE, OW 8198 UMPROF, Petition of the Madubuotu Welfare Society, Owerri and Okigwi, c/o Alfred Emenyonu, to Resident Owerri, 25/3/55, as cited in Nwaka, "The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland," p. 483.

Price⁵¹ after extensive investigations published in its recommendations to the then government, that it was necessary to ameliorate or remove “anomaly or hardship” associated with customary marriages and divorce. The findings of the Commission revealed that certain persons suffered social disabilities and were stigmatized for purposes of marriage simply because they were labelled *osu* or descendants of *osu*, or *ohu* or descendants of *ohu*. It also made clear in its findings that it was during marriage inquiries that the skeleton in the *osu*’s ancestral cupboard was exposed. The Commission whose mandate was merely to investigate bride-wealth, made recommendations that produced three Bills – a Bill to abolish the “Osu” System, a Bill to prohibit the marriage of persons under the age of sixteen, and a Bill to limit Bride Price and incidental marriage expenses.

As was expected, the Osu Abolition Bill provoked an intense debate in the East Regional House of Assembly in 1956. The sponsor of the Bill, then Minister of Welfare, spoke condemningly of the criticisms the bill had attracted particularly those that considered instead, that education and the progress of enlightenment would do the abolition automatically. Decrying the unfortunate discrimination which was rife in schools and amongst leading lawyers and other educated men who openly supported the practice, the Minister insisted that education was not curing the stigma. The Government received a prominent protest from a Kaduna based Igbo group, Owerri Division Cultural Society, who indicated in their petition that it was preferable to allow the practice to die through a gradual process of acculturation rather than to abolish it by legislation. The group warned the government of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons against giving importance and reviving the already dying practice. Generally, the

⁵¹ It was the Balonwu Commission report on Bride Price that rekindled the desire of the indigenous government to get the *osu* system abolished as the then minister of social welfare only commenced the abolition process after the submission.

concern by most anti-abolitionists was that imposing penalties for practising the *osu* system would stir up quarrels and litigations and equally allow the caste groups to take undue advantage of the law to abuse their new rights.⁵²

Moreover, the fiercest opposition the Bill got from the members of the House⁵³ was by N. N. Anyika of the Awka Division who said: "I am ashamed to see that some gentlemen, who are respectable, and who said we should not support the *osus* have entered this House to say they are supporting the *osus*. Surely they are afraid." Anyika argued against the freeing of old *osus* but called on the Government to prosecute anybody who is seen consecrating any new *osus*, after all, "If there are no masters there will be no *osus*," he supposed. Most House members established fears that supporting the Bill might suggest they are *osu*. Some also feared the wrath of the deities, but the Health Minister advised: "About those fears of some Honourable Members who are opposed to the Bill, I say that these gods will not do anything." Moreover, one tough criticism that came from the abolitionists was the issue of penalty which they

⁵² The Premier, Nnamdi Azikiwe, who equated the process with the Magna Carta of 1215, the Petition of Rights of 1628, the Abolition of Slavery Act of 1806, the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, and India's Untouchability Act of 1954, noted that it was hypocritical to expect independence from Britain when "certain imponderables, like the *osu* system, stare us squarely in the face," because it was important to prove "to the world that our demand for self-government is based on sound ethical foundations." See the Eastern House of Assembly Debates, Third Session, First Meeting, Vol. 1, 5th to 19th of March, 1956, pp. 403-405.

⁵³ One House member, A. N. Obonna, who represented the Owerri Division, also had strict reservations about the Bill. He asked the House to note that the Legislation was not particularly targeted at educated and enlightened masses, but for those in local areas who did not understand what human rights meant. He argued that it was best to educate the local people first and prepare their minds for the expected change before any form of legislation was introduced. Obonna's verdict on the issue of marriage rights for the *osu* was that no law could prosecute a man for refusing to give his daughter in marriage to an *osu*. For instance, if an *osu* walked up to a freeborn to marry his daughter and he says "my daughter is not ready to marry," and the following day a freeborn comes to marry the same young girl and her father agrees to their union, will the freeborn "be prosecuted in any Court of Law?" Obonna asked. In fact, he condemned: "one of the things this law will succeed in doing is to revive the dying thing." (See the Eastern House of Assembly Debates, 1956, p. 406). Obonna based his suggestions on the fact that the force of mere legislation only meant toleration and lacked the principle to eradicate the system from its root – that is from the human heart. He however supported the abolition of the system but had grave doubts in doing so by legislation.

imagined was not enough. In fact, the Health Minister suggested that any offender going against the Law when passed “ought to be jailed straight away.” Another suggestion by C. Okafor, a Member from the Orlu Division called for the increase of the stipulated fine from £50 to £500.⁵⁴ The Law was remarkably passed on May 10, 1956 and the punishment for offenders was put at a fine not exceeding £50 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.⁵⁵

The legislation against the *osu* practice also covered other forms of social disability and stigma against the *ohu*, *ume*,⁵⁶ and other caste groups that suffered similar prejudices. And because it was the first indigenous abolition after several abolitions by the British administration, it was remarkable and welcomed by those who sought emancipation. The process was a giant leap for pro-abolitionists and even though the legislation had setbacks as we will observe in the following chapter especially, it provoked considerable changes in and around Igboland which was experienced at the beginning of the third era after Nigeria had gained independence.

2.4 The Third Era: Local Abolitions and Redefinition of Identity, 1965-1980s

This period, after the 1956 abolition, was most vibrant and eventful for both the Nigerian government which had gained full independence from Britain, and the caste groups, who were now to enjoy their new rights. The Abolition Law had become popular and published even in pamphlets and gazettes across the Eastern Region and the government wholeheartedly expressed determination to enforce the law to the last letter. But many things happened. This phase witnessed numerous calls for local abolitions amongst many village groups, mass media campaigns against the caste practices and especially, the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 408-415.

⁵⁵ See Appendix I for the 1956 Osu Abolition Law.

⁵⁶ *Ume* is a distinct caste group as the *ohu* and *osu* known particularly around Imo and Abia States. They do not exist outside these states. But they belong to the *osu* groups as well.

Indeed, the era defined today's conception of the caste practices and the patterns of people's behaviour towards the descendants of former slaves.

2.4.1 The Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970

The Nigerian Civil War which lasted through July 6, 1967- January 13, 1970, was a conflict that resulted after the then military governor of the defunct Eastern Region, Lieutenant-Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, declared the Igbo dominated Eastern Region the Republic of Biafra. The proclamation had come on May 30, 1967, a week before the Nigerian Federal Government under its commander, General Yakubu Gowon, launched its action to retake the secessionist territory.⁵⁷

However, the effects of this war on the caste practices were intense. Because it was forbidden for a freeborn to mix or have any form of social interaction with the *osu*, except under special circumstances, bodily contacts, eating or drinking from the same cup or plate was a taboo. No form of contact or association was encouraged; after all, to spill an *osu's* blood alone could

⁵⁷ Many essayists have attributed the causes of this war to the economic, cultural, religious and particularly, ethnic tensions that Nigeria experienced from the beginning of the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by the British in 1914, and particularly, after its independence in October 1960. From independence, until the first military coup in January 1966, a number of political crises threatened the dissolution of the then fragile Nigerian Republic and the rift between the Federal Government and the East Regional Government then seemed to be over who was to head the Military junta after the 1966 coup, as the latter only recognized the Federal Military Government as an interim regime. But the dispute was centred on a number of issues which had serious ethnic underpinnings. A good number of books have been written on the Nigerian-Biafran War. See amongst others, Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, *The Biafra War: Nigeria and the Aftermath*, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1991, see especially 73-114; E. Wayne Nafziger, "The Economic Impact of The Nigerian Civil War," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 10, No.2, July 1972, pp. 223-245; and Elechi Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra: A Civil War Diary*, London: Heinemann, 1973. John De St. Jorre, a foreign journalist who witnessed the events of the war compiled his account in his book - *The Nigerian Civil War*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972. His book gives a comprehensive account on both sides and is published with useful pictures. Also, John J. Stremlau's *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977, is a good historical account with a chronology of important events in the war. Perhaps, the most detailed report on the Nigerian-Biafran conflict is A. H. M. Kirk-Greene's volumes - *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969, Vol. I, January 1966-July 1967*; and the second part - *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969, Vol. II, July 1967-January 1970*, both published in London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

attract the wrath of the deities and inflict misfortune on the offender. But the war, which displaced a lot of individuals and had many Igbo returnees who had fled from the Lagos Township and other areas like far away Kano, transformed the status quo. For three long years, people fought together irrespective of freeborn or slave status, they ate together, shared the same war camps and rehabilitation centres and even travelled together. Their aim was unitary, and it was to defeat the other side. Gradually, even as the war came to an end, many freeborn realised that association with the *osu* was not dangerous in itself. And, as one respondent told us, the war “changed the freeborn perception about the caste groups” because it decreased the usual fear of association.⁵⁸ No matter how one looks at the effects, it diminished the intensity of isolation even though it did not completely eradicate the prejudice and discrimination against the stigma. After the war, *osus* in some village groups started living amongst freeborn groups. In some areas the ban against admitting them into some special institutions was beginning to wear off. And as we will see below, the caste groups began to influence the town unions and traditional institutions to institute local abolition laws.

2.4.2 Local Abolitions amongst Village Groups

During the East Regional House of Assembly debate concerning the Abolition Law, some members of the House expressed doubts about the effect the Law was going to have on the grassroots - the local villagers - who were at the forefront of the discriminatory practices. Others outside the House, including the Church, feared that the Law would have very little impact on the people since they hardly even knew how to read or write. These thoughts and the experiences of the Civil War triggered local abolition proclamations across several parts of Igboland where the practice was prominent. Nnobi, for instance, was one of the first

⁵⁸ Emeka Onuorah, Private Discussion, 2007.

communities to take such a step. The then traditional ruler, Igwe Ezeokoli, had been consulted by a group of public-spirited individuals in March 10, 1969, to form an association that would work towards the abolition process. He was to head this group and by November 15, 1971, after several meetings and rituals, and according to the Igwe, "in keeping with the former Eastern Nigerian Government 'Osu Caste Law 1956' which made the practice of *osu* an offence punishable by law,"⁵⁹ the *osu* practice was pronounced abolished at a local ceremony and other similar events followed in several village groups.⁶⁰

Even though most of these abolitions appeared to be mere celebrations and show-off, it became evident as the years rolled by that they opened the doors for the caste groups into most of the social organizations and chieftaincy institutions where they once were denied membership. Nnobi, for instance, a few months after its abolition admitted for the first time an *osu* into the Igwe's cabinet. However, Nnobi's constitution provides that a person must be freeborn to occupy the town's Igwe stool.⁶¹ Also, for the first time, an *osu* had the privilege of becoming the

⁵⁹ H.R.H. Igwe E. C. Ezeokoli, *The Liberty of Man and Other Essays*, Obosi: Pacific Publishers, 1990, pp. 42-27. Also see, Godwin Anyanwu, "Osu Abolished in Nnokwa," Enugu: *Daily Star*, July 29, 1981, p. 5.

⁶⁰ A month after Nnobi's proclamation, on December 30, the abolition was celebrated in the presence of many prominent dignitaries including the commissioner for health and social welfare of the East Central State, S. G. Ikoku. Before this time, the Adazi-Ani community, a neighbouring village to Nnobi, had instituted a local abolition when members of its town union met at their town hall in December 31, 1964 to deliberate on the issue. (See Patrick C. Ezech, "Caste Practices in Igboland: Osu in Adazi-Ani," BSc (Sociology/Anthropology) Dissertation, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1977, p. 75). Ogidi too, had its caste practices abolished in August 21, 1971. Moreover, the abolition attempts by Nnobi and others continued to spur other neighbouring towns. All communities in the Ihiala Division, for instance, reportedly abolished all caste practices in April 15, 1972. Another village, Umuoji, which shares certain boundary with Nnobi, abolished its case on October 1972, even though they had a larger celebration in September 22, 1973 to mark a years' anniversary. Other communities like Oba in the Idemili group of villages, without dissentient voices, abolished the practice in July 24, 1974. Umuagor community in Orlu joined the bandwagon, abolishing all forms of caste practices within the area in 1974. Nnokwa, under Igwe Ezekwem I, at an impressive ceremony at the Eke Nnokwa Market, followed suit after seven years, on June 13, 1981. (See George Chikata, "'Man's Inhumanity to Man' - The Osu System Among Christians in Igboland: A Socio-Theological Investigation," Bachelors of Theology Dissertation, Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, 1989, p. 66). Awka-Etiti did the same in an elaborate ceremony where the Igwe, Okaa-Ome Silas Ezenwa, called the practice a social evil.

⁶¹ Ezeobianumba Ajaghaku, Interview, Nnobi, June 24, 2007. Also see Nnobi Town Constitution, 1998.

president of Nnobi Welfare Organization.⁶² Following similar moves in towns across Igboland, the former *osu* gradually gained most of the privileges they had clamoured for at the beginning of the first era and the isolation gap between the freeborn and the *osu* was indeed beginning to close. At Nnokwa particularly, the effect of the local abolition is felt until today. Although people still know who is who, both classes have so merged that according to the present traditional ruler, an *osu* could even contest to become Igwe.⁶³ However, as we will observe in the following chapter, most of the local abolitions failed to remove all prejudices attached to the system, even though they solved in one way or the other certain problems related to association.⁶⁴

2.4.3 Self-determination and the Jostling for a “New Name”

From the foregoing, particularly after a series of local abolitions by several village groups, the caste groups began clamouring for separate and autonomous communities. They began to seek

⁶² Benechukwu B. O. Emeh, Interview, Nnobi, June 16, 2007. Both E. Ajaghaku and B. B. O Emeh have held positions as president of the Nnobi Welfare Organization. Ajaghaku was president at the time of this interview. Of course, in Nnobi, like most towns in Igboland, the town union is a powerful political block, especially in taking decisions. At times the authoritative union is even more powerful than the Igwe because it constitutes a strong democratic force with membership spread across major towns in Nigeria and Diaspora. See particularly, Ifi Amadiume's book where she writes on the Nnobi Welfare Organization; *Daughters of the Goddess, Daughters of Imperialism: African Women Struggle for Culture, Power and Democracy*, London: Zed Books, 2000, pp. 200-202, 209-220.

⁶³ H.R.H Igwe Christopher Ezeagu, Interview, Nnokwa, June 15, 2007.

⁶⁴ Most of the abolition rituals were shams to deceive the caste groups into believing that their problems were over. In Igbo-Ukwu for instance, a retired principal, 80, who witnessed an abolition attempt in the area in 1975 narrates how a manipulative abolition ritual was carried out to deceive the caste groups who clamoured for what should never be their right. According to Cyril Ike, the whole process began with gathering of dignitaries to the town, including the minister of information, culture and tourism. The event which held at the civic centre was broadcast on television. The time came for the highest chief in the town, a ninety year old man who was in charge of culture and traditions in Igbo-Ukwu to perform the rituals of abolition. The old man stood at the centre of the congregation and was given seven kola nuts to pray and break and declare the practice abolished in the town. According to Ike, as the old man fumbled on one of the kola nuts, “he became a target of a battery of eyes and equipments. But the old man was wiser than all the people who came together. He used a language with which he circumvented, cornered the whole functions and nobody understood it until afterwards.” Ike refused to state what the old man said on record, but he explicitly recounted that the old man was able to “philosophically outwit the whole town” even in the presence of dignitaries. The old man did this to avoid inviting the wrath of the deities to his side. Cyril Ike, Interview, Igbo-Ukwu, June 24, 2007.

a new identity. Before this time, most *osu* had been segregated in a part of the town where they all lived, usually at the precincts of a shrine. The reason they clamoured for separate communities is twofold. For them, change had become inevitable. And following the abolition of their former status, it was believed that complete emancipation could only be achieved when the people totally enjoyed certain prestigious rights such as chieftaincy, memberships of social organizations and freedom to participate in cultural events, like the special dances which were forbidden to them in the past. Also, it was necessary, in their opinion, to change the names of their villages and even surnames since most of these names suggested meanings associated with servitude. In Nnobi, for instance, because of their large numbers, most *osu* lived around the prominent Idemili shrine along the boundary demarcating Nnobi and Nnewi.⁶⁵ People in this area have changed their name three times so far, the latest being 'Eziora.' At the beginning they were called 'Umu-Osu' which literally translates to 'children of slaves,' later their name changed to 'Umu-Ifeagu' and then 'Ifite-Ofuu,'⁶⁶ before the new name was coined.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ The location, which has remained to date, was in the past, the evil forest of Nnobi village group. Before the European outsiders invaded the area, dead criminals and slaves or cursed persons were thrown into the evil forest. In fact, when the missionaries visited Nnobi in the past and demanded for a land to build a hospital and a school, Nnobi people gladly asked them to site their projects at the evil forest without buying the land believing that it would scare the missionaries away. To their surprise, the missionaries with the aid of indigenous converts cleared the area once feared as evil and built their projects which have remained at the area to date. Fieldwork Notes, 2007. See Awuda-Ebenesi Land Case, 1907-1935: Court Proceedings and Decisions.

⁶⁶ All of these names, except 'Umu-Osu', have got no relationship with *osu*. 'Umu-Ifeagu' translates to 'descendants of a new town'; 'Ifite-Ofuu' in Nnobi means 'new Ifite' – this is because the caste groups in the area were part of a larger (freeborn) village called Ifite. However, Eziora means different things in Igboland. But in this case, 'Ezi' when used as a prefix to a village name means 'road leading to', while 'ora' means 'public.' It is important to note that most Igbo villages bear similar names. For instance, 'Eziora' or 'Ifite' may be the name of another village in Igboland. It is obviously because of the fact that these names do not have caste connotations that this group chose to be called by these names.

⁶⁷ Nnobi people had always defined a clear distinction between the freeborn and the caste groups even after the war, well on to their local abolition. No member of Eziora community was admitted into the Igwe's cabinet before this time. They could never perform the ritual of breaking kola nuts even where their member was the oldest in the gathering. Indeed, it was also rare to find an *osu* amongst lineages of freeborns. The relationship between both groups was particularly unpleasant. Nevertheless, after the abolition in the area the Eziora people boldly approached the Igwe and the town union requesting for

Similar attempts to redefine their community were made by northern Igbo former slaves. From the works of Nwaka,⁶⁸ Brown⁶⁹ and Harneit-Sievers,⁷⁰ one can see that the *ohu* in Nkanu and Nike areas began to redefine their status after they discovered it was difficult for their group to be integrated into the freeborn community. The people called themselves *Ndi Awbia* or *Obia* which plainly translates to ‘those from elsewhere’ or basically ‘strangers.’⁷¹ It is not clear how far the change of name helped this group, but the people of Nkanu were particularly hostile to the ex-slaves. However, we must remember, as already indicated, that their rift was as a result of disputes over land and labour. For the former slaves, they were exploited and thus, they formed the Ndiobia Society to challenge the exploitative dominance of their former masters. Nkanu former slaves took this step after World War II, and ever since, they have continued to struggle over land in the area and like the Eziora people in Nnobi they changed their name several times. Also, around the Owerri area, most *osu* villages continued to transform their identity, making changes in family and village names. All these changes in local names and

substantial memberships for their people. The admission of their kinsman into the Igwe’s inner caucus was the beginning of the change they foresaw, and the Igwe never hide his determination to prove the sincerity of his abolition proclamation. It would seem that the most significant element of emancipation in this area was equal rights to partake in every function that was formerly reserved for freeborn. But one thing that remains impossible, at least for now, is climbing the stool of Igweship, which most people, even those who dislike and detest the practice fear they never want to experience. Such hindrances as this are what most caste groups have continued to fight for and this increased the call for autonomy. The feeling amongst this people is that total emancipation would be attained if and when they had their own village; so far as they will elect a leader amongst themselves, have their own kingship patterns, social organizations, peer groups and lineages where restrictions to things like breaking kola nuts and pouring libations would be totally unnecessary.

⁶⁸ Nwaka, “The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland,” p. 475.

⁶⁹ Brown, “Testing the Boundaries of Marginality,” pp. 77-80. By the second decades of the 1900, the colonial government declared the term *ohu* illegal in the northern Igbo area as a result of the persistent request by the *ohu* group, and the name *Awbia* was to be used henceforth. This according to Brown was an attempt to erase the stigma attached to the slave born. See also, pp. 16, 21, 25-26 of the same article.

⁷⁰ Harneit-Sievers, *Constructions of Belonging*, pp. 258-279. Also see Axel Harneit-Sievers, “Igbo Local Histories: Constructing Community in Southeastern Nigeria,” in Axel Harneit-Sievers (ed.), *A Place in the World: New Local Historiographies from Africa and South-Asia*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, pp. 54-55.

⁷¹ In 1937, in a report on slavery, the colonial administration noted that there were *Awbias* who had requested for separate settlements around the Nsukka Division. The report particularly mentioned Akegbe area in Nkanu, and Nara, also in the same area. See “International Slavery Convention,” Vol. II, NAE, CSE 1/85/2925, pp. 198-199, 221.

especially family names solved part of the problem because some names had become very popular across Igboland as slave names. In fact, speculations abound, with several scholars suggesting that those with such names as Nwosu, Osunkwo, Osuagwu, Osudo and others have servile connotations. To date, most Igbos are not sure why people have these names. Some say their meanings may merely be attached to the situation surrounding the individual's birth. According to Arinze, "Igbo names always have a meaning and these names are often given in honour of God, the spirits or ancestors, at times it may just be given to show some form of joy at the arrival of a child or to commemorate a special occurrence."⁷² From our poll of respondents, many people still think individuals with these names must be descendants of former slaves, but as well, a good number of our respondents think otherwise. The case may be different across several areas, because in the Anambra area for instance, these names do not in any way suggest servitude, but in some parts of Imo, many people argue such persons are indeed descendants of slaves. That aside, Arinze's suggestion in any case is true in diverse parts of Igboland.

2.4.4 The Mass Media and the Emancipation Struggle

The 1956 abolition was followed by an avalanche of criticisms from the mass media unleashed against the caste practices. All abolition attempts attracted considerable media attention to the emancipation of the caste groups during this period and by the end of the 1980s when the media continuously criticized the existence of the *Efuru* deity and the continuation of servitude in the Ukehe area which finally got the attention of the government of the old Anambra State.⁷³

⁷² Francis A. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970, p. 3.

⁷³ In the late 1980s when the *Efuru* case became prominent, the news media especially reported the investigation daily and attracted the government and other neighbouring communities to the events surrounding *Efuru*. A TV journalist who worked with the Nigerian Television Authority at Enugu for instance, told us that the story was a 'big one' for newspapers. According to him, many papers gave the story 'headline coverage' and this got everyone talking about the incident. Even after the state government set up an investigative enquiry committee to look into the matter, the media continued to

And as we shall see in the next chapter, the deity was brought to the ground by the government and the slaves it held bondage were released and resettled at their former homes. Spirited attempts were made, not only by journalists, but also concerned individuals across Nigeria, to speak, usually against Igbo caste practices. Several articles with headlines like “Culture that Must Die,”⁷⁴ “Time to Bury the ‘Osu’ Caste System”⁷⁵ and “Bringing an End to ‘Osu’ System”⁷⁶ were published in various newspapers and most of these articles concentrated on convincing readers on why these caste practices must be stopped. Chapter IV especially, looks at these articles and the debates that followed their publication.

Moreover, more than forty-five media articles and features were published between 1973 and 1989 in major dailies. And between June and November 1987 when the Judicial Commission of Inquiry on the worship of *Efuru* deity investigated the deity’s activities, the news media – both television and newspaper – reported daily on the activities of the Commission. According to one elderly respondent in Onitsha, “the information that was carried by the media was enticing to the public who never imagined that such ‘barbaric’ practice still existed by that time, 1987.” It aroused sympathy on the side of the government and the public.⁷⁷ However, this is not to say that the mass media failed to perform these functions before or after this period, but available resources and investigations suggests that this period attracted more media attention than any other.⁷⁸

expose events that led to the final destruction of the juju enclave in 1987 after the committee recommended that the juju be destroyed.

⁷⁴ Cletus Amadife, “Culture that Must Die,” *The Sunday Times*, Lagos, May 16, 1976.

⁷⁵ Diamond T. N. Chukwuma, “Time to Bury the ‘Osu’ Caste System,” *Daily Star*, Enugu, Monday, February 13, 1989, p. 3.

⁷⁶ G. G. Igbokwe, “Bringing an End to ‘Osu’ System,” *The Renaissance*, Enugu, Saturday, June 21, 1975, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Chief Emmanuel Okwelume, Private Discussion, 2007.

⁷⁸ We discuss the news media in great detail in Chapter IV.

2.5 The Fourth Era: Advanced Urbanization and Christianity, 1990s-Present

The final era of the emancipation history dates from the fall of traditional religious practices in many parts of Igboland at the beginning of this period and the gradual transformation and urbanization around these areas to the present when the ‘new generation’ Churches have grown rapidly the numbers of their congregation. By the last quarter of the twentieth century, most Igbos, had undoubtedly become Christians, partly because large numbers of people had abandoned their local areas for the townships, and partly because of the increase in Pentecostal evangelization which charged the Christendom in a different way – unlike the kind of worship that happened in the orthodox Catholic and Anglican Churches. Perhaps, the phenomenal development of Nigeria’s film industry also defined this era.

2.5.1 The “Pentecostal Force” and Urbanization Fever

The growth of Christianity in Nigeria is no secret, particularly amongst the Igbos and Yorubas. The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s witnessed a huge growth of membership in new radical charismatic Churches in Nigeria.⁷⁹ This period was particularly different in many ways because it saw the rise in indigenous Pentecostal denominations. Even though prominent large Churches like the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) had been founded by Pa Josiah Akindayomi, a dropout of the Cherubim and Seraphim group, in 1952, Church of God Mission International by Benson Idahosa in 1972, Grace of God Church in 1974 and Deeper Life Bible Church in 1975, other big denominations such as the David Oyedepo’s Living Faith Outreach Worldwide, aka Winners Chapel (1986), Mike Okonkwo’s The Redeemed Evangelical Mission (TREM) (1981), and Daniel Kolawole Olukoya’s Mountain of Fire and Miracles

⁷⁹ Before this time, foreign Pentecostal denominations such as the Welsh Apostolic Church (1931), the Assemblies of God (1939) and the Foursquare Gospel Church (1954) had established branches before the collapse of the colonial administration.

Ministries (MFM) (1989) kicked off the enthusiasm in this era. The beginnings of the 1990s were characterized by evangelism across various areas, even within media space. According to Ihejirika, there have been proliferations of Pentecostal Churches whose leaders had had a dominant presence in the print and electronic media in Nigeria and without doubt, "Conversion to these Churches has been on a steady increase, with membership rising up to 20 million within a thirty-year period."⁸⁰ Unlike traditional orthodox Churches like the Catholic and Anglicans, these new denominations are characterized by rigid observance of religious doctrines. The vision of the Pentecostal Churches over the years has continuously remained winning 'born-again' converts and effecting a radical transformation of the society, and as we agree with Ihejirika, "The major strategy which is being adopted to achieve the Pentecostal social agenda is a massive presence in the nations' mass media."⁸¹ Indeed, the advent of Pentecostal media has attracted more 'radical' Christians to the Pentecostal Church and through this, the denominations' influence on public life and sociocultural change has increased in the last fifteen years or so, affecting hugely the emancipation of the so-called caste groups. In Nnobi, for instance, the Pastor of TREM stationed in the area for nearly a decade confirmed that his Church had encouraged and married several couples of the caste and freeborn groups, ignoring agitations from parents and other members of their family.⁸² And because these Churches like to show off that they practice what they preach, pastors and congregation have continued to defy the resentment on the part of their family to marry whomsoever they deem to love. Even where the case does not directly involve marriage, the born-again congregations seem to discriminate less than members of orthodox Churches, at least in public as we observed

⁸⁰ See Walter Ihejirika, "Media and Fundamentalism in Nigeria," The World Association of Christian Comm., http://www.wacc.org.uk/wacc/publications/media_development/2005_2/media_and_fundamentalism_in_nigeria (Accessed August 2008)

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Rev. Sunday Iroabuchi Eze, Interview, Nnobi, July 18, 2007.

at Nnobi.⁸³ It is not clear how many of them will go further to act on their words, but they have undoubtedly embraced members of the caste groups in areas where they exist.

The 'change agent' status of these Churches is largely defined by their mandate. For instance, Oyedepo, the General Overseer of Living Faith, claims he received this mandate from God some twenty-seven years ago: "The hour has come to liberate the world from all oppressions of the devil through the preaching of the word of faith, and I am sending you to undertake this task."⁸⁴ For MFM, it "is a do-it-yourself gospel ministry where your hands are trained to wage war and your fingers to fight."⁸⁵ TREM claims to be "big enough to contain you, small enough to reach you, and powerful enough to deal with anything the devil brings against you." In short, they "do not look at the bigness of your problem but the bigness of our God."⁸⁶ Nearly all Pentecostal missions claim to have the power to perform miracles and free people from the shackles of the 'devil'. The Church has made inroads into the interior of several Igbo villages and many of these new Christian groups have been known to physically attack traditional worshippers, destroying their shrines and places of worship. In what they may tag 'liberation' as was done in Nnobi at the beginning of the 2000s, most religious organizations make issues such as the discrimination against caste groups their business, particularly when it involves juju and rituals; and their attitude to the 'lovers of darkness' has held a constant appeal for the caste

⁸³ At Nnobi, we observed that those who attended the Pentecostal Church in the village were free to mingle with the caste groups in anyway, not minding what comments the freeborn made. When we casually asked some respondents from this Pentecostal Church if they will marry an *osu* they fall in love with all of them said yes. But others who were Catholics/Anglicans said they wouldn't marry an *osu* even though most of them agreed the discrimination against the caste group was a bad practice. We do not want to magnify this observation because we did not compare the views of the different denominations. But this note as we will also mention in our concluding chapter is subject to further research. Fieldwork Notes, 2007-08.

⁸⁴ See info on <http://www.davidoyedepoministries.org/about/mandate> (Accessed August 2008).

⁸⁵ See MFM's website: <http://www.mountainoffire.org/mfmstart.htm> (Accessed August 2008).

⁸⁶ Also see TREM's Mission Statement on their website: <http://www.trem.org/missionstatement.html> (Accessed August 2008).

groups as was the case in the early decades of the 1900s.⁸⁷ The difference between the early 1900s and now, was the Pentecostal force that was injected into the fight against 'ungodly' acts – acts like the discrimination against the caste groups. Hence, the growth of these denominations has further encouraged the emancipation of the caste groups. Nevertheless, even the Pentecostal Churches have being criticized several times for not doing enough to end the discrimination against these groups in Igboland.

But as Pentecostalism established itself, urban centres too were flooded with migrants from the villages in search of greener pastures. By this time of course, many Igbos had been educated, so getting employment in town centres only required very little effort. These movements had effects on narrowing the gap between the freeborn and the caste groups, because as Ikedife argues, the intermingling of people who do not even know who is *osu* or freeborn in the town centres make Igbo people tolerable of certain actions which should normally have necessitated the stigmatization against one.⁸⁸ All in all, Christianity and urbanization have softened the intensity of the stigmatization against the caste groups in Igboland.

⁸⁷ See 2.1.

⁸⁸ Ikedife told us that “with modern technology and modern intermingling of people you go to a hair salon you don't know who owns it. Urbanization; people are intermingling. People who are *osus* from Nnobi when they come to Nnewi nobody know their background; nobody knows they are *osu* and so they intermingle with ordinary people. People who are *osu* from here [Nnewi] when they go to Onitsha they will meet people from Okija, somebody from Abagana; somebody from Enugu-Ukwu; somebody from Nsukka or Nsugbe; they will intermingle with these people and they won't know they are *osu*. So, all these things have slowly disappeared. I am a medical doctor. I am a gynaecological surgeon. I operate on people and I am sure I must have operated on some *osus*. In the process of operating I must have caused blood to flow from their body. If you follow that strictly I am probably an *osu* by the fact of having drawn blood from that person; by my profession. If you have a barbing salon many *osus* must have come to you for hair cut. You too then will become *osu* by removing of hair from an *osu's* head and so on and so forth. So there are so many breaches that are taking place on daily basis. Besides most people are now Christians, not that Christianity is totally new, but Christian activities make people to intermingle freely. *Osus* can now be doctors; they will operate on people and make blood to flow. *Osus* can now be clergymen; giving you Holy Communion and you open your mouth like a pigeon and an *osu* man will throw wine and bread into your mouth. I mean you have automatically become an *osu* man in the normal circumstance.” Dozie Ikedife, FGD, June 18, 2007.

2.5.2 Critique of Igbo Caste Practices in Nigerian Video Films⁸⁹

In the period 1960-1980s, the Nigerian film industry developed in a gradual manner, but by the beginning of the 1990s the industry boomed,⁹⁰ and today, with more than 1,000 films flooding the market annually, it is unquestionably “the leading form of Nigerian popular culture.”⁹¹ Interestingly, while the regular themes and story lines have revolved around greed, perfidy, treachery, occultism, love and hate, childlessness, problems of polygamy, child abandonment, legacy or inheritance, prostitution, sibling rivalry, philandering, wife or husband snatching, problems of in-laws, house helps, bonding and oath-taking, incest, witchcraft and fetishism,⁹² sensitive cultural issues as the *osu* system has been given some attention, especially after the production of Nkem Owoh’s script, *Taboo*, in 1994. *Taboo* was in fact the first whole film devoted to the *osu* system; this had come only two years after the long-familiar *Living in Bondage* movie - also produced by the same company, NEK Video Link, and supposed to be the industry’s first blockbuster - was released. The producer of both movies, Kenneth Nnebue, who had earlier been involved in the production of Yoruba movies and had produced *Circle of Doom*, another

⁸⁹ See 2.4.4 for our discussion on the mass media and the emancipation struggle.

⁹⁰ On the development of the Nigerian film industry which has grown rapidly and independently with very little or no influence or participation from outside see Jonathan Haynes article, “Nigerian Cinema: Structural Adjustments,” *Research in African Literatures*, Austin: Fall 1995, Vol. 26, No. 3, p. 97. According to a report by Jeevan Vasagar published in *The Guardian*, Nigeria’s film industry has gone from nothing in just 13 years to estimated earnings of US\$200m (£114m) a year making it one of the world’s biggest film industry. (See “Welcome to Nollywood,” March 23, 2006. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2006/mar/23/world.features>). However, Nigerian video films continue to be made in large quantities in Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Pidgin and English. Other smaller ethnic groups like Itsekiri, Ikwerre and Efik have received very little attention. Though Jonathan Haynes and Onookome Okome in their article supposed the minor ethnic groups in Nigeria will be represented in the near future. See their article, “Evolving Popular Media: Nigeria Video Films,” *Research in African Literatures*, Austin: Fall 1998, Vol. 29, No. 3, p. 106.

⁹¹ Jonathan Haynes, “Political Critique in Nigerian Video Films,” *African Affairs*, Vol. 105, No. 421, Oct. 2006, p. 511 (pp. 511-533).

⁹² Adeola James, the executive director of the Nigeria National Film and Video Censors Board, in 1997 condemned the usual practice of making Nigerian movies on only these issues while ignoring major contemporary issues as “joblessness, problems of the legal system, justice, equity, freedom, politics, social problems in education, medical services, housing, food, drug addiction and trafficking,” which in his judgement begged for serious screen treatment. See his “Producers Face Challenges of New Direction on Film Content,” as published in *The Classifier*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1997, pp. 4, 8; as quoted by Haynes, *Ibid* 349.

Igbo blockbuster, in 1993, had recognized the problems of the *osu* system early enough, at least at this time when Igbo films progressively carved their niche in the industry.⁹³

Taboo, which had prominent actors like the late Francis Agu, Kenneth Okonkwo, Stella Damasus-Aboderin and Bob-Manuel Udokwu, among others, encouraged love and marriage between young adults irrespective of status. The theme of the movie revolves around two lovebirds, Obi and princess Ijeoma, whose love is doomed from the start. Ijeoma was a daughter of the Igwe whose household was entangled in a conspiracy. Dorcas, the Igwe's wife who had acquired some spiritual control over her husband, whom she shared with other wives, was implicated in a plot to assassinate the traditional ruler. She soon became an enemy of the entire community and a subject of disgrace who was later banished from the town after some traditional rituals of denunciation. Her attempted assassination of the Igwe was foiled by Obi, a descendant of *osu* lineage, who threw himself in between the Igwe and his killer, who was later to reveal the involvement of his employer, Dorcas. The jubilant chief, to show appreciation for Obi's courage, provided support for the poor young man who was consequently able to earn a university degree. Thereafter, Obi declared his intention to marry the princess, an episode which was detested even by the Igwe who had once loved his would-be son-in-law. Such a union was forbidden. Besides, the bride's father was supposed to be the custodian of tradition. Several attempts to kill the stubborn lover led to the arrest of men presumably hired by the Igwe to prevent the young man from bringing disgrace to his household. After *Taboo's* production, other similar films followed. Chapter VI examines these Igbo films.

Today it is difficult to give an intellectual assessment of Igbo caste practices without reference to *Taboo* and other video films devoted to the subject of caste. In purely conceptual terms, *Taboo* set

⁹³ See Hyginus Ozo Ekwuazi, "The Igbo Video Film: A Glimpse into the Cult of the Individual," in Jonathan Haynes (ed.), *Nigerian Video Films*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000, pp. 139-145.

the pace for the discourse of sensitive cultural issues as the *osu* system in Igbo film production. In fact, this film was to increase the knowledge of the practice and make more people, especially young adults, aware of the existence of this practice in Igboland. We also learnt of the *osu* practice for the first time from this film, and follow-up questions to parents and older relations gave us a somewhat in-depth knowledge on the reasons for discrimination. Even regular visits to the villages were not enough to expose us to the practice, except when issues such as marriage or, less frequently, chieftaincy, were discussed. But while we will discuss the effects of this film and others in Chapter VI, it is essential to note here that the film encouraged other producers and upcoming actors to get involved with projects on the *osu* discourse. Almost every film, if not all, produced with the *osu* system as its central theme encouraged emancipation of the caste groups through usually sympathetic endings that often lead to the *osu*'s triumph over the obstacles put in his/her way.⁹⁴

2.5.3 The Judiciary and NGOs

Two other highly significant factors that may have boosted the emancipation of the caste groups by way of change in the political dispensation in Nigeria must also be mentioned, for they had effects which went far beyond the confines of the region. It would seem that after the transition from military dictatorship to democratic governance in Nigeria the justice system had become more robust and more Non-Governmental Organizations, particularly those with legal and human rights interests, had been established within the area to address abuses and discrimination against the citizenry. It is not clear how much influence the judiciary has had so far in realizing the total emancipation of the caste minority, but what is certain is that the judiciary has enjoyed more independence than it had in the past, and especially under the

⁹⁴ Refer to Chapter VI where we examined some Nigerian video films on the Igbo caste practices.

military juntas which ruled the country for nearly thirty years since it gained independence from Britain in 1960. As we mentioned in our introduction, the judiciary in the past seemed to be afraid to listen to cases of discrimination against the caste groups, perhaps for fear of arousing the anger of local people or being tagged an 'osu lover.' As for the NGOs especially, a number of them received reports and complaints from the caste groups. In November 1999, the Umuode people in Nkanu East local government area of Enugu took their fight to the Human Rights Commission (HRC) in Nigeria. As the people indicated in their petition, "We are generally regarded as outcasts no matter our social standing. The class ostracism is operated in such a way that any person from Umuode pays a fine sometimes as high as N1,000," for mingling with a freeborn.⁹⁵ Even far away, in Durban, South Africa, the Human Rights Watch in 2001, in a report for the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, dedicated significant space in its report to the caste system in Igboland.⁹⁶ Leo Igwe's Nigerian Humanist Movement⁹⁷ in Ibadan has also been at the forefront of the fight against prejudices against this minority in Igboland.

2.6 Conclusion

All in all, the Church, the media and government have greatly influenced the emancipation discourse of the caste groups in Igboland, even though these groups have been chastised more often than not for not doing enough to curb or purge the discrimination that *osu* people face. All these agents of change seem to have displayed some apathetic attitudes towards matters relating to discrimination against the caste groups. Most of them have been known to declare strong positions against the practice, but it rarely goes beyond spoken or written words.

⁹⁵ See Tobs Agbaegbu, "Moves to Stop Slavery in Igboland," *NewsWatch*, Lagos, February 7, 2000, p. 16.

⁹⁶ See the comprehensive report of the Human Rights Watch "Caste Discrimination: A Global Concern" at - <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/globalcaste/index.htm#TopOfPage> (Accessed July 2008).

⁹⁷ See his article on the *osu* system at - <http://www.iheu.org/node/2452>. (Accessed July 2008).

However, no matter what happens, as Basden argued in the 1930s, "It will probably be a long time before all traces of slavery disappear from the minds of the people. Even if a man redeem himself he does not, thereby, get rid of the stigma; he has merely emancipated himself."⁹⁸ Therefore, "the stigma remains. There may be no open manifestations of slavery, yet, underneath, the old ideas still [persist]."⁹⁹

For the most part, the cases discussed in this chapter involve the struggle of caste or freeborn groups to either reform or preserve the status quo. Let us now turn to the next chapter to examine some reasons why Igbo caste practices have persisted after these challenges and critiques against its continuance.

⁹⁸ "International Slavery Convention," Vol. II, NAE, CSE 1/85/2925.

⁹⁹ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, p. 243.

CHAPTER III

PERSISTENCE OF IGBO CASTE PRACTICES: ARE THE GODS TO BLAME?

3.0 Introduction

After all the efforts by colonial and indigenous administrations to put an end to caste practices, and the struggles against the discrimination by caste groups and rights movements, the practice persists, even strongly in most areas. Some reasons may be attributed to this. First, the lack of political will by the government and local administrations in village groups from the colonial period to this day to sincerely ensure that the caste groups enjoy equal rights as their counterparts in Igboland can be partly blamed for this problem. Also, the belief that time will heal the wounds of the caste groups and make the freeborn groups disregard the stigma may share in the blame because history indicates that both foreign and local administrations failed to do more to tackle the problems of the caste groups because they thought the problem would disappear in time.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the fear of the stigma and, sometimes, of deities believed to be linked to *osu*, also encourages persistence and this is the main reason for the persistence today. This chapter examines the issues that are tied to the persistence of this problem in Igboland. We base this analysis on reports of a Judicial Commission set up by the government of old Anambra State in 1987 to look into a significant case of persistence – the *Efuru* case. We got these documents firsthand from the family of the chairman of the Judicial Commission. We will also rely on other archival materials and oral sources in this chapter.

The *Efuru* case became well-known at the end of the 1980s as a result of profound media attention and we have made references to it in previous chapters. This case is significant to our discourse not because the deity was the most powerful in Igboland, but partly because it quietly

¹⁰⁰ Most abolitionists in government and at the local levels were not sincere when they made attempts to abolish the caste practices.

survived decades of expeditions, abolitions and smear campaigns which had begun even before 1900 around Igboland on its counterparts across the hinterland. As a matter of fact, at a period when most parts of Igboland claimed to have been greatly Christianized, juju activities flourished, with a large colony around the shrine where its devotees stayed and attracted a followership, even amongst Igbos in the township.

3.1 Highlights of the Efuru Case and the Commission's Inquiry, 1987

A good way to think about the persistence of caste practices in eastern Nigeria is to examine what transpired in the *Efuru*¹⁰¹ case in the second half of the 1980s. On June 3, 1987, a commission of inquiry – Worship of *Efuru* Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987 – was constituted by the military governor of the old Anambra State, Emeka Omeruah, to among other terms of reference; (a) determine whether the continued existence of *Efuru* deity and/or the beliefs and practices of its worshippers will lead to a breach of the peace or encourage the perpetuation of such social evils as prostitution, creation of the caste system, breeding of illegitimate children, etc., (b) establish whether the agitation by certain people for the destruction or abolition of *Efuru* deity is motivated by religious rivalry or antagonism which may exist between the adherents of the traditional religion and the Christian religion, etc. and (c) advise on the desirability or reasonableness of amongst others, destroying or abolishing the *Efuru* deity – which was primarily situated at Ukehe and Idoha – both in Igbo-Etiti local government area. *Efuru* belonged to the entire Idoha community – a smaller unit sandwiched right inside Ukehe – but it was serviced and ministered to by the Umuikpagu family of Ezi-

¹⁰¹ According to the people's mythology and tradition (though not backed by records), the founder of *Efuru*, Ekwuluma, a powerful prophetess, turned into a stream, the *Efuru* stream, which until the introduction of pipe borne water in the area, served the people of Ukehe and Idoha. And while she was dying, Ekwuluma taught the Umuikpagu people how to pray and offer sacrifices to her for continued protection. This is what developed into the dreaded deity, *Efuru*.

Idoha. The family provided the priest of the *Efuru* who was called the 'Eze-iyi', an office traditionally held by the oldest man in Umuikpagu family, although the Eze-iyi at the time of the Commission's investigation was not the oldest man because the oldest man declined. Like earlier mentioned, this case was very significant, partly because the juju had survived many decades after other such powerful oracles as the Aro *Ibinukpabi* and others had been dismantled, and partly because its influence and booming business grew rapidly amongst surrounding village groups at a time when more than a quarter of the area, according to the Commission, had been Christianized. The Commission itself reported that this case shocked the public "because not many people outside Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area ever heard of *Efuru*." It continued further that, "There had been no major news item in the mass media" about the *Efuru* deity, "and people kept wondering what this was all about,"¹⁰² and why it persisted in such a primitive manner.

As previous chapters have established, several changes occurred over time in Igboland, particularly after the invasion of the territory by the British. But it would seem as if at this time Ukehe and Idoha – the two villages primarily and most deeply concerned in the *Efuru* affair – were not susceptible to this broad change. In fact, while the Commission conducted its investigations, it soon became obvious how strong the grip of this deity was on the people and how intense the fear thereof. The juju was very powerful at this time in the 1980s, and as the Commission observed, "People were not easily ready to talk about *Efuru* as the mere mention of that name, especially in circumstances not complimentary to it, was supposed to immediately attract its wrath."¹⁰³ The inquiry presumably engendered a lot of public interest, some for and

¹⁰² Report of the "Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987," Volume I, Main Report, November 1987, p. 3.

¹⁰³ The Commission had observed this when it called for the submission of memoranda from the public via the media. See Ibid.

others against the deity. *Efuru* was no doubt influential; and its presence for an alleged period of two hundred years, according to the Commission, had so permeated the psyche of the people that it simply controlled the beliefs and behaviours of most of the people of Idoha, Ukehe and a large number of people outside these areas. As a matter of fact, “almost all Idoha – Christianity notwithstanding – seem to regard *Efuru* as their champion and protector.” “But behind that face of champion-worship,” the Commission remarked, “there is a manifestation of morbid fear and dread of this *Efuru*, not only in Idoha but also in the neighbouring communities, especially in Ukehe, among the non and not so strong Christians.” Interestingly, “Such people prefer not to discuss *Efuru*, not even in support thereof. They would avoid any mention of that name, flee their homes or feign sick, or deaf when summoned to appear before the Commission.”¹⁰⁴

Apparently, *Efuru* was dreadful. But like the Aro Long Juju, its activities were shrouded in tricks and deception.¹⁰⁵ *Efuru* worship rested on spiritual intimidation accompanied by

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ The Commission’s investigation revealed some of *Efuru*’s tricks. First of all, an incident or more happens – disasters or misfortunes as repeated death, epidemic of bad diseases, or finding a dead vulture or palm frond with signs, or an *Efuru* pot suddenly appears on ones compound – and the affected person or group runs to the fortune-teller to ask questions. After some rituals, the seer mentions the vengeance of *Efuru* whose name alone was enough to raise panic in such family. With the foundation now laid, the next step, for which the enquirer again pays some money, is finding out what the deity requests for atonement. And after series of consultations, the fortune-teller declares that *Efuru* wants this, that and the other. The Commission however disclosed that *Efuru* demands showed “some elements of calculation and planning.” According to it, “the demands appear to be tailored to match the victim.” In fact, “it is in evidence that some have paid as much as up to N2000 plus a cow or ram or goat and other things, while less affluent ones have been asked for just a sheep or ram plus N200 or so,” the Commission reported. *Efuru* demands for a wife, it however continues, “appears to follow a prior knowledge of the availability of the supply, since there was no evidence or indication that the afflicted family had to go outside to find a maiden. The testimony is that the family concerned is usually left to choose one of their daughters by themselves,” (see p. 36 of Vol. I’s Report). Such a girl is beforehand, earmarked by an *Efuru* agent and the juju in turn, through its priest, demands for that particular girl. Such demands were of course usually made where there was least likelihood of troublesome resistance. The girl was now presented to the deity with certain marriage rites performed by her family who was to now build a befitting house for her at the precincts of the shrine. If she died before such rites were concluded, the family was to offer another girl. The case of one Euphemia Ifeoma Ugwu was prominent in the Commission’s findings. As it reported, she lost her father when she was only about two years old and was requested by *Efuru*, following allegations that the deity was after her family and her father was the only one alive in her immediate family. On

crippling dread of the consequences of displeasing it. People, even amongst Christians, would do anything they were told that *Efuru* demanded of them. The grip the deity had on them was so strong that not too long, before 1987, herds of *Efuru*'s cattle, of which was said to be in several hundreds, used to roam about people's farms, devouring crops as they pleased, and no one dared touch them or even complain for fear of *Efuru*'s reprisals. The mere sight of a pot on one's land was enough to send the owner of such land frantic with fear that *Efuru* had been invoked. Anyone who spoke or even thought ill of *Efuru* was believed to immediately incur its anger. And those who suffered its wrath by death especially were thrown into the *Efuru* bush. This was compulsory or else, it was believed, the juju would harass and torment the family until this was done.

The most shocking aspect of *Efuru* was its association with human sacrifice, which was thought to have disappeared in the region long before the 1980s. The Commission's findings were most revealing. Among offerings the juju received in the name of propitiation were cows, sheep, goats, money, food stuffs, wine, cloth materials, even corpses, and above all several 'young maidens' attractive enough to please *Efuru*. *Efuru* absolutely owned every female betrothed to it, along with all children the female might bear. All *Efuru* women and children were *osu*, but they were all referred to as '*Efuru*'. Any man who married any of these women was followed, even to distant lands and was dealt with severely by the oracle. It was also forbidden to kill or sell into slavery anyone who *Efuru* was interested in. People were shocked by the revelations of

account of her age, the betrothal was postponed till she grew old enough to move to the *Efuru* enclave to become the bed-mate of whosoever chooses her. Fortunately, nothing happened until about 1986, in November, after she had turned fourteen and grown into a beautiful girl as the Commission then observed. Apparently, pressure had started to mount on her family to fulfil their promise when the matter leaked and was immediately reported at Ogbede police station. In fact, this was the major case that exploded the *Efuru* controversy which led to the birth of the Commission. See Report of the "Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987," Volume III, Memoranda and Other Documents, November 1987, pp. 22, 78.

these happenings at this time. Of course, this was not the only case of human beings being offered to deities, at least in Igboland. But this case stood out because, according to the Commission, "it is the only known one where, in the civilization of 1987, the practice is not only still openly thriving and being propagated, but also being indirectly defended, in the guise of tradition and constitutional freedom of worship, even by some enlightened persons."¹⁰⁶ The dedication of girls to *Efuru*, after a soothsayer's divination, naturally meant marriage to the deity and henceforth, she bears the married name 'Mrs Iyi' – wife of the juju; and all the children of those hundreds of *Efuru* wives, whatever their number, go by the surname 'Nwiyi' – the child of the juju. This juju marriage, seemingly, caused a problem amongst *Efuru* family with allegedly over 1000 living *Efuru* children who were regarded as brothers and sisters and so not allowed to marry one another, although, as the Commission reports, "in the laxity and promiscuity that prevail around their enclave, no one questions who mates with whom and how they breed and multiply."¹⁰⁷

The agitation against the deity in the 1980s was never as a result of its mere existence, - other deities, after all, existed in the area – but the anger and rage was against *Efuru* as a peculiar deity that demands and takes human beings. The *Efurus* in short, suffered from all, if not more of the disabilities of those called *osu* elsewhere. Unlike the *osu* in other areas who were only free to marry amongst the caste group *Efuru* women were prohibited from marrying other men, even those in their *Efuru* group because they were already married to *Efuru* and so no man could marry them. And because their children were considered siblings – sons and daughters of *Efuru* –, intermarriages was not at all possible amongst them. The Commission interestingly

¹⁰⁶ Report of the "Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987," Vol. I, p. 33.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 35. This happened because *Efuru* agents were feared as well, and nobody was bold to question the agents. Similar cases like this have been depicted in video films. We will discuss a video film in Chapter VI where a similar story was shown. See Chapter VI, 6.2.3. Also see, Jude C. Mgbobukwa, *Alusi, Osu and Ohu in Igbo Religion and Social Life*, Nsukka: Fulladu Publishing, 1996, p. 79-80.

noted that *Efuru* wives and children were tabooed as the wives and children of the idol, “not to be touched by anyone, except in the promiscuous sexual satisfaction carried out on them by the Umuikpagu men.” As its findings reveal, “The mere mention, even in rumour mongering, that [such] a girl is wanted by *Efuru*, puts that stamp on the girl for good,”¹⁰⁸ meaning that no one would marry her. One Matthew Okoro of Ukehe had defied *Efuru* and taken *Efuru* Mary Nwiyi as his wife. According to customs, he performed all marriage rites with Mary’s uncle and guardian, to whom he paid the bride price. He even wedded her in Church in the usual manner. Afterwards, *Efuru* agents started their campaigns against the duo. Mary’s uncle had died during this period and was believed to have been killed by *Efuru* for interfering with its property. Out of fear, Matthew’s family demanded that he throw Mary out; he declined and was ostracized by his people for bringing a curse and taboo to the family. Then Mary’s house got burnt and fingers were pointed at the deity. Consequently, after untold harassments, Matthew fled to the north of Nigeria after jilting Mary and taking another wife. Mary, in frustration, fled to Lagos, where she lived at the time the Commission was set up. Mary’s case and many others dramatically ensured that the fear of the deity was sustained for a long time. As Ndolue who had lived in the area for more than a decade told us, “those who defied *Efuru* suffered terrible illnesses, some died in very horrible circumstances. The deity spilled blood. Through its agents it promoted fear around Ukehe. This is why even today some people still fear to talk about it.”¹⁰⁹ Let us now examine how this fear and other reasons promote the persistence of caste practices in Igboland.

¹⁰⁸ Report of the “Worship of *Efuru* Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987,” Vol. I, p. 63-64.

¹⁰⁹ In 2007, Ndolue told us that he had lived at Ukehe from the early 1980s through the incidence of the Commission’s inquiry until the late 1990s when he left the area for Nnewi.

3.2 The Fear of Local Deities

One striking feature that marked the *Efuru* case was the undisputed fear it inspired among the people which had a far-reaching influence on the persistence of the discrimination against the caste groups. As we know already, this fear was only instilled by the wickedness and absolute vengeance of assumed powerful deities and spirits that discharged misfortune on the people each time they were vexed. H. H. Marshall, a DO, for instance, had noted this when he wrote in 1942 to the Senior Resident, Owerri Province, requesting the prohibition of the worship or invocation of the *Angulama-nom-awo* juju which he warned “can be harmful to any person against whom it is invoked.”¹¹⁰ This particular juju, A. F. B. Bridges, a Resident in the Owerri Province reported, “is greatly feared even by educated people.”¹¹¹ This fear was virtually replicated across diverse areas in Igboland, even to date, in some areas. It is not as if the people – who of course, at least a good majority, had basically turned to Christianity – readily believe that the deity will pounce on them once they accept, marry or engage in one form or another with the caste groups, but such fears leave people with the thought of avoiding uncommon misfortunes especially where they could easily do so. As a respondent said to us, “why will I go out of my way to marry an *osu* and attract bad luck to myself and [my] entire family when I could marry a freeborn and stay clear of these troubles?”¹¹² Even where elders, who should know better as an Igbo proverb insinuates,¹¹³ suggest that ‘prevention is better than cure’, we find younger adults who now fear for their future, and not necessarily for the juju alone. One Rose who claimed to be a born-again Christian told us that

¹¹⁰ Angulama-Nom-Awo Juju, “Prohibition of Angulama-nom-awo,” NAE, CSE 1/85/9575.

¹¹¹ Angulama-Nom-Awo Juju, “Native Authority Ordinance,” NAE, CSE 1/85/9575.

¹¹² Chidi Omenka, Private Discussion, Enugu, 2007.

¹¹³ The proverb – ‘what an elder sees sitting a child does not see even while on the top of a tree’ is popular amongst the Igbos.

It is not enough to marry an *osu* because I am born-again. I may not be afraid of the juju itself but what about the *osu* person I may be marrying? He may be neck deep into the juju and because I am married to him his curse will follow me.¹¹⁴

One Asoluka in Enugu also told us that,

In the past, late 1990s, I was indifferent about this *osu* people. I didn't even care about what people said even while I talked to them. I may have even married one then. [But] Now, I don't think that way again. Because, in 2003 my friend's sister married one of them [the *osu*]. After three years of marriage without children, both of them died mysteriously in a car accident on their way home. I didn't even connect this to juju at all until another one happened in my village at Mbaise. One very rich man who we all know allowed his son who came from the US after medical school to marry this *osu* girl. The man did not approve the marriage initially, but after they went away to marry the man had no choice because it was his only son. Both of them went to the US. Then we heard later that he became poor all of a sudden. And, what did we see later? They brought his corpse home for burial! The two things connect to the *osu* god. Though I don't believe in juju, I know it can work if you look for its trouble.¹¹⁵

Although Asoluka was convinced by his explanation, it is possible that both cases he narrated were mere coincidences because a few respondents also claimed to have heard of marriages between freeborn and caste persons and they confirmed that these couples have children and are alive. Moreover, it is common to find similar comments expressing fears in the media which will form the basis for our discussions in subsequent chapters. On one internet blog for instance, one Nkechi noted that even at gun point, she will not marry an *osu* because of the connection to local deities. According to her,

I do not care if I remain single all my life instead of me marrying an *osu*. I cannot stand the humiliation in my village. No matter how wealthy an *osu* could be, I will not marry him. It is an abomination in my village to go out with *osu* as friends, how much more to talk of going to the altar with him.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Private Discussion, 2009.

¹¹⁵ Fieldwork Notes, 2008.

¹¹⁶ See <http://www.naijarules.com/vb/news-current-affairs-politics/20560-osu-casteigboland.html> (Accessed December 2007).

But most Igbos will agree that it is difficult not to believe in the existence of evil forces and the strength of their powers because as a matter of fact most of Igbo culture still practised today is tied to traditional religion and these cultures are celebrated by many irrespective of religion. Basden argued in the 1930s that “In no circumstances, and at no time, is the primitive native free from fear and superstition.”¹¹⁷ His suggestion was aimed only at ‘primitive natives,’ but evidently, even enlightened and Christian folks were and are still held under the grip of fear and superstition. Leith-Ross observed this fear of local deities while at Owerri in 1937.¹¹⁸ Nwaka reported similar fears of the deities in 1985.¹¹⁹ Even Afigbo, only in 2007, seventy years after Leith-Ross’s observation, expressed this fear that gripped people just by the mention of the word ‘*osu*’. Afigbo too associates this fear with the oracles who owned the caste groups and the misfortune which was bound to affect anyone who mingled in an unacceptable manner with a ‘cult slave’ or his/her descendant.¹²⁰ We have already pointed out that it is this dread for the subject alone, as Afigbo noted as well, that made it difficult for us to obtain information in some quarters.¹²¹ For example, a respondent at Nnobi, Ajaghaku, remarked before an interview with us:

You know, if this was 1997 I won’t be talking to you about this thing [the caste practice]. Even till now, some people will not open their mouths to tell you anything concerning it. Even some Christians that go to Church with us fear that the juju is still intact and it can attack anybody at anytime. So people still fear to talk about it or mix with the *osu* people; even around us here. I am bold to talk about this thing because I am a strong Christian.¹²²

¹¹⁷ G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos*, London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966, p. XVI.

¹¹⁸ S. Leith-Ross, “Notes on the Osu System Among the Ibo of Owerri Province, Nigeria,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April 1937, p. 206-207.

¹¹⁹ Geoffrey I. Nwaka, “The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1985, p. 474.

¹²⁰ Adiele E. Afigbo, Interview, Abakaliki, August 29, 2007.

¹²¹ See Methodology.

¹²² Ezeobianumba Ajaghaku, Interview, Nnobi, June 24, 2007.

Ajaghaku's expression gives us a clear picture of what it is like to discuss the practice in public or associate with the caste group intimately. Though it is not perceived as being as dreadful a topic as it was many years ago, it is still rare to find people talk about it in public.

3.3 The Problem of 'Backsliding' Christians

On many occasions, critiques have suggested practical Christianity as a providential solution to removing all forms of prejudices against the caste groups, at least from the mind or heart. Because as Ekwunife, a clergyman in Enugu, told us, "many Igbos that claim to be good Christians are the first to run away when they hear of the presence of an *osu*."¹²³ Clearly, one problem observers began to detect among the Igbos in the old days when the missionaries began evangelization in Igboland to this date, is the dilemma of faith. We have seen many cases of Christians who detest the *osu* practice wholeheartedly, but choose to run away when called upon to practice what they preach. Green reported a case in the 1940s, of "a middle-aged man in Owerri who was an earnest and educated Christian of many years standing." According to Green,

He admitted that the *osu* status was incompatible with Christian principles and was not recognised by the Church. But he was emphatic that he would not contemplate a daughter of his marry an *osu*. He was quite frank. He said that officially he preached in Church against any discrimination in the matter, but that none the less when it came to putting his principles into practice his heart said no.¹²⁴

Another case was narrated to us in 2007. It involved the Bishop of the Anglican Communion in Owerri, The Rt. Reverend Cyril Okorocho, who preached against the persistence of the caste practices and even encouraged his gigantic congregation to marry people from the caste groups; he allegedly found himself in a quagmire when in 2005, an alleged *osu* young man approached

¹²³ Anthony Ekwunife, Interview, Nsukka, August 22, 2007. Ekwunife is a Catholic priest and an emeritus professor of religion.

¹²⁴ M. M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, London: Frank Cass, 1964, p. 158.

him for marriage to his daughter. The Bishop, after tracing the man's lineage refused the union, and according to this respondent, he screamed "God forbid." This young man who had only approached the Bishop because of his widely known stance on the caste issue now published his story in a popular Catholic newspaper in the Owerri region, *The Leader*.¹²⁵ A similar narration was recounted in 2008 at a Catholic Church in Abuja, of a Knight of the Church in Owerri who too had championed the fight against discrimination of the caste groups in his Diocese for several years. A young man, himself a descendant of *osu* parents, intended to marry this man's daughter. The Knight bluntly refused. The young man took the report to his Parish Priest in Owerri who called the Knight on the telephone and asked him why he had taken such decision. The Knight's response was apt: "Father, this one pass Church!"¹²⁶ Afigbo too gives us something to think about in this regard. According to him, "The kind of thing you ask yourself is supposing you are not *ohu* or *osu*, you are a Christian, you believe that God brought you into this life and put you in a situation where you can best realise yourself and in all his own wisdom God did not put you in the family of the *ohu*. Will you then on your own plunge yourself into this *osu* family? ...It has pleased God not to bring you out loaded with this handicap. Will you now want to load yourself with that handicap?" he asked bluntly.¹²⁷ In such case of prejudice against the caste groups, according to Ike, religion is helpless!¹²⁸

Like her foreign counterparts, Isichei had observed that the first generation Igbo Christians particularly, was "characterized by the great fervour with which they practiced their new

¹²⁵ Olivia Duru, FGD, July 21, 2007. We visited the publisher of this paper - Assumpta Press - in 2007. A senior member of staff of the press confirmed coming across this story but he couldn't get hold of the paper at the time of our visit.

¹²⁶ "Father, this one pass Church!" is Pidgin English which translates to "this problem is bigger than the Church!" The man who said this implied that even though he preached against discrimination, it didn't make him a fool to practice what he preached. According to the man, he understood the significance of such a taboo in his area and could not overcome it in his own household. Fieldwork Notes, 2008.

¹²⁷ Adiele E. Afigbo, Interview, Abakaliki, August 29, 2007.

¹²⁸ Cyril Ike, Interview, Igbo-Ukwu, June 24, 2007.

religion and by a marked tendency to syncretism, that is, to practice elements of the old and the new simultaneously, with no apparent sense of inconsistency.” This alleged backsliding¹²⁹ according to Isichei was due to the “irreconcilable conflict between Igbo custom and Christian morality.”¹³⁰ We had earlier, in our introduction, mentioned Metuh, who like Isichei, noted that Igbo draw from both religions – traditional and Christianity – according to circumstances, and also easily combine both.¹³¹ In the *Efuru* case, for instance, over eighty percent of the people were or had been Christians by 1987, as Christianity had become widespread in the area since 1923. The remaining minority were adherents of the traditional religion but in virtually all families in Ukehe-Idoha, Christians constituted the majority of the members. However, according to the Commission’s findings, “many of these professed Christians in both communities are lukewarm in their practice of Christianity and, to a certain extent, combine Christianity with traditional religious practices.”¹³² In fact, George Okoro, the chief priest of the *Efuru* shrine at that time, and Christopher Nwiyi, the oldest son of *Efuru* bore Christian names, indicative of an earlier connection with Christianity. One Alphaeus Isiani, a professed Christian from Idoha confirmed this in his evidence to the Commission when he noted: “I am a good Catholic but I believe that *Efuru* has all the powers ascribed to it.”¹³³ Another person, Ozor Chijioke Aro, from Ukehe, also acknowledged that some Christians support *Efuru* but in his opinion, they do so for the economic and personal benefit they get from its worship. As Isichei

¹²⁹ In fact, Bishop Shanahan had noted in 1919 that it would at least take some six generations to produce a genuine Igbo Christian. As he writes, “after some half dozen generations, our neophytes will have developed a truly Christian character. By that time the taint of paganism will have left their soul.” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*, 1919, as quoted by Elizabeth Isichei in “Seven Varieties of Ambiguity: Some Patterns of Igbo Response to Christian Missions,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 3, Fasc. 2, 1970, p. 219.

¹³⁰ Isichei, “Seven Varieties of Ambiguity,” p. 219.

¹³¹ Emefie Ikenga Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion: A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981, p. 49.

¹³² Report of the “Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987,” Vol. I, p. 47.

¹³³ Report of the “Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987,” Volume II, Oral Evidence, November 1987, p. 160.

pointed out “Christianity promised ‘salvation’; Igbo religion promised concrete protection amid the many dangers and uncertainties of life.”¹³⁴ This clearly still applied in the 1980s.

The *Efuru* Commission itself observed that some Christians pitched camp with *Efuru* during the controversy.¹³⁵ The same Christopher Nwiyi, *Efuru*’s reputed oldest son, emphasized in his evidence that “whatever accusation I lay against Ukehe people and Christians should be qualified by the word ‘some’, because not all of them are out against *Efuru*.”¹³⁶ In fact, the Commissions’ investigations indicated that “some Christians, particularly those in Idoha, who may even be fervent Christians, are in favour of leaving *Efuru* alone. They rather say that Ukehe people should be told to stop bringing their daughters in marriage to it.”¹³⁷ Some Christians were obviously afraid of *Efuru* because even after giving evidence before the Commission, George Okoro reported that most Christian witnesses came to him privately after each session of the Commission to offer sacrifices to *Efuru*, saying that they are not among those who say that *Efuru* should be destroyed. Besides, it was as a result of this fear, the Commission noted in its recommendations, that “so long as the physical representation of *Efuru* deity is in existence, so long will the fear and dread of it remain and so long will its influences continue to be propagated, no matter how secretly.”¹³⁸ Nevertheless, as things stand now, most of these dreadful shrines have disappeared but some people have continued to express fears in connection to the local deities.

Today’s fear may no longer be for the deity alone in many quarters. People also fear inheriting the stigma because it could affect their decedents. Many people have expressed fear of this

¹³⁴ Isichei, 1970, p. 220.

¹³⁵ Report of the “Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987,” Vol. I, p. 48.

¹³⁶ Report of the “Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987,” Vol. II, p. 296.

¹³⁷ Report of the “Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987,” Vol. I, p. 52.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

stigma. A chief at Nnewi, Dozie Ikedife, expressed similar fears during an interview. In the interview, Ikedife, who claims to be an avid follower of Christ, had earlier told us that the *osu* practice was evil and wicked, and that he even chaired the presentation of a book – *Alusi, Osu and Ohu in Igbo Religion and Social Life* – in the late 1990s which basically condemned the caste practices. Yet, he insisted from the beginning of our FGD to the end that nothing would attract him or any member of his family to the caste group because of the ‘infectious’ stigma. As he said blatantly: “there are people who are *osus* and have climbed the economic ladder almost to the top echelons but that one is wealthy doesn’t mean I will like to go to his house to drink water.” He yelled heatedly, “I won’t like his daughter to visit my son or his son to visit my daughter. I won’t even like my son to visit his son talk less of the daughter or inter-sex,¹³⁹ lest something begins to develop. The stigma is too troublesome,”¹⁴⁰ Ikedife said. It seems that even with very little fears of the deities; people tend to keep the taboo, not least because they in turn fear the ostracism of others. As one respondent said to us, “even though I am a Christian, a staunch one at that, I do not have to associate or marry the *osu* to show that I detest the practice. My people will not forgive me!”¹⁴¹ Indeed, education and Christianity have not achieved much in this regard. And as Leith-Ross rightly argued, *osu* discrimination “might take years to disappear even with the help of the rapid advance of Christianity and education.”¹⁴²

3.4 The Underlying Segregation Gap

We indicated in the previous chapter that caste groups across Igboland started struggling for autonomy and separate village groups from the freeborn at the beginning of the 1900s.¹⁴³ As we

¹³⁹ Dozie Ikedife used inter-sex here to describe sexual intercourse.

¹⁴⁰ Dozie Ikedife, FGD, June 18, 2007.

¹⁴¹ We spoke to this respondent (Jude) at a local bus station on a trip to Enugu in 2008.

¹⁴² Leith-Ross, “Notes on the *Osu* System Among the Ibo of Owerri Province, Nigeria,” p. 208.

¹⁴³ See Chapter II, 2.4.3.

highlighted, the reason for their agitations was to enjoy certain rights they and their forbears were denied. Such petitions for autonomy continued to reach government at all levels even to date, and today it would seem as if this supposed solution to the prejudices against the minority would later be their bane. One source, Nwosu, at Nnewi told us in 2007 that,

If the *osu* groups had not continued asking for autonomy here and there we may probably not be talking about the tradition today because they would have been integrated well into the freeborn groups and people will begin to care less since they wouldn't know who is *osu* and who is free in one village.¹⁴⁴

Moreover, while we journeyed across eastern Nigeria in 2007, we came across some villages with names or origins that suggest they suffered some sort of discrimination in the past. Most of these villages either became autonomous in the last fifty years or are in the process of struggling for autonomy. This, Nwosu suggests, is disadvantageous for them. The Igwe of Nnokwa rightly commented on this problem when he said that:

Places like Nnokwa and Alor are free from the *osu* practice because instead of separating them from the freeborn and giving them a separate village, we merged with them. [Today] Nobody can tell who is who. Nobody can tell you that that area is for the *osu* people or that area is for the freeborn people here in Nnokwa. We all live together. This separation like you have at Nnobi is the biggest problem. Everybody knows who they are, what they are called or where they are. It's not a good thing. That is not total abolition!¹⁴⁵

Residential segregation or autonomy does not help the caste groups in this regard. In short, we can suggest from our observations in the field that it could make matters worse for the people.

¹⁴⁴ Prince Anene Nwosu, FGD, June 18, 2007.

¹⁴⁵ This statement by Igwe Ezeagu of Nnokwa doesn't imply that the Igbo caste practices have totally disappeared in Nnokwa. It is still practiced there. However, he claimed it is not as strong as it is in Nnobi and Nnewi. Alor, which he mentions, is another neighbouring town in the Idemili area. According to the Alor local stories, Alor do not have the caste practices in their area because they started marrying amongst themselves (freeborn and caste groups) long before the 1800s. Hence, no one can claim today to be a freeborn or an *osu*. They are all equal and free from Igbo caste practices. See HRH Igwe Christopher Okonkwo Ezeagu, Interview, Nnokwa, June 15, 2007.

For example, we know already that for marriage to happen between two people investigations must be carried out to know their backgrounds. It is during these investigations that emissaries discover who is freeborn and who is *osu*. In any case, investigations may not be necessary if a person is known to come from an autonomous community that is known to be populated only by the caste groups. We asked a respondent from Nnobi if she will marry a man from Eziora, the supposed *osu* village, and her immediate response was “God forbid.”¹⁴⁶ The only reason she was able to give a quick answer was because everyone from Nnobi and surroundings knows that the residents of Eziora are descendants of the first caste groups in the area. Concerning this issue, a young man narrated his experience to us in 2006. He had informed his parents of his proposed marriage to a girl from another village around Owerri. An uncle, whom his father had sent to go to the girl’s village to make enquiries and confirm that she was from a good family, got to a roundabout at Owerri and asked a commercial motorcyclist for directions to the girl’s village; the following conversation (in pidgin English/English and Igbo) took place between them.

UNCLE: Please how can I get to ABC village?

CYCLIST: Oga that village? Me I no fit go there oh! [Sir that village? I can’t go there oh!]

UNCLE: Why?

CYCLIST: Oga no be me go tell you oh. But if you wan know, *ha nile wu ndi aha*. [Sir I shouldn’t be the one to tell you. But if you want to know, all of them are ‘those people.’]¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ The lady in question is a dedicated Catholic who also believes that the *osu* issue should be forgotten. But then she insists she wouldn’t want to be at the vanguard of such war against the practice. After all, as she said, even if she married an *osu* man (two had come to ask her hand in marriage in 2007) the stigma will be rested on her unmarried sisters who will now be faced with difficulties in getting married because they would have automatically inherited the stigma. Fieldwork Notes, 2008.

¹⁴⁷ Researcher’s Notes.

Interestingly, the motorcyclist replied to the main question in Igbo and with the phrase used to refer indirectly to the caste groups, 'those people.' Obviously he did this knowing that people rarely say the word 'osu' in public. However, our respondent's uncle turned back and headed home. He immediately informed the young man's father that the girl was *osu*, and that cancelled the marriage. This incident suggests that similar episodes may have occurred in villages primarily reserved for the caste groups.¹⁴⁸

That aside, if as many argue that time will make people forget who is who, how can residential segregation then go along with time? In Nnobi alone, it is true that a child not older than ten is aware that members of the Eziora village are descendants of *osu*. The same case applies in Awka-Etiti, Nnewi and other areas, especially in the Nara area in northern Igboland where the mention of a village name alone gives the origin of its inhabitants away.¹⁴⁹ This does not help the *osu* at all. Yes, the creation of special village groups for the caste groups had short-term gains but it also had long-term consequences. True also, the caste groups were now able to perform rites that were denied them before – like the breaking of kola nuts, the pouring of libations or even the partaking in traditional dances – but in the long run, the disadvantages only seem to outweigh the advantages. However, one respondent who belongs to the caste group in Enugu told us that autonomy is their priority, and it is the only way they could enjoy

¹⁴⁸ Afigbo's position on this is interesting. He takes "the case of the *ohu*, the strangers in Nkanu; I mean, I did a paper on what I call the fans of social adjustments when they stupidly accepted to have a separate village. That village became marked. So that even from Nnobi when somebody says he is from the village you know who he is, an *ohu*. But if they remained in the midst of their former landlords you will have to make further enquiries to find out who is an *ohu* and who is not *ohu*. But as soon as you go to the new village, the new community, so you can dance *ngene* [a local Igbo dance], so that you can pour libations and so on, other Igbos will know who you are. When you go to get married and you are asked where you are from and you mention the village they simply ask you to come another day so they can inform the *umunna* about the marriage and fix a date for you to come. By the time you go back for feedback he doesn't find time for you again because he knows who you are." Adiele E. Afigbo, Interview, Abakaliki, August 29, 2007.

¹⁴⁹ Chidiebere Chukwudi, Interview, Enugu, August 9, 2007. Chukwudi is an indigene of Isiogbo Nara who told us of the travail of his people to get rid of the stigma attached to their group.

equal rights with the freeborn. For this respondent, it is not important how quick people get to know of their status because people would find out eventually.¹⁵⁰

Moreover, another problem, as we noted in the previous chapter, was that of name.¹⁵¹ It has also shown to favour persistence in some areas, as regards the same knowledge we talked about of knowing who is who by one's village group. In *Efuru* case for instance, *Efuru* wives had 'Iyi' as surnames while their children used 'Nwiyi'. These names alone stigmatized them and singled them out in society. One Uchenna Nwiyi, a daughter of *Efuru*, only 16 at the time, indicated in her testimony that she was stigmatized and laughed at by her mates in school who called her father a 'stick' – probably referring to the ritual objects placed at the *Efuru* shrine.¹⁵² Another daughter of *Efuru*, Edna Nwiyi, who noted that her fellow 'Nwiyis' had begun to change their names to Nwagu, wrote on March 20, 1987, requesting to change her name because of insults people rendered on her. "They call me *Efuru* child on the way because I bear the surname NWIYI,"¹⁵³ she wrote sadly.

3.5 Apathetic Attitude of Regimes to the Caste Practices

From the fall of the 1800s to the present day, the authorities have lacked political will to deal with the discrimination against the caste groups.¹⁵⁴ In the previous chapter we showed how the colonial administrators established enabling laws against the caste practices in the early 1900s, but they were not stiff enough and did not entirely kick against the practice.¹⁵⁵ For example, in 1935, the acting DO of Nsukka Division, J. B. Barmby, had reported to the Resident, Onitsha

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ See Chapter II, 2.3.3.

¹⁵² Report of the "Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987," Vol. II, p. 103.

¹⁵³ Report of the "Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987," Vol. III, p. 51.

¹⁵⁴ G. Ugo Nwokeji, "Caste, Slavery, and Postslavery in Igboland," Conference Paper, German African Studies Association 17th Biennial Conference, Leipzig, March 31- April 1 2000.

¹⁵⁵ Refer to Chapter II, 2.2.

Province of continuous dedication of children by their parents to the local juju in his area to avert some family disaster or restore family fortunes. According to him, all the accused in cases of this nature that went before the Native Courts were all acquitted on “grounds that there was no evidence that the children were to be held or treated as slaves, and no proof that the children could not run away if they wished to.” Barmby argued that because of the nature of the practice where the children dedicated to deities are not ill-treated or made to perform duties of servile nature, it was difficult to get a conviction. In any case, the children were at liberty to run away, but even if they planned to, their families who gave them away would never have received them; so they were bound to stay there. The DO’s position against the law was that if it remained unchanged, it appeared impossible to convict any offender of the practice. As he observed, after the acquittals of the last cases, no fewer than ten new cases were brought to his attention. Accordingly, he pleaded for the reformation of the law, noting: “I do not wish to interfere with cases in which the original transaction is ancient history, but I consider that I should have power to put a stop to future dealings of this kind.” This instance is significant at this juncture because, the acting resident, O’Connor, treated his request indifferently, noting thus that “there does not appear to be any grave necessity of prohibiting the custom by law, other than upon purely moral grounds.”¹⁵⁶ This was and still is the case throughout most parts of Igboland as it has continued from the colonial era to the present time when authorities that have lacked political will from the onset, avoid meddling in disputes involving caste origin.¹⁵⁷

Across Igboland today, caste groups in several village groups, especially those in the Nkanu and Owerri areas, have taken different cases of discrimination against them to courts. Yet, no

¹⁵⁶ “Dedication of Children to Juju Priests (1935),” NAE, CSE 1/85/5537.

¹⁵⁷ Emeka Omeruah’s handling of the *Efuru* issue in 1987 continues to remain a reference point to the prospect of government’s hardstand on issues concerning prejudices of the caste groups.

judgement has ever been delivered or recorded in favour of the group.¹⁵⁸ Leo Igwe, an activist at the forefront of the emancipation struggle for the caste groups, told us that “Since 1996, I have learnt of cases that have reached the courts concerning this practice. Yet, nobody has been punished for discriminating against these people.”¹⁵⁹ The law of 1956 was supposed to be a giant step of government effort in this regard. But most observers have either called it a mistake or a failure. Afigbo for instance argued that the law was bound to fail from the day it was enacted. As he opined:

You cannot take somebody to court because he refuses to allow you to marry his daughter. ...the colonial masters were wiser. It is just because of the political inexperience of the so called nationalist group - Azikiwe and his group - that this practice got to the level that it is. What they had was not sound in knowledge and experience. If they were experienced and informed they wouldn't have made that legislation because in some respects it made matters worse.¹⁶⁰

Ekwunife also expresses this fear. According to him, “You don't abolish a religious belief through paper work. Religion is higher than any government. It permeates government decisions.”¹⁶¹ Moreover, because of the law, another respondent, Ike, said that if he was asked about *osu* in Igboland his simple response would be, “it has been abolished some thirty years ago, we don't have anything about it.”¹⁶² The Igwe of Nnokwa spoke in the same way.¹⁶³ However, the last two acknowledged the persistence of the practice in many areas irrespective of the law, even though they reasoned that the law made it difficult to publicly call someone an

¹⁵⁸ See Introductory Chapter. Also, for colonial instances, refer to Chapter II, 2.3 where we narrated the cases of some caste groups that took their cases to the courts and got unfair judgement.

¹⁵⁹ Leo Igwe, Private Discussion, March 2009.

¹⁶⁰ Adiele E. Afigbo, Interview, Abakaliki, August 29, 2007.

¹⁶¹ Anthony Ekwunife, Interview, Nsukka, August 22, 2007.

¹⁶² Cyril O. Ike, Interview, Igbo-Ukwu, June 24, 2007.

¹⁶³ HRH Igwe Christopher Okonkwo Ezeagu, Interview, Nnokwa, June 15, 2007.

osu. For other respondents like Emeh, the law failed because it “stopped where it was made”¹⁶⁴ – the government did nothing more for the caste groups after enacting the law.

Also, Nwokeji blames the failure of the 1956 law on the split of the Eastern Region which jointly enacted the old law. It would appear that after the Biafran War in 1970, most of the entire Igbo region on the east of the Niger formed the East Central State, while the other side, the western Igbo area composed what became the Mid-Western Region in 1963, becoming Bendel State from 1976 to 1989 thereafter and since then Delta State. The East Central State which had the Igbo majority was split into Imo and Anambra States in 1976, and Abia, Anambra, Enugu and Imo States in 1989. The effect of this, according to Nwokeji, was that it created difficulties for these states to pursue common programs, in other words, anti-*osu* action initiated in one state was only applicable to the citizens of that state.¹⁶⁵ Thus, the law which was enacted collectively merely became another paper tiger. Even after all, state governments barely displayed the sincere will to solve the problem. For example, Ezekiel Izuogu, a prominent politician in Imo State had in the 1980s refused to be dragged into the caste controversy, but as he promised: “We shall educate people. But there are certain things you cannot legislate.” Also, Ikoku, another prominent member of the eastern government in the days of Ukpabi Asika, where he headed the pertinent ministry, expressed caution:

I will not attempt to solve the situation by marrying *osu*. And I won’t advise anybody to do so. The best way to defeat the system is not to fall foul or to fly in the face of its authority... We make ourselves better agents of change if we anchor ourselves on the positive side of the social plane.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Benechukwu B. O. Emeh, Interview, Nnobi, June 16, 2007.

¹⁶⁵ Nwokeji, “Caste, Slavery, and Postslavery in Igboland.”

¹⁶⁶ Ely Obasi, Akpa Edem, Janet Mba and Sam Smith, “The Gods Are to Blame,” *NewsWatch*, Lagos, September 18, 1989, p. 19.

Even more recently, the government of Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu State which ended after an eight-year tenure in 2007, treated the case of the *ohu* in Nkanu with little concern.¹⁶⁷ This problem as we have indicated from Chapter II, lingered since the early 1900s. Nevertheless, one common argument against creating prohibition laws is that it strengthens agitations by the caste groups and on the other hand, stiffens the resistance of the freeborn. This doesn't however, free the government and other agencies from blame, because as Okigbo mentioned, the government's lack of political will has "prevented them from trying other viable alternatives as orientation campaigns and dealing with cases of physical harassments" of the caste groups "squarely." And, "Until they encourage Igbos to stop this practice," he insists, "it will remain strong for a very long time."¹⁶⁸

3.6 The Conflation and Misconception Discourse

One issue some scholars have connected to the lackadaisical handling of the caste problems by the colonial administration was that the British did not really understand what the practice was about. According to Afigbo for instance,

The colonial officials didn't know what the caste practice was all about. That's why all their attempts to solve the problem failed. Let's take the case of the *ohus* in Nkanu; they [the British] had long problems with the *ohus* in the area and even tried to resettle them. This is the same issue the defunct East Regional Government inherited and thought they could legislate against the practice. They did not understand the problem had to do with stigma.¹⁶⁹

Furthermore, Nwokeji's paper, we have cited in previous chapters, dwelt on this issue of misunderstanding on the side of both the British and the indigenous administrators and activists who, he argued, interpreted the *osu* system as slavery. According to him, the

¹⁶⁷ See Tobs Agbaegbu, "Moves to Stop Slavery in Igboland," *Newswatch*, Lagos, February 7, 2000, p. 16.

¹⁶⁸ John S.C. Okigbo, Interview, Nnobi, June 24, 2007.

¹⁶⁹ Adiele E. Afigbo, Interview, Abakaliki, August 29, 2007.

movement against the *osu* system “suffered due to its intellectual affiliations with the dominant Western antislavery school, one that equated all sorts of exploitation and marginality with slavery.” Nwokeji argues that the mix-up of the *osu* institution with slavery backfired, resulting in “uncritical scholarship that has taken a cue from, rather [than] correct, the mistakes of early European missionaries and administrators.”¹⁷⁰ According to him, the British made the wrong move towards solving the problems of the caste groups because they perceived the problem as a political and economic one; one that made the caste activists more interested in the material benefit of colonial rule, rather than in a problem of social discrimination. He suggests that if the colonial administration had isolated Igbo caste practices from slavery and treated the caste practices as a distinct institution they may have made headway. However, the colonial administration tried at some point to distinguish the *osu* practice from the practice of slavery or trade in persons. In 1930, for instance, a conference to discuss the relationship between the Church and native customs which held at Ozala and unanimously condemned the “evil custom” admitted that the Church had done very little to condemn the practice, but significantly, they acknowledged that the *osu* institution “differs from slavery as it is religious in character.”¹⁷¹

Nevertheless, no matter how one observes the institution, the *osu/ohu* condition is as it was then an aspect of slavery. Just like the conference noted, the one significant difference is the fact of ownership – because the slaves were dedicated and belonged to deities. Perhaps, as Afigbo noted as well, the British might have taken more drastic measures if they had really understood the long-term consequences of the practice.

¹⁷⁰ Nwokeji observed this in his paper, “Caste, Slavery, and Postslavery in Igboland.”

¹⁷¹ “The Church and Native Customs,” in Appendix 5 (Miscellaneous) No. 67, University of Birmingham, G 3/A3 0/1930

3.7 Waiting on 'Time'

Furthermore, one thing the British (missionaries and colonial administrators) and the government of the Eastern Region had in common was their belief that time would lessen the persistence of caste practices in Igboland. From the colonial era to date, this has been the position of several governments. At the beginning of the 1900s, after the colonial administration had promoted its stance on the issue, several cases of these practices were reported in many areas. In 1935, for instance, slave dealings and human sacrifices were reported in the Onitsha Provinces, around the Nsukka area.¹⁷² The *West African Review* also reported in August 1938 that cases of human sacrifice as well as the killing of twin children was still rampant, again in the large district of Nsukka.¹⁷³ Moreover, in August 1945, thirty-four women and children dedicated to the *Ugwuagboko*, *Ani-Ajukwu*, and *Ugwuabazi* jujus were found in the Udi Division.¹⁷⁴ Even up till 1958,¹⁷⁵ and then lately, in 1987 as we have already noted of the *Efuru*, the activities of these oracles prevailed in many areas. Most of the British documents on matters of the caste practices indicate their stern belief that time would be the solution to this problem. But from the *Efuru* saga to our present observations in the field, time has definitely not achieved very much. Perhaps the incessant belief that time would heal the wound contributed to the laid-back attitude of government towards the matter and consequently, as Ezeike remarked;

Because all governments in the past and now, both the British and the Nigerian ones, believed that by the year 2000 everybody would have forgotten about the *osu* tradition, the thing has continued to linger. They refused to do anything about it. No one is saying that they should continue making laws,

¹⁷² "Dedication of Children to Juju Priests (1935)," NAE, CSE 1/85/5537

¹⁷³ "Human Sacrifices and Destruction of Twin Children, Nsukka District, Onitsha Province," NAE, CSE 1/85/7875.

¹⁷⁴ "Ukana-Ebe Jujus," NAE, UDDIV 4/1/13.

¹⁷⁵ "Human Sacrifices and Destruction of Twin Children," NAE, ONDIST 12/1/1244.

but they can reorientate the people – especially the freeborn to change and stop practicing this system. All they talk about is time, time, time!¹⁷⁶

Moreover, the statement by the *Efuru* Commission of Inquiry on the ‘time’ solution is apt in this regard and it is worth quoting in full:

As regards time, there is no doubt that time changes everything. But the efficacy of time in effecting change depends on the presence of factors on which time will operate. As far back as the 1920s and 30s, it was the belief of the then colonial administrators, who were faced with the problem of the ‘*osu*’ caste system, that time would solve the problem. They were right in a general sense, but it never occurred to them that unless active steps were taken to provide for that time, it may never come. Those expatriates simply failed to see the matter from the viewpoint of the native whose life and total existence are involved in the system which time is expected to solve. That was why Mr. P. F. Grant, the then District Officer, Agwu, in 1955, after forty years of Christianity and education failed to cure the ‘*osu*’ headache, suggested his panacea for effective speeding up of the decay of the ‘*osu*’ system. His recommendation was “...for those prominent in society to give their daughters in marriage to *osus*. That example would assuredly be effective...” The truth is that time will only solve the problem if the factors on which time will operate are there. A cut or wound or other sore will only heal with time, but you must first kill the bacteria that cause decay around the sore, and then provide the patient with the right nutrition for the body-building or replacement of the damaged parts.¹⁷⁷

The Commissions’ findings were undeniably helpful. It observed that time without a defined action will only strengthen rather than weaken the practice. Their investigations after all revealed that enlightened and educated individuals, parliamentarians and other law makers were seeking the services of *Efuru* to achieve whatever they desire, even at the time the Commission did its work.¹⁷⁸ To display some form of action against matters of servitude and

¹⁷⁶ Godwin Ezeike, Interview, Nnobi, June 16, 2007.

¹⁷⁷ Report of the “Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987,” Vol. I, p. 83-84.

¹⁷⁸ This case is no less different from what happens in Nigeria today, juju and voodoo is still patronized by enlightened elite. Just recently, in July 2008, the Chairman of the Niger Delta Development Commission in Nigeria, Ambassador Sam Edem, a self proclaimed Christian, allegedly spent a whopping sum of one billion naira on the services of a juju man who he employed to help him achieve some selfish

move away from the 'time' talk to action, the Commission recommended an out-right proscription and demolition of the *Efuru* and its practice system, advising that this case should not be handled as nonchalantly as the redundant Abolition of Osu Law of 1956. The government one morning destroyed the entire *Efuru* shrine to the ground and declared all existing *Efuru* wives free and liberated from all bonds real or imaginary that were believed by them to exist between them and *Efuru*, or anyone else for that matter, in regard to *Efuru* worship. In like manner, all *Efuru* children were declared free of all connections with *Efuru* and the government made it a punishable offence to refer to any person as an *Efuru* child or Nwiyi or any other description suggesting relationship with *Efuru*.¹⁷⁹

The present situation in Igboland is not far from this as most state governments in the region handle matters relating to the practice nonchalantly. However, some traditional rulers in the area still hope that the caste practices will dwindle in time. The Igwes of Nike, Nnokwa and Nnewi are hopeful, but they all insist that concrete measures must be put in place to ensure this happens. For Igwe Nnaji of Nike, "Yes, time will work. But do we just sit down and wait for time?" "We must all make efforts to see that those who have continued discriminating against this caste people have a rethink or else this thing will survive for a very long time,"¹⁸⁰ the chief said to us.

political desires in the government circle. See among other news stories on this incidence, Funke Aboyade's article: "How Sam Edem Story Mirrors the Nigerian Tragedy," Lagos: *Thisday*, August 11, 2008, available at <http://www.thisdayonline.com/nview.php?id=119428>. (Accessed August 2008)

¹⁷⁹ The handling of *Efuru* in the late 1980s by the defunct Anambra State Government has often been described as a success because the area where the *Efurus* lived had been cleared since 1987. One respondent who belonged to the *Efuru* group told us in 2007 that because all the former inhabitants in the area were moved to other locations, nobody discriminates against them. However, while most people say the abolition in the area was successful, others say discrimination against the group may exist especially amongst those resettled in areas surrounding the former *Efuru* enclave.

¹⁸⁰ HRH Igwe Julius Ugwu Nnaji, Interview, Nike, July 23, 2007.

3.8 Rebuff of Regular Calls to Join the Caste Groups

One respondent at Awka told us that Igbo caste practices might have been forgotten by now if the majority of the freeborn had agreed to marry from the caste groups long ago. According to Chiweta,

I remember a traditional ruler that was asked by his people to marry an *osu* in the 1980s after he had abolished it. He refused. Even one big man who had participated in the abolition rituals made so much noise then about the abolition because he was a Knight in the Church. He didn't allow his children to mix up with this people. This man is still alive. You dare not come close to his family if you are *osu*.¹⁸¹

Besides, we would have noticed P. F. Grant's suggestion above on marriage to an *osu* as a way of speeding up the decline of the practice and prejudices rather than wait for time.¹⁸² Okigbo supports this idea. In fact, in his call against the practice in Nnobi, he suggested that every freeborn be consecrated to the deity so no one will have the guts to segregate or discriminate since everyone will have the stigma.¹⁸³ Ikedife frowns at this bitterly. He argues: so "if we are trying to stop discrimination against AIDS we should all go and be infected with HIV?"¹⁸⁴ According to him, this is a funny and odd way of thinking. However, the popular call for traditional rulers and other abolitionists to get involved in marriage to the caste groups has never ceased since after the 1956 abolition especially. At the same time, we had earlier mentioned the case of a traditional ruler in Anambra who was dethroned and humiliated after he acted according to his subjects' request that he gave one of his daughters out in marriage to an *osu*, once he had outlawed the practice in his territory.¹⁸⁵ Other traditional rulers across

¹⁸¹ Fieldwork Notes, 2008.

¹⁸² See 3.7.

¹⁸³ John S. C. Okigbo, Interview, Nnobi, June 24, 2007.

¹⁸⁴ Dozie Ikedife, FGD, June 18, 2007.

¹⁸⁵ See Introduction.

Igboland got similar requests to engage with the caste groups, but none according to our findings complied.

Accordingly, abolitionists and chiefs that have denounced the practice in their areas have continued to face wide criticisms and blame for the persistence. Umeh, for example, mocked the abolition that was carried out by the Igwe of Nnobi whom he accused of abolishing the practice without practicing what he preached. As he told us, “Edmund Okoli [the Igwe of Nnobi] said he abolished it. Did he allow his child to marry one? Have you seen anyone of his children that is married to an *osu*? Go and ask all those who claim to have abolished it if anyone is married to an *osu*.”¹⁸⁶

3.9 Conclusion

The persistence of Igbo caste practices can be attributed to a lot of varied and complex reasons as we have shown. But the problem as it stands today seems to be an ideological one. When we spoke to individuals casually, all of them had different reasons why they might or might not associate with the caste groups. The ideas about the practice really differ from person to person, just like the reasons why people continue to discriminate against these caste groups. In fact, some individuals do not even know why they discriminate as one Onyeka said: “I can’t marry an *osu*. I don’t know much about them but my parents always tell us they are bad people.”¹⁸⁷ Besides, parents and elders have dramatically encouraged the persistence of caste practices because it is indeed them that prohibit their children from marrying members of the caste groups. Most parents start feeding their children with rubbish images of the *osu* from

¹⁸⁶ John Anenechukwu Umeh, Interview, Enugu, July 22, 2007. Umeh even laughed at us and refused many times to take part in the interview because according to him, anyone who wants to do research on the issue must show some seriousness too and be married to an *osu*, though we told him the research was neutral and had no particular position on the issue, yet. The research was at its initial stage.

¹⁸⁷ Private Discussion, 2009.

childhood through folklores and tendentious real life stories. This practically serves as a forewarning that such persons are taboos. However, Chapter VII extensively dwells on the connectedness of the caste practices to Igbo life and thought. There we will observe that because several Igbo institutions and traditions are tied to placing the caste groups on a different pedestal from the freeborn, it has been difficult to reverse the status quo.

Finally, from observing respondents in the field, three schools of thought appear to have emerged. Firstly, the deniers who would claim that the caste practices had ceased to exist in all forms after the abolition of 1956 which declared it an illegal institution; secondly, the 'apathetics' who generally prefer to sit tight-lipped and pretend the institution has gone while waiting on time and education to make it fizzle away; then lastly, the realists, who will at anytime acknowledge the persistence of the practices irrespective of place or who is listening. We came across different people during fieldwork who had these different views as we have shown and these feelings have shaped the discourse in the media.

This concludes our discussion of persistence. Chapters I, II, and III have now set the historical and sociological background of our thesis. The next three chapters will switch gears and look at how Igbo caste practices have been discussed and represented in the media – news media, cyberspace and then video films, respectively. All subsequent chapters will give us an impression of the attitudes to the Igbo caste practices and in short, they clearly tell us of the level of persistence of these caste practices.

CHAPTER IV

CRITICAL QUESTIONS WITHIN THE NEWS MEDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLISHED REPORTS IN THE MEDIA, 1973-2009, AND ATTITUDES TO THESE REPORTS

4.0 Introduction

A key argument of this study is that the mass media have the potential to powerfully affect attitudes to Igbo caste practices, by influencing personal or group decision making in particular cases and by affecting society more generally, because media reports have an impact on various participants in the system. But the sensitive nature of the caste practices also constitutes a problem particularly for the newspapers/magazines, television and radio, because journalists/editors fear stepping on the wrong toes. The media in this study are conceived as comprising the print and electronic institutions of communication with emphasis on the print segment for this chapter. Two other chapters will focus on the electronic segment by means of the internet and then on video film. The print media are emphasized because, although newspapers and magazines are not readily available to many rural residents in Igboland, they continue to act as an avenue for debates on these issues. They also are a more attractive means of getting to most elite policy makers than the other two means – cyberspace and video film - which of course have their own advantages. However, this study focuses on several interdependent variables, including media attitudes and behaviour as well as choice and influence on its audience. Media attitudes refer to general subjective evaluations of the media, such as the extent to which a medium is willing to set an agenda or take a position on Igbo caste practices. These attitudes and behaviour of the media and its audience are influenced by characteristics of situations, the social environment and persons.

Generally, the media is expected to perform its watchdog responsibility to the society by holding accountable public personalities and institutions whose functions affect the adherence to the laws prohibiting all forms of stigmatization against the caste groups. Because these laws have been loosely held, it becomes difficult for the media to perform these functions. However, the media initiates discourses on issues and acts as a referee in determining what issues are discussed and published; thus it could determine the flow of information and set the agenda for policy makers and even the public to act accordingly. Hence we examine in this chapter, the nature of media reporting on the *osu* system and the perceptions on the practice held by the public and the news media actors. Central questions are: Has the news media platform encouraged or shaped discussions on these issues? What challenges do they encounter in reporting the Igbo caste issues? What kinds of reactions arise as a result of media critique of the practice? Is the platform capable of influencing and affecting decisions of audiences and policy makers? And, finally, do the media contribute to the persistence or elimination of Igbo caste practices? To address these questions, the chapter will firstly offer an overview of the news media in eastern Nigeria. We analyze some published reports on Igbo caste practices to understand how media actors and the audience or guest writers perceive the problem. Secondly, we examine the extent to which the media is cautious in reporting sensitive cases as this – probably as a result of the controversy it could stir and the suspicion that it contributes to the persistence of the practice by giving it coverage and attention. Thirdly, we assess how media content affects the public's attitude to the practice. Then, finally, we maintain that mass media choices may be affected by its ownership as well as the sensitivity of the problem to the medium's immediate and extended environment; and the effects on the attitude of the public which is either reinforced or changed as a result of media content, may be influenced by the

persuasive nature of the article, and hardly ever by tough attacks on freeborn Igbos who are normally the target of such news stories.

Information presented here and in the last two chapters was collected during seven months (April – September 2007; April 2008) of fieldwork in eastern Nigeria, primarily through focus group discussions, as well as observation and interviews with adults of varying professions and groups in Igboland. We conducted an online survey and participated in several meetings to observe how people communicate amongst themselves regarding this issue. The results of this survey and our field experiences inspired our decision to focus on the news media, cyberspace and video films. Moreover, 117 individuals, the majority of whom fell within the 18-24 (30%) and 25-34 (60%) age brackets, participated in the online survey. Table 4.1 shows the representation of these respondents' states of origin.¹⁸⁸ We will not be generalizing from this data because the sample is too small, but it gives us an impression of what to expect from a general sample. In addition, seventy newspaper articles published as opinions letters, news stories and features were collected from sixteen daily and weekly newspapers and examined in this chapter for peculiarity in style, content and, especially, the issues that surfaced in rejoinders. A critical study of these articles revealed that the Igbo caste discourse has remained as contentious as it was over fifty years ago and that it continues to attract the attention of the public who continuously use the news media as a platform to debate these issues. This simply tells us that the practice is persistent. This chapter hence concludes that even as the news media is careful to report issues concerning this practice as a result of the controversies that could arise, the public engaged in the issues have sustained the discourse and the media as a result has shaped the views of other readers on this issue.

¹⁸⁸ Over 92% of our respondents were from core Igbo areas, while the remaining 9% were from Delta State in the western Igbo area. See table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Representation of Respondents by States of Origin

State of Origin	Number of Respondents	Percent of Total
Anambra	55	47.0
Imo	33	28.2
Abia	13	11.1
Delta	9	7.7
Enugu	7	6
Total	117	100

Source: Online Survey

4.1 Brief Overview of the News Media in Eastern Nigeria

The development of the modern Nigerian press,¹⁸⁹ particularly in the Eastern Region, is often attributed to the strides of Nnamdi Azikiwe – one of those who pioneered the struggle for the liberation of Igbo caste groups. Nigeria’s Head of State at independence, Azikiwe, returned to Nigeria in 1937 from the US and Ghana where he had worked in Accra’s *African Morning Post*, to found what became the first chain ownership of newspapers in Nigeria. And significantly, one of his papers, the *Eastern Nigerian Guardian* which was based in Port Harcourt and started

¹⁸⁹ Nigeria generally has developed a robust news media over decades. The origin of modern journalism in the country can be traced to 1859 when a European missionary established *Iwe Irohin* – a Christian newspaper published in Yoruba in Abeokuta, west of Nigeria. *Iwe Irohin* is believed to be the first newspaper published in Nigeria and it was founded by Reverend Henry Townsend, a white missionary who had come to Nigeria from Sierra Leone for evangelism. (See Fred Omu, “Iwe Irohin: 1859-1867,” *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. IV, No. 1, pp. 35-44). By 1859 when *Iwe Irohin* started in the west, no newspaper was published in eastern Nigeria. Many colonial newspapers were published in Lagos after *Iwe Irohin*. Newspapers like the *Anglo African* was published between 1863 and 1865; *Lagos Times and Gold Coast Advertiser* in 1880; and the *Nigerian Pioneer* published between 1914 and 1937 by Kitoye Ajasa. However, more newspapers were published under the *Lagos Times and Gold Coast Advertiser*. They included *The Lagos Observer* – published by J. B. Benjamin between February 15, 1882 and December 29, 1882; *The Eagle and Lagos Critic* – published by Owen Macaulay between March 31, 1883 and October 31, 1883; and *The Mirror* – published from December 17, 1887 to November 17, 1888 and published by Adolphus Mark. Most of these papers defined the interest of other papers which had been founded by politicians and those who sought to use the medium to fight against colonialism as was the norm in some African countries. Nnamdi Azikiwe’s papers followed the same style and struggle. See in detail, Clementina Okafor’s “History of Nigerian Print Media” in Chinyere S. Okunna (ed.), *Teaching Mass Communication: A Multi Dimensional Approach*, Enugu: New Generation Books, 2002, pp. 39-46.

publication in 1940 was the first daily newspaper in eastern Nigeria.¹⁹⁰ He published other newspapers in other parts of Nigeria and was undoubtedly influential and instrumental to both the beginning of newspaper publication in eastern Nigeria and thereafter the abolition of Igbo caste practices, which he also spearheaded as Premier of Nigeria's Eastern Region in 1956.¹⁹¹

Today, numerous local and regional newspapers are also published in the region by state governments, private individuals, religious groups and development associations.¹⁹² All state governments in eastern Nigeria publish and control chains of newspapers that circulate throughout their states while the readership of a few popular ones may spread to neighbouring states. A regular newspaper may count between 25-60 pages and the majority of them are published in the English language. Just a handful are published in local languages. Though most of these newspapers do not enjoy national circulation, some frequently get into the hands of indigenes that live in cities outside the region. And because of cost and other pressing problems that the people in the area may face, residents – some of whom know how to read and write – rarely purchase newspapers daily even when they are readily available,¹⁹³ but good-spirited individuals like a respondent in Akwa-Etiti, who provides two nationally circulated

¹⁹⁰ Idowu A. Sobowale, "The Historical Development of the Nigerian Press," in Frank Ugboajah (ed.), *Mass Communication, Culture and Society in West Africa*, London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1985, p. 31.

¹⁹¹ Other publications in his chain included the *Nigerian Spokesman* which began publication in Onitsha in 1943; *Southern Nigeria Defender* published in Warri in 1943; *Daily Comet* published in Kano in 1944; and *Northern Advocate* which started in Jos in 1949. Azikiwe became Governor-General of Nigeria in 1960 and in 1963 when Nigeria became a republic he became its first president. See in detail, S. Nnamdi Okenwa, "The Growth of the Nigerian Press" in Chinyere S. Okunna, Chudi Amafile and Nnamdi Okenwa (eds.), *Theory and Practice of Mass Communication*, Enugu: ABIC Publishers, 1993, pp. 50-57.

¹⁹² See Appendix II for a comprehensive list of newspapers and magazines published in eastern Nigeria.

¹⁹³ In 2007 for instance, Nnobi only had one regular vendor who came to the town's local market on Mondays every week to sell his paper. He was permanently stationed at Nnewi – a neighbouring village, because the sale of newspaper at Nnewi is higher than that in Nnobi since Nnewi is a mini-city and has got several industries and banks operating in the area. Thus, the market at Nnobi was not very attractive for vendors. So people who must purchase newspapers daily at Nnobi must travel to Nnewi to do this.

newspapers daily at his office for people to drop-in and read,¹⁹⁴ may pass on their papers for others to read.¹⁹⁵ Notably, however, some A4-newspapers without the publisher's physical addresses are published in the region and they are extremely cheap and could sell for as little as twenty Naira. These newspapers were popular at the beginning of the 2000s and they often carry unusual news items that may be exclusive to the publication or even controversial.¹⁹⁶ Incidentally, more than half a dozen newspapers enjoy national circulation in Nigeria and a handful of their publishers are indigenes of the region (the table 4.2 below shows the Igbo presence among newspaper proprietors). Thus, the activities in the region are hardly ever ignored in the pages of these papers. As a result of ownership, however, where government practically owns major electronic media and politicians own a large proportion of the print media,¹⁹⁷ the media gives little attention to problems like those of the Igbo caste groups because, as in other African countries, government is the greatest news maker in the society. Thus, the proprietors of these mediums, even though they may accept their medium has a social responsibility, may give in to certain pressures – which of course include profit making.

¹⁹⁴ Just like in most areas in Nigeria, most vendors allow passers-by to look through the pages of their newspapers often displayed on the floor or table on the road. Through this people get the information they desire and pay a little sum which is often casual. And in most cases when they become regular visitors to any spot they are allowed to read through the newspapers free of charge at the discretion of the vendor.

¹⁹⁵ Some people may even share the cost of a newspaper which may cost between N50 and N300. For instance, two civil servants who live together at Nnobi share the responsibility of buying newspapers daily so as to minimize expenses. By this way, their extended family and friends get to read these papers which are displayed in a wide veranda at the entrance of their family house for visitors to read.

¹⁹⁶ These A4 newspapers are printed in black and white ink and they usually come with bold pictures or cartoons positioned at the front, middle and back pages. They are normally stapled and the number of pages could range between 4-10 pages. These papers became popular in the region in the 2000s during the days of the Bakassi Boys – an anti-crime vigilante group in eastern Nigeria that tortured and killed 'criminals' in broad daylight. They were usually armed with guns, machetes and charms and because their executions were published on these A4 newspapers, the newspapers became popular and sold regularly at motor parks and at the entrances of public gathering arenas. See the Human Rights Watch article, "The Bakassi Boys: The Legitimization of Murder and Torture," Vol. 14, No. 5, May 2002, and available at <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2002/nigeria2/>

¹⁹⁷ The publishers of *The Champion*, *The Sun* and *Daily Times* newspapers are politicians of Igbo origin. (See table 4.2). Though we have no specific information on circulation figures, *The Sun* has reportedly got the highest circulation figures in Nigeria. See Appendix II.

Table 4.2: Ownership of Major Media Institutions

Name Of Medium	Location	Proprietor & State of Origin
<i>Champion</i>	Lagos	Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu (Imo)
<i>Comet</i>	Lagos	Lade Bonuola (Oyo)
<i>Daily Independent</i>	Lagos	Abel Ubeku (Delta)
<i>Daily Times</i>	Lagos	Fidelis Anosike (Anambra)
<i>Guardian</i>	Lagos	Alex Ibru (Delta)
<i>Punch</i>	Lagos	Ajibola Ogunsola (Oyo)
<i>Sun</i>	Lagos	Orji Kalu (Abia)
<i>This Day</i>	Lagos	Nduka Obaigbena (Delta)
<i>Tribune</i>	Lagos	H. I. D. Awolowo (Ogun)
<i>Vanguard</i>	Lagos	Sam Amuka-Pemu (Delta)
African Independent Television	Abuja	Raymond Dokpesi (Edo)
Minaj Television	Obosi	Mike Ajaebo (Anambra)
Nigerian Television Authority	Abuja/ State Capitals	Federal Government
State Radio/Television Stations	All States in the region	State Governments

Source: Researcher's Notes

4.2 Media Reporting on Igbo Caste Practices

The print media has been at the forefront of the struggle for the emancipation of Igbo caste groups, at least in its regular coverage of the case each time an event springs up. The media gave considerable attention and space to each major incident that took place concerning the practice, from state abolition to local abolitions, etc. But from the news reports we collected, published between 1973 and 2009, it seemed as if the public was more interested in debating the issue than even journalists themselves who, one may have thought, would be as engaged in the debate as the former; more published materials came from non-journalists or individuals with no affiliation to newspapers. The table (4.3) below shows us the number of media articles written by journalists and non journalists. Most of the pieces by non-journalists, however, were

inspired by already published reports by journalists. The debate on the discrimination against caste groups has continued amongst individuals and groups who use the news media as a platform. However, most journalists and non-journalists who wrote news and feature stories, and gave opinions on the caste practices took a similar stand on the issue. They generally opposed the practice. And because of the proliferation of materials written by members of the public, we use their responses to examine their behaviour and attitude towards the information received via the mass media. Only a few writers, mostly non-journalists, were sceptical about joining the bandwagon of those who condemn the practice. For journalists, doing otherwise was unusual, perhaps because they were guided firstly by the editorial policy of their organization,¹⁹⁸ and secondly by the ethics of the profession. Thus even where they think the practice is good, they may not express the same views in the pages of their newspapers. Significantly, because the ownership of a news media determines its editorial policy, we will look into the effects this has had on the news media coverage of caste practices. Nevertheless, because of the media's gate-keeping function where it edits or chooses what will be published, we must note that all material that goes through its editorial board would have been edited or approved for publication; hence having an effect on the writer's approach to the issue or the finished product.

¹⁹⁸ See Idowu Sobowale, "Influence of Ownership on Nigerian Newspaper Coverage on National Issues," in Onuora E. Nwuneli (ed.), *Mass Communication in Nigeria: A Book of Reading*, Enugu; Fourth Dimension, 1985, pp. 94-103.

Table 4.3: News Media Publications on *Osu* by Journalists and the Public, 1973-2009¹⁹⁹

	Number of Articles	Percent of Total
Non Journalists (Public)	42	60
Journalists	28	40
Total	70	100

Source: Fieldwork

From the outset, most writers lambasted those who continued to discriminate against the caste groups – in discriminations like rejecting them in positions of authority or in marriages – or those who we may choose to call realists, who argue that the caste practices are persistent and real.²⁰⁰ As we observed during fieldwork, most people who would not normally allow their wards to get involved in a close relationship with an *osu* openly criticized the persistence of the practice, calling it ‘barbaric’ and ‘evil’. We know this as a result of our personal knowledge of interview partners and journalists/respondents. Even though we cannot tell if the criticisms in the pages of newspapers against the practices are genuine, the reactions of readers are helpful. No one of course can tell the sincerity of a person’s opinion on our subject, even with direct contact; as we have indicated in previous chapters, one can only test one’s seriousness when a strong action like marriage to an *osu* or *ohu* in areas where they suffer similar discrimination is required. We will, however, examine various aspects of the articles published in the pages of the newspapers and magazines we collected. Notably, different articles of various angles and shapes were published at various times indicative of the failure of all abolition attempts and the contemporary nature of the problem.

¹⁹⁹ We were only able to gather seventy newspaper articles published since 1973. There may be more articles in existence.

²⁰⁰ Refer to Chapter III, 3.9 Conclusion.

4.3 Public Debates in the News Media

For a subject that attracts so much attention with very little spoken about it openly, the discourse on Igbo caste practices amongst the public in the news media has been a vibrant and interesting one. As we indicated earlier, more than half the articles we collected in the news media were written by individuals with no affiliation to the media. This trend has continued even up to the 2000s as our collections reveal more articles have started coming up in newspapers than they did before the 1990s (see table 4.4 below).²⁰¹ This does not just show the level of controversy the system attracts, but it reflects societal interest in the persistence of a tradition that many people think should have been extinct by now. Public debates in the media have taken different patterns and dimensions. Since the 1970s, the arguments by commentators in the news media have revolved around the real meaning or history of Igbo caste practices and others have made arguments on why the caste practices should persist. Some writers have also criticized the views of other writers who seemed to have suggested other abolition means – such as traditional or legislative. All in all, the arguments have been fascinating and they give us an impression of people’s feelings and attitudes to what has already been written or discussed in the media.

²⁰¹ Note that our survey of newspapers mainly concentrated on national and state publications stacked in libraries and archives. Thus, more articles might have been published in the 1990s. But amongst the 70 we collected; only one was published in that decade. However, the table indicates that the *osu* problem today still gets the kind of attention and debate it got in previous years within the print news media. The 1980s may have had more articles because of the *Efuru* incident and the abolition exercises that continued in village groups across Igboland. Most villages that abolished the caste practices in the 1970s like Nnewi had repeat abolition exercises because the practice was still persistent. As it stands now, Nnewi’s last abolition was in December 2008. These continuous abolition ceremonies, especially in the 1980s, may have also increased the debate in the media because the continuous abolition signified the failure of previous ceremonies.

Table 4.4: Frequency of Published Materials on Osu in the Print News Media

Year of Publication (in Decades)	Number of Publication	Percent of Total
1970s	12	17.1
1980s	35	50.0
1990s	1	1.5
2000s	22	31.4
Total	70	100

Source: Fieldwork

4.3.1 News Reports by Journalists

While public debates filled the news media, journalists themselves reported several stories that concentrated on abolition attempts and calls for abolition by leaders and institutions across Igboland. By this trend, which has continued since the 1970s, a number of newspapers avoided taking direct positions on the issue. Instead they indirectly brought these problems into the limelight by focusing on the actions and debates of prominent stakeholders. For instance, in 1981 the *Daily Star*, which reported the local abolition in Nnokwa, emphasized Igwe Ezekwem's actions. The Igwe noted that the system:

is abolished in the community to demonstrate their belief in practical Christianity and also to promote peace and unity among the citizen[s] of Nnokwa.²⁰²

The newspaper also gave prominence to the words of the president of Nnokwa Progressive Union, who claimed that the abolition “was the burning desire of the people to improve communal interaction in the community.”²⁰³ We must note that this report was published at the time when many other communities like Nnobi and Awka-Etiti publicly abolished the *osu* practice. At that time, media focus on the problem was high. As a respondent recollected, the

²⁰² Anyanwu Godwin, ““Osu” Abolished in Nnokwa”, *Daily Star*, Enugu. Wednesday, July 29, 1981, p. 5.

²⁰³ Ibid.

Igbo-Ukwu abolition ceremony in 1975 was carried live on state television.²⁰⁴ One of the most prominent calls against this practice was by Maryam Babangida, the wife of the then president of Nigeria, who visited the Owerri area in 1988 during the launch of the Imo State Rural Women Movement at Abiriba, where she criticized the practice for having outlived its usefulness.²⁰⁵ Though the newspaper gave Mrs Babangida's call a bold headline: "Scrap Osu Caste System – Maryam," the story focused on the women's movement, probably because it was the object of interest at the time.²⁰⁶ But the headline attracted the reactions of some readers like Ekwenchi, who first praised Babangida for doing "what no woman had ever thought of doing by condemning" the practice, and then warned:

it is not a simple matter to be dismissed by mere words of mouth. I want our first lady to know that the origin of *osu* was religious in nature and can only be removed religiously.²⁰⁷

Many others shared this sentiment with regard to the methods of abolition. In fact, most reports published during the 1980s berated the law. The headline of a report published in 1987 was apt: "Legislation Can't Wipe Out 'Osu'." The report came off an interview the News Agency of Nigeria had with the deputy chairman of the Imo State Council of Traditional Rulers in Owerri – a town we have noted is notorious for this discrimination, and the newspaper gave his comment prominence. The Eze, Egwunwoke, who opined that the 1956 Abolition Law was hopeless, was quoted as saying that the law had been "most ineffective and we do not intend to make more laws on the system." According to the traditional ruler:

²⁰⁴ Cyril Ike, Interview, Igbo-Ukwu, June 24, 2007.

²⁰⁵ Chris Nwegbo, "Scrap Osu Caste System – Maryam," *Daily Times*, Lagos. Tuesday, January 26, 1988, p. 2.

²⁰⁶ Maryam Babangida's movement for rural women, which was the first notable movement by a Nigerian first lady at the time, was popular and it attracted a lot of rural women in all the states in Nigeria. She formally called it the Better Life Programme for Rural Women and it was her campaign to provide help and skills acquisition for rural women. The programme always made news in the 1980s and early 1990s while Mrs. Babangida's husband was Nigeria's head of state/president.

²⁰⁷ E. E. Ekwenchi, "A More Realistic Way to end 'Osu' System," *Daily Star*, Enugu. Wednesday, April 20, 1988, p. 11.

It is only through education, religious tolerance, civilization and disarmament of those members of the caste system who always gang up to fight their cause that will see to the eradication of the system... through interaction majority of the members of the system had gained greater momentum and acceptance in this area.²⁰⁸

In the same year also, Emeka Omeruah, then governor of the old Anambra State, whose government destroyed the *Efuru* shrine,²⁰⁹ spoke at the launching and presentation of a book – *The Osu Concept in Igboland* –; the presentation of which attracted politicians, clerics and traditional rulers. The event was dominated by criticisms of the practice, and newspapers highlighted this disapproval. According to the governor:

The problems created by the *osu* concept in Igboland had not only paralysed many communities but had made nonsense of rural development efforts... Anambra State government will not stop any moves geared towards the elimination of the *osu* concept in the Igbo society.²¹⁰

The comment of the Catholic Archbishop of Onitsha who presented a paper at the ceremony and regretted that “the *osu* concept which was officially abolished 30 years ago was still being upheld in some parts of Igboland,” was noted as well. Another condemnatory remark by S. G. Ikoku, another public official was highlighted. He described the practice as “an abomination against man by man,” while noting that “it was a disgrace to the Igbo race to still talk about *osu* at this stage of its development.”²¹¹

Another newspaper – *Daily Champion* – which had just begun publication in 1988, reported the abolition of the social stigma by Ifakala community in 1989. Ifakala’s case was well-known because the discrimination against the *osus* amongst them was extreme in the sense that *osu* and

²⁰⁸ *New Nigerian*, “Legislation Can’t Wipe Out ‘Osu’”, *Sunday New Nigerian*, Lagos. Sunday, December 27, 1987, p.4.

²⁰⁹ Refer to Chapter III, 3.1.

²¹⁰ See Ejike Uchella, “Discard Osu Caste System – Governor Tells Ibos,” *The Statesman*, Enugu. Monday, June 1, 1987, p. 9.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

freeborn had separate markets, town halls, etc; thus abolition in the area was positive news. However, noting that “Renewed attempts to dislodge the *osu* caste system in Igboland has paid off,” the newspaper quotes the traditional ruler of the area who proclaimed:

I, Eze C. E. Ahaneku, MFR, by virtue of the power conferred upon me by the instrument of appointing me the traditional ruler of Ifakala and as the custodian of the culture and tradition of Ifakala community entrusted with the maintenance of peace, security, order and good governance of the people of Ifakala and in consonance with the spirit of the present Federal Government today proclaim the end of the feud in my community.²¹²

As the newspaper reported, the traditional ruler disbanded all forms of sanctions imposed by the community on Amafor village and restored all rights, obligations and responsibilities, allegedly withdrawn from it - especially in chieftaincy and marriage.²¹³ The same newspaper had earlier in the same year given prominence to a report: “MAMSER to Dislodge ‘Osu’ Caste,” which got front-page attention and very bold headlines. MAMSER²¹⁴ was President Babangida’s political orientation agency, and it was charged with re-orientating Nigerians on social reforms.²¹⁵ The news report noted the efforts of this agency which pledged publicly that “any fight on social injustice which exclude[s] *osu* caste system is incomplete,”²¹⁶ to finally eliminate the practice. And of course, the front-page attention which the report got and the newsworthiness of the orientation agency whose activities were popular in the late 1980s may have attracted the attention of several readers. More so, the journalist who wrote the story confirmed that his first attraction to the news was MAMSER because of its relevance at the time;

²¹² *Daily Champion*, “Community Scraps *Osu*, Ume Castes,” *Daily Champion*, Lagos. Saturday, April 8, 1989, pp. 1, 3.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ An acronym for Mass Mobilization for Self Reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery.

²¹⁵ One of MAMSER’s official policies was “to re-orientate Nigerians to shun waste and vanity and to shed all pretences of affluence in their lifestyle, to propagate the need to eschew all vices in public life, including corruption, dishonesty, electoral and census malpractices, ethnic and religious bigotry.” See the Report of the Political Bureau - Directorate for Social Mobilisation, March 1987, pp 3-7.

²¹⁶ Victor Alozie, “MAMSER to Dislodge ‘Osu’ Caste,” *Daily Champion*, Lagos. Thursday, January 5, 1989, p. 1.

although the *osu* problem bothered him as well because he lived in Owerri where it is rife. Significantly, the proprietor of the newspaper is an indigene of the state as well.²¹⁷ Bringing both popular issues together – MAMSER and the *osu* system – was enough to arouse interest at that time. One Ezigbo who commended the effort of MAMSER for instance, hoped that as a result of the agency's resolve, Igbos were "assured of a lasting solution to the menacing *osu* caste..."²¹⁸ In his words:

The *osu* caste system – the long social system predominant in Igboland and which successive governments in the defunct Eastern Region of Nigeria could not abolish, will once again face a serious offensive in the times ahead... It is the opinion of many that if only the traditional chiefs would lead by example, the *osu* controversy would have been buried and forgotten since ages. Therefore, if MAMSER is to succeed in their mission of laying the issue to rest, they must work and convince the ignorant traditional rulers who are the custodians of culture, to change the law from within.

However, newspapers have continued to propagate the views of prominent public personalities on this issue. Headlines that express the views of these individuals like "Discard Osu Caste System – Governor Tells Ibos" published in 1987 and "Scrap Osu Caste System – Maryam," published a year after, continue to surface in the media. For instance, in 2009 *The Tide* published a story: "Atulomah criticizes Osu caste system." Professor Atulomah had spoken against the caste practices in Imo State during an interactive session at Umuezeagu village square. According to him the system has persisted because of the continuous lip service being paid by some Christians who "encourage it after preaching against it in their Churches." Atulomah

²¹⁷ Victor Alozie, Private Discussions, 2007.

²¹⁸ Maduakona P. Ezigbo, "MAMSER and the 'Osu' Caste, *Daily Star*, Enugu. Wednesday, February 8, 1989, p. 11.

acknowledged the failure of the 1956 Abolition Law and went on to blame the fear of harm from some deities for the persistence as well.²¹⁹ In his words:

some people, up till now, erroneously think that the spirits will harm them if they do away with this belief system of their forefathers which was tied with the gods.

Another newspaper reported the same event. The *Daily Independent's* caption for their story was "Group Seeks Abolition of Osu Caste System." But this newspaper went further than just reporting the news than *The Tide* did, and explained what the system was about.²²⁰ The difference in the angles of their reports can be attributed to the coverage of each medium; while *The Tide* is a state owned publication with circulation in and around Rivers State, the *Daily Independent* is a private newspaper with nationwide circulation. Thus, the *Daily Independent* would have imagined that most of its readers were not knowledgeable about the tradition. Nonetheless, newspaper headlines serve as forerunners to these reports, and the ideological postures in these headlines and reports nevertheless portray the *osu* problem as persistent. From our selected reports for instance, several headlines like "Children of Juju Messengers: Despite Education and the Gospel, the Osu Caste System Remains in Igboland," and the general contents of stories reported by journalists, indicated this. However, daily newspapers as well as weekly ones (magazines) have always differed in the manner of their reports. Because most newspapers are published daily, time is of serious consequence and digging deep into events could make a report late. Magazines on the other hand have the advantage of time for research, as their stories are usually fully and thoroughly investigated and backed with as many facts as possible. While a newspaper journalist may have only few hours to do a job for instance, a

²¹⁹ Tide News, "Atulomah Criticizes Osu Caste System," *The Tide*, Port Harcourt, Wednesday, January 21, 2009, p. 13.

²²⁰ Daily Independent, "Group Seeks Abolition of Osu Caste System," *Daily Independent*, Lagos, Thursday, January 22, 2009, p. 5.

magazine journalist may have a month or even longer to go to the field and do proper research. This has caused more newspapers today to have pages dedicated to 'opinions', 'features', etc., and we observed this trend in the materials we collected.

Figure 4.1. Typical Headlines and Pictures as portrayed in the News Media.



Source: May E. Ezekiel, "Osu: The Untouchable Igbo Caste System," *Sunday Concord*, Lagos, Sunday, June 12, 1983, p. Mag. I.

Like the diagram (4.1) above and those below (4.2-4.5), we observed that newspapers and even video films as we will discuss in Chapter VI depict the caste groups as poor slaves/wretches in ugly cloths and tattered outfits. These depictions of the caste groups do not mean they are all poor. The pictures/cartoons may just be a strategy used by the media to underscore the woes

and discrimination of the caste groups and attract the sympathy of the freeborn and others to the group.²²¹

4.3.2 Digging Deeper – Evidences of Investigative Journalism

One approach newspapers have used to generate public curiosity and show their interest in this problem is by investigation and afterwards publishing lengthy feature stories on the problem. At various times, these publications have dwelt on issues such as histories and abolition. Newspapers have also published real life experiences and testimonies of Igbo caste groups; especially those which have suffered violent attacks from the freeborn groups. By doing this they have managed to draw the attention of public officials and members of the public to the plight of these people. *African Concord* for instance published a ten page report in 1987 that was exhilarating and included pictures, interviews, case studies and facts. Before that, in 1983, the magazine had published another huge story with a large bold caption: “OSU: The Untouchable Igbo Caste System.”²²² But unlike the 1983 report which was more of an eye-opener, the latter was richly investigated. It contained enough information to teach a non-Igbo what the practice was about. The journalists also published a part of the Abolition Bill proceedings. It appeared to be the most detailed report on Igbo caste practices in the news media. Onanuga and Ojudu, both non Igbos, visited Igboland to investigate this problem which they likened to South Africa’s apartheid.²²³ Their report looked into several cases they heard while in the field. But they were sceptical about the Abolition Law; they learnt of cases of physical maltreatment of the *osu* population by freeborn, and discrimination that occurred even in broad daylight. In fact,

²²¹ See Chapter VI, 6.3.5 for our discussion on the depiction of the caste groups as poor slaves in video films.

²²² See May E. Ezekiel, “Osu: The Untouchable Igbo Caste System,” *Sunday Concord*, Lagos. Sunday, June 12, 1983, p. Mag. I, V & XI.

²²³ We will see below how South Africa’s apartheid (which was still intense at the time of this report) influenced the criticisms against the Igbo caste practices.

their investigation, which was carried out in Anambra and Imo States, followed a letter published in their newspaper that was sent in by a desperate man in his mid-30s. The man, Okey Njoku, who was employed in a Lagos bank, claimed to be ageing and in desperate need of a wife. In his letter, he lamented the fact that every woman had rejected him because of his status as *osu*.²²⁴ Njoku was bold to have done this in the 1980s because even at this time, no one would easily claim to be an *osu* in public, in the pages of a newspaper. Moreover, the publication of his grievances on the pages of a national newspaper rekindled awareness of the significance of this problem and several debates were to spring up as a result of the article.

No less than a dozen letters to the magazine were published in the following weeks concerning this story. Amongst the letters, two were unusual because they diverged from the usual standpoint where people tag the practices as 'bad' and rarely give supporting impressions of it in public. For instance, one of the letters that extolled the report read: "For bringing the *osu* question into light, one sees Africa truly as your constituency. And not only that, you are perceptive of her problems. The "Osu Caste" system is one of them. Therefore, a feather to your *Concord* cap!"²²⁵ More letters with this tone were published alongside the two which stood out. One of them was by Chris Mbaeri who started by lauding *African Concord* for the investigation. Then he went on to write that: "The story was shocking mostly to those the Osu Caste is strange to." After that, he continued:

In as much as one would agree that Osu Caste is a societal evil and wish it abolished, I would like to add here that it is a phenomenon that is as old as the origin of the Igbo. Agreed, too, that Osu Caste is a social malady, we must not shy away from the truth that it is a cultural system. Since cultures die

²²⁴ See Bayo Onanuga and Babafemi Ojudu, "Apartheid: A Nigerian Version: Laws of Nigeria Can't be pleaded against the System," *African Concord*, Lagos. Tuesday, June 30, 1987, pp. 14-23. Also see Victor Omoregie, "Osu - Dying Stigma of Igbo 'Untouchables'," *Vanguard*, Lagos. Saturday, April 11, 2009, p. 5.

²²⁵ Okey Franklin Azuonwu, "Letters: Osu Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos. Monday, August 24, 1987, p. 4.

hard, it may only be tolerated and not truly abolished. There is one Igbo saying that he who likes the nose of the dog should peel it and eat. Until that is done, *osu* has come to stay, period.²²⁶

Another letter that was more interesting and supportive of the caste practices followed:

Your cover story of 30 June misconstrued our inherited culture as Apartheid. I warn that *Osu* Caste in Igboland be left alone. Our culture is our culture. If the Hausa practise their culture and the Yoruba theirs, why can't we? ...There are many differences between freeborns and *osu* people. They (*osu*) are handicapped and subjugated by our culture. They have no share or part in our social life as far as freeborns are concerned. They know their position better and accept their fate without complaint. *African Concord* should allow sleeping dog[s] lie.²²⁷

African Concord got many other letters and comments from the public as a result of this publication, as they acknowledged. As a matter of fact, they had published more letters before this edition especially from non-Igbos. Views like these give us an impression of the public's attitudes to media reports on Igbo caste practices. Reports create anger amongst conservatives, while those eager for change concur with suggestions for modification of the tradition. As one Arinze who advised the government to implement existing laws on Igbo caste systems to end stigmatization wrote in his letter, admonishing Igbos to, "please learn your lessons from the comments of many Nigerians and change with time."²²⁸

Another magazine, *Newswatch*, had published two lengthy feature reports on the *osu* caste system at different dates in 1989 and two others, more recently in 2000, on the *ohu* practice which hardly ever received the same media attention as the *osu* case. One of such report by Aguiyi-Ironsi and Edokpayi criticized various abolition attempts. Spread over three pages, it argued, on the basis of real life case studies, that education and Christianity had failed in bringing the caste tradition to an end. It called for an action by government and Igbos in the

²²⁶ Chris Mbaeri, "Letters: *Osu* Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos. Monday, August 24, 1987, p. 4.

²²⁷ Nnabike Nwosu, "Letters: *Osu* Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos. Monday, August 24, 1987, p. 4.

²²⁸ Michael Arinze, "Letters: *Osu* Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos. Monday, August 24, 1987, p. 4.

way of an emancipation law that will be adhered to by the people. Their article was influenced by the testimony of a journalist which they reported:

Time had come after several years of friendship, for Comfort Obi, journalist with the *Statesman* newspaper, Owerri, Imo State, to marry the man she had loved. But her hope was dashed. Her family rejected the suitor because he is an *osu*.²²⁹

After this publication, in the same year, a lengthier feature followed. This time, the report enjoyed front page cover that was designed with faces sketched as if they were worried or slaves (see figs. 4.2-4.5, Iconography of Igbo Caste Tradition as represented in the News Media, below) and it wore a bold headline: "OSU: Nigeria's Untouchables." Then, inside the cover, the outline read:

The *osu* caste system among the Igbos, that has made pariahs of some unfortunate fellows, has persisted with the stubbornness of old habits despite the people's high level of education, their gregarious life pattern and material wealth.²³⁰

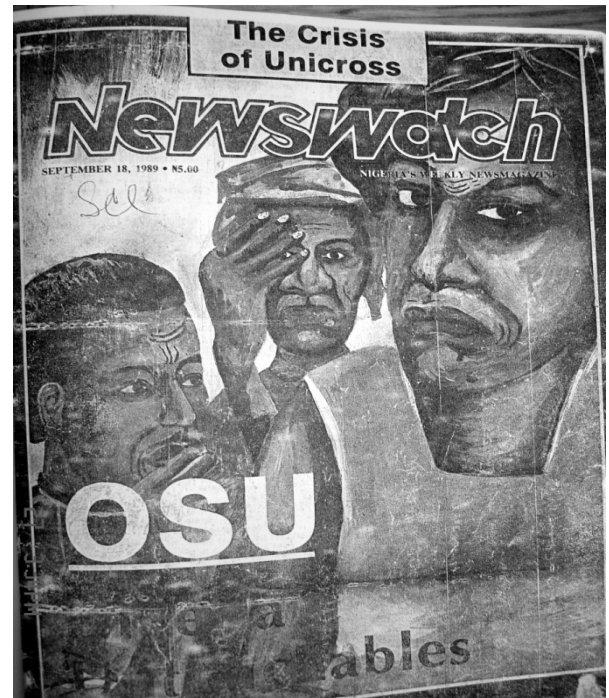
²²⁹ See Louisa Aguiyi-Ironsi and Ben Edokpayi, "Children of Juju Messengers: Despite Education and the Gospel, the Osu Caste System Remains in Igboland," *Newswatch*, Lagos. January 2, 1989, pp. 34-36.

²³⁰ Ely Obasi, Akpa Edem, Janet Mba and Sam Smith, "The Gods are to Blame," *Newswatch*, Lagos. Monday, September 18, 1989, p. 3 (pp. 3, 14-19).

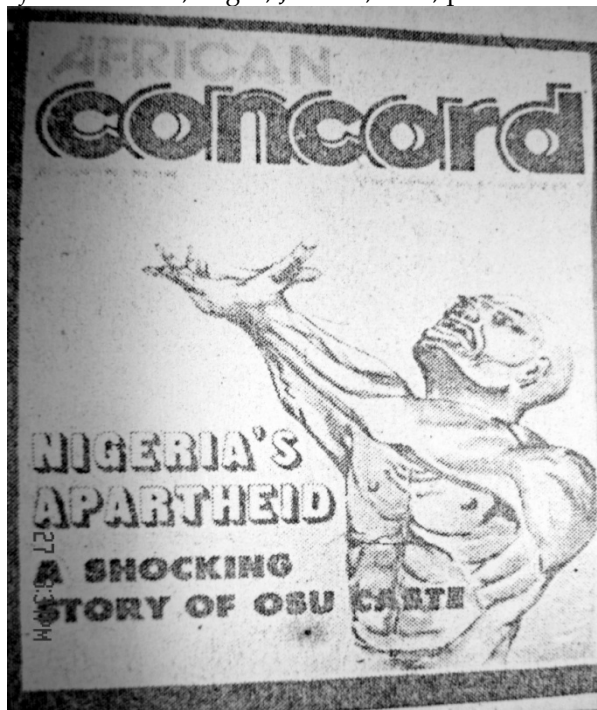
Figures 4.2-4.5. Iconography of Igbo Caste Tradition as represented in the News Media.



Source: Bayo Onanuga and Babafemi Ojuda, "Apartheid: A Nigerian Version: Laws of Nigeria Can't be pleaded against the System," *African Concord*, Lagos, June 30, 1987, p.14.



Source: Front Cover, Ely Obasi; Akpa Edem; Janet Mba & Sam Smith, "The Gods Are to Blame," *Newswatch*, Lagos, September 18, 1989.



Source: Cover Page, *African Concord*, "Nigeria's Apartheid: A Shocking Story of Osu Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos, June 10, 1987.



Source: May E. Ezekiel, "Osu: The Untouchable Igbo Caste System," *Sunday Concord*, Lagos, June 12, (1983), p. Mag. XI.

The report which starts with a quote from Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, was spread over six pages fully loaded with interviews and pictures of people who had suffered in one way or another as a result of the caste system. One case they reported was about Ijeoma Mgbemere whose picture was published as well. Ijeoma had come home one evening and met extended family members gathered around her house. She was surprised and thought something had happened. When she sat down, the oldest man in the group cleared his throat, "Ijeoma", he said, "why do you want to kill us?"²³¹ This happened because she had met a man who had come from the US to marry her. After the usual checks he was ordered not to see her again. Another lady, Ijeoma Amechi, a reggae musician who spoke to *Newswatch*, gave an unusual statement that is commonly expressed in hushed tones:

I would never have anything to do with an *osu* because they are spirits. That is why Jah bans them. I will never touch one. They are dangerous people. They will set you back. We don't have them in the village I come from but I take what the elders tell me about them. They are the most dangerous people. I can't eat out of the same plate with one.²³²

Amechi judged the *osu* from the information she got via oral sources. But her attitude is reflective of the view many Igbos and non-Igbos still feel today about these caste groups. Because a cross section of respondents reacted similarly when asked who an *osu* is. A few reactions are noted below:

A spirit, kind of godly spirit.²³³

A person, who belongs solely to the said deity and thus becomes untouchable and is resented, avoided and rejected.²³⁴

...witches according to the book I read.²³⁵

²³¹ Ibid., p. 14.

²³² Ibid., p. 16.

²³³ Questionnaire, 22/9/2008.

²³⁴ Questionnaire, 15/8/2008.

Nevertheless, Obasi et al, managed to speak to both sides of the divide in a village group that has been known for fighting between freeborn settlements and those with *osu* lineages. One respondent, Cyprian Ahaneku who was the traditional ruler of Ifakala, the non-*osu* community, was bitter about the practice. He confirmed that his village had collectively agreed to stop any form of discrimination against Amafor an alleged *osu* village. But in contrast to his narration, Pius Onwukwe who was the patron of Amafor Progressive Union recounted that when his village contributed N23,000 to provide electricity for Ifakala, the other side criticized them for “showing off” that they had money. He claimed that some market stalls that were constructed by the entire village group were only distributed to the freeborn villages. He also confirmed that discrimination against them was still rife and obvious.²³⁶ And as other reports have done, this article attracted the attention of the Imo State government at the time it was written and the governor, Ikwechegh, set up a committee headed by the commissioner of culture to look into the problem.

A pair of articles by *NewsWatch* followed in 2000, reporting the *ohu* incidences at Enugu and, in the same way as the former, attracted government attention. In the first report, Agbaegbu examined the case of Umuode, a clan in Nkanu, and their petition to the Human Rights Council of Nigeria. His investigation took steps in analyzing various attempts by the then government of Chimaroke Nnamani to relocate the caste groups and it examined the problems and conflicts the people still face.²³⁷ This case was significant because it caused major disturbances in Nkanu during the emancipation struggle in the colonial era.²³⁸ And, because of the attention *NewsWatch* gave to this story in January 2000, Nnamani visited the community two weeks after the

²³⁵ Questionnaire, 26/6/2008.

²³⁶ Ely Obasi, Akpa Edem, Janet Mba and Sam Smith, “The Gods are to Blame,” p. 16-17.

²³⁷ Tobs Agbaegbu, “Slavery in Igboland: The Osu take their Case against the Diala to the Human Rights Commission,” *NewsWatch*, Lagos. Monday, January 10, 2000, pp. 23-26.

²³⁸ See discussion on Nkanu slaves in Chapter II, 2.2.1.

publication “to assess the situation, with a view to finding a lasting solution to the problem.”²³⁹ Even though there were no follow-ups to the actions taken by the government, *Newswatch*’s agenda-setting role is admirable and imperative as it indicates the kinds of interest newspapers could attract from policy-makers. Even in *Efuru*’s case, it was the media that brought the story to the attention of the government. We also know that the newspaper, for example, published daily proceedings from the Commission and this drew some sort of sympathy and attention for *Efuru* slaves from the public, which worked to their advantage.²⁴⁰ The same way, a contributor to a call-in programme we hosted on Cosmo FM acknowledged thus,

Late last year [2007] our local government chairman visited the *osu* community in my area because one of them called on the radio just like I’m doing now to complain. Although I am not sure of what happened after everything, the radio helped her in making him know that they are suffering.²⁴¹

4.3.3 Public Debates and Rejoinders

There is a common discourse which is shared by the public on this issue. The newspapers are not really giving the lead by way of publishing editorials on this subject; rather they are willing to host a number of opinions that are seemingly alike. The *Daily Champion* however, published an editorial in 2006 where it extolled a recent abolition by the Igwe Kenneth Orizu III of Nnewi. *Daily Champion* came out strong against the persistence of Igbo caste practices, noting that “This is sad... unscientific and un-Christian.”²⁴² Nevertheless, the attention given to the problem by newspapers continues to provoke debates from the public and these arguments have centred on several aspects of the problem. And, to appreciate the magnitude of interest the media generated on the Igbo caste problem we must look at some rejoinders by members of the public.

²³⁹ Tobs Agbaegbu, “Moves to Stop Slavery in Igboland,” *Newswatch*, Lagos. Monday, February 7, 2000, pp. 16-17.

²⁴⁰ Fieldwork Notes, 2007; Chief Emmanuel Okwelume, Private Discussions, June/August 2007.

²⁴¹ Cosmo FM Discussion, April 2008.

²⁴² *Daily Champion*, “Editorial: The Osu Caste,” *Daily Champion*, Lagos, Tuesday, January 10, 2006, p 3.

One recurring argument in our corpus bordered on the hypocrisy displayed by Igbos who continue to uphold this discrimination. For instance, one Joe Lot who had recently completed his national youth service programme in the Okigwe area in 1987 reacted to *African Concord's* publication. He recounted his personal experiences while in the area:

I did my youth service at Okigwe, Imo State during which time I became friendly with a young man who took me to a family any human being would be proud to belong – magnificent houses, abundant wealth, scores of educated handsome men and pretty women... Soon I realized that each time I went out to town alone to visit friends and mention the family where I put up with some air of triumph and achievement, I always got cold shoulders. One day, a young undergraduate whose father and other relatives I always saw in the house of my host, told me that the family with which I was putting up was the *osu* of the village. Because I am not an Igbo man I did not understand what he meant. He then explained that the *osu* are those with whom nobody should interact in any form – no drinking together, eating or love-making... The Igbo are extremely hypocritical about their *osu* institution. If you are a stranger they use the word to keep you away from the usually wealthy and pretty *osu* families. Among themselves, wise ones use it to keep off others from competing for favours from wealthy *osu*.

Clearly, the narration indicates that Lot's experiences shaped his idea on the practice since he wondered why someone who is bold to visit an *osu* would advise another against seeing such person. Consequently, he wrote: "*African Concord's* report did not go far enough. For instance, the monstrous origin of the evil practice was not properly explained nor were the deceit, hypocrisy and utterly unchristian attitude of I[g]bo Christians underlining the practice..."²⁴³ Throughout Lot's article, he condemned Igbos for being hypocritical about the *osu* issue and it was his encounter with the stranger in his friend's parlour that shaped his first impression about the practice.

²⁴³ Joe Lot, "The Other Side of Osu Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos. Tuesday, August 4, 1987, p. 25.

Then again, debates amongst members of the public which gathered momentum towards the end of the 1970s, and especially in the 1980s,²⁴⁴ condemned Igbos for criticizing apartheid in South Africa. At this time South Africa's apartheid was strong and because the Nigerian government and its citizens strongly opposed it, several commentaries damned Igbos for calling for its end when they had similar practices in their homeland. In almost every article that was published during the 1980s and 1990s, the case of South Africa was mentioned in at least the headline or in the body of the story. Ezenwa, for instance, lamented the attitude of most educated Igbos whom, he argued, had not come out publicly to condemn Igbo caste practices with the same seriousness they used to attack the obnoxious system of South Africa's apartheid.²⁴⁵ In another article he wrote two years later, he reasoned again that "Igbos had no moral justification and right to condemn apartheid policies in South Africa..."²⁴⁶ One Nweke who responded to Ezenwa's "The Igbo Social Lepers" even called on the federal government in 1981 to "sack any Igbo man in any organization or committee formed to fight against apartheid in South Africa" since they had no moral ground to be involved in such fight.²⁴⁷ Altogether, like Ezenwa, Nwaizu and many others made similar comments, referring to Igbos as hypocrites.²⁴⁸

Besides, headlines like "Legislation Can't Wipe Out 'Osu'", "Controversy over Osu Caste System: Laws Can't Terminate That Social Cancer" and "Apartheid: A Nigerian Version: Laws of Nigeria Can't be pleaded against the System" began emerging when it seemed obvious that the laws had failed. It was the growing legal abolitions that spread through some village groups in the 1970s and 1980s especially, and the alleged failure of these laws that primarily increased

²⁴⁴ See table 4.4.

²⁴⁵ Vincent Ezenwa, "Our Social Apartheid," *Daily Star*, Enugu. Thursday, December 21, 1978, p. 8.

²⁴⁶ Vincent Ezenwa, "The Igbo Social Lepers," *Daily Star*, Enugu. Thursday, December 17, 1980, p. 8.

²⁴⁷ See Anayo Nweke, "The Igbo Social Lepers - A Rejoinder," *Daily Star*, Enugu. Thursday, April 23, 1981, p. 5.

²⁴⁸ See his article, Joe Nwaizu, "Dehumanizing Effects of the Social Evil," *Daily Times*, Lagos. Tuesday, April 21, 1981, p. 7.

the debates on the viability of the law, the persistence of the practice and the effectiveness of several modes of abolition.²⁴⁹ For instance, one frequent suggestion that often caused arguments in the media was the idea of abolishing the *osu* practice by traditional and fetish means. Obumse's article where he suggested that the only way to tackle the problem was educating children on the ills of discrimination through the schools, through the Churches and then, the Press, opposed this. While he extolled previous government legislations, he argued that the media "can help a great deal." He was indeed bitter about the way village groups publicized their unreliable local abolitions, suggesting that these steps were not at all the prime aspect of the process, and that people should be allowed "to air their views freely on this vexing issue" in the media instead. According to him, it is only by this means that "the people will learn exactly how the cross-section of the community feels and reacts to it and how best to eradicate it."²⁵⁰ Some writers disagreed with him on his position against juju abolition. Ikemefuna, for instance, argued that the failure of the Abolition Law of 1956 was because it didn't consider the usefulness of making sacrifices to deities who claim to own the caste groups.²⁵¹ Igbokwe who also responded to Obumse's article and Ikemefuna's, concurred with the latter. Igbokwe argued that people learnt about the *osu* caste by traditional means - oral sources, secret taunting and gossips - , so abolishing the caste practices by offering sacrifices to deities was more workable than Obumse's suggestion of educating people on the evils of the practice.²⁵² For Ekwenchi, a cleric, it was compulsory for all abolitions to take note of the circumstances that made one *osu*

²⁴⁹ One critique that really hit legislation on this matter was that written by Ogbu, who deplored the law and its agents for not being stiff and serious about punishing those who openly harass or discriminate against the caste groups. See Chijama Ogbu, "Osu: An Anti-Social System in Igbo Land," *Daily Star*, Enugu. Monday, December 4, 1989, p. 11.

²⁵⁰ Mbanugo Obumse, "The Osu Caste System: We Are All Equal Before God," *The Renaissance*, Enugu, Thursday, March 27, 1975, pp. 11, 13.

²⁵¹ Chuks G. Ikemefuna, "The Osu Caste System: A Rejoinder," *The Renaissance*, Enugu, Tuesday, April 22, 1975, p. 10.

²⁵² G. G. Igbokwe, "Bringing An End To 'Osu' System," *The Renaissance*, Enugu, Saturday, June 21, 1975, p. 3.

because it required a religious ceremony to consecrate an *osu* therefore it must require another religious absolution for final release.²⁵³ Other writers like Chukwuma,²⁵⁴ Ogbu²⁵⁵ and Okonjo,²⁵⁶ suggested some sort of public enlightenment or education which must be led by the media. While Okonjo questions the effectiveness of making legislations, Ifeadiogo believes the solution lies within the Church.²⁵⁷

On the persistence of *osu*, another view by Xrydz-Eyutchaе also stirred substantial debate in the media. In his first article, which was a rejoinder to Amadife's piece,²⁵⁸ he rejected Amadife's argument that there was no moral judgement in discriminating against Igbo caste groups since the prejudices they suffer is based on the evils of their forbears. Xrydz-Eyutchaе suggests first of all that Amadife's views make him appear like those brain-washed Igbo men "who still refer to the Igbo man as "Ibo" and who believes in the doubtful blessings of European civilization."²⁵⁹ Okpii challenged Xrydz-Eyutchaе's thesis in a television programme where he appeared as a guest speaker. Okpii as well questioned the rationale of making Igbo caste groups suffer for the sins of ancestors. This provoked Xrydz-Eyutchaе to write another piece where he examined the science of heredity. He argued that since most Igbo caste groups were children of evildoers, they would have the tendency to do evil because it lies in their DNA. He went further to posit that, because, "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin and thus

²⁵³ Ekwenchi, "A More Realistic Way to end 'Osu' System," p. 11.

²⁵⁴ Chukwuma specifically argued that giving the *osu* problem more publicity and space within the media is the best way to go. He advised the media to encourage public debates on the issue. See in detail, Diamond T. N. Chukwuma, "Time to Bury the 'Osu' Caste System," *Daily Star*, Enugu. Monday, February 13, 1989, p. 3.

²⁵⁵ Ogbu, "Osu: An Anti-Social System in Igbo Land," p. 11.

²⁵⁶ Luke O. Okonjo, "Osu Caste: A Challenge to the Church," *Daily Star*, Enugu, Friday, June 4, 1976, p. 10.

²⁵⁷ John Ifeadiogo, "Is the Osu System Dying Fast?" *The Renaissance*, Enugu, Sunday, November 18, 1973, p. 10.

²⁵⁸ We could not get hold of Cletus Amadife's article. But it was titled: "Culture that Must Die," and published in *The Sunday Times* of May 16, 1976.

²⁵⁹ C. Xrydz-Eyutchaе, "Osu System in Igboland," *Weekly Star*, Enugu, Sunday, June 6, 1976, p. 3.

death spread to all men because they had all sinned,” the caste groups must suffer for the sins of their fathers! After using some bible quotations and a few scientific terminologies to drive his point home, he argued that even if we reject the bible and claim not to know God, “heredity is a natural law and our forefathers cannot be crucified for applying this natural law in the case of the *osu* system.” Besides these arguments, Xrydz-Eyutchaе warned:

...never again should government enact a law that is as inoperative as the Pope’s bull against the comet. Why not let sleeping dogs lie. The hangover of the *osu* system, sooner or later will die a natural death.²⁶⁰

Expectedly, Xrydz-Eyutchaе’s arguments generated plenty of reaction. Okpii again responded to his critique. He condemned Xrydz-Eyutchaе for supporting the survival of the system and called on the government and the media to be wary of such statements.²⁶¹

Moreover, the persistence of the practice today has also shaped contemporary arguments. Towards the end of the 1990s, more articles started appearing in the pages of newspapers again (see table 4.4), suggesting that the problems of Igbo castes are still as strong and topical as they were many years ago. *Osu* continued to receive similar reactions as those witnessed before the 1990s. For instance, the violence that erupted at the Nkanu area in 1994, and again at the beginning of the 2000s, amongst the *ohus* and the freeborn in the area has remained in the news.²⁶² Beyond these reports, however, some interesting views have appeared in the media

²⁶⁰ C. Xrydz-Eyutchaе, “Crying Wolf When there is no Wolf,” *Weekly Star*, Enugu, Sunday, July 18, 1976, p. 4.

²⁶¹ L. A. Okpii, “The *Osu* System: Tragedy of the Igbo Culture,” *Daily Star*, Enugu, Saturday, July 24, 1976, p. 10.

²⁶² *ThisDay* newspaper reported just recently that Umuode and Oruku communities in Nkanu attacked each other at the beginning of 2009. These *ohu* and freeborn groups had started to fight over matters such as land even before Nigeria’s independence in 1960. See the story, “Ten Feared Dead in Enugu Communal Crisis,” as reported by Francis Ugwoke on January 30, 2009. Available at: <http://www.thisdayonline.com/nview.php?id=134349> (Accessed February 2009). Also refer to Chapter II, 2.2.1.

lately, which point to the media's ability to stir up debates and bring issues to the public's attention. In 2007, Juliana Francis, a columnist with Nigeria's *Sun*, did an article on the *osu* caste because she had received a letter from an Igbo lady who had sought her advice. According to Francis, the lady "sounded desperate. She was in love..." This lady had been in a long relationship with an Igbo man until it was time to get married, when she got a shock. Her parents had investigated the man's background and discovered he was *osu*. Francis expresses shock: "does such nonsense still exist? In this jet age? In this age of computer, Christianity and miracles? This age of ATM?" Francis discussed this issue with a friend, Chinedu, because for her limited knowledge of Igbo customs, such "nonsense" had become extinct! Fortunately, her source had had her own experience of the problem. Chinedu was on the verge of her traditional marriage when some family members of her husband started whispering that she was *osu* and wanted to halt the wedding. According to Francis, "She stood up and told them to get their facts straight." And, "Like one reciting the oral poetry of her clan, Chinedu had told them her family name, compound, village and kindred." It was very likely the errand people who had gone to Chinedu's village to investigate her background had gone to a wrong compound. However, Francis asked, "What makes the preacher better than the *osu*? Tell me, what sort of blood flows in the veins of the so-called freeborn fool?" "Please correct me if I'm wrong," she continued, "is the free man or the lady that is not cursed like the *osu* better in bed than the *osu*?"²⁶³ Francis got numerous responses to her article. As one would expect, most of them condemned the persistence of *osu*. For instance, one Nnani wrote:

²⁶³ See Juliana Francis, "Does the Osu Caste System Still Exist?" *Sunday Sun*, Lagos, September 16, 2007, p. 43.

I've had a number of heartbreaks in many areas of my life and I have long decided that when I see something or someone that makes my heart beat faster, I will go for it or him, and Satan and all his hordes of hell will take anyone or anything that has the effrontery to even think of standing in my way!²⁶⁴

Another person, Tonye, who had gone to Amakama in Umuahia to pay a girl's bride price, narrated:

I almost fell a victim when I went for my wife's introduction [at] Amakama in Umuahia, Abia State. My uncle was carrying a tray with wine to present to my in-laws and the tray fell and one of the bottles broke. A lot of reasons were deduced why the marriage should not hold but I thank God that I am married to my wife and we even have a delightful daughter to show for it.²⁶⁵

The incident that Tonye described, where the tray fell, could imply bad luck in rural settings especially. And Tonye narrated this story because his in-laws were suspicious that he was *osu* after this incident happened since the *osu* is often suspected to bring bad luck.

After all the support for Francis's condemnation of the practice one Eze, who had accused Francis of growing up in the cities and being ignorant of Igbo dos and don'ts, cautions her to be careful, that those who have tried to disobey traditional norms, like those who destroyed *Efuru*, pay dearly for it. He supposed that those who write against the *osu* in the media are themselves *osu*. According to him:

If you see anybody that claims it is nothing it means that person is a slave or *osu* also. That is why you see many I[g]bo ladies roaming the streets of Lagos. If any freeborn I[g]bo man wants to marry, he will go home where he will pick a well trained, well known girl from his village as nobody is sure who is who in Lagos.

²⁶⁴ See Nnani in Juliana Francis, "Crazy Osu Caste: Reactions," *Sunday Sun*, Lagos, September 23, 2007, p. 43.

²⁶⁵ Also see Tonye's letter in Juliana Francis, "Crazy Osu Caste: Reactions," *Sunday Sun*, Lagos, September 23, 2007, p. 43.

He goes further to advise Francis, who claimed that most of these *osu* descendants were wealthy, that “good name is better than silver and gold!”²⁶⁶ However, Francis, who also got similar letters like Eze’s, reacted to these notes. For a stranger who had written to her and warned her, like Eze, that whoever got involved with an *osu* would pay dearly for it, she calls it “absolute rubbish!” Then finally, she blasts parents for the perseverance of this discrimination: “If not for parents, how come this old practice survived up till date? Parents and family are definitely behind it,” she insists. “They pass on the horrible message of discrimination and slavery of a people called *osu* through folklore and oratory,”²⁶⁷ Francis summed up.

We used Francis’ article as a case for our online survey and asked individuals to share their thoughts on it. While most respondents praised her style of speaking against the practice, others advised that persuasive messages on the reasons the practice should be ignored may have positive effects than forceful essays. Also, some respondents blamed parents for this persistence. However, some reactions to her article are as follows:

I can relate to the author’s opinions. I too have had many-a-discussions with my parents regarding this topic. I believe it is something that Igbos can never get themselves out of, and that’s a pity. The whole notion of *osu* versus freeborn is truly sad. I do think it is high time that this caste system be cancelled, removed from our cultural context.²⁶⁸

I think it’s beautifully written with so much emotion. I can relate with the writer’s feelings. The whole *osu* thing is so archaic, I think it’s such a shame it still exists.²⁶⁹

It was very interesting, makes me wonder though is the author ‘osu’? Even though I hate to hear traditions like that, my family is in the process of checking my boyfriend; I will still go on and marry him no matter the outcome.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ Tony Eze in Juliana Francis, “Crazy Osu Caste: Reactions,” *Sunday Sun*, Lagos, September 23, 2007, p. 43.

²⁶⁷ Juliana Francis, “To Hell with the Osu Caste System!” *Sunday Sun*, Lagos, September 30, 2007, p. 43.

²⁶⁸ Questionnaire, 10/8/08.

²⁶⁹ Questionnaire, 18/7/08.

[I] think the writer of the article is writing out of emotion. Criticizing the system this way may not help matters; rather clear reasoning on why it should be forgotten seemed to be a better way.²⁷¹

One best way to talk to people out of this practice is not necessarily to bark at them or call them evil or so. It is a practice handed down to generations from older generations, thus, we shouldn't blame anyone. The writer stressed a good point here though by saying that the practice has remained because parents have continued to pass it on to their children. This is the problem and I agree with her on this one!²⁷²

Additionally, some commentaries argued against the continuous use of the media to critique this practice. The *Sun* for instance, published another critique by a clergyman in 2008 who opined that "All Igbo Christians are heading to the lake of fire" because of the persistence of caste practices in the land.²⁷³ Two weeks after his article was published, one Ijioma wrote a rejoinder that decried Nwachukwu's approach to solving the *osu* problem. As he writes:

I share his concern for this evil, but I believe he is fighting a right course through the wrong means. What he needed to do was to preach a sermon on the evils of the system, or appeal to the conscience of those who still practice it. But he has rather chosen to exhibit a level of ignorance and insincerity towards the system and decided to play God and make himself the judge of who will or will not enter into the Kingdom of God... There is no need to ask whether Nwachukwu is one of the *osu*, although he sounded like one... If what is irking Nwachukwu is in the area of marriage, then he should know that there is no boundary to where one should marry these days. Both the man and the woman can decide to marry outside their communities where the evil system is still upheld. In fact, many have already done so. If the people he is sympathizing with are Christians then they need not bother about the traditional system to which, in the first place, they are not supposed to be part of. But if they decide to fight for traditional titles, then they must face the tradition... Instead of insulting every Igbo Christian and playing God, Nwachukwu should have told us how far he has gone in abolishing the system in his own community. It is not enough to stay in Lagos and answer Reverend... Nwachukwu should therefore start the campaign... from his hometown and stop being loud mouthed.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Questionnaire, 16/7/08.

²⁷¹ Questionnaire, 28/5/08.

²⁷² Questionnaire, 11/7/08.

²⁷³ S. J. Nwachukwu, "The Osu Caste in Igboland," *Daily Sun*, Lagos, Friday, September 19, 2008, p. 48.

²⁷⁴ U. I. Ijioma, "Re: The Osu Caste in Igboland," *Daily Sun*, Lagos, Wednesday, October 8, 2008, p. 42.

Another campaigner for human rights in Nigeria, Leo Igwe, who published an article on this issue condemning the persistence of Igbo caste practices,²⁷⁵ was cautioned by one Onyiliagha who wrote in an article that the *osu* liberation struggle was not a fight that could be won on the pages of newspapers but rather by concerted efforts of Igbos at every level, especially local, since no sort of legislation can effectively wipe out a discrimination that stems from the state of mind of the individual, group or situational circumstances.²⁷⁶ We contacted the duo, Igwe and Onyiliagha, and they held on strongly to their opposing views.²⁷⁷ However, according to Igwe:

The news media (print) should be used to debate the *osu* caste issue because the practice has held sway partly due to lack of open and public debate and discussion of the matter. Yes such debates should continue because it will help enlighten the people, and get them to understand why, how and when the practice started. Such debates will expose the myths, falsehoods and misconceptions that underlie the *osu* caste system.

And for Onyiliagha, who happens to be a journalist,

This is a detested practice that should never be discussed. The fewer the number of people who knew this existed in the past the better... it should not be debated [in the media] to avoid widening the spread of its awareness. The media has no role on this issue. We should let sleeping dog[s] [lie].

Similar to these debates, one article that rejected the continuous airing of the *osu* issue especially in the media was by Dureke who argued that the *osu* population in Igboland was too insignificant to cause a row, hence, people had better let sleeping dogs lie, allowing the tradition to disappear naturally. As he ended his essay, "Making a mountain out of a mole hill will not help the situation," it could instead encourage persistence.²⁷⁸ Nwosu disagrees with

²⁷⁵ See Leo Igwe's article, "The Osu Caste in Igboland," *The Guardian*, Lagos, Friday, October 24, 2008, p. 9.

²⁷⁶ Victor Onyiliagha, "Twilight of the Osu Caste System," *The Guardian*, Lagos, Monday, November 17, 2008, p. 4.

²⁷⁷ Leo Igwe, Questionnaire, March 6, 2009; Victor Onyiliagha, Questionnaire, March 13, 2009.

²⁷⁸ C. O. Dureke, "Persistence of Osu Caste System in Igboland," *Sunday Times*, Lagos. December 27, 1987, p. 4.

this view. The persistence of the issue according to him is basically “due to habit rather than any genuine fear...” of the wrath of deities. “Instead of letting sleeping dogs lie,” he adds, “we ought to begin a public debate” expecting that the attitudes of Igbos to the practice will change.²⁷⁹ Like Ikemefuna and Igbokwe, Nwosu suggested that a ritual must be performed by traditional leaders and priests to offer sacrifices to the deities who alone can set the caste groups free.

Another critique against Dureke’s position was by Nwachukwu who initially examined several debates that had been in the media about Igbo caste practices. His contention was that most of the articles that appeared in the newspapers were usually written by people from freeborn groups, thus, they “are invariably grossly subjective and the facts are highly distorted.”²⁸⁰ Nwachukwu also blamed this on those discriminated against for choosing to remain silent and allowing the articles in the media to continue unchallenged. Despite this, Nwachukwu criticized Dureke’s insistence on the *osu*’s insignificant numbers. His conflicting view was that the *osus* were in the minority because they were a special class- sacrosanct, sacred and holy. They lived a secluded life similar to monks and this transformed them into superior beings, he reckoned. He continued,

Therefore if anyone who is an *osu* does not know it he should know it now that he is superior to the *diala*. The *diala* cannot lord over him. He should stand up and claim his right wherever he may be. He is not a stranger in Igboland but the rightful ruler and owner of the land.²⁸¹

Nwachukwu based his thesis on the fact that most *osu* people were sacrificial lambs for the evil deeds committed by the majority; therefore he calls them “the Saviour of the People.” While

²⁷⁹ Okenwa Nwosu, “Controversy Over Osu Caste System: Laws Can’t Terminate That Social Cancer,” *Sunday Times*, Lagos. Sunday, March 10, 1985, p. 9.

²⁸⁰ J. O. Nwachukwu, “Tyranny over a Helpless Minority,” *Sunday Times*, Lagos. Sunday, March 10, 1985, p. 9.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

criticizing his adversaries, he insists that the freeborn have struggled effortlessly, “though fruitlessly to change the order of history using the majority power as their weapon to pervert history.”²⁸²

4.4 Searching for a Middle Ground for the Media

We can draw several points and positions from these arguments published in newspapers. And, through the years, since the 1970s, the arguments and positions of writers have remained similar and journalists within the newspaper medium seem to have continued reporting events the same old way. The style is the same irrespective of the newspaper. But the most common argument each article dwells on is the issue of persistence which has continued to be the justification for ongoing discussion of these issues in the media. However, the role the media should play is questionable because, as fieldwork experiences exposed, the media seem to be the messenger as well as a veritable weapon against the practice. By and large, certain roles are naturally ascribed to the media. People expect the media to perform three core roles – educate, inform and entertain – irrespective of what kind of medium it is. These roles are traditionally played by the media across the board but it becomes problematic when the media is tied between choices of discussing a rather sensitive subject or leaving it open to public debate. Why should the media dabble in discussing an issue that many people will like to assume is abolished and should be totally forgotten? We encountered many problems as a result of this argument while speaking to people, especially the elderly and journalists, in the field. Thus, we discuss the opinions of our respondents (from interviews and questionnaires) with regard to the media role below.

²⁸² Ibid. We could not find any other article that indicated Dureke’s or any other response to this article.

Ekwunife, a Reverend Father, for instance, asked us if the 'osu' caste practice was still in existence. As a matter of fact, he refused to take part in the interview because, according to him, the issue is abolished, dead and buried! So he wondered why one should be talking about it or be interested in digging up the past. And, like many others, he advised that we leave the issue alone and let it die naturally. Ekwunife who is a professor of Igbo religion was no doubt aware that the practice persisted and that discrimination against the caste groups flourished in parts where the tradition was known. But he played safe and asked a lot of questions before agreeing to do the interview to ascertain that we are knowledgeable and aware of the consequences of dabbling into a presumed sensitive subject. Many others like him expressed doubts over making noise about this issue and giving it media prominence or space. Afigbo, for instance, asked why we had chosen to work on such a sensitive thesis topic at this time. As he warned of the consequences of raising undesirable dust, he mentioned that the possibility of finding a lasting solution to the discrimination was really slim and almost impossible. If the great Nnamdi Azikiwe was not capable of solving the problem while he lived, who then are you or anyone else who choose to dabble into this matter to think an end to it is near or even possible, he asked. Then, we told Afigbo that the focus of the research was not necessarily to find a permanent solution but to understand why it has persisted and to ascertain, by use of respondents comments, if the mass media is a useful weapon to weaken this discrimination and change people's conception on the caste practices. He laughed and warned again, that it did not matter what one was trying to investigate in so far as it involved a practice that has remained as strong as it had ever been even before the legal abolition in 1956. Afigbo argued that people will hear about the *osu* caste with or without the media; even though they manage to ignore this knowledge while growing up, once they got to the stage of marriage it was going to come one way or another either by mention by the parents or a relation. But whether the media can solve

the problem, he argued, remained doubtful. He insisted that even if we made so much noise about it within the media and got the attention of the United Nations, total abolition would only be secured within the hearts of Igbos who alone could determine if or not they wanted the practice to continue. He gave an instance of a woman who had suggested to her fellow women during a women's meeting to start a campaign against the discrimination of *osus* and they simply turned down her request and advised her to ask her husband to begin the fight himself. The women felt powerless on the issue. They weren't interested! Afigbo, in short, capped his argument with an Igbo proverb: 'it is those who own the land who bury a person.' Thus, let the husbands of these women begin the struggle for the emancipation of the *osu* groups since they are the heads of the family.

Pete Edochie, another Igbo elite and cultural guardian first spoke to us on the phone before agreeing to grant an interview. He expressed fear about carrying out such research at this time when people were trying to forget the past. Firstly, he asked if such culture still exists. Like Ekwunife he was definitely pretending not to know the stigma was still strong. But when we finally spoke to him he never minced words in opining that the culture could not be wiped off by any means, well except as a result of time – because, as he complained, the present generation of Igbos are beginning to ignore and forget their tradition. Even the youths, as he challenged us, don't deem it worthy to learn to speak the Igbo language. They rather choose to learn French or Portuguese, he disappointedly expressed.

So our problem now is not only what role the media should play but if it should in any way play a role. Already, we have examined various reports that were published in newspapers and from the reactions to those reports, people had divergent opinions on the discussion of Igbo caste practices in the media or in any way at all. While some suggested keeping mum, others

argued that ignoring the existence of a problem does not make it just disappear. Just like a few respondents believe legislation only provoked hatred for the caste groups amongst Igbos who did not think it was necessary to forcefully tell them who to associate with, lead them or even marry, can the media provoke the same hatred?

By electronic questionnaires, we asked respondents if they thought it was useful to use the mass media to conduct public discussions on the *osu/ohu* subject, 92 people responded to this question and only 7 of them thought it was harmful to do this.²⁸³ As some responses noted:

I think some positive and drastic measures should be taken to set all this misconceptions straight especially through the media.²⁸⁴

It might be useful for information purposes. However, it may just open up old wounds between *osu* and non-*osu* groups and that might lead to war of some sort.²⁸⁵

I don't think the practice is still so prevalent as to make it a topic for public discussion.²⁸⁶

No, it is better to leave it to die a natural death.²⁸⁷

We also got several views from the interviews we conducted. Generally speaking, we noticed that most of the soft spoken people amongst our respondents were quick to say the mass media should act against the practice. Most of them seemed like they didn't want to provoke controversy of any sort. All the same, Obianumba, a progressive leader argued that it was

²⁸³ Online Survey, 2008.

²⁸⁴ Questionnaire, 19/8/08.

²⁸⁵ Questionnaire, 10/8/08.

²⁸⁶ Questionnaire, 31/5/08.

²⁸⁷ Questionnaire, 26/5/08. We got many similar responses to this question and here are a few of them: "Absolutely yes, if people genuinely want to expose the wickedness and foolishness therein," 5/7/08; "Yes, because it educates people on what is going on and poses challenges to some negative traditionalist ideologies," 13/8/08; "Yes, so people can see the negative attributions of the segregation," 11/8/08; "Sure... I think it'll correct the wrong impressions people have of it," 27/6/08; "Yes! But it won't do any good because the fight has been on for long and can't be erased except we eliminate the elders and others that grew up with the knowledge screwed into them," 2/6/08; "So far I don't think it has helped to check the problem as it is still practiced," 10/6/08; "It does not worth it," 6/6/08.

funny for people to imagine the media will stimulate hatred or some form of aggression. According to him people are already aware of the practice as it is fully in existence, hence, the media should be used to stimulate debate and use compelling means to expose the ills of discrimination. Ezeike, a retired headmaster, suggested the media could help as it helped in the days when Nnobi abolished the caste in their village. But then, he could not tell what effects the media really had in Nnobi because the practice is still very popular in the area, so the media may have achieved very little if it really did. Chukwudi, himself a media professional and a musician, agrees with Obianumba. He points that there should be no fear of the media raising dust or opening closed wounds. He wondered why people thought differently of the same media that is being used to fight against the discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. Even though he accepts that the media may not produce quick results in fighting discrimination against Igbo caste groups, Chukwudi argued it will achieve better results than the passing of unnecessary laws. Chukwudi who is from one of the *ohu* villages in Enugu even pledged to start this struggle through his music. Two other respondents, Irobi and Okoye also suggested the media could be effective in ending Igbo caste practices. For Eze, a pastor of a Pentecostal Church, the media will only be a viable tool if it encourages televangelism because it is only through the preaching of the 'good news' that Igbo will come to realize the *osu* culture is pagan and old. As he notes:

[The] Media is helping. It will help more and more to stop it. Christianity is hitting it strongly. I have a community. The chief is in this Church. I always educate them not to allow this thing [*osu*] happen in their midst. So Christianity and the media are helping to wipe it.²⁸⁸

Nonetheless, Ejim, a young journalist, confessed that the media was really in a quagmire. She argued that no matter how good the media presents its message or how well it criticizes the

²⁸⁸ Reverend Sunday I. Eze, Interview, Nnobi, July 18, 2007.

practice, its message must be viewed from different angles. Like a two edged sword she insists, the media was capable of producing negative and positive effects. She gives an instance of two children watching a killing or shooting scene in a film. As she supposes, one of them may say 'that thing is bad' while the other may simply say 'but I like it, I could try it out.' So this, according to her, boils down to cognition or what the individual chooses to accept. Like Ejim, Osuagwu, a historian, agrees the media should do something but he wonders how they get out of this dilemma. Ekwunife reckoned that the media may be able to help but warned that they must bear in mind that you cannot speak about the issue publicly these days without being prosecuted. However he refused to tell us where the prosecution, in his view, would come from, whether from the juju or from the law courts.

Edochie, who had taken part in the production of an *osu* video film in 1998, confessed that he received loads of criticisms for taking part in such a project. He said people even ignored the film at that time and this in turn affected sales. In his opinion, those who encouraged the boycott were wealthy top-placed individuals who were *osu* themselves. He said even when producers choose to do a film on Igbo caste practices they avoid using names that suggest the film is about the practice. However, Edochie, who had just taken part in a similar production in 2008, believed that orchestrating a media campaign against the caste system was fruitless because people had already concretized their views on the issue. Emeh thought along this line too. He argued that no one should talk about Igbo caste practices, that not even the media should mention the word. According to him, speaking about *osu* would only encourage children who were unaware of the practice to ask questions and become more inquisitive so as to know what the practice was about and even who was involved. Igwe Ezeagu, a traditional ruler who claimed the practice has been totally forgotten in his area advised that the media will

only expose those who are castes and invoke quests by people who may want to know who is who. He suggested that the solution was totally in the hands of the Church.

Umeh, a professor and foremost traditionalist and native doctor in Nnobi, had only a few words on the role of the media. He simply advised that the media should 'shut up' and face other problems, and that anybody who championed the cause of the Igbo caste groups – media or no media – should begin by marrying a member of the caste group to at least show some level of seriousness. All participants in our first FGD which involved elders did not think it was useful or even wise for the media to get involved in this problem. Ikedife, who was the president-general of the pan-Igbo group Ohaneze Ndigbo at the time of this FGD, argued that the media was only capable of causing confusion. He said that the only result the media was going to achieve was to make all abolition attempts that had taken place futile. In fact, the Igwe of Nnewi who took part in this FGD narrated an incident which he claimed only happened six months before the FGD. According to him a young man from Nnewi was going to be married to a lady from another village in Nnewi. They agreed and had even printed invitation cards. The lady had missed her menstrual cycle when the story emerged that her mother came from an *osu* family. The young man immediately withdrew from the marriage arrangement and insisted he was only going to be married to her over his dead body. The lady's family had insisted that the man's family give them a reasonable explanation for the cancelation but they didn't get any. Her family took the case to the Igwe's cabinet and he summoned them on a later date. In the presence of both parties, the Igwe asked the young man why he had changed his mind and he gave an excuse of some sort. Being unsatisfied with the man's explanation, the lady and her family decided to go to court. The Igwe now advised her family about taking such an irrational move. He asked her what she expected from the court while pointing out clearly that the court

could only make her case public and attract media attention, yet, it could not force the young man to marry her against his will. Her family agreed with Igwe Orizu because once the matter went before the court, even those who were not aware that the lady was *osu* would now be aware and it would publicly make her taboo for marriage amongst other indigenes.

Another informant, Okigbo, who had written a small pamphlet on ways to completely abolish Igbo caste practices in Nnobi, advised that the media should stay clear of the issue. He observed that discrimination against the people increased after the abolition episode at Nnobi. So why make noise about it in the media, he asked. In his view, the media would only expose those who belonged to the group and more people would start asking questions. He gave us an instance. After he published his pamphlet, a lot of people came from different places, including outside Nnobi, to ask questions like what the *osu* was all about. While he advised that the best solution was to again allow the tradition to fade away with time, he narrated a similar story to the one previously told by Igwe Orizu. According to his account, a little boy at Nnobi who was called *osu* by his friend in school reported the issue to his father. This little boy and his family belong to the caste group at Nnobi. His father took the case to a chief who then called the father of the boy who committed the crime. After debates, the visibly angry man decided to take the case to the Igwe's court. Before he walked out, the chief advised him that taking such a problem to the Igwe was only going to publicise his status as an *osu* and make people fear him and his family. He advised him to forget about the insult, swallow his pride and let the matter die between all of them. Few ears alone were enough, he advised. Fortunately, the man took the advice. Instances like this no doubt contribute to the quietness displayed by Igbo caste groups. But does this kind of publicity really affect the media role?

4.5 Obstacles to the Media Role

For the journalists and media professionals we spoke to the problem was not in any way different. Igwe Ojukwu, a traditional ruler and a journalist, expressed doubt over using the media to change people's attitudes because the media is a double edged sword which can do two things – it could either produce negative or positive effects just as Ejim, another journalist, stated earlier. He said while he was fully active in the media industry they avoided mentioning or discussing anything that was connected to Igbo caste practices in the open. Like him also, Okpala, who is the manager in charge of news at the Nigerian Television Authority in Enugu, told us that they try as much as possible to avoid discussing such topics as it will only open old wounds. Because of the wide reach of the NTA he argued, their medium alone was capable of causing confusion amongst the people and they were afraid of stimulating hatred against the caste groups. Okpala obviously referred to the kind of trouble that started in Nkanu in 1995 after the Igwe of Oruku community, Igwe A. Nomeh, used the radio to make an announcement to his people to boycott a reception that was being organized for Professor Bartholomew Nnaji, a US based Umuode native who had distinguished himself in public service in the US and was even honoured by Nigeria's Federal Government. The boycott was mandated because Nnaji was a member of the *ohu* group. This caused problems amongst the freeborn and the *ohu* people in the area,²⁸⁹ the kind of problem the media tries to avoid.

Moreover, another journalist with the Anambra Broadcasting Service, Okpalaeke, who had worked at the organization for over thirty-three years and is presently the legal director, confessed that because of the legal abolition of the *osu* tradition and other related forms of slavery in Igboland his organization does not at all mention the caste system since it ceased to exist legally after its abolition. When we confronted him with facts of the persistence of the

²⁸⁹ Agbaegbu, "Slavery in Igboland," p. 23.

practice in his area especially, he indicated that his personal view of the practice was totally different from his view as a journalist or public official. He gave one or two instances of events in his home town Awka-Etiti, which suggests that the *osu* practice was strong there. But Okpalaeke declined to accept that the practice was persistent because, according to him, if he accepts that the practice is persistent, this could affect the views of his radio/TV audience who would now uphold the practice because he does too. In fact, he confirmed that for thirty-three years while he worked at the ABS, no programme or commentary had been aired concerning Igbo caste practices. He also confessed that the ABS may even be afraid of bringing up the issue because they did not know who was going to be provoked. As most people in the villages listen to radio more often than reading the papers, and because they might take offense at the reporting, they did not want to stir up communal clashes.

As a matter of fact, we had approached a popular private radio station in Enugu – Cosmo FM²⁹⁰ - to speak on Igbo caste practices. The reason for this was to stimulate debate amongst the audience of the programme which was huge because it aired at a peak period of the morning when some people travelled to work and when others were already at their offices. Our intention was to really understand how much controversy the issue could attract. For a long time, Cosmo FM was reluctant to grant such a request. We spoke to the producer of the programme to find out why it was difficult to get a slot for the discussion but he declined to give a reason. It was indeed disappointing and unbelievable because the programme was aired five days every week – Monday to Friday, so it was not possible to believe every day had been booked. For three months, however, Cosmo FM failed to give a specific date and confirmation.

²⁹⁰ Cosmo FM, located in Enugu, is a 24-hour independent commercial radio station which transmits 24 hours daily on 105.5 MHz on the frequency modulated band. The FM has an amazing reach spanning several states including Anambra, Abia, Imo, Ebonyi, Enugu, Rivers, Delta, Kogi, Benue, Akwa Ibom and Cross River States.

It was difficult. However, the producer confessed later that it was because of the controversial nature of the topic that it took so much time and so many hurdles to get a confirmation. He even advised us to forget it, that the managing director of the station was not sure if they were ready to get caught in such controversy. Their decision may have been affected by the ownership of the station which was allegedly tied to the then governor of the state, Chimaroke Nnamani. Nnamani had once been accused of being unfair to the *ohu* people in Nkanu. He was even accused by the *ohu* people of sacking a member of his cabinet who had a day before his sack commented that the government had not done enough to help his people.²⁹¹ After several months however, Cosmo FM approved the appointment. But at this time, Chimaroke was no longer the governor of the state and only represented his constituency in the Senate. Also, at the time of the discussion Cosmo FM was faced with numerous challenges related to corruption charges allegedly levelled against its ownership. Thus, the managing director who had challenged the discussion of Igbo caste practices on air was nowhere around the station to take such decisions. He may have left the company as most of its staff did or he may have been somewhere avoiding capture by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. However, our point is that the decision to discuss the topic on air was approved by the producer himself; this time there were few or no obstacles as to who to report to or seek permission from. Thus, we observe that the ownership of a medium of communication could determine the direction the medium chooses to follow.²⁹² However, one of the callers to this programme on the radio who gave his name as Emeka simply gives us an impression of the rarity of the topic in the media. According to him:

²⁹¹ The reason for this sack may be unconnected though, it is not entirely our business in this thesis. However, see Tobs Agbaegbu, "Moves to Stop Slavery in Igboland," p. 17.

²⁹² See table 4.2.

It's good to hear about this *osu* thing on the radio. We don't hear about it at all on the radio or TV even though we know it is still there. I hope you people will continue talking about it so it will raise some awareness. Let people know it is bad so we see if this will change them.²⁹³

At the same time, as we have noticed, gathering information on Igbo caste practices is really very difficult. And as we have done already, this is attributed to the supposed fear of causing dislike and hatred amongst the public. There have been many reported cases of violence that erupted across Igboland, especially in the Owerri region, because someone in one way or another implied another is *osu*. Only recently, one informant, Leo Igwe, who has gained prominence in the pages of the newspapers for his fight against the discrimination of Igbo caste groups, reported that violence broke out in Eziamma community in Obi-Orodo after a man in one neighbouring village called another man in Eziamma *osu*. People were beaten on both sides and several houses went up in flames.²⁹⁴

We have observed from our discussions in previous chapters as well that the colonial administration displayed this form of lackadaisical attitude today played by the media and even policy makers in some quarters when they avoided getting involved in the practice. Undoubtedly, this was for fear of being caught up in the whole controversy. However, a lot of factors come into play when one examines the attitude of the media because the media is virtually a vehicle used to convey a set of messages, most of which originate from members of society and are sent back to society by way of the media as we have seen. For instance, the journalists' perception of what he stands to gain affects his performance. Ethnic affinity also affects the journalist or contributors because evidence suggests that non-Igbos are less likely to be discriminated against if at all, than Igbos who comment on the practice. We have already

²⁹³ Cosmo FM Discussion, April 2008.

²⁹⁴ Leo Igwe, "Letters: Gov. Ohakim, come to the aid of Eziamma Community," *The Guardian*, Wednesday February 25, 2009, p. 3.

noted above that two contributors to the newspaper, Ijioma and Onyiliagha, in separate rejoinders, implied that Igwe and Nwachukwu who contributed a condemning article against the persistence of the *osu* practice may be *osu* themselves.²⁹⁵ They implied this because of the duo's style of writing against the practice which seemed to have been sympathetic to the *osu/ohu* liberation cause. Even where a private media organization may engage itself in a campaign against these practices, people may imply that the ownership is *osu*. So it seems easier when the job is done by a non-Igbo who will be unarguably nonpartisan, or at least viewed that way.

4.6 The Media Role: A Theoretical Matter

The idea of the media as an agenda-setting instrument for public interest is one that is crucial to our thesis, whether for those who argue ignorantly that Igbo caste practices are extinct or those who would suggest otherwise. The term agenda-setting was coined by McCombs and Shaw in 1972 to describe the phenomenal role the media played in the 1968 US presidential campaign in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.²⁹⁶ The focal argument of the agenda-setting hypothesis is that the media influences the audience greatly by raising issues of public importance and generating some sort of interest and importance or newsworthiness for such subject so that the audience, policy makers or the targets of such information will give some form of attention to the said information or case. The media, it is well known, is charged with some responsibilities just as people expect so from government, but from the media, people expect some sort of devotion to the service of public interest through its provision of accurate, truthful and complete account of everyday's events to the public, and also by acting as a forum for members of this public to not only exchange ideas but to provide criticisms of public issues as members of the public have

²⁹⁵ See again, Ijioma, "Re: The Osu Caste in Igboland," p. 42; Onyiliagha, "Twilight of the Osu Caste System," p. 4.

²⁹⁶ See Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*, Third Edition, London: Sage Publications, 1994, p. 365.

done on the Igbo caste issue. In other words, the responsibility of the media is complete devotion to public interest above everything else. Because people also rely on the media for facts more than information on daily events - like informed analyses and interpretations of the facts, meanings and necessary perspectives to such facts, thus rendering the facts understandable, authentic and highly useful to the public in increasing their knowledge and awareness of these facts, the media daily affects lives in many more ways than we can imagine.

The effect of the media could no doubt cause changes to our attitudes and behaviour as a result of exposure to the persuasive messages contained in it. Our daily mode of dressing is affected by weather forecasts, advertisements affect our purchases, posters of new films affect our choices at the cinema, music on the radio makes us react in countless ways, slogans of institutions stick in our heads. And, as Ekwelie argues, the "exposure to the media - print or audiovisual - will have effect on individuals' attention, saliency, information, skills, taste, images, attitudes and actions." "The media," he insists, "can serve as agents of change, change in any direction."²⁹⁷ However, many scholars, especially McQuail, have argued that the media are rarely likely to be the only means through which change can occur. But the media in eastern Nigeria remains the most effective tool for reaching a larger audience even though we agree other contributory agents could ensure change together with the media - like communicating face to face and preaching to individuals on the ills of maintaining this practice.

Notwithstanding the lopsidedness a medium could have as a result of its proprietor's or even the journalists' interest, the fear of these institutions in getting involved in local controversies contributes to the seeming lack of attention given to these prominent problems in Igboland. Since we did not specifically study the broadcast media in the form of radio and television, we

²⁹⁷ S. A. Ekwelie, "Evolution of the Print Medium: The African Experience," in Onuora E. Nwuneli, *Mass Communication in Nigeria: A Book of Reading*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1985, p. 10.

relied on our discussions with staff of major broadcast organizations – NTA, ABS and Cosmo FM – in the region for this information. For instance, from our study of seventy newspaper articles we can see that the debate largely relied on public contributions rather than publications from journalists. Nevertheless, the print media has been a vibrant platform for exposing the persistence of this issue for public debate as we have noticed. And like we gave an example of the media's agenda-setting function with the case of Agbaegbu's story on *Newswatch* which attracted the government's attention to the plight of the Umuode people in Nkanu, several similar cases have occurred. As Leo Igwe told us, the letter he published in the *Guardian* of February 2009 got the attention of the governor of Imo State who subsequently took action on the plight of the Ezianya people.²⁹⁸ By examples like this, the print media continues to fulfil this mandate especially as it affects policy makers. As Okpalaeke of the ABS said:

Yes it is our duty as media men to set agenda and inform people about this *osu*. But this function is left to those whose editors feel or judge that it won't bring problems to the station or its journalists or even cause problems for the *osu* themselves. This issue is very hot and I know the moment I go on air to talk about it people will start calling me on the phone to say shut up. But I know some newspapers have reported issues like this, but for us we don't. Let the newspapers continue setting the agenda!²⁹⁹

Moreover, these debates on the emancipation of Igbo caste groups championed in the media may have caused some sort of silence from the so called members of the caste groups or those who may generally be against predominant public opinion and this may be explained by yet another media effect, the spiral of silence. The argument by Noelle-Neumann, the originator of the concept, was that public opinion could affect individual opinion. The notion of a spiral of silence contests the usual view that the media generally change attitudes. Instead, according to Noelle-Neumann, the media can reinforce predominantly existing attitudes and cause change

²⁹⁸ Leo Igwe, Private Discussion, March 2009.

²⁹⁹ Anthony Okpalaeke, Interview, Awka-Etiti, July 19, 2007.

when it contradicts predominantly existing attitudes. In short, she describes spiral of silence as “The process of an interaction between individual and environment, where dominant opinion is defended and new opinion is established.”³⁰⁰ This effect generally suggests that people build their opinion by joining the bandwagon of popular opinion and rejecting opinions that have little support. According to Noelle-Neumann, when people observe their views are losing supporters, they fall silent on them because of fear of standing alone and thus they conceal their convictions in public. And because the members of the seemingly strongest group express themselves with confidence, their opinion then appears to be the public opinion whereas the opinion of the silent group appears weaker than their numbers suggest. Signs of this have been evidenced in this Igbo case. For instance, from the side of public opinion we can assume a majority of members of the public agree to an extent that this practice is barbaric and bad. This may affect the number of criticisms against anti-abolitionist groups because people may be too shy to come out and explain their stance for fear that they may be called names like ‘lovers of darkness’ for refusing change or refusing to accept the *osu* as normal people. We have already articulated our fieldwork experiences where we noticed that even people who practise the tradition and strongly believe it was persistent turned around to join the bandwagon and criticize those like themselves who uphold the practice when they observed we recorded the discussions. It was clear that only very few people, maybe ten percent of our respondents on the field, wanted their names to be associated with criticisms against those anti-*osu* elements. For instance, one respondent said in 2009 that the practice is tradition. According to him,

There’s absolutely nothing wrong with this tradition. It is the way our ancestors lived and they themselves placed the *osu* and their descendants on this caste. I don’t know why you people have

³⁰⁰ See Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, “Mass Media and Social Change in Developed Societies,” in Elihu Katz and Tamas Szecsko (eds.), *Mass Media and Social Change*, London: Sage Publication, 1981, p. 139 (pp. 137-165). Also see, McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*, p. 361.

decided to continue talking about this practice and criticizing here and there. Anyway... for me it is tradition and I don't have anything against it continuing. Please don't quote me oh! I don't want anybody to read me now and say I am against the *osu*. I know many of us Igbos like to pretend and say it's bad so they won't look at us with funny eyes.³⁰¹

Furthermore, this effect may also explain the deficiency of debates by the caste groups in the media. Afigbo, for instance, noted that, even when caste groups complained to the colonial administration in letters, they used false names and addresses since they didn't want to identify themselves as *osu* or *ohu*.³⁰² Thus members of these caste groups may have been involved in the debate but we cannot confirm this because people rarely claim to belong to the group when using the media platform. In fact, of all the people we interacted with via our questionnaires only one lady was bold enough to acknowledge she was a descendant of former *osus*. Her words: "to answer your question without mincing words, I realized my generations were labelled *osu*, in that case what do you call me? *Osu*? Freeborn? It really doesn't matter, what matters is what I call myself: A SUCCESSFUL YOUNG WOMAN!"³⁰³ This lady was bold indeed and as she believes, if testimonies like hers could be heard especially in the media, it might help get rid of the practice because people would see the successes of the caste groups and know that their members are human beings, not spirits to be feared.

Besides, the argument that the media may reinforce already existing attitudes is one we have already noted, as we observed during fieldwork. As we explained, some people were of the view that the media would only harden the hearts of freeborn towards the caste groups. The general attitude amongst this group was to leave the media out of the debate. For example, one Chinwe Durunna asked satirically: "What would the media do? The best it can do is teach me

³⁰¹ We had this discussion in London with a respondent who had just come to the UK to begin his MSc. He later agreed to be quoted anonymously. Private Discussion, 2009.

³⁰² Adiele E. Afigbo, Interview, Abakaliki, August 29, 2007.

³⁰³ Questionnaire, 12/6/08.

about the *osu* practice and scare me more into avoiding them and running away each time I see them.”³⁰⁴ Nevertheless, public opinion is divided on this issue as the few respondents argued that knowledge is double edged. Thus, the media cannot just be cut off and ignore these problems because some people believe it should. A middle ground must be reached between both groups. And because it is the mass media that generally determines what the dominant public opinion is as it has shown us in the continuous debates in the print media, its effort cannot be totally ignored.

4.7 Conclusion

We had anticipated at the beginning of this research that the effects of the media on people's attitudes to Igbo caste practices would be more positive than our findings suggest. During fieldwork, we tried as much as possible to assure our respondents of the confidentiality of their remarks, and we confirmed that their comments were strictly for academic purposes, but just by seeing a mini recorder placed in front of them most felt compelled to say what they thought people might expect them to say. By and large, communication was often biased to suit popular opinion. This alone indicates the difficulty one should expect if a journalist was involved in gathering information on caste practices because if it was tough for a mere student, the journalist may find it tougher especially if a reporter does not pretend to be just an onlooker, but part of the community being investigated. That notwithstanding, we still experienced difficulties in getting information in our home town. The difficulty in collecting oral information on Igbo caste practices makes it difficult for the caste problems to be solved by the media even when the media is committed. And because people seem to always speak for members of the caste groups, their problems may not be heard until someone amongst them

³⁰⁴ Chinwe Durunna, Private Discussion, 2009.

who is sincerely sympathetic to their struggle finds time to react on the pages of newspapers or via other media.

Altogether, we have managed to establish some attitudes of individuals to Igbo caste practices on the media and to media reports. We have also indicated the level of disagreement on what roles the mass media should play and what it should not do. And to a greater extent, we have indicated that the debates within the media have been sustained through several years by the public even as the media is careful in its coverage of the issues for fear of being caught up in web of controversies surrounding the subject. All in all, this chapter has shown that the information published in newspapers provoke debates among the public, affects their attitudes or reactions to the caste practices, and continues to make the problem contemporary in so far as it is discussed. As we indicated, these debates are capable of gaining sympathy for the caste groups. Hence, the effectiveness of the news media in bringing up these issues to public attention is eminent and debates within it could help policy makers quieten the rancour within the public since persuasion seem to be the most effective means of dealing with the issue than any other form of attack, the media appears to be the most probable and extensive means of channelling coaxing messages, especially amongst older adults.

However, we will now move on to the next chapter to examine the discourse of Igbo caste practices within cyberspace.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETING CASTE DISCOURSE IN CYBERSPACE: INTERNET COMMUNICATION AMONG IGBOS IN THE DIASPORA

5.0 Introduction

We have reserved the discussion of the hosting of the Igbo caste discourse on cyberspace for a separate chapter because it provides strong evidence for our argument that the media sustains the discourse and provokes debates on the subject. Incontestably the world's largest network, connecting an estimated one billion people in more than 150 countries including Nigeria and Nigerians in the Diaspora,³⁰⁵ the internet has given the Igbo Diaspora in different locations the ability to communicate with each other, despite distance, through the venues of virtual online forums. And, like the news media, Igbos exchange and discuss issues concerning Igbo caste practices, particularly, as it stands today, in these forums. In this way, Igbos in Diaspora have managed to contribute to the discourse as it is being represented in the news media, because volumes of internet forums that have emerged on the *osu* discourse began with the hosting of news media materials that were posted to these forums in anticipation of participants' contributions.³⁰⁶

However, the internet discourse presents significantly different challenges as compared to those of the news media. For instance, websites and blogs that primarily seek to change attitudes to this practice have been gradually emerging to deal with the issue. Besides, by publishing electronically – essentially at no cost, and with a potentially vast audience – various views that are often overlooked by the mainstream media are publicized, offering perspectives frequently

³⁰⁵ These statistics are provided by the International Telecommunication Union and the Internet World Stats. See information at <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>. Also see the information on internet usage in Nigeria at <http://www.internetworldstats.com/af/ng.htm> (Accessed May, 2009).

³⁰⁶ These days, Igbos in Diaspora may not just rely on gossip and telephone calls to family and friends in Nigeria for information on local happenings, but from forums on the internet where most Nigerian newspapers and even video films have managed to penetrate.

stifled by the editors or ownership of newspapers and other media outlets who may not feel these materials are publishable. Interestingly also, anyone can publish a story anonymously on the internet without the usual fear of controversy that trails discussions on this subject. And, because responses to the discussions in these forums are quick and may come on the spot, it presents an even more active space than the news media. In short, cyberspace dramatically expands the range of voices heard on this issue – permitting the local to become global and vice versa.

This chapter is yet another attempt to show that the media provokes debate on the Igbo caste subject and in so doing, expands knowledge on the practice and consequentially affects attitudes. Here, we will simply explore the attitudes and reactions of Igbos in internet forums by looking closely at the somewhat informal style of messaging in these forums where a good number of issues – similar to those raised in Chapter IV – emerge as a result of linked news media articles. However, the informality of these discourses makes them interesting because they are raw thoughts from the writers’ mind – free from the worries of censorship and the editor’s pen. Interestingly also, the debates presented here are primarily by Igbos in the Diaspora.³⁰⁷ This chapter shows that Igbos in the Diaspora are as interested in this debate as their counterparts in Nigeria, and it presents the varying positions of these Igbos in Diaspora. Specifically, we attempt to show that while there are similarities between the arguments of Igbos in Nigeria who primarily use the local media to engage in the discourse and their counterparts in the Diaspora who mainly engage on cyberspace, cyberspace is gradually becoming a viable forum to promote change. This may be connected to the fact that even Igbos in the Diaspora who have lived in the West for all their lives still tend to have similar attitudes

³⁰⁷ As a matter of fact, most of these respondents, especially those residents in the Americas, have not visited home for many years.

as most Igbos in Igboland. One would expect diasporic Igbos to react differently to the discourse on *osu* (by condemning and rejecting the practice outright) since they live outside Nigeria. But most of them strongly believe that Igbo caste practices will persist for a long time to come.

The data presented here was drawn from three prominent internet forums where Igbos in the Diaspora have maintained longstanding ties. The first, Nairaland, according to its webmaster, is a forum where Nigerians discuss breaking news, share experiences and ideas, and ask questions of any kind for members to reply.³⁰⁸ Nairaland was created in 2005 and has since then hosted debates of interest on various topics. However, we will consider a long conversation in this forum that went on for thirty months – between September 2006 and February 2009. Secondly, Naijablog is an online journal that hosts daily entries about matters concerning Nigeria; then just below the entries, respondents are allowed to make comments.³⁰⁹ The blog is maintained by Jeremy Weate. In this forum, we culled a brief discussion that took place in 2008 after Weate published a newspaper article on the Igbo castes.³¹⁰ Then, USA Africa Dialogue (UAD) is the third forum, hosted by Toyin Falola,³¹¹ which covers issues of concern to Nigerians. Like the other two forums, respondents over the years have discussed the Igbo caste practices at considerable length.³¹² The brief exchange we will discuss occurred in April 2009 as a result of a BBC publication that was posted to the forum for respondents to discuss.³¹³ All three virtual forums demonstrate how cyberspace is used as a form of transnational communication,

³⁰⁸ Nairaland is available at www.nairaland.com.

³⁰⁹ <http://naijablog.blogspot.com/>

³¹⁰ The names used in this forum may not be real names but just usernames or log-in IDs.

³¹¹ Toyin Falola is a historian of Nigerian origin. In the US, he is one of the most important Chairs in African Studies. Falola comes from the Yoruba ethnic group in western Nigeria.

³¹² <http://groups.google.com/group/USAAfricaDialogue>. This is a closed forum, available to only academics and professionals on approval by the host.

³¹³ Our case discussion took place between April 7 2009 and April 9 2009. However, note that the names used in this forum unlike the former are the actual names of contributors.

providing a space for a discourse that articulates the experiences of Igbos living in Nigeria and in the rest of the world. In addition, they serve as sources of information and emphasize connections between Igbos living within and outside the region. An examination of these forums will not only show that the media provokes debate on this issue and how, but that the discourse on cyberspace is a highly social form of communication. Also, it shows that internet forums do not only focus on exchanging information, but also the possibility of change. Significantly, all the debates in these fora will again show that the Igbo caste practice is persistent and still provokes contentious debates.

5.1 Narrations of Igbo Caste Practices on Internet Forums

Up to now, Igbo caste subject has remained a topic that is mainly discussed behind closed doors. No one ever really appreciates talking about it publicly. In contemporary Igboland, to talk about the caste practices, especially when in support of the practice, is considered a measure of ignorance because discussions on the practice are normally reserved for later, preferably when the congregation is smaller and those involved are certain of the status of all discussants. Even then, it is commonly done in hushed tones. Often, this quietness is blamed as the primary cause of the persistence of the practice even as many others argue that keeping quiet will make the practice of stigmatization disappear.³¹⁴ However, like the news media, particularly the newspapers that have for decades documented episodes of this practice, the internet has formed a new dimension for public dialogue on this issue. The internet is of particular advantage to this discourse because it can be used to reach many people at a time without having personal contact or face to face interaction with them.

³¹⁴ Refer to Chapter III for our discussion on persistence.

In this chapter, we do not claim that there are substantial differences between the nature of the discourse on the internet and in the news media, but the mode of discussion in cyberspace is informal and unique. Moreover, some Igbos abroad have continuously used blogs and internet forums to share ideas on this tradition and one major goal of most of these discussions is to convince participants of the need to reject the caste practice totally. While most of the writers seek to change attitudes, especially by providing links to newspaper articles and other electronic publications that criticize the persistence of the practice, some pose critical questions and allow readers to react. The language of those who seek change usually has a pragmatic force of persuasion; as Ekwo counsels on Nairaland, for example, “let us join hands and push back this wall of ignorance for justice[’s] sake and for the fact that we are all Igbos.” “This should be our challenge,” he pleads. But there are others who basically emphasize the dogged nature of the practice in modern times. For this group of people, no amount of persuasion will make the practice go away unless Igbos collectively decide to disregard the practice. In addition, some discussants in these forums also exhort, admonish and narrate personal ordeals. They use their cases to teach those who are not conversant with the practice, assuming thus that most of them have lived abroad for long years and have lost track of events and cultural practices of their local areas back home.

Also, some participants try to be as polite as possible in order not to negate their messages or cause serious disputes; though in many instances there have been serious disagreements. Even when contributors condemn those who move back and forth on their positions by criticizing the practice at one point and upholding it at another, they do it in a polite manner knowing the purpose of the discussion is to change attitudes. Participants start the discourse by generally posing a question or posting an already published journal article for others to read and then

discuss. When questions are asked, they are typically rhetorical and at best are meant to set the readers in meditative mood. For example, one Adaobi Iwu who complained bitterly of her experience wrote on Nairaland:

Can we find a solution to this madness? I am truly dying in pains, I have found love in someone and it's time for us to get married and they say I am an *osu*. How can something so sweet turn bitter all of a sudden? Life is becoming difficult for my boyfriend already. What can I do? The thing is that those who call us *osu* still come to party and dine with us; they even receive money from us when we give them. They fetch water from a borehole my father provided for them! Now, they've cost me my happiness and I know my God will act real soon.

Furthermore, discussions on this subject, with all its controversial attributes, are bound to stimulate many reactions from people in cyberspace for what we have noted before – the ability for participants to remain anonymous. And, within these discussions several issues come up, ranging from the persistence of the problem and the hypocrisy that follows – as Iwu's statement clearly depicts above, the question of morality, the influence of parents, the family and the larger community in marriage decisions and other communal relations. For instance, the following dialogue is an excerpt from a long exchange that happened for over two years on Nairaland. It followed Iwu's complaints (see above) and after one Chichi had posed the question – will you marry an *osu*?

Buchi – This practice will NEVER go away and I feel very sorry for them. If you want to live in the Diaspora all your life, then marrying *osu* will not really affect you. But if you plan sometime in the future to return back to Nigeria, you really have to be very careful. Remember, we do not only marry for ourselves but for our children as well – you don't want to give your children a bad start in life.

Agu – If someone doesn't want to marry you because of "what people will say" then he/she doesn't love you.

Buchi – Agu, I understand your position on this matter. But you cannot understand. It goes beyond love.

Scorpio – Buchi, if these caste groups are allowed to exercise their full rights would people like you still marry them? I can bet \$50 (from your response) that you won't. Just because someone is an *osu* is not enough to reject them in marriage. If you're in love, you shouldn't care.

Buchi – Scorpio, can you marry someone you know to have a vampire trace, even if it was some foolish tradition that happened way before you were born? It is a sad and violent way to brand people. I did not do it and cannot afford to live with the stigma. Life on its own is complicated and I won't complicate it more for me and my unborn children, No! If you can marry them, good for you. Lots of open minded people like you have married *osu*. I am open-minded, but my dad will first disown me. I love my family. My family is a lineage of kings and I will not start to spoil it for them because of my feelings for *osu*. Besides, the price to pay is too much for me particularly. I have deep political intentions for the future and can't ruin it by marrying *osu*.

Ibe – The *osu* practice is really terrible. I had them in my secondary schools days; some stupid boys would openly discriminate against them – even tell them openly that they were *osu*. Even during bazaars in church, no one would willingly buy from them. This topic really makes me uncomfortable. Deep in everyone's heart, we may want to abolish the damned system but who will bell the cat?

Bee – Ibe, it isn't a hard thing to do, as long as we individually reject such old practices, they will definitely disappear. But, the truth is that even Christians pretend to reject the practice but indirectly hold on to it.

Ibe – Bee, it's the stigma. Are you willing to lose your freedom? I think it has to be a unanimous decision by Igbos.

Bee – What freedom are you talking about? I have eaten with the *osu*, slept with them (not sexually), in fact, they are my brothers and sisters. Besides, it has been abolished long ago.

Ibe – Yes, you did everything except marry them. Go ahead and marry them then we will know you are serious. Stop pretending not to know the magnitude of the problem. One of my uncles married an *osu* when I was very young in the 1980s, but I know what he passed through – not from the family alone, but from the community.

Laura – Bee, it is so easy to say on the internet that the *osu* practice has been abolished. But in fact, the practice thrives in several communities in Anambra, Imo and Enugu State as we speak. A female friend of mine dated a guy for four good years before the chap finally proposed marriage to her. When he notified his family of this they immediately kicked against it. Reason – she came from a family of *osu* people. The lady was pregnant and this happened in 2005, not in the dark ages. Even in 2002,

another neighbour of mine who dated a guy for two years faced the same problem when she told her parents of their plans. Her mother threw herself on the floor and started wailing that her daughter wanted to kill her. The girl was depressed for months after this incident. Another guy in my office would have had the same fate but for a colleague at our office who told him earlier before he moved to ask the girl out that she was *osu*. Some of us would never understand what kind of problem this is. People who have experienced it know where the shoe pinches. So there is no point dismissing the *osu* problem as some people say that it concerns a 'very negligible minority.' Anyway, the truth is that it is important to propose viable solutions, instead of empty rhetoric, to deal with the problem, once and for all.

Arnold – I will never marry an *osu*, not because I don't like them but because of the stigma the Igbos have on them. I am sorry to say this, but this is the way it is and I did not make it so. Remember, that *osu* are human beings like us too.

Heart – Arnold, (laugh) we should remember they are human beings yet in the same sentence you said you would never have anything to do with them.

Eso –³¹⁵ This is hypocritical. In one breath people express their utmost disdain for the practice, yet in another breath they admit they will never have anything to do with us. You shouldn't be a hypocrite; you should be HONEST to yourself. For me, I don't believe in idols as most people think we do. We suffered once in the hands of Igbos, and we now suffer again through excommunication and isolation. We deserve respect for what our ancestors went through, not persecution. All I can say now is thank God my father did not raise us in one of those backward, idol-worshiping Igbo villages!

Hanny – I may not marry an *osu* not because I think they are less human, but because majority of the people are against them. I definitely don't want to be abused by my kinsmen.

Siena – Of course, I'd marry an *osu*. It's folk's mentality that makes them what they are. As far as I'm concerned, God made them as he made me! If marrying an *osu* will turn my family against me, then so be it. It would just mean my family isn't worth having.

Mandora – As an Igbo girl, I can only pray I don't come to the stage where I get to love an *osu* though I have nothing against them. This is why I'm not personally looking out to marry an Igbo guy.

³¹⁵ One can tell from Eso's contributions that she belongs to the caste groups. Although she resides in the United Kingdom, we can see how she distances herself from Igbos with her comment: "We suffered in the hands of Igbos." Clearly Eso is Igbo, but she writes as if the *osu*-freeborn demarcation puts each group in different ethnic groups. This may be anger expressed as a result of the stories she might have heard concerning the ill-treatments of the caste groups by the freeborn.

Osi – Contemplating marriage to an *osu* is a dilemma. Even where one wants to, like my friend whose Catholic parents approved her marriage to an *osu* man notwithstanding his status, the uncles and kinsmen will become a problem. In her case, they opposed the marriage and even wrote a letter to the council of chiefs in the village expressing their opposition to the union. According to them, their opposition had nothing to do with the lady's choice, but the fact that her marriage to an *osu* will not only condemn her with the stigma but it will also condemn the kinsmen who are her relations. Though the marriage eventually took place, the kinsmen boycotted the ceremony and never saw this family eye to eye for more than ten years. This is the situation. It is driven by fear of what others will say.

It is clear from the foregoing that these forums enjoy the kind of reciprocity that characterizes casual conversations. Because, in most similar exchanges, one finds even non-Igbos who perhaps learnt of the practice at the brink of marriage, publicly asking participants in the forum to enlighten them or advise them on steps to take. For example, in 2005, one Kachi wrote on Nairaland:

Dear all, I have a lady I want to marry but I found out she is what Igbos call *osu*. I don't believe in the *osu* system, but I'm sure my parents will object to my marrying her. Igbos in this forum please help me out since you understand better what I'm talking about. Does marrying an *osu* make me an *osu*? Can I damn what people say and marry her?

Moreover, some of the responses below followed.

Stephanie – Kachi, It's a big problem in Igboland. I have not seen a freeborn marry an *osu* in my lifetime because of the background check they always do before marriage. Even if you do not see anything wrong with the practice, your parents will.

Don – Kachi, leave that girl, unless you want to become Nelson Mandela or something – freedom fighter!

Okwunuzo – My brother, I will personally go ahead with the marriage if the families involved are Christians. But this is a crucial matter in Igboland; therefore, you have to make one of two tough decisions. One, to live with the stigma which could also affect your children and their children; two, don't go ahead with the marriage.

Whitney – Kachi, take the girl to Church and sort it out with God or leave the marriage entirely and look for someone else! I’m not a traditional person but I know the culture to an extent and I can tell you that either her, her immediate family or ancestors would have committed an abomination for them to be in this situation – an abomination or curse that would have continued through bloodlines. Marriage is a lifelong thing and should be taken very seriously. You need to ask why she’s *osu* and know what steps to take to remove all the curses on her head in the house of God. As much as I believe in God, I have seen a few things that have convinced me on the existence of smaller gods. So you have to be careful.

Aida – If you must marry the girl Kachi, she must go for deliverance in case of any ancestral curses.

Mayor – For me, I had an Igbo friend from Mbaise who told me everything about *osu*. Though he is educated, enlightened, a pastor and a partner at a UK firm, he told me he would never let his two daughters marry an *osu*, rather he would allow them marry a layabout who drinks and smokes weed. According to him, the layabout can change but the *osu* will remain an outcast. The irony is that this man organizes walks, crusades and marches against racism, but his views are totally different.

Tochi – This *osu* problem is deep and complex and we Igbos are guilty of intra-racial discrimination. But, non-Igbos should not attack Igbos outright for this position. We hate the practice, but who will stop it? I can love an *osu*, but marry her – if I’m living in Europe, I wouldn’t mind; but to marry her and live in Igboland, your family will reject you, your children will suffer stigmatization and at the end you’ll hate yourself. You may love the girl, but do you want to be estranged from your family?³¹⁶

³¹⁶ Questions like this continued surfacing on Nairaland. In fact, two seemingly worried individuals we must note also made similar complaints on Nairaland and participants in the forum replied in large numbers. Below is a brief excerpt of this conversation:

(A) Angelina – For me, I dated a guy for five years and we got married this year. Though he is an *osu*, my heart accepts him. Am I wrong for marrying him?

Tipia – Angelina, all you need to do is move away from people who can tag him as *osu*. There is no reason to start broadcasting his ‘social status’ like you’re doing here.

(B) Marcel – I have a similar problem. The girl I want to marry just said that her parents asked her to forget about me because I am *osu*. Though she doesn’t care, her parents are bent on stopping us. What do I do? We have been together for two years now and have built an account together. We love each other, yet, I am in a dilemma.

LM – Marcel, forget about her parents and run away with the girl to a remote island.

Milton – If this girl loves you, go ahead and get married. What’s stopping you? I hope her parents come around to accept you later. If they don’t, you have your lives to live. Make the best of it.

Sisterjay – Marcel, move on and forget this girl since her parents have said no. What can you do? I only hope she doesn’t end up like me – my parents are still waiting for a man to come and take me off their hands.

Esther – As a traditionalist and upholder of our customs I say walk away. However, find a non-*osu* and marry. It’s for your own good. At least, you’ll have a freeborn blood flowing in your children.

These dialogues by Igbos in the Diaspora establish similarities in the language, attitudes and reactions of both Igbos in Diaspora and their counterparts in Nigeria to the caste discourse.³¹⁷ The participants are not clearly determinable; however, they show some understanding of brotherhood. For example, most of them start their address by simply writing “my brother,” and very often, their advice to those who make complaints has fraternal undertones – as if they really care about what happens to the affected person. Yet, in all forums, there is some sense of vigilance, that is, participants are aware of the wide reach of the internet and that anybody could access and participate in the discourse so some are cautious not to publicly call someone an *osu*; though they conveniently mention the names of some highly placed individuals who belong to the caste groups because as they suspect, such individuals may not participate in such forums – even when they do, real identities are not known. Also, when an *osu* publicly declares his or her ordeal there is this sense of pity in the reactions of some readers. In this instance, some respondents encourage the caste persons like one Mba who advised Iwu after she complained, to “put your trust in God, this practice will become history with time.” Mba had earlier noted otherwise, but changed his position when reacting to Iwu’s comment.

Other important points also come up in these dialogues. Most respondents speak of love; they do so by advising the freeborn who is worried about marriage to an *osu* to ignore the warnings of the elders and marry whomsoever they wish to, in so far as they are in love. Like one respondent, Scorpio, said above, “If you’re in love, you shouldn’t care.” Other bloggers like Siena, who noted that love was more of a priority than her family, expressed similar views. According to her, if her family rejects her relationship with an *osu*, “It would just mean my family isn’t worth having.” Also, from the remarks of Osi, who tells the story of his friend

³¹⁷ See Chapter IV, especially 4.3.3.

whose kinsmen boycotted his marriage, it is clear that respondents understand the fears associated with *osu*-freeborn relationships. In fact, many respondents expressed concerns about the children born out of an *osu*-freeborn marriage. From the dialogues above for instance, Buchi who insists that the “practice will NEVER go away,” noted that “we do not only marry for ourselves but for our children as well,” thus, we should be wary of who we marry to avoid placing our children in the caste groups. Even one Okwunuzo points to the fact that the *osu* stigma could “affect your children and their children” when he advised Kachi, who was confused on whether or not to go ahead with his proposed marriage to his *osu* girlfriend. So while some respondents feel that love should determine *osu*-freeborn marriage, others still think it is important to consider the effects such marriage could have on the family.

5.2 Too Much Talk, Not Enough Action – Critique of Empty Rhetoric

Criticisms formed a significant part of the discourse in newspapers,³¹⁸ and internet forums were no different. Criticisms on these forums are directed against abolitionists who will campaign physically and publish journals that condemn the persistence of the practice in the media. It is rare to come across abolitionists who haven’t been criticized for talking or writing too much and taking few or no action at all. For instance, a small group of people on the Nairaland forum criticized one Victor Dike after he published an electronic book on the internet that condemned the practice and people’s attitudes to the caste groups.³¹⁹ Dike, who is a prolific writer and campaigner against this practice, was called *osu* because of his dedication in fighting for the rights of the caste groups. Some respondents in the forum referred to his efforts (especially

³¹⁸ Refer to Chapter IV, 4.3.3.

³¹⁹ Victor E. Dike, who is also the author of *The Osu Caste System in Igboland: A Challenge for Nigerian Democracy*, lives in California, USA. His e-book is titled – *The Osu Caste System in Igboland: Discrimination Based on Descent*. He also published “The ‘Caste System’ in Nigeria, Democratization and Culture: Socio-political and Civil Rights Implications” on June 13, 1999. The full text is available at <http://www.afbis.com/analysis/caste.htm> (Accessed February 2009). His write-ups are circulated all over the internet and they have caused several debates as well.

through his books) to get rid of the practice as “mere talk, devoid of action.” It is true that no Igbo individual can sincerely engage in the struggle for equal rights for the caste groups without being tagged as a member of the group. This especially has scared many freeborn individuals away from joining the struggle. Campaigners like Dike have faced similar suspicion. Leo Igwe, for example, condemned the continuation of caste practices in Igboland in a newspaper article he published in 2008.³²⁰ Following this, a British blogger, Weate, posted this article to his blog and, as usual, called for the opinions of his readers. Weate had previously attended the traditional marriage ceremony of his friend at Oba³²¹ in 2006 – his first contact with the Igbo caste practice. The couple were members of this caste group.³²² However, on Igwe’s article, Weate noted on Naijablog,

At last an article on the *osu* – the outcasts or untouchables of Igboland. It is odd that this enduring caste system does not seem to have been challenged. You hardly ever read about it in local papers. Perhaps there are human rights groups in eastern Nigeria who are tackling it, but who never get any airplay... The linked article does not shed any light beyond make[ing] condemnatory noises.³²³

As an illustration, a respondent who read Igwe’s article on Naijablog mentioned that he was aware of an Owerri abolitionist like Igwe who was torn between allowing his child to continue an affair with an *osu* young man she had fallen in love with at university and practising a sermon he had preached for over a decade. However, as Weate implied, this respondent also went on to call Igwe’s article a mere “rant.” Perhaps, Weate and this respondent believe that rather than write articles in the media bashing *osu*, a more positive result could be achieved by

³²⁰ We mentioned Leo Igwe’s article in Chapter IV, 4.3.2. Igwe, is a human rights activist and has consistently campaigned against Igbo caste practices and written articles concerning it in the media. See his article, “The Osu Caste in Igboland,” *The Guardian*, Lagos, October 24, 2008, p. 9.

³²¹ Oba is a town close to Onitsha and Nnewi in Anambra State. It was formerly the headquarters of the Idemili-South local government area.

³²² Jeremy Weate, Private Discussion, May 2009. Weate currently lives in Nigeria where he works and runs a press that publishes literature books in Nigeria’s capital, Abuja.

³²³ The blog written on October 24, 2008 is available at <http://naijablog.blogspot.com/2008/10/on-osu.html> (Accessed October 2008).

campaigning against discrimination of the caste groups in the field and encouraging the freeborn groups to marry from the caste groups.³²⁴

Accordingly, this notion of talking too much and doing little or nothing concerning the caste practices is widespread across Igboland, and debates on this are interesting and popular within cyberspace because many people are aware of abolitionist groups who make statements in the media and act differently in their private lives. People even refer to clergymen who say one thing on the pulpit and go home to act otherwise by refusing their children's marriage to members of the caste groups. Almost everyone expects abolitionists and their cohorts to marry from the caste groups. That, it is believed, will give abolitionists the guts and authority to continue their quest for the total emancipation of the caste groups. In 2009, a BBC reporter, Andrew Walker, reported a story on his encounter with a man from the caste group at Enugu. One Ikenna Anokwute³²⁵ reacted promptly to an excerpt from Walker's report which noted that because the fear associated with the stigma is still intense, caste groups find it difficult to admit their status; and as a result freeborn groups continue to exhibit fear of associating with them.³²⁶ Thus, Anokwute noted on the UAD forum that:

This is exactly the core of the matter. If people whose families are so stigmatized had mobilized a strong civil right movement, the issue could have been dissolved. The silence has been too long and hurting. Igbos must confront it head-on. We all must admit that this culture has caused an irreparable damage to the psyche of Igbos. I was also brainwashed growing up in my village. I remember a grandmother lecturing me on the dangers of associating with THEM. As a ten-year old, I believed every word she told me. Back then, it was scary to see THEM pass my compound on their way to the market. We never say anything to THEM. And THEY'LL smile and pass... But as I grew older, got

³²⁴ Throughout this thesis – in previous chapters and in subsequent ones –, we have observed similar instances of criticisms against abolitionists who are pushed to marry wives or husbands from the caste groups rather than just talk.

³²⁵ As most of the respondents we discuss in this chapter, Anokwute lives in the US.

³²⁶ See Andrew Walker, "The Story of Nigeria's 'Untouchables', Enugu: BBC News, April 7, 2009 and available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7977734.stm> (Accessed April 2009).

EDUCATION, my views became liberal. And I have fought ever since to change this inhumane dogma. I wrote term papers on it in College, and over the years, have written dozens of essays and reports on the issue. If we have to end this horrible culture, or tradition, or heritage, it has to start from this generation. Not next.

Following this, Azuoma Anugom wrote a critical response to Anokwute's efforts,

your passion for the abolition of this evil practice in Igbo land is very commendable. We need folks like you who are liberal minded and willing to fight to wipe out this inhumane dogma from our culture. Anyway, your statements above fall short of meeting the required threshold for sincerity – I may be mistaken. Pardon me, I was expecting that after you have grown older, gotten education, wrote term papers on the issue of *osu* in college, condemned the practice; you'd have taken your fight to a logical and conclusive end (to show that you are really sincere and/or serious about ending this "apartheid") by MARRYING one of the *osus* – at least the ones in your town (Umuaka)... Well, now you have carefully or mistakenly maintained the status quo by marrying a fellow *diala*, I hope you will let your sons and daughters break down this man-made wall of separation? I understand that Umuaka folks are so traditional and there is open discrimination against a section of the town named after your local market. Well, take this war to Umuaka – start from there. We can only do so much on the internet. Go home and preach to your folks and if you can win at least 10 converts you have done your fair share and on your way to becoming the next Martin Luther King Jnr!

5.3 "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"

A usual offshoot of the critique against empty rhetoric is the notion that avoiding debates on the caste subject will make it become a thing of the past. The question of keeping mum resonates each time and everywhere the discourse comes up. As one elderly Adazi-Ani man recalled, the practice was rife in his area in the 1970s because of the manner of certain villagers who would unhesitatingly point to members of the caste groups in the area, and by referring to them as *ndi aha* – those people –, recount the histories of their forbears' initiation into the caste group.³²⁷ Adazi-Ani had abolished the practice during a local ceremony in 1964;³²⁸ even so, most villagers were still keen on knowing who was freeborn and who was not – especially when it came to the

³²⁷ Private Discussion, Adazi-Ani, 2007.

³²⁸ Refer to Chapter II, 2.4.2.

usual investigations carried out before marriage. They would willingly pass on the knowledge of an individual's caste status to strangers even without being asked. As a result of this attitude of 'asking' and 'telling', many suggestions have surfaced right from the colonial days to date, proposing that the best form of abolition is to keep quiet and not discourse anything about Igbo caste practices in the media or in any fora whatsoever. Furthermore, by shutting up, abolitionists particularly argue that the tradition will be disregarded, after all, a new generation of Igbos will emerge and there will be no 'old folk' to tell who is freeborn or who belongs to the caste groups. A huge chunk of the debate on the internet revolved around this notion. As a result of a newspaper article that was published on the internet and linked to Nairaland, for example, one Tochi wrote thus,

this tradition will only die when people forget about it. Each time we talk about it, it resurrects. Please, help Igbos bury their shame – stop writing things like these on newspapers and on the internet.³²⁹

While there is clearly some awareness amongst Igbos in Diaspora that the caste practices still persist, the dialogue between them has often also focused on the significance of this tradition in contemporary Igboland. In the UAD forum, for instance, Ezejiofo Udeh³³⁰ started off a lengthy debate on this issue by insisting that the practice has become a non-issue hence, it should not be discussed at all. According to Udeh, in 2009, a group of Igbo women in the US lobbied three NGOs to raise funds to fight against the discrimination of Igbo caste groups. Perhaps they suffered such discrimination themselves, faraway from Igboland but right in the US, because they had severally reported some cases of discrimination against them by the freeborn groups to an Igbo social organization also in the US. And, as a result of their complaints, Udeh wrote emphatically:

³²⁹ Nairaland Forum, 2008.

³³⁰ Ezejiofo Udeh is resident in the United States but, he an indigene of Egede Ugwunye in Udi LGA of Enugu State.

It [is] most unfortunate that we are dwelling on ancient history as we desecrate Igbo and its culture with a discussion of what is obviously not a problem. Yes, I mean what is not and should not constitute a problem in all reasonable ramifications except in the infantile imagination of those who are bent on wiping up emotion and sentiments to enable them raise money for a non-existing cause. The *osu* caste system belong to the past. Perhaps, those who have nothing better to offer are bent on regurgitating ancient misdeeds to sow seeds of discord amongst Igbos. I bet most of them do not know much about Igbo and our culture. That is why they want a discussion where none is required as they impose misdeeds such as 'untouchables', slaves, [and] caste on Igbos which never existed as clarified by Dr. Moe below. I will not dwell on a non-existing problem. *Osu* peddlers must leave Igbos alone. We do not need your preaching. If there are still pockets of areas in Igboland where anything similar is going on – just head over there with your Bible and Koran. Enough of this *osu* nonsense back and forth – *osu* is a non issue.

Meanwhile, Moe whom Udeh mentioned had also rebuffed the continuous mention of Igbo caste practices because according to him, the mention of such “derogatory terms” make the so-called caste groups steer clear of public discussions concerning the practice. However, Okenwa Nwosu – a prolific commentator on this issue – was at the forefront of this debate.³³¹ He rejects Udeh’s position on the insignificance of the problem, while insisting that the phenomenon is a “quintessential Igbo problem” and persistent in almost all aspects of Igbo life. Furthermore, the debate on this issue continued with another discussant – Simon Iberosi – who agrees with Udeh. But Iberosi’s argument dwelt on the fact that the practice had since been abolished, and given this present circumstance, the problem is of no consequence today and should be confined to history rather than being discussed within the media as a contemporary problem. According to him, prolific discussants like Nwosu, whom he completely disagrees with, make

³³¹ Okenwa Nwosu had written an article on Igbo caste practice in the 1980s. See his piece - “Controversy over OSU Caste System: Laws Can’t Terminate That Social Cancer,” *Sunday Times*, May 10, 1985, p. 9. Also see his rejoinder to Victor Dike’s electronic journal (“The ‘Caste System’ in Nigeria, Democratization and Culture: Socio-political and Civil Rights Implications,” published on June 13, 1999), “Osu Caste System: A Cultural Albatross for the Igbo Society,” published on June 19, 1999, and available at http://www.kwenu.com/igbo/igbowebpages/Igbo.dir/Culture/osu_caste_system_is_a_cultural.htm (Accessed February 2009).

the problem stick around because of the bold headlines they give to the subject. Alluding to the unhelpful manner of bringing up these issues for public discourse, he remarked:

A friend (in years gone by he could have been consigned in this group on the basis of his lineage) called me a while ago to complain about this topic, especially given the framing, tone, the pejorative images folks are crystallizing and above all the consciousness and currency it is giving to a rather moribund culture. And of course I sympathize with him... This is exactly why I asked one of my home boys to refrain from fighting a fight no one has invited him to. Folks are doing ok just as they are, in spite of the mental images you guys are forming in your heads!

Following Iberosi's position on the problem's irrelevance today, Nwosu replied:

My village has an ample number folks who are classified as *osu* and we all have lived as neighbours for generations. I grew into adulthood with nonstop intimate relationship with the *osu* phenomenon. You don't need to be told that the *osu* phenomenon is a very sentimental and emotive subject for a sizeable and vital segment of the Igbo society. Let me assure you that, contrary to your reasoned position on this discourse, the *osu* issue belongs at the centre stage of Igbo public discourse if any speedy, practical and permanent solution can ever be found. Denial of existence of a problem is hardly a solution to it.

The debates on this aspect of the problem were intense and long in most forums. In fact, after Nwosu gave several instances of the manifestation of caste practices in areas like Igbo-Ukwu, Owerri and Enugu in modern times, Iberosi reacted further, agreeing that the practice is still persistent. Yet, he noted that the continuous manifestation of the practice shouldn't justify the continuous discussion of the problem in the media or in public forums. His point notwithstanding, other participants in this forum continued to exchange constructive arguments regarding this issue. And, for some of them who argued along the same line as Iberosi, the internet traffic is meaningless chatter designed by Igbos to simply make the so-called caste groups uncomfortable. No media should host this discourse no matter what, they

insist. As one blogger on Igbo related issues mentioned on the UAD forum, this is not at all for the good of the general Igbo public,

Since this debate ensued most people who hitherto have operated and mixed with folks unencumbered have become unnecessarily self-conscious, and even recoiled from associations because of their discomfort in the knowledge that in this day and age someone could still have mental images of them as ‘untouchables’.

“You tell me, what has been achieved by introducing the discussion here only to be hijacked by hypocrites as catharsis for their bigotry?” this blogger asks satirically. Yet, this position may not entirely be accepted by those who insist the problem is contemporary and still discuss it. For them, as another contributor noted, Igbos cannot pretend not to know the persistence of this problem since every aspect of living in the region and outside is tied to tradition. How can Igbo women in faraway US be discriminated against because they belong to the caste groups? Most of them have not been to Igboland for over a decade and more, yet, they suffer discrimination as a result of the stigma. What then is the fate of those caste groups who live in Nigeria and in Igboland where the practice is rife and tied to almost every aspect of the people’s daily life? Hence, even if the practice is ignored and not discussed at all, when Igbos parley on marriages and chieftaincy, the problem will most certainly arise. This is why Chapter VII examines in great detail the embeddedness of this problem in contemporary Igbo society.

5.4 Cyberspace and the Message of Change

What is the significance of the internet discourse? Unlike the news media where journalists merely report incidences or do lengthy feature stories on caste practices, cyberspace is practically an emerging space for challenging the persistence of the caste practices on a broad scale. It is obvious from the dialogues in this chapter that most diasporic Igbos believe the stigmatization of caste groups is still strong and real. For example, Nneoma Ezeocha, an

indigene of Anambra State by descent, who was born in the US and had never been to Nigeria, told us that she feared interacting with members of the caste groups even as she claims to know very little about the practice. According to the twenty-four year old lady who regularly blogs her thoughts on issues such as this,

Even though I have never been to Nigeria, I do not want to have any form of relationship with the *osu* people. My parents often tell us about the problems associated with the stigma and I have grown up knowing that having a very close relationship with them alone could ruin you and your family for life.

Ezeocha continues,

As much as I pity them, I do not want to get involved. It's a stigma I can't bear to have. Not in this life.³³²

Therefore, it would seem as if these emerging cyberspace forums wholly dedicated to the discourse target younger adults, especially those in the Diaspora who have refused to embrace change in the face of prevailing development. One of such prominent forums is the stop-osu website which according to the webmaster, is "aimed at creating awareness through education and public discussion against silence to help put an end" to the practice.³³³ For over two years the website has encouraged virtual online discussions on Igbo caste practices as it hopes these discussions will "change the attitudes of Igbos in the Diaspora" to Igbo caste groups who by no fault of theirs have suffered from this discrimination.

Many other forums and blogs have come up with similar goals and they have continuously encouraged debates on this issue. Leo Igwe has regularly contributed to this discussing via his

³³² Most Igbos in the Diaspora think the same way as Ezeocha because they know that living abroad or far away from Igboland does not disconnect most Igbo families from their extended families and villages. These ties will be discussed squarely in the last Chapter, VII. Nneoma Ezeocha, Private Discussion, May 2009.

³³³ <http://www.stop-osu.com/>

blog.³³⁴ Other bloggers not only use news articles that condemn the practice to encourage debates on their blogs, they now post video films and short films that condemn this practice. And their primary goal as Igwe tells us, is “to take the struggle against the persistence of Igbo caste practices to even those in the Diaspora who may not have access to local newspapers and video films” but “have continued to discriminate” against the caste groups.³³⁵

5.5 Conclusion

From the dialogues examined above, we can clearly tell that the attitudes and reactions by Igbo in Diaspora to the discourse is not significantly different from those of their counterparts in Igboland, though most respondents in Diaspora frequently compare the Igbo caste practices with other similar practices in India and especially with the racial discrimination in the West. For instance, at many junctures throughout the three forums, it is common to find statements like Richy’s, made on Nairaland:

Any Igbo man or woman who believes or abides by or practices this form of discrimination tagged ‘osu’, but has ever complained about tribalism in Nigeria, or racism in the West, especially racism that is directed towards blacks (like him or her), should be summarily shot – execution style!

Also, one can easily spot conflicting statements from respondents in these forums who write as if they are all against the practice but go on at another point to give a different impression as Wansie who writes on Naijablog that “What particularly amuses me about this *osu* issue is how even the most educated and elitist of Igbo families still subscribe to the *osu* philosophy;” and goes on to note, at another point, that

I am a product of western education but I will not marry an *osu*. At a point in my life I thought I could brave it but learnt that the problem was much deeper than I thought.

³³⁴ See http://www.mukto-mona.com/Articles/Leo_Igwe/index.htm (Accessed May 2009).

³³⁵ Private Discussion, 2009.

Yet, while these forums host usual commentaries it is important to realize that respondents go as far as mentioning names of individuals who belong to the caste groups – a feat that may not be tolerated in the mainstream media. The mention of the names of highly placed individuals who are *osu* may be a strategy to stress the fact that the *osus* themselves can be successful. Nevertheless, most respondents in these forums do not mention names in this context. They just provide the information for others to be aware. The participants in these forums even mention the names of heroic personalities who engaged in freedom fighting, especially against discrimination. Names like Nelson Mandela, came up in several comments when respondents likened a freeborn's courage to marry an *osu* to freedom fighting. Anugom, for instance, noted above while advising another respondent to "Go home and preach to your folks [not to discriminate against *osu*] and if you can win at least 10 converts you have done your fair share and on your way to becoming the next Martin Luther King Jnr!" This means that a group of people out there think that marrying an *osu* is a heroic thing. Moreover, what is more significant is that respondents use these forums to share varying kinds of information and to bring the persistence of the problem to the notice of Igbos, especially those in Diaspora who may have thought the practice had totally disappeared. For example, after one Chinani attached a newspaper article on a recent abolition of the practice in Owerri in 2006 on the Nairaland forum, several comments that expressed shock at the persistence of the practice like "Does this practice still exist in this day and age," followed. In fact, some others who heard about the practice for the first time, followed with questions like "what's an *osu*?" and "How do I know if someone is an *osu*?" and other respondents were quick to give answers to all these questions.

Besides, it is not rare to find members of Igbo caste groups who come forth on these forums to ask questions about their status as one young lady who had lived in the US since childhood did

on Nairaland in 2007. According to her, she sought to know more about her people in Owerri but couldn't do so because she had never visited the area and her parents were unwilling to give her information on that. She only learnt from a cousin in the US that they belonged to the caste group and came on to the forum to learn what the practice was about, and Igbos in the forum exchanged ideas with her on this practice. People mainly attached online articles to her on the caste practices and most of them advised her to remain abroad and marry a non-Igbo since it is obvious the practice is persistent. In another similar case, an Igbo lady who had never visited Nigeria went on to the forum to ask if her surname – Nwosu – had any connection to being a caste. There and then, she got different responses from people who advised her based on their knowledge of the practice. While some said she was *osu*, others disagreed.³³⁶ After all the debates on her status, she posted the name of her village and her family name on the blog. Fortunately, a blogger whose mother comes from the same village and also claimed to be this lady's distant cousin confirmed she was freeborn and her surname had nothing to do with *osu*. This, amongst other reasons, is what makes the internet forums unique for these kinds of conversations. It brings people together to discuss a problem they will rarely talk about in public. And in this space, most people express their views on the *osu* practices bluntly without minding whose toe they step on, while others change their attitudes towards the *osu* – like when they feel pity for them.

However, contrary to what one may suspect, namely that Igbos in Diaspora, because of their daily intercourse with western cultures and values, will think, speak or act differently from their counterparts in Igboland to issues concerning this practice, many of them share the fear of

³³⁶ Refer to Chapter II, 2.4.3 for our discussions on these names with 'osu' in them.

the caste groups. This is comparable to the attitudes of very educated Igbos with longstanding Christian backgrounds who will still uphold the practice even when they agree it is pagan.

In sum, cyberspace forums have attracted the attention of the Igbo diasporic public to the persistence of this problem and they have greatly participated in the discourse in a way that is uncommon in the mainstream media. Moreover, while their debates have remained robust and contentious, most of the discussions are inspired by the zeal to change the negative attitudes to caste groups in and outside Nigeria. The next chapter however, will look at how Igbo caste practices are portrayed in video films. As will become apparent, such films are also becoming a popular channel of engaging Igbos in this discourse.

CHAPTER VI

DEPICTION OF IGBO CASTE PRACTICES IN NIGERIAN VIDEO FILMS

6.0 Introduction

In what is truly a remarkable cultural renaissance in Africa, Nigerian video films, which according to Haynes, “offer the strongest, most accessible expression of contemporary Nigerian popular culture,”³³⁷ and according to Ukah, “constitute a cultural and social revolution,”³³⁸ have come to dominate local media production in Nigeria. Since the early 1990s, the Nigerian film industry has made Nigeria a regional hegemony in the export of video films to other countries in Africa and to the rest of the world.³³⁹ The industry which was only recently ranked as the second largest in the world, following India’s Bollywood and before US’s Hollywood,³⁴⁰

³³⁷ Jonathan Haynes, “Introduction” in Jonathan Haynes, *Nigerian Video Films*, Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 2000, p. 4.

³³⁸ Asonzeh F. K. Ukah, “Advertising God: Nigerian Christian Video-Films and the Power of Consumer Culture,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2003, p. 203 (entire article 203-231).

³³⁹ Nigerian video films have certainly become Nigeria’s fastest growing cultural export and the films have become available to Nigerians and non-Nigerians around the world. The industry has also become a booming money-making business in many areas in Europe as is evident in London and Birmingham where small shops pile up these video films with advertisement posters glaring on their walls and showcases. In fact, a friend who is a student at the University of Glamorgan and had lived there for more than three years has been involved in the business of renting Nigerian home videos in the UK. And he confesses that even non-Nigerians, especially Ghanaians and other African nationals, and even some non Africans, rent these movies regularly. His profit is so much that he travels to Nigeria by himself almost quarterly to purchase video films. See in detail, Enyonam Osei-Hwere and Patrick Osei-Hwere, “Nollywood: A Multilevel Analysis of the International Flow of Nigerian Video Films,” A Paper submitted to the 2008 Conference of the International Communication Association, Montreal, Canada, May 22-26, 2008. Also see the BBC News article and forum, “Why are Nigerian movies popular?” 2005, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4524458.stm> (accessed May 2009).

³⁴⁰ The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2009, ranked Nigeria's growing film and video production industry tagged Nollywood as the world's second largest film producer. In a global cinema survey conducted by the global body's Institute of Statistics India maintained the first position, but Nigeria edged out the United States from the second position. It now ranks the U.S. number three after India and Nigeria. According to the survey, Bollywood produced 1,091 feature-length films in 2006 compared to 872 productions (in video format) from Nigeria’s film industry. In contrast, the US produced 485 major films. The UIS survey revealed that a key element of the Nigerian success story is the multilingual nature of its video films. About 56% of Nollywood films are produced in Nigeria’s local languages, namely Yoruba (31%), Hausa (24%) and Igbo (1%). English remains a prominent language, accounting for 44%, which may contribute to Nigeria’s success in exporting its films. See UNESCO Institute for Statistics press release May 5, 2009, available at http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=7650_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC (Accessed May 2009).

has gained a major cultural presence within contemporary Nigeria and in the African Diaspora. All over Africa, Europe and the Americas, Nigerian video films have gained prominence and are highly sought after.³⁴¹ In Africa for instance, these films are constantly screened in villages and urban centres, public meeting spheres, buses, offices and even on television networks across the world where they have continually formed staple programmes.³⁴² In all these areas, the merits and demerits of video films and issues like the Igbo caste practices inform public discussions and debates in formal and informal avenues. A respondent,³⁴³ for instance, who took part in our video film survey, recounted:

³⁴¹ In Nigeria, evidence of the huge acceptance and unprecedented patronage of these video films which cuts across social classes, abounds everywhere, as video rental and sales outfits, - occasionally operating in mere shacks, and at times illegally, even with the presence of the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB), the regulator of the film and video industry in Nigeria, - are literally scattered around towns and cities in highbrow areas and low income neighbourhoods. In Abuja for instance, gatemen of 'big men' often use their gatehouses as video rental outfits. Most of them do this illegally and they are often embarrassed by officers of the NFVCB. However, they have adapted to the new situation on ground, so instead of publicly displaying their wares, they expose their 'now open' signs on carton cards for customers to know they still operate. This is still lucrative for them because they have built a huge customer base over several years they have functioned without disturbance from the NFVCB. Nevertheless, spies within the area have made business difficult for them these days.

³⁴² Television channels, especially the Nigerian Television Authority network, African Independent Television, and Minaj Broadcasting International amongst others, show these home videos almost daily on their broad-programmed channels. As a matter of fact, 2008 was exceptional for the Nigerian broadcast media because no less than six indigenous Nigerian television stations that beam these video films as a programming staple, had penetrated the European TV market; broadcasting in the United Kingdom and across Europe. AIT and NTA launched their international stations in 2008, hence they broadcast in the UK as AIT International and NTA International, respectively. Both channels show Nigerian films almost on a daily basis. Another station, HITV, which has got HI-Nolly, a station wholly dedicated to showing films from Nollywood, broadcast in the UK as well, and on a daily basis as well, churn out Nigerian movies. OHTV, which seem to be a religious station, show Nigerian films and soap operas regularly at least daily. Black Entertainment Network (BEN) and Original Black Entertainment (OBE), old-timers in the UK media show Nigerian programmes and movies daily. However, the ownership of OBE is Ghanaian. Other major indigenous Nigerian channels that launched in 2008 are Nigeria Movies, AIT Movistar and Nollywood. Most of these channels especially Nigeria Movies, AIT Movistar and Nollywood, are solely dedicated to showing films from Nigeria's video film industry and in one day up to five films usually in two parts are shown on these stations.

³⁴³ Note, we will call respondents who were assured of anonymity by first names only.

I watched *Soul of a Maiden* and *World of Tears* in the presence of many visitors at my sister's video rental shop who watched both films to the end. We all talked about the *osu* caste system and all its controversies. It was a very lengthy issue that even caused some serious debates among us.³⁴⁴

Video films are one of the preferred channels for education and entertainment in Nigeria and over the years, the films have come to be closely associated with the culture of the people, and with the popularity of such genres amongst Igbo especially, it is perhaps pertinent to look at the effect it may have on Igbo caste practices by way of its coverage and representation of the practice. Especially because, at the beginning of the video film boom in the early 1990s, the problems of Igbo caste practices took a position of prominence in some of the films that defined that era. Lately more producers have continued to make films on this issue, signalling the importance and contemporary nature of the problem. What then, one may ask, are the contents of these video films with regard to Igbo caste practices, and from what angles do they reflect contemporary Igbo society? How have the "midwives of popular culture,"³⁴⁵ as Owens-Ibie refers to the filmmakers, shaped their messages in order to stimulate public discourse and affect attitudes towards the practice? What aspects of these messages do filmmakers need to emphasize to positively influence change? Selected Nigerian films on Igbo caste practices have been analysed following the above questions. The general view of this chapter is that video films, just like newspapers, have continuously contributed to shaping ideas about and expanding knowledge of the caste system and the potential of reaching a larger audience, especially younger adults, and changing their attitudes through video films may be more rewarding because of the popularity and accessibility of the medium. The effectiveness of the medium to carry persuasive messages and win sympathy for Igbo caste groups is

³⁴⁴ Amaka, Video Film Questionnaire, March 10, 2009.

³⁴⁵ See Nosa Owens-Ibie, "How Video Films Developed in Nigeria," *The Guardian*, March 24, 2004 and available at <http://www.waccglobal.org/lang-de/publications/media-development/84-1998-1/902-How-video-films-developed-in-Nigeria-.html> (accessed January 29, 2009).

overwhelming as filmmakers bring the issue to the limelight. Therefore, this chapter will establish that video films continuously make attempts to bring the *osu* discourse to the public eye. As Tchidi Chikere, a filmmaker whose work we examine below, told us:

As a filmmaker it is my duty to take this issue to society. I brought it up for my audience and the world to see and make their judgements. In as much as I am sympathetic to the *osu* people, I can't make decisions for the public. After society sees this film, they can now decide if they want to continue perpetuating the injustices against this people. *Soul of a Maiden* is thought provoking; it was made to provoke the interest of my audience.³⁴⁶

Also, we examine the way filmmakers bring this issue to the public interest. And to demonstrate this, we will depend on our video film collection, observations, interviews, FGDs and e-questionnaires.

6.1 The Emergence of Nigerian Video Films

The early explosion of video films in Nigeria in the 1990s is usually attributed to the upsurge and availability of cheap and easy technology as Ukah,³⁴⁷ Adejunmobi,³⁴⁸ Adesanya³⁴⁹ and many others have argued. Before the 1990s videocassette recorders (VCR) had become rampant in the US and Europe in the early 1970s and they started infiltrating Nigerian shores. But feature film production was already in vogue before the VCR became popular in Nigeria. According to Ukah, the use of VCR became widespread in Nigeria because of the increase of salaries of staff in the Nigerian Civil Service which was as a result of the oil boom the country enjoyed in the

³⁴⁶ Tchidi Chikere is a well known filmmaker in Nigeria and he directed one of the Igbo caste video films we examine in this chapter – *Soul of a Maiden*. Private Discussion, May 2009.

³⁴⁷ Ukah, "Advertising God," p. 207.

³⁴⁸ Moradewun Adejunmobi, "English and the Audience of an African Popular Culture: The Case of Nigerian Video Film," *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 50, 2002, p. 76 (entire article 74-103).

³⁴⁹ Afolabi Adesanya, "From Film to Video" in Jonathan Haynes, *Nigerian Video Films*, Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 2000, p. 43.

1970s. As Uka suggests, the review of worker salaries by the Udoji Commission,³⁵⁰ propelled the taste of Nigerians to look out for high-tech goods because they now had the capacity to import these products. So filmmakers started making video films in large numbers and they had an audience with the capacity to purchase these films. It only required a small budget, a video camera, a VCR and a television to produce a film.³⁵¹

Nevertheless, the inaugurating production of *Living in Bondage*, an enormously popular Igbo film widely believed to have kicked off a new era, moved most producers towards making films concerning Igbo tradition – often at that time, in Igbo language. For instance, after Kenneth Nnebue – who had been involved in Yoruba film production before the 1990s – had produced *Living in Bondage* in 1992, other filmmakers went on to produce blockbusters like *Circle of Doom*, *Rattle Snake*, *Adamma* and many others in Igbo language. Expectedly, the successes of these movies made the producers realize the potential of films in other languages. Once they realized how large their audiences could grow, they began to shift to making films in English language to attract a larger audience, but most of their productions remained rich in cultural content. Nnebue's subsequent productions like *Rituals* and *True Confessions* followed the new trend and were produced in the English language.

Today, the industry has grown to rival the biggest industries in the world in terms of annual production. From the mid-1990s over 500 films were produced annually, but today more than 1,000 films are released annually in cassettes and video compact disc format.³⁵² The business certainly has boomed internationally making most of the filmmakers and artists prominent

³⁵⁰ Udoji Commission, 1972-1974, was a public service review commission set up by the government of General Yakubu Gowon to carry out a comprehensive review of the entire public service of the federation. Amongst the changes the commission caused in government was the rise in workers' salaries.

³⁵¹ Uka, "Advertising God," p. 209.

³⁵² Jonathan Haynes, "Political Critique in Nigeria Video Films," *African Affairs*, Vol. 105, No. 421, October 2006, p. 511 (entire article 511-533).

faces and stars in the entertainment business. Many actors like Ramsey Nouah, Genevieve Nnaji and Julius Agwu have endorsed popular brands for advertisements within Africa. Actors like Richard Mofe-Damijo and Hilda Dokubo, both pioneers in film production, have even been appointed to political positions in their states.³⁵³ Distinguished old-timers like Pete Edochie and Justus Esiri have gone to win prestigious national awards in Nigeria, awarded by the president and commander-in-chief. All in all, many of these film-made stars have become authorities that people listen to or pay attention to. In other words, the industry has grown many mentors and it continues to expand even though it attracts criticisms for its lack of artistic content and negative portrayal of Nigerian culture.³⁵⁴

Interestingly, however, most indigenous video films combine modern and traditional points of views, and as Haynes argues, they “are full of examples of modern and traditional elements wrapping around one another until they become a contradictory whole.”³⁵⁵ Nigerian video films have become viable mediums for carrying powerful messages and for the transmission of cultural values to most sections of the society. For instance, Owens-Ibie agrees with Arulogun that films are tools governments engage in practicing subtle diplomacy. According to him, films help “shape perspectives on a people’s culture” and, “The impressions which viewers develop about a people and their cultural values are greatly influenced by film portrayals.”³⁵⁶ He also

³⁵³ Richard Mofe-Damijo has been the commissioner for culture and tourism in Delta State since 2007 and his colleague Hilda Dokubo held a similar position in Rivers State where she was the special adviser to the governor.

³⁵⁴ The industry has more often than not been criticized for the speed at which films are realised. At least one film is released per day and this hurry has been blamed for the poor quality of the content of these ‘microwave’ videos as Katrina Manson of Reuters calls it, indicating the amount of hurry evident in the industry. See her article, “Africa Must Learn from Nigeria’s ‘Microwave’ Movies,” available at http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20090306/film_nm/us_africa_film_nollywood (accessed on March 8, 2009). Also see Eno Akpabio’s article, “Attitude of Audience Members to Nollywood Films,” *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 90-92 (entire article pp. 90-100).

³⁵⁵ Haynes, “Introduction,” p. 32.

³⁵⁶ Owens-Ibie, “How Video Films Developed in Nigeria.”

argues that films are educational; hence, they complete the teachings of a country's origin and culture which is not usually available in school curricular. These arguments underscore the relevance of video films in building and transforming a people's way of life.

Moreover, the themes of Nigerian video films have revolved around pertinent social, political, economical and religious issues, touching on witchcraft, sex and prostitution, infidelity or childlessness, fraud, violence, struggles between good and evil, intrigue, sibling rivalry, inheritance, prosperity teachings or a theology of abundance as in most religious films, as well as many other subjects intended to entertain and excite, spread spiritual ideas and religious messages, and change attitudes and beliefs of the audience. We must note that most indigenous video films are usually targeted at tackling a problem of society and the moral lessons to be learnt from each film are clearly depicted at the end. Normally, the film ends well for the good and otherwise for the bad, hence, good characters are rewarded while bad ones are punished accordingly.

6.2 Critique of Igbo Caste Video Films

Perhaps because many filmmakers had realized that it was profitable to make films on Igbo culture, the depiction of certain traditions of the people started surfacing in the thematic and formal characteristics of new video films. After *Living in Bondage* and *Circle of Doom*, another Igbo blockbuster, *Taboo*, the first full film with themes entirely built on the *osu* caste system, was produced in Igbo language.³⁵⁷ Like *Living in Bondage* and *Circle of Doom*, *Taboo* was a hit. It tells the story of two lovebirds – Obi, a poor *osu* young man who is in love with Ijeoma, the Igwe's daughter who of course is a freeborn. Obi becomes a target of Ijeoma's father when the news of

³⁵⁷ See *Taboo*, Director: Vic Mordi, Producers: Tony White Meribe and Daniel Oluigbo. Igbo, Sage Production Inc. 1994.

their love affair is exposed. The Igwe attempts to take Obi's life to stop Obi from marrying his daughter, but he fails and is exposed for the evil he tried to commit.³⁵⁸ After *Taboo*, more films followed with similar themes; and most of the problems associated with the *osu* in these video films usually centre on marriage which we have highlighted from the beginning of this thesis as the major prejudice against the caste groups. For instance, Amaka Igwe's 1994 television drama series, *Checkmate*, which was well-known in the mid-1990s, briefly dealt with the *osu* caste system and other themes such as sexual harassment in universities. In *Checkmate*, Nduka who is the only child of his parents and is in love with Ada is barred from marrying her when his parents discover she is of the *osu* lineage. They bring another girl, a local one, Nkemji, from the village and force her on their only child. Nduka is unyielding; after all, Nkemji rarely speaks good English. He however accepts her after some time when she becomes pregnant with his child as a result of a drunken mistake. Nonetheless, only few episodes of *Checkmate* touched the *osu* issue as more of it covered the business empire of the Haatropes family. Another film with a similar theme that also combined the discrimination against the *osu* in matters of chieftaincy is *Never Ever*. In this film, Pete Edochie who plays the Onowu's³⁵⁹ role in the Igwe's cabinet is opposed to his son's marriage to an *osu* young lady. The Onowu of course, rejects such 'ungodly' arrangements because they are capable of resulting in his expulsion from the cabinet and stigmatization within his community.³⁶⁰ He is involved in several attempts to kill the lady. When she finally dies, his son, Mario, runs after him to avenge his lover's death. This leads to the death of his mother who protects her husband from Mario's bullet.³⁶¹ Themes like these

³⁵⁸ We initially discussed *Taboo* in Chapter II, 2.5.2.

³⁵⁹ The Onowu is a prominent position in some parts of Igboland. He is the traditional prime minister of the village and is the next in line after the Igwe. He is often made Igwe at the demise of the Igwe.

³⁶⁰ Pete Edochie, Interview, Enugu, August 21, 2007.

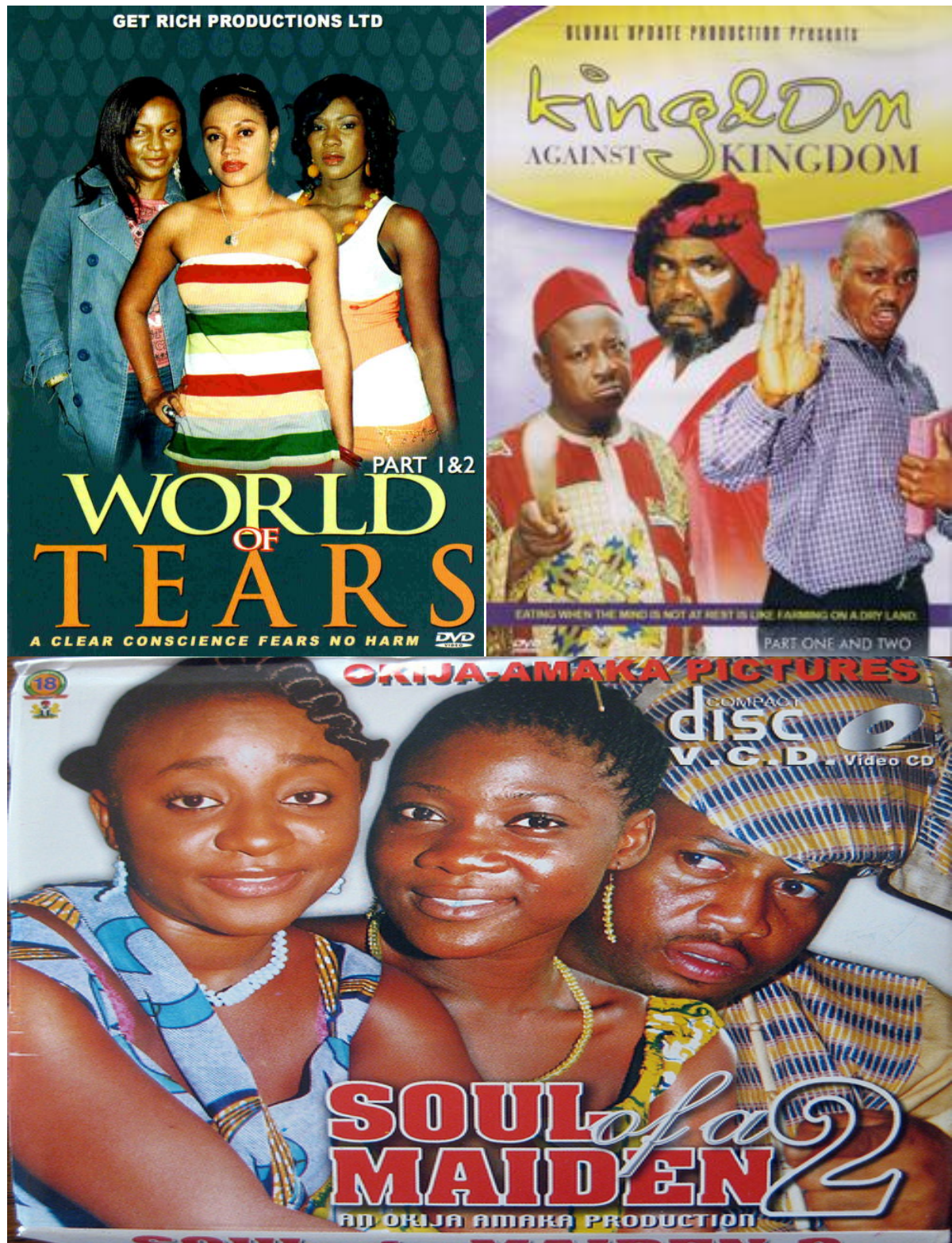
³⁶¹ See *Never Ever*, Director: Ndubuisi Oko, Producer: Amos Onwe. English, I. G. Best Movie Industry Limited and E. Onwe Movie Industry Limited. 1998.

characterize most of the video films that deal with the *osu* practice. They generally dwell on the problems of freeborn-*osu* association which may be in form of romance, chieftaincy or mere intermingling as we will observe in the films – *Royal Palace*, *World of Tears*, *Soul of a Maiden* and *Kingdom against Kingdom* – we examine below (see figs. 6.1-6.3 below for the jacket cover photographs of some of these video films).

6.2.1 Royal Palace

Andy Amenechi's three-part *Royal Palace* explicitly addresses Igbo caste issues, especially the *osu*. It is the story of an unhappy Igwe; obviously wealthy with huge estates, numerous wives, more than a dozen children and countless servants. Igwe, played by Olu Jacobs, assembles his household and boasts of his wealth. But with all his affluence, he tells his family, he has not found joy. His wives query his sadness. One by one, his children follow. After their mumblings, Igwe decrees there and then that he is going to divide his wealth in two with any member of his family that is going to win his heart. He continues, that if such a person happens to be a male child, he will be crowned 'Eze Anochie' - the successor to his throne. All family members, especially his wives and sons become agitated and interested in his wealth. Lolo, Igwe's first wife, advises her son, Samson, against losing his birthright and admonishes his siblings who are also interested in the prize to work towards the success of their elder brother who is the oldest amongst Igwe's known sons. Samson brags that he is up to the task.

Figures 6.1-6.3. Jacket Covers of Some Igbo Caste Video Films¹



¹ Fig. 6.1: *World of Tears I & II* (2008), Director: Ikechukwu Onyeka, Producer: Chinedu Nwani. English, Get Rich Productions Limited; Fig. 6.2: *Kingdom against Kingdom I & II* (2008), Director: Ugo Ugbor, Producer: Kenneth Okonkwo and Ugo Ugbor. English, Global Pictures Update; Fig. 6.3: *Soul of a Maiden II* (2008), Director: Tchidi Chikere, Producer: Obi Madubogwu. English, Ojika Amaka Industries Limited.

Like Lolo, the other wives, especially the second, advise their sons against being weak and letting the prize slip away from their hands. And like Samson, the sons boast that they know how to win Igwe's heart. Then the competition starts. Most of the sons misunderstand Igwe's need and start providing him with unnecessary luxuries. For instance, Samson buys and displays three exotic cars for his father, who disappointedly walks out on him and his gifts. Obinna, another son, furnishes a gym in the palace for Igwe. Igwe again walks out on him, insisting that the gym will give him agony not happiness. Two other sons follow. One of them provides various delicacies and drinks to win Igwe's heart. The other son even brings together seven female sluts to please Igwe. Igwe is shocked and disgruntled in return.

Meanwhile, Chimobi, a poor young man who hangs around in the palace and lives with his mother is told about the Igwe's prize. Emeka, the only one who seemed good amongst Igwe's sons had told him of Igwe's promise even though Emeka had no interest in competing. Emeka and his mother are close to Chimobi and his mother, Olanma. In fact, they regularly buy them gifts because they live in the poorest apartment within the palace. As it seems, Igwe is worried and confused about the irresponsibility of his sons. Night after night, he sits at the garden wondering what each of them has turned into. One of these nights, as he ponders, he overhears music – a song his father once sang to him – coming from the backyard and he peeps to see who is singing. In the morning, he sends his guards to go get Chimobi. The song came from Chimobi and his instrument. Igwe asks Chimobi to sing for him. He is happy with the music and then he asks Chimobi what he is doing in the palace. Chimobi tells him he lives with his mother, Olanma. Igwe shockingly calls Chimobi his son whom he had not seen for twenty-eight years. Both of them are shocked. But Chimobi is dumbfounded because he cannot explain the episode.

He goes back to his mother who had initially told him the Igwe was his uncle. There and then, Olanma recounts her ordeal.

In a flashback, the story goes back to the past, nearly thirty years before the present time. It begins with several elders accusing a man called Udoji of mingling with the *osu* group. Udoji had attended the burial ceremony of an *osu*. He was also present at a marriage ceremony between *osus*. The elders insist Udoji must be banished for such sacrilegious offences. They physically drag Udoji and his family together with their belongings to the Igwe's palace - the same Igwe, only this time younger. Igwe asks what Udoji has done, and the elders start enumerating his sins. They accuse him of eating with the *osu* and mixing up with them. Igwe asks his servant to get kola nuts. He blesses the kola and asks the elders who dragged Udoji to eat from the kola as a form of swearing that none of them have associated with an *osu* at any time. He assures them that if none of them dies, he will banish Udoji and his household. None of the men attempts to touch the kola signalling guilt. "Those who point accusing fingers are as guilty as the accused," Igwe pronounces and abolishes the *osu* tradition, there and then. He frees Udoji and his family and asks the elders to leave his mansion.

Pleased with Igwe's judgement, Udoji and his family - his wife and daughter, Olanma, return to the palace the following day with a goat and kola nuts to thank Igwe. Udoji's wife even offers her daughter, Olanma, to Igwe to become his servant for two years without remunerations. Igwe reluctantly accepts Olanma. He falls in love with her and sneaks into her bedroom one night to sleep with his servant. Because of the shame, the following day, he gives her a carton filled with money and gifts and asks her to return to her parents. Her father is worried about her sudden return and goes to Igwe's palace to confirm Olanma has not committed any crime. After three months, Olanma is discovered to be pregnant. Her parents are angry. As is normal

in most African settings, they beat her, and then demand to know who is responsible. She confesses her brief affair with Igwe and Udoji decides to take Olanma to the palace. Igwe gets mad on seeing them the following day but his adviser, Ochiri, advises him to marry Olanma so as to avoid shame. By this time Igwe has no son. He reasons with Ochiri that Olanma is probably carrying the male child he deserves. Six months after, Olanma is delivered of a son, Chimobi. Thirty minutes after, Lolo too is delivered of a son, Samson. As one expects, Lolo is jealous of Olanma's position of bearing the first son. She reports her to Igwe for having an affair with one of her servants. She has seen them together on several occasions and has wrong suspicions. The visibly angry Igwe confines Olanma to her apartment and vows never again to have any form of relationship with Olanma and Chimobi. She is banned too from taking part in palace activities. Hence, they become outcasts within the palace.

The following morning after Olanma's narration, Igwe visits them for the first time in twenty-eight years. There, he revokes his vows and pronounces Olanma and Chimobi his wife and son. He gathers his household where he announces Chimobi as his 'Eze Anochie.' Also, to the envy of all the other wives and children, except Emeka and his mother, he gives Chimobi half of his wealth as he promised. The first two wives make several attempts to change Igwe's decision to no avail. They physically attack Olanma and Chimobi and make several attempts to kill them. In fact, half of the three-part film is full with plots to embarrass and assassinate Olanma and Chimobi. Chimobi's brothers sell him to another village in the closing scene. But he soon gains freedom and is united again with his family. His brothers are punished and arrested for their involvement in his disappearance.³⁶²

³⁶² See the film, *Royal Palace, I, II, III*, Director: Andy Amenechi, Producer: Valentine Nwabulu. English, Valseco Industries Limited. 2005.

6.2.2 World of Tears

World of Tears begins with Chiadinkondu, a prince who returns from the US with girlfriend Edna, to face stiff opposition to their proposed union. The arrival of this duo marks the beginning of a series of painful trials until at last their dream dies. Chiadinkondu is the crown prince of Amangwu kingdom and the only child of his parents. The prince, who exhibits all the outward signs of love and westernization, introduces Edna to his mother as his fiancée. She frowns. Rather than encourage him, she insists he waits for the king's approval to take such a bold step. Chiadinkondu concurs. But the king is just recovering from a stroke he suffered while his son was abroad. Edna is polite and beautiful, but her good virtues alone do not convince the queen. Both lovers roam about Amangwu, romancing, hugging and kissing in public eye, even before local elders. Their love is no secret. His parents become aware of this and warn against it. This now spurs them to investigate Edna's background. They send spies to Edna's Ezeukwu village - only few miles away from Amangwu. The investigation reveals Edna is *osu*, but Chiadinkondu's parents do not disclose this to him.

When such investigations are carried out in Igboland, the outcome is hardly ever communicated to the individuals involved. They are simply (and literally) told that the road is not clear. So the couple are left in the dark. However, Edna decides to visit her village and hopes to be accompanied by her partner, but his parents refuse. They advise a driver to take Edna to Ezeukwu and return without her. Already lonely, Chiadinkondu learns of this from the driver and then confronts his parents who now advise him to begin living his life without Edna. As is expected, the prince rejects every move to seize joy from his heart, especially for a tradition he calls archaic. But the frail king disagrees. Unrelentingly, he advises Chiadinkondu that civilization cannot erase tradition and that an *osu* will never be admitted to his kingdom.

However, Chiadinkondu persists. He approaches his father, who is unbending on the issue and literally recites his experiences with Edna abroad. He continuously talks about their love, but the grim father insists he will find love again. He is restricted from going out to see Edna. This act earns the parents the ire of their son who now aggressively talks to them. At one point he is confined to his room. Edna manages to force herself into the king's compound but is physically dragged out by the servants. Frustrated by these new experiences, Edna complains to her aunty. She barely understands the genesis of her dilemma; after all, she had lived abroad for the best part of her life. But her aunty, who displays calm and helplessness, is quick to call her to order. She explains the *osu* system to her after disclosing that their family is of the caste lineage, and she warns that it is forbidden to mingle with any freeborn, talk more of doing so with the heir apparent of a prominent kingdom such as Amangwu. Edna rejects her place in the tradition like every child does, while preaching civilization and education. But her aunty is able to convince her that a fight will only expose her burden; it is a tradition no one dares to stop, she maintains.

Meanwhile, Chiadinkondu escapes very tight security in his father's mansion to see Edna because she had stopped taking his calls. And, for Edna who had only boasted a day before that she would rather die than quit, love is not enough to make the relationship work. She quits and asks Chiadinkondu to move on. By this time, Igwe who is preparing Chiadinkondu to succeed him, sends messages through his chiefs to all great men and women of Amangwu to assemble their daughters for the prince to select a 'real' wife. The young man is surprised at his father's old-fashioned act. He leaves Amangwu secretly for the city, where he hopes to begin life afresh. The story continues with many other enduring intrigues, but at the end Igwe dies as a result of

his son's disappearance. And, Chiadinkonu who is now repentant finds love again and marries a freeborn.³⁶³

6.2.3 Soul of a Maiden

The gist of *Soul of a Maiden* hovers around Olanma, a poor girl who is kind and naive. She is, like her two-faced friends, a beautiful maiden, who faces difficulty in mingling with her fellow maidens because she is *osu*. In this situation, she finds solace in helping her old mother on her farm and discussing the injustices meted out to them consequentially by the positions of their forbears. Olanma unsurprisingly starts probing, and her mother narrates their past – a narration that is similar to the oral tradition of some Igbo villages like *Efuru's Ukehe*.³⁶⁴ According to her, they were originally from Umuawka, a village known for their hunting skills. Umuawka made traps to catch wild animals in the bush and a cow that belonged to the *Apata* deity in Afanasa lost its way and fell into this trap. Knowing very well that this animal belonged to the deity of a neighbouring village, the people slaughtered the cow and ate the meat instead of looking for the owners. A few months later the wrath of *Apata* fell on Umuawka and people died in large numbers. The oracle then demanded a virgin in replacement for the dead cow. This virgin was never to be married, she was now a taboo. But men could sneak into her shrine hut at nights to make her pregnant, that way she became mother of more than a dozen children and her descendants grew in large numbers in Afanasa.

This narration interestingly defines the film because Olanma, who is amazed at the part of history where Afanasa men defiled an innocent virgin, vows to keep her virginity until she dies.

³⁶³ See, *World of Tears I & II*, Director: Ikechukwu Onyeka, Producer: Chinedu Nwani. English, Get Rich Productions Limited. 2008.

³⁶⁴ This similarity is in the instance of virgins being used as objects of sacrifice and defiled by hungry village men as was the case of *Efuru*. We discussed the *Efuru* deity in Chapter III, 3.1. Simon Ottenberg gives a similar narration like this of the *osu* origin in the Afikpo area. See Chapter I, 1.3.

Meanwhile, the Igwe of Afanasa calls for a maiden dance for his only son, Obieze, who must, against his will, select a wife in a few weeks as their culture demands. But, Olanma cannot attend because she is an *osu*. Her friends even ridicule her when she attempts to join them to prepare for the rare event. Her laidback mum advises her against participating and attracting the ire of *Apata* to their side. While the maidens dance, Obieze picks Morea, Olanma's deceitful friend, who pretends to be a virgin. Obieze soon finds out when he tries to sleep with her and she is banished from the palace. However, Obieze's heart is with Olanma, because she had given him water from her bucket at the stream where he pretended to be an old haggard man, and where other maidens, including Morea, scorned him and refused to quench his thirst. Obieze tells his father of his heartthrob, and Igwe encourages him to go and find her. He meets Olanma, who barely knows him, at her mother's farm. They cultivate the land together and tell tales of their lives until Olanma's mother appears and bows before Obieze; then Olanma realizes he is Afanasa's prince. Unlike the other maidens who fall at the prince's feet, she plays hard-to-get for Obieze. But he woos her patiently and finally introduces her to his father who blesses them without knowing her background.³⁶⁵

Igwe is furious. A cabinet chief just disclosed Olanma's status. He chases her away from his palace and threatens to sacrifice her to the deity if she is found near Obieze. Emotionally laden Obieze is persistent, but his father sends guards to beat and physically harass Olanma's family. Igwe sends Obieze to a neighbouring village to represent him at a ceremony while he perfects his plans to get rid of Olanma. Meanwhile, Olanma's friends who were nasty to her pretend to love her. They surprisingly appear at her house one morning and ask her to join them to play in

³⁶⁵ In Igboland normally, a man does not bless any union involving his child until he investigates to confirm such partner is not *osu* or *ohu*, depending on the area. But then, Igwe does this because he imagined Obieze's servants would have told him of Olanma's status if it was bad, but before the blessing, Obieze made his servants swear never to tell the old man.

the bush. There, she is kidnapped by Igwe's servant and taken to another village as sacrifice to their deity. Providentially, Olanma is rejected by this deity, because according to the chief priest, she has royal blessings – the same blessing Igwe initially bestowed on her as his daughter-in-law. In the interim, Olanma's family are experiencing difficulties because of her association with Obieze. Igwe's guards beat up her mother, who had accused them of selling Olanma to slavery, until she collapses and dies. Obieze returns from Igwe's errand and discovers these incidents. He mourns Olanma and visits her home. On his way back home, he meets Olanma in the bush and she confesses Igwe's involvement in her agony. The angry prince vows before his father, to reject his position as heir to Afanasa's throne unless those who took part in frustrating Olanma are banished and the *osu* group too, are declared free. Even though the film ends with the duo not tying the knot - because Olanma could not imagine marriage to Obieze, whose father killed her mother, Igwe succumbs to this pressure and abolishes the agelong tradition.³⁶⁶

6.2.4 Kingdom against Kingdom

Kingdom against Kingdom is an exposé of the recurrent woes of the *ohu* groups in Enugu, where struggles over land and status have continually caused conflicts since the 1920s.³⁶⁷ Unlike the films mentioned above, *Kingdom against Kingdom* disconnects from the usual motifs of love and royalty associated with Igbo caste films. In the film, two rival villages, Enuala and Umuawka, who are members of the same village group – Umueji, are at war with each other because of certain rights denied to the servile Enuala for decades.³⁶⁸ Aku, played by Francis Duru, is the

³⁶⁶ See, *Soul of a Maiden I & II*, Director: Tchidi Chikere, Producer: Obi Madubogwu. English, Ojika Amaka Industries Limited. 2008.

³⁶⁷ Refer to Chapter II, 2.2.1

³⁶⁸ The history of their servile status which is similar to that of the *ohu* in the Nkanu areas and other parts of Igboland was recounted in the film. Enuala, as the film suggests, killed the pregnant wife of the then

protagonist who loses his brother, Ikem, to death. They are slaves; outcasts who must live on the fringes of society. Each passing day they bury their people killed by the Umueji freeborns as often as they liked and scorned whenever they cross paths. Even at the stream, the slaves are barred from fetching water in the presence of a freeborn. Aku is hurt by these occurrences and is pushed to fight against it, but for his old parents who cannot stomach the thought of losing their remaining child. Enuala elders report their sufferings to the Igwe who rules both villages, but for the dissenting voices in his cabinet – championed by Mazi Ukadike (Pete Edochie), the issue is dropped each time it comes up. However, Igwe seems determined to bring these differences to an end. He calls his cabinet to discuss the issue and with all the rancour and disagreements from anti-abolitionists, he boldly and independently abolishes the practice and fixes a date for ritual cleansing. Ukadike strongly opposed this move.

Ukadike visits the palace one evening where he sees Enuala elders. He insists before Igwe, “I do not wish to sit with slaves,”³⁶⁹ and walks out. He even attacks Enuala people and threatens them with guns, but Igwe intervenes. Meanwhile, with all the abolition and cleansing Enuala continues to suffer discrimination. In fact, an *ohu* woman is insulted and embarrassed by a young girl in public when she tries to buy garri from her. The abolition did not yield quick results. Nevertheless, the war thickens when Igwe and his cabinet seize a plot of land from Ukadike and return it to Enuala people, who previously lost the land because of their servile status. Ukadike, who insists Igwe abused his powers, is furious.³⁷⁰ He takes the fight to the

Igwe several years ago. Consequently, both communities – Enuala and Umuawka, went to war. They beat Enuala people, captured them and made them slaves.

³⁶⁹ See *Kingdom against Kingdom I & II*, Director: Ugo Ugbor, Producer: Kenneth Okonkwo and Ugo Ugbor. English, Global Pictures Update. 2008.

³⁷⁰ We must understand here, that one major problem that has led to usual fracas between the freeborn and *ohu* groups in the Nkanu area has been that of land. And this has continued for nearly a century after the colonial administration in Enugu tried to quell the problem by relocating the caste groups. Again, refer to Chapter II, 2.2.1.

huge piece of land where he meets and kills Nnanna, Aku's old father and the lead crusader for the emancipation of Enuala people.

Aku is bitter. He runs to the shrine of the local deity, Okaka Umueji, and complains. He asks Okaka to find his father's killer. The Okaka deity sends messengers to summon Ukadike who stubbornly refuses to bend. Okaka patiently sends emissaries, including Ukadike's wife and his local confidant – Nwabueze, to convince him to appear before it. Ukadike persistently refuses. Meanwhile, Aku again cries to the deity, this time by his father's grave. He calls on Okaka to first make his father's killer mad, but he doesn't complete his statement. Left with no other option, Okaka's chief priest, Ezenmuo, after several incantations, asks Okaka to take judgement to Ukadike. Immediately, Ukadike becomes mad. Ezenmuo visits Aku to inform him of Okaka's judgement, he also asks him to complete the wish he made before Okaka at Nnanna's graveside. Aku now prays for his father's killer to serve Okaka deity for as long as the culprit lived.

Accordingly, there is confusion in Ukadike's compound. His daughter dies mysteriously and his wife, in the company of Nwabueze, consults Ezenmuo. Ezenmuo advises them to bring Ukadike to Okaka's shrine before sunset to live and serve the deity. If this is not done, more members of Ukadike's household will die. Ukadike is moved to the shrine and he is cured of his madness. Okaka warns him not to escape, but being the stubborn man he is, he refuses and walks out. After a few steps, he becomes mad again and is made to live in the shrine, his new abode. Though the story continues and even extends to a third part, Ukadike is made to experience what Enuala people suffered innocently because of the sins of the forebears. Like them, he becomes a slave – Okaka's servant.³⁷¹

³⁷¹ See the film, *Kingdom against Kingdom I & II*.

6.3 Structural Narratives Customary in Igbo Caste Video Films

Video films about Igbo caste practices nearly all focus on love, especially the tensions between arranged and love marriages, and chieftaincy; the plot is usually driven by family conflict. However, the video films examined above look at a number of issues which filmmakers continually raise to shape our understanding of the practice. These issues on the style and presentation of Igbo caste problems by filmmakers has ranged from plot, the meaning attached to the practice, the basis and possibility of solving the problem, etc., and we discuss these issues below. Besides, we conducted a FGD amongst nine individuals in Birmingham, all of whom are Igbos. They watched *Soul of a Maiden* and *World of Tears* before we examined the contents of these films together. We also conducted a survey by questionnaire where links to these videos were attached. Twenty-one respondents, all of whom are Igbos resident in Nigeria, the US, the United Kingdom and Ireland, returned their responses after watching the films. We had private discussions with ten filmmakers and actors about how they perceive this problem and how they have managed to deal with it within the film industry. While we will use comments from all these discussions, three particular filmmakers are noteworthy because we discussed their films in this chapter: Andy Amenechi – *Royal Palace*, Ikechukwu Onyeka – *World of Tears* and Tchidi Chikere – *Soul of a Maiden*. Hence, in this section, we use the remarks of these respondents to explain certain occurrences, commonalities and distinctions presented in these films.

6.3.1 Traditional Plot

Although video films are largely targeted at a cosmopolitan public with a modern and traditional worldview, filmmakers place Igbo caste problems within a traditional or local plot. The forms and concepts of traditional practices loom large in the imagination of these films. They depict the problem as a tradition customary with old folks that have strong ties with their

native villages and local people resident in these villages. They are not really about modern life in the city. The settings are in villages rather than in town centres. *World of Tears* for instance, situates its plot in Amangwu village, *Soul of a Maiden* in Afanasa, and *Kingdom against Kingdom* in Umueji, all fictional villages in Igboland. The action in *Taboo* and *Never Ever* takes place in villages as well. Though scenes may often shift between traditional and township locations, filmmakers present the *osu* problem as a creation of tradition and then tend to keep it that way – as part of the people’s tradition and it is discussed in the same way. As Chikere noted, the practice “should be placed in a traditional setting which was the basis of the caste system in the first place.”³⁷² However, most respondents view the practice this way as well, as one Theresa implied:

This tradition is too old and has got to stop. I’m not even sure my grandfather would remember how it started. So what’s the point sticking to something this archaic and old? Useless tradition!³⁷³

Interestingly also, the plots of these films usually have folkloric impressions similar to some old Western drama and filmmakers tend to blend this with local acts. In *Royal Palace* for instance, the narrative of the rich Igwe sharing his wealth with his favourite child who is innocent and not expectant reminds us of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* who decides to divide his realm amongst his three daughters as a result of old age and offer the largest portion to the one who loves him best.³⁷⁴ Also, *Soul of a Maiden* which begins with prince Obieze who pretends to be an old man in need of water at the village stream where beautiful maidens lounge, adopts this folkloric structure. The wealthy prince disguises himself to seek a kind-hearted maiden who will love him for his heart, not for his riches. In this way he finds Olanma and she is rewarded with love. This narrative follows a similar plot to Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, where Portia, a rich

³⁷² Tchidi Chikere, Private Discussion, May 2009.

³⁷³ Theresa, Video Film Questionnaire, March 11, 2009.

³⁷⁴ Rene Weis (ed.), *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition*, Essex: Longman, 1993.

heiress awash with suitors, is left with her father's will which stipulates that each of these suitors must choose correctly from one of three caskets of gold, silver and lead before he can win her hand. Two princes of Morocco and Aragon pick the most expensive caskets – gold and silver – incorrectly expecting to find Portia's portrait but find a note tagged "all that glistens is not gold," but Bassanio who was sincerely in love with Portia gets it right when he picks the leaden casket where Portia's portrait is enclosed.³⁷⁵ Just like Bassanio's case, Olanma, an *osu* who is innocent and not expectant, in the midst of several freeborn maidens characterized by evil, greed and deceit, wins the prince's love without competing for it. However, according to Andy Amenechi who directed *Royal Palace*, "the use of folkloric impressions in films like mine is to portray the mix of the western culture with our tradition, which is of course today's reality." Plots like these "bring us to the days of moonlight storytelling which was full of similar folkloric embellishments that can be found in Western plots,"³⁷⁶ Amenechi noted.

6.3.2 The Old and New Dichotomy

Some of the films examined above also bring back old traditions that are not necessarily the norm in contemporary Igbo society; perhaps to depict Igbo caste practices for what they are – an agelong tradition. For instance, Chiadinkonu is expected to select a wife from a bunch of maiden dancers in *World of Tears*, and in *Soul of a Maiden* Obieze actually picks Morea to be his wife from a dozen or more maidens that dance during an elaborate ceremony. The film depicts these actions as obligatory for heirs, perhaps to prevent marriage to an *osu* or outsider. However, the kind of picture that is coming out here does not apply today in Igboland as Tchidi Chikere who directed *Soul of a Maiden* opined; "it is merely used for aesthetic reasons and to

³⁷⁵ See Charles Edelman (ed.), *The Merchant of Venice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pgs. 157-160, 166-171.

³⁷⁶ Andy Amenechi, Private Discussion, May 2009.

show the primitive nature of the *osu* system.”³⁷⁷ Though traditional rulers prefer their heirs to marry ladies within their immediate village, the selection process is rarely done by gathering maidens and doing the picking while they dance. This may have been the case in the past. Nevertheless, most Igbo parents do something similar to this. They arrange marriages between their children and other people that are indeed known to them. Traditional rulers may do this as well to be certain their heirs marry from unquestionable family backgrounds. And, as one would expect, these arrangements are often rejected by youths who see them as archaic and refuse to accept the old norms.³⁷⁸

Also, and significantly, there seems to be a clear divide in Igbo caste video films between two generations – the old and new, traditional and modern. There is some modernized handling of traditional discourses in these video films; this may be as a result of the target of the videos which seems to be a more modern or urban society, that is cosmopolitan to include those who entirely reject the *osu* practice and those who may just sit on the fence. Younger adults, particularly those grown up in the towns, tend to reject the practice and all its vices when it comes to marriage. In video films, the *osu* tradition is associated with the older folks even though they may be educated Christians, while modernity and change is often tied to younger people. All these films depict this clear divide and the parents who embrace the old ways are depicted as ‘backward’, ‘traditional’ and ‘ignorant’ while their children are projected as ‘confused’, ‘stubborn’ and ‘ignorant’ as well, but in their parent’s eyes. While children display some aspects of westernization like in *World of Tears* where Chiadinkondu publicly hugs and

³⁷⁷ Tchidi Chikere, Private Discussion, May 2009.

³⁷⁸ Video films do not however portray all Igbo traditional practices as outdated and bad. Some practices like the breaking of kola nuts are usually portrayed as norms acceptable even today to all – young and old – members of the society. Filmmakers no doubt depict these ‘good’ practices as ones that should be preserved for cultural sake. Thus, not all aspects of the Igbo tradition as it appears in real life is pictured in bad light – even in the eyes of youths and older folks; as depicted – good cultures should be preserved while bad cultures must be reformed where necessary or discarded.

romances Edna – actions that are not tolerated in normal Igbo villages, elders as portrayed embrace the archaic culture even when they believe it is bad; and these films do well in showing the kinds of antagonism that could erupt when an elder disagrees with a child's rejection of the norm.³⁷⁹ Parents can go to any length to prevent their wards from marrying *osus*. In *Taboo* for instance, Igwe hires men to kill Obi, an *osu* he had educated who is now interested in marrying his daughter.³⁸⁰ Pete Edochie performs a similar act in *Never Ever* where he kills his son's bride-to-be who is an *osu* to prevent her marriage to his son and consequently to prevent the loss of his traditional stool as Onowu. Likewise, Igwe in *World of Tears* seems ready to hurt and lose his son – Chiadinkondu, rather than let him bring disgrace to his throne by marrying Edna, the *osu*. Moreover, in *Soul of a Maiden*, the Igwe frustrates the family of his son's lover – Olanma – because they are *osu*; he ends up killing Olanma's mother. We see traditional rulers portrayed as murderers and evildoers in the name of resisting change. These depictions particularly show the eagerness of elders to maintain the status quo irrespective of who is hurt. But the youths who are represented as agents of change act with a similar force. In *Kingdom against Kingdom* for instance where Ukadike is bent on preserving the norm, his strongest adversary is Aku – a youth who practically parades the village to fight those who discriminate against his people, the *ohu* group, at streams and market places. Even in other films mentioned above, like in *Soul of a Maiden* where Obieze is willing to reject his throne and marry an *osu*, the non-*osu* youths that are interested in mingling in one way or another with the *osus* are portrayed as antagonists of the caste practices – those thirsty for change. This thirst for change was evident in the

³⁷⁹ The jacket copy of Tchidi Chikere's *Soul of a Maiden II* for instance expressed that: "Igwe Ogbatuluenyi of Afanasa realized that the beautiful lady which he gave his blessing as the future queen of Afanasa is an OUTCAST. The Igwe did all he could to stop the marriage but to no avail."

³⁸⁰ Refer to Chapter II, 2.5.2.

expressions of our respondents, some of whom are young adults. Chigbo for example, who compared the plots of *World of Tears* and *Soul of a Maiden* and preferred the latter, argued that:

Soul of a Maiden makes people become aware that a cause could be accomplished irrespective of how hard it is or gets. Personally, it convinces me that change can be achieved if we are willing and wish to persevere. I guess nothing stays forever, jinxes are broken, myths are rewritten all because of change.³⁸¹

6.3.3 Representation of Social Reality

A significant handful of Nigerian video films retell contemporary societal events. Perhaps, for this reason, Igbo caste films attempt to reflect the actual situation of the problem in today's Igboland. Filmmakers are showing something very much like what exists and, moreover, the usual commentaries on the discourse hosted by newspapers and other media fora form a huge part of the films' plot. For instance, the issue of hypocrisy which we noted in the previous chapter was rampant in newspaper and cyberspace discourses came up in some of these films. In *Royal Palace*, Igwe's judgement against those who sought Udoji's expulsion from the village because of his fraternization with *osu* people describes this. According to Igwe who blesses some kola nuts and hands them to Udoji's accusers:

I will banish Udoji and his family upon one condition. If any of you who claim not to have anything to do with the *osu* people can have this kola nut and eat and if nothing happens then, I will banish them.

When all the five men declined, Igwe continued:

Those who point accusing fingers are as guilty as the people they accuse. What we cannot admit in public we must not do in secret. I hereby decree that there will be nothing, nothing like *osu* or caste system in this land never again!

³⁸¹ Chigbo, Video Film Questionnaire, March 11, 2009.

Another marvel expressed in some quarters on Igbo caste practice is the fact that individuals mingle with the caste groups even to the points of having sexual relationships but when it comes to marriage it becomes taboo because in *World of Tears* Chiadinkondu is involved with an *osu* but he escapes discrimination, even Obieze, the prince in *Soul of a Maiden* had a brief romance with an *osu* girl, Olanma, but no one tagged him *osu*. This is reminiscent of the practice in today's society and filmmakers make this explicit in these films. Some individuals frown at this fact, but it shows the kind of modification that the practice has undergone over the years because before the 1980s, merely associating with the caste groups or attending events organized by them automatically made one *osu*. As one respondent who watched the video films said:

This is nonsense! You cannot date a girl to the extent of sleeping with her for years then when you return to the village to marry her and discover she's *osu* you dump her. What is the difference? Why can one sleep with an *osu* but not marry them? This is mere hypocrisy. The Igwe in *World of Tears* cannot deny Chiadinkondu happiness because of this rubbish. What if he married her abroad before returning home, will they call him *osu*? This people are hypocrites! Chiadinkondu should in fact be *osu* as well since he had sex with Edna, that's the same with marriage only without a formal contract.³⁸²

Filmmakers have also pictured another very common argument that comes up in public fora about the *osu* problem. We noted in previous chapters, the usual sentiments expressed by anti-abolitionists who believe abolition of Igbo caste practices must not just come by mere words but by actions such as marriage to show such abolition is real. This opinion continues to dominate public discussions on Igbo caste practices and it forms part of the plot in most Igbo caste films. In *Kingdom against Kingdom* after the Igwe had abolished the caste practices in his territory before members of his cabinet, Ukadike, his strongest and most visible antagonists expresses satirically:

³⁸² Ugo, Video Film FGD, March 14, 2009.

If a father asks his son to stick his finger into a fire, I suggest that the son should first of all stand aside and watch the father stick his own finger into that same fire. If that finger is not burnt by the fire and the father does not withdraw his finger in pain, then his son can follow suit!

This expression has been the view of many anti-abolitionists and others who express doubt at the possibility of a successful abolition and in many areas like Nnobi where the caste practices have been traditionally abolished, individuals continue to insist that propagators of such moves must engage themselves in marriage or one way or the other with these groups first for them to be taken seriously. But the position of abolitionists has normally been similar with the position of the Igwe in *Kingdom against Kingdom* who disappoints Ukadike when he insists that the Igwe must marry or allow his son to marry a girl from the caste village to complete his abolition. Besides, filmmakers do well to expose the kind of impasse that surrounds the abolition of Igbo caste practices. In *Royal Palace*, the Igwe abolishes the *osu* practice without dissenting voices; the producer presents him as an ultimate ruler which is rarely the case in Igboland. The Igwe in *Soul of a Maiden* encounters very little opposition when he expresses his intention to abolish the practice which he succeeds in doing. It was only *Kingdom against Kingdom* that went beyond abolition to show the kind of resistance that comes with such action. In fact, even after Igwe abolishes the practice, the Enuana *ohus* continue to suffer discrimination in broad daylight. *Kingdom against Kingdom* presents the situation as it really appears in most areas in contemporary Igboland.

6.3.4 Preference for Happy Endings

Additionally, video filmmakers in Nigeria appear not primarily concerned with ideas of cultural authenticity and value. Most clearly, because the industry is driven by commercial interests and producers are largely concerned about making profits, the films have indeed fashioned aesthetic forms and modes of cultural address based on the experiences and interest

of the societies they address. Video films in Nigeria often build their theme around a subject that will largely interest the audience, just as Amenechi told us.³⁸³ The films are produced because filmmakers calculate that they will sell. And, more often, these films are made to end in ways that will please or excite the audience. Perhaps, this is why the moral lessons in every video film are basically spelt out towards the end of the film, and in many cases, as we have mentioned before, good characters are rewarded while bad ones are punished at the end. This seems to satisfy the audience. No wonder that some critics of Nigerian video films claim to know how a film will end before it actually does. However, the ending of these Igbo caste films support this idea. For instance, Obi, the *osu* in *Taboo* is rewarded with not just education but marriage to the princess while all those who fight against their union and commit atrocities are arrested by the police. In *Royal Palace*, poor Udoji, who is accused of mingling with the *osu*, becomes the grandfather of the future king and all the accusers maintain their common status and are chased out of the palace. *Soul of a Maiden* is no different. Olanma who suffers discrimination is saved at the hands of an oracle that intends to sacrifice her. The partakers in her ordeal are banished from the community and her people are finally freed from the shackles of discrimination.

Then again, filmmakers portray the abolition of Igbo caste practices as one of societal interest. They depict the problem as one that requires societal solution – involving both the freeborn and the caste groups. And because all the films except *World of Tears* end with some sort of abolition, filmmakers indirectly oppose the continuation of the practice by this depiction. Hence, since their plot is designed to please their audiences by its happy ending especially, we can suppose the audience, at least a majority, desire to see the practice abolished as filmmakers reckon as

³⁸³ Andy Amenechi, Private Discussion, May 2009.

well. We recorded a number of views like this amongst our respondents whom we asked to compare *World of Tears* and *Soul of a Maiden* and decide which one pleased them most in respect to plot. Their responses to this were common. For example, as Chinedu who prefers *Soul of a Maiden* because of its joyful conclusion where the practice is abolished remarks:

I prefer *Soul of a Maiden*, because as usual everybody prefers the good ending where the lovers are united at the end. Although it is cliché, the end is perfect as the couple get back together to 'live happily ever after.' Because of this end people get to realize that there really isn't any problem with marrying an *osu*. But in the case of *World of Tears*, it gives a more realistic ending.³⁸⁴

Chinedu views the action of the Igwe who in *Soul of a Maiden* abolishes the *osu* practice and is willing to allow his heir to marry an *osu* as unrealistic. In Igboland today, it is rare to find a traditional ruler who not only abolishes such tradition but allows his child to mingle freely with the *osu*. This is why the director of *World of Tears* insists:

We are trying to push the message back to society to decide what is right or wrong. Ordinarily everybody wants us to conclude that Chiadinkondu and Edna get married but this has never happened anywhere in Igboland!³⁸⁵

Moreover, Chigbo reasons the same way as Chinedu. According to him:

What happened in *Soul of a Maiden* would rarely happen in a real Igbo setting but it gives hope for a better tomorrow while *World of Tears* appears more realistic by giving an actual picture of what really happens today. But both films go a long way to expose these injustices.³⁸⁶

The duo suggests that *World of Tears* depicts accurately what will happen in contemporary Igbo society, and, in line with their argument Zulike opined that:

Soul of a Maiden pleased me most because it shows that determination can achieve so much. However, it does not mean that because the king abolished the *osu* caste system, that the generality of the people

³⁸⁴ Chinedu, Video Film FGD, March 14, 2009.

³⁸⁵ Ikechukwu Onyeka, Private Discussion, May 2009.

³⁸⁶ Chigbo, Video Film Questionnaire, March 11, 2009.

have accepted it. There would still be a few people who would want to perpetuate the old tradition for their own selfish interest.³⁸⁷

We still notice this preference for happy endings – in this regard, abolition of the practice - from the responses of other respondents. According to Chinyere:

Soul of a Maiden is preferable because they showed steadfastness in what the lovers felt for each other and the senseless tradition was abolished. And because the tradition was abolished in *Soul of a Maiden*, it will have more positive impact on society than other movies that fail to end this way.³⁸⁸

Others thought along the same line, and their comments are as follows: for Uche,

Soul of a Maiden really impressed me because it actually ends a tradition that is not meant to continue. It doesn't seem right for one to be 'stamped' with that phrase now that there is nothing like slavery in Nigeria. *Soul of a Maiden* will have more positive effect because it lets the world know that this tradition needs to be abolished.³⁸⁹

Also, according to Ada:

Soul of a Maiden appealed to me most because Olanma and Obieze didn't give up on their love, they believe that love conquers all barriers and they were strong enough to withstand opposition even in the face of many troubles. The *osu* caste is archaic and should be abolished – these were traditions of our selfish past.³⁹⁰

For Onwo,

Soul of a Maiden pleases me most because of the way it ends. It shows that we should fight for what we believe in irrespective of what society dictates. It is likely to have [a] more positive effect on society because the happy ending portrays the triumph of good over evil and shows that the *osu* institution will one day be totally abolished in Igboland.³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Zulike, Video Film Questionnaire, March 12, 2009.

³⁸⁸ Chinyere, Video Film Questionnaire, March 12, 2009.

³⁸⁹ Uche, Video Film Questionnaire, March 12, 2009.

³⁹⁰ Ada, Video Film FGD, March 14, 2009.

³⁹¹ Onwo, Video Film Questionnaire, March 8, 2009.

According to Amaka who incidentally watched *Soul of a Maiden* and *World of Tears* in the company of guests:

Soul of a Maiden is more encouraging because the tradition was abolished and Olanma took up the quest to go to other communities with the tradition to get them to abolish the practice – she becomes a crusader for the *osus*. It will sure have a more positive impact than *World of Tears* because society [has] looked for ways to abolish this stigma and yet people continue to hold on to it even though [the] majority wants the practice abolished; I know this as a matter of fact because I watched both films at my sister's video rental shop and the reaction of her customers was that this practice must be abolished.³⁹²

While many others expressed similar views, love was of great interest to our respondents most of whom are young adults. Jachi for instance, reckons:

Soul of a Maiden has got a perfect plot because against all odds, the prince and Olanma stood their grounds against discrimination and this is more likely to have a positive impact on society than *World of Tears* because it not only holds out against discrimination but it exhibits a great amount of love.³⁹³

Chinyere opined similarly on the effects of the film on her:

It just got me wondering why people could hold on to tradition so strongly at the expense of love.³⁹⁴

And, Ogey followed:

Soul of a Maiden will have a positive effect on society even though the lovers in *World of Tears* walked away from love because they couldn't handle the problems in their way, *Soul of a Maiden* ends with the abolition of the caste system and I suspect it is the desire of everyone to do away with this tradition.³⁹⁵

While respondents upheld similar positions as these, our FGD panel argued that *Soul of a Maiden* may have had a better ending if Obieze and Olanma had been married. As Nwamaka regretted for instance:

³⁹² Amaka, Video Film Questionnaire, March 10, 2009.

³⁹³ Jachi, Video Film Questionnaire, March 13, 2009.

³⁹⁴ Chinyere, Video Film Questionnaire, March 12, 2009.

³⁹⁵ Ogey, Video Film Questionnaire, March 10, 2009.

The maiden did not marry the love of her life even when she had won the battle, she didn't enjoy the spoils of the battle she still embarked on another one. I wish she had married Obieze; that would have been a perfect end to the story.³⁹⁶

The couple came close to getting married and all restrictions before them were removed, but the union was marred by the fact that Obieze's father was involved in Olanma's mother's death. Thus, our FGD panel supposed it as an indirect language used by the producer to acknowledge the impossibility of royalty marrying an *osu*. Besides, Chikere who directed the film confirmed that such tactic was used to show the rare nature of marriage between an *osu* and royalty.³⁹⁷ On the other hand however, with all the views of respondents who argue that the *osu* practice is old and needs to be discontinued, we notice a similar impasse in their responses to these video films to the kind that actually exists on the field in contemporary Igboland as we noted in previous chapters where individuals who speak against the practice find it difficult to not discriminate. After watching *Soul of a Maiden* and *World of Tears* we asked respondents what likely effects these films would have on viewers, and some of their responses are as follows:

Joe opined at one point that:

I felt so bad, cried so much. I was really touched emotionally, and was wondering how the *osu* were suffering especially for what they do not know or cause. I hate the *osu* practice and would never be in support of that evil act.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁶ Nwamaka, Video Film FGD, March 14, 2009.

³⁹⁷ Chikere told us that he was aware from his experiences of the difficulty associated with freeborn-*osu* marriages. Thus, it would be highly fictional to have an *osu* marry a freeborn in a film. According to him it is possible for the *osu* practice to become history as a result of "the fall of the traditional framework in Igboland," which he insists is dwindling as a result of rural-urban migration. However, he suspects the practice will continue with the same force for some more fifty years before we begin seeing real signs of change because while some individuals are willing to embrace change society is not willing to let go of the tradition. Tchidi Chikere, Private Discussion, May 2009.

³⁹⁸ Joe, Video Film Questionnaire, March 11, 2009.

Afterwards, Joe followed with this statement:

I am totally against *osu* tradition, placing people in bondage, it's a horrible situation. Everybody should be regarded as same, and treated fairly. I wouldn't give my child to an *osu* because it is a way of putting her for the rest of her life in bondage, though I don't support it but those freeborn have a way of humiliating her or sending the message of "you're an *osu*" to her. That would make her feel rejected all her life.³⁹⁹

A good number of our respondents had similar views with Joe. As Jachi remarked:

Truthfully, these films are not convincing enough because most Igbos (especially the educated ones) are neck-deep in this tradition so even if I want to change my attitude towards the *osu* groups, society will not pardon me.⁴⁰⁰

As Zulike also expressed:

There may not be an immediate effect as it will take some time for the effects to sink in and the subconscious to recollect how people suffered as a result of the system, but continuous production of similar films, though may publicize the *osu* system to the younger generation, the sympathy aroused would still help in condemning the perpetuation of the system. However, as far as I am concerned, there is no difference between people. But we live in a society and until society accepts that the *osu* system is abolished, it will be suicidal to go ahead and marry an *osu* or encourage my child to marry an *osu*. More than 75% of Igbo society would want the system forgotten but because of the fear of being labelled *osu*, no one would want to take the plunge.⁴⁰¹

Theresa supposed similarly:

In religious circles I may marry anyone, *osu* or not, since everyone has the image of God. But humanly speaking, it's a hard decision to make considering the discriminations meted on the people who belong to this *osu* group and their generation.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Jachi, Video Film Questionnaire, March 13, 2009.

⁴⁰¹ Zulike, Video Film Questionnaire, March 12, 2009.

⁴⁰² Theresa, Video Film Questionnaire, March 11, 2009.

Even Uche, a young Igbo adult based in the US, argued along these lines.

These films made me feel that Nigeria has not learned that the days of slavery are over. It kind of makes me feel hesitant on marrying back home. If I must do so, I would have to do proper research on the girl before communication with her. Well, I've always been a cultured man, therefore, whatever my people are opposed to, I will follow suit because of tradition.⁴⁰³

Statements like this were common in the discussions on newspapers and internet forums on Igbo caste practices. And, this give us an impression of what the problem still is – while everyone acknowledges that there is a need for change, people find it difficult to contribute to these changes by way of closing the gaps of discrimination against these groups. They fear Igbo society is unwilling to embrace change. Today's problem lies in this paradox. That is why the next chapter looks closely at Igbo communal life. However, before we move to that it is also worth looking at the use of audio-visual imagery in *osu* films.

6.3.5 Audio-Visual Impressions

Nigerian films are known for their special effects, as humans transform into animals, charms fly in the air, and evil people are attacked by flying dragons. Even scenes that depict evil and forces of darkness are intensified by the use of horror and supernatural songs or sounds. The *osu* is not represented like this in these video films. We must bear in mind that some Igbos and non-Igbos still believe that *osu* descendants are spirits or evildoers, such as Ijeoma Amechi,⁴⁰⁴ who said:

I would never have anything to do with an *osu* because they are spirits... I will never touch one. They are dangerous people...⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ Uche, Video Film Questionnaire, March 12, 2009.

⁴⁰⁴ See Chapter IV, 4.3.2.

⁴⁰⁵ Ely Obasi, Akpa Edem, Janet Mba and Sam Smith, "The Gods Are to Blame," *Newswatch*, Lagos, September 18, 1989, p. 16.

Other individuals also expressed similar views in our online survey as we explained in the fourth chapter.⁴⁰⁶ Even Jachi who took part in our video film survey noted the following as a condition for her to accept an *osu* in marriage:

Marrying an *osu* depends on the individual's mindset. I or my child will only marry an *osu* on the grounds that they go for deliverance since their ancestors were dedicated to idols.⁴⁰⁷

Filmmakers do not view Igbo caste groups this way. They do not depict them explicitly as a people who should not be touched or feared. Yes, they depict the kinds of prejudices against the group in forms including marriage and chieftaincy, but the fetish or fear usually attributed to this group in some quarters is not shown in any of these films. Thus, filmmakers present the people as mere descendants of former *osus* and *ohus* that only suffer discrimination as a result of the actions of their forbears.⁴⁰⁸

Interestingly, video films seem to portray more Igbo caste groups as poor or mere commoners whereas the freeborn are presented otherwise.⁴⁰⁹ *Taboo* for instance, presents Obi as a poor domestic servant. In *Soul of a Maiden*, Olanma and her fellow *osus* are all portrayed as poor wretches. *Kingdom against Kingdom* presents the *ohus* in the same way. While this representation may not necessarily mean that filmmakers generally view Igbo caste groups as a poor class, it differs from the common idea held in many quarters that most of the *osu* people are wealthy and educated because of the advantage they had during the colonial days when the

⁴⁰⁶ Again, refer to Chapter IV, 4.3.2.

⁴⁰⁷ Jachi, Video Film Questionnaire, March 13, 2009.

⁴⁰⁸ Like Tchidi Chikere said, Igbo caste groups "are normal people. The *osu* system is an accident of culture or worship or religion. The present caste groups only have the stigma as a result of history. Yes, the system in the past was connected to gods and deities," he insists, "but, I tried to portray them as mere descendants without the fear normally attached to their ancestors because they know almost nothing about the practice." Private Discussion, May 2009.

⁴⁰⁹ Refer to Chapter VI, 6.3.5 for our discussion on the pictorial representation of the caste groups in the news media. See particularly, figures, 4.1 and 4.2-4.5. Also see figures 6.1-6.3 above for some jacket cover illustrations of some video films discussed in this chapter.

missionaries introduced Christianity and education. Igbo caste groups, it is acknowledged widely today, were among the first groups to embrace these western norms.⁴¹⁰ But the video film impressions of the group intend to show that the people belong to a minority in Igboland that suffers varying kinds of discrimination. As Chikere opined in this regard:

We portray the *osu* in such light because of the numerous woes they are exposed to in reality.⁴¹¹

And from the point of view of our respondents, these pictures are capable of causing some sort of sympathy for the people, consequently reducing discrimination. As Emeka implied:

These films make my heart bleed. How can acts like this be meted on these people? They did not bargain for this. Someone has got to stand up for what is right.⁴¹²

Theresa followed:

The immediate effects are that of ANGER and DISGUST at the proponents of this barbaric customs. But there's hope as seen in the *Soul of a Maiden*.⁴¹³

Additionally, we asked respondents' views on the use of video films to stimulate these kinds of debates and their thoughts concentrated on the quality of the content of these video films. While some decried the filmmakers' habit of churning out video films without proper research, others believed that until original testimonies of caste groups are documented as video films, the effect may not be far-reaching. As Kenechukwu, Wilson and Oghey noted respectively:

Filmmakers should focus on the current status of *osu* or produce a progressive film that shows how it started till date. That means more research before shooting.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁰ See Chapter II, 2.1.

⁴¹¹ Tchidi Chikere, Private Discussion, May 2009.

⁴¹² Emeka, Video Film FGD, March 14, 2009.

⁴¹³ Theresa, Video Film Questionnaire, March 11, 2009.

⁴¹⁴ Kenechukwu, Video Film Questionnaire, March 10, 2009.

The information provided in these films is not sufficient enough for a novice or non-Igbo to understand what the *osu* practice is about.⁴¹⁵

Producers should do documentaries on the *osu* system and create more awareness regarding it. They could get success stories of individuals who have lived a healthy and successful life even with the discrimination. This will help achieve more positive results if their aim is really to fight against the tradition.⁴¹⁶

Chinedu also insisted:

If I was against marrying an *osu*, I don't think watching these movies will convince me that there is no harm in marrying an *osu* but I would let my child marry whoever if that's what he truly wants. I think if biographies were done of real life experiences where a person who is affected by this problem is talked to, I think this will be more effective in changing my attitude since at the end of the day; the movies are seen as mere fiction.⁴¹⁷

But one assumes that if it is difficult to get an *osu* to speak to it may be even more difficult to get one who would agree to document his/her testimony in permanent form.⁴¹⁸ However, Ikechukwu Onyeka who directed *World of Tears* confirmed that because of the desire of the audience to know more about Igbo caste practices, he is in the process of making a docudrama on the tradition.⁴¹⁹ Undoubtedly, filmmakers are not afraid of making Igbo caste films. All our respondents in the film industry, both Igbos and non-Igbos expressed willingness to take part in

⁴¹⁵ Wilson, Video Film FGD, March 14, 2009.

⁴¹⁶ Ogey, Video Film Questionnaire, March 10, 2009.

⁴¹⁷ Chinedu, Video Film FGD, March 14, 2009.

⁴¹⁸ In fact, a prominent Igbo historian, professor Afigbo, told us that most of the letters that were written to the colonial administration and later, the Nigerian government, concerning the *osu* abolition debate by the Eastern House of Assembly were written by the *osu* groups with fake names and addresses because they didn't want to identify with the cause they claimed to fight. Adiele E. Afigbo, Interview, Abakaliki, August 29, 2007.

⁴¹⁹ The docudrama according to Onyeka is a step to building momentum for public awareness against the practice. He claims this film will do what no other film has done in terms of covering history and other aspects that may have been ignored by traditional video films. And as he supposes, the film will be produced in Igbo language and translated to the English, French and Dutch languages. Ikechukwu Onyeka, Private Discussion, May 2009.

an *osu* film production – believing that society will not attach any form of stigma to them for playing such roles. As an Igbo filmmaker, Serah Donald, told us,

I haven't done any film on the *osu* tradition but I'll sure love to direct one the moment I get a script.⁴²⁰

And for Omotola Ekeinde, a Yoruba filmmaker who had incidentally played an *osu* role in the past,

It doesn't really matter if I play such roles or not. I have no fear in taking part in an *osu* production.⁴²¹

Other actors expressed similar views.⁴²² Nevertheless, some respondents reckoned that video films had an advantage over other media because of its audio and visual characteristics. As Emeka noted:

Video films are better at drawing the Nigerian public to the consciousness of the fact that the *osu* thing exists. When they watch these videos, it makes more sense to them than when they read it on newspapers. Besides, it is more entertaining to watch films than read.⁴²³

Likewise, Theresa pointed out:

Videos though 'make believe' are more reliable than other mediums since they bring out life in a book. Most people don't have time to read but when a film is made with a good cast and plot, it interests both the learned and unlearned.⁴²⁴

Moreover, culture in a broad sense is prevalent in Nigerian video films. And, because video films extend "access to this programming to the middle class and even poor Nigerians"⁴²⁵ who may lack access to newspapers and digital television or even the internet, it becomes a

⁴²⁰ Serah Donald, Private Discussion, February 24, 2009.

⁴²¹ Omotola Jalade Ekeinde, Private Discussion, March 16, 2009.

⁴²² The other actors that expressed similar views included Segun Arinze, a non Igbo filmmaker whose mother is Igbo, Julius Agwu, Ramsey Noah, Nonso Diobi and Emmanuel Ehumadu Totolos.

⁴²³ Emeka, Video Film FGD, March 14, 2009.

⁴²⁴ Theresa, Video Film Questionnaire, March 11, 2009.

⁴²⁵ See Brian Larkin's "Hausa Dramas and the Rise of Video Culture in Nigeria" in Jonathan Haynes (ed.), *Nigerian Video Films*, Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 2000, p. 217.

promising platform for the exchange of ideas on this tradition.⁴²⁶ Because of their reach and ability to even be published on the internet, video films provide some sort of guidance and direction, educating individuals especially those who are not aware of certain aspects of culture.⁴²⁷ Video films continue to build and shape public knowledge on the Igbo caste system as well as provoke public discussions on the subject. As a respondent told us:

I watched *Soul of a Maiden* and *World of Tears* with my family and a non-Igbo guest. We talked about it from six that evening until about 2'oclock the following morning. It was that serious. My father had to even call someone to confirm that the practice is still intact at Mbaise which is not too far from my hometown - Orlu. It was an interesting discourse and until we saw these films, we were unaware of certain aspects of the tradition, like the history which *Soul of a Maiden* tries to tell.⁴²⁸

6.4 Conclusion

Nigerian video films have over the years been a popular space for cultural imaging and they continue to solidify their position as the most significant Nigerian imaginative media. Doubtlessly, the genre has contributed, just like the newspapers and other mediums discussed in this thesis to bringing this discourse to limelight for public debate just as it also expands public knowledge on the tradition. As a filmmaker said, "the tradition has been with us for a while and nobody wants to talk about it, nobody wants to make it an issue. Yet, it is something that is eating deep into society. We are tackling it in the film industry."⁴²⁹

⁴²⁶ Also, while video films continue to maintain its validity, the medium enjoys some sort of freedom in terms of content because unlike television/radio and newspapers, owned primarily by government and politicians, video films are not primarily controlled by the state, even though they are censored by the federal agency.

⁴²⁷ For instance, one of our respondents, Uche, had lived abroad (United States) for his entire life, but he was aware and indeed very knowledgeable of Igbo caste practices. He had watched the film *Taboo* and become interested in the culture since it was prevalent in his native town, Owerri. This young man, today in his early twenties, has only visited Nigeria on two occasions; yet, he is so knowledgeable on Igboland and Igbo customs, a feat he owes to the number of video films he is exposed to.

⁴²⁸ Njide, Video Film FGD, March 14, 2009.

⁴²⁹ Ikechukwu Onyeka, Private Discussion, May 2009.

Altogether however, we have shown that video films have been instrumental to the discourse of this contemporary problem. And, the effects video films have on the society as regards Igbo caste practices particularly are immense. This is because:

When home video films employ various screen techniques and storytelling format that reflect the culture of Nigerians, it could be a vehicle for positive change. Recourse to local languages, myths, legends, folktales and other traditional forms would bring about the synergy that is required for better message reception and influence.⁴³⁰

Thus, although the news media, cyberspace and video film as we have discussed have provoked discourse on this subject and managed to also provoke change in attitudes, it has been difficult for respondents and others to embrace the 'good news' all of these channels seem to present; not just because of the bullheadedness, but because Igbo society has only grudgingly embraced change and the caste groups. It is necessary to look at how the society handles this problem and interacts daily about the practice. The next and final chapter takes on this task.

⁴³⁰ Eno Akpabio, "Nigerian Home Video Films as a Catalyst for National Development," *Journal of Sustainable Development*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2004, p. 8 (entire article pp. 5-10).

CHAPTER VII

MAKING CONNECTIONS: CASTE PRACTICES IN IGBO LIFE AND THOUGHT

7.0 Introduction

In 1987, 43 year old Cecilia Nwanesidu, a meat seller at the Ifakala market, was tending her shed where she sold beef when a prospective buyer asked for N12 worth of meat. She was happy; it was her first customer that day. But just as she cut out the meat, a man, Josiah Omeronweye, walked into the shed. Omeronweye comes from one of the other villages that make up Ifakala, while Cecilia comes from Amafor, a presumed *osu* village. Omeronweye, according to her, told the customer not to buy meat from her. "Don't you know she is *osu* and we don't buy anything from them?" The customer dropped the meat and fled. At the same Amafor, the funerals of caste groups, as in the case of Mary Agbahime, are boycotted by the other villages in Ifakala. Where warnings against attending caste ceremonies were ignored in the 1980s, culprits were pronounced guilty and made to pay a fine of N300 as ruled by the Ifakala Central Union.⁴³¹ Agbahime's case was reported in the newspapers in 1987, but the fine continues to be imposed on erring villagers today, and it has gone up to N1,000. At Oba, a Catholic clergyman in 2002 reportedly opposed the burial of an *osu* woman who had married a member of his family for the reason that her corpse was not fit for burial on freeborn soil. The clergyman and his kinsmen attempted to even remove the dead body while it lay in state. Another clergyman at a Pentecostal Church around Owerri in 2007 divorced his wife on discovering she had *osu* lineage. And as he reasoned with his congregation, "Church is Church and culture is culture." Even one Udoji from Imo State who was barred by his parents and kindred from marrying an *osu* girl he had loved for three years took the problem to his uncle

⁴³¹ Ely Obasi, Akpa Edem, Janet Mba and Sam Smith, "The Gods Are to Blame," *Newswatch*, Lagos, September 18, 1989, p. 16.

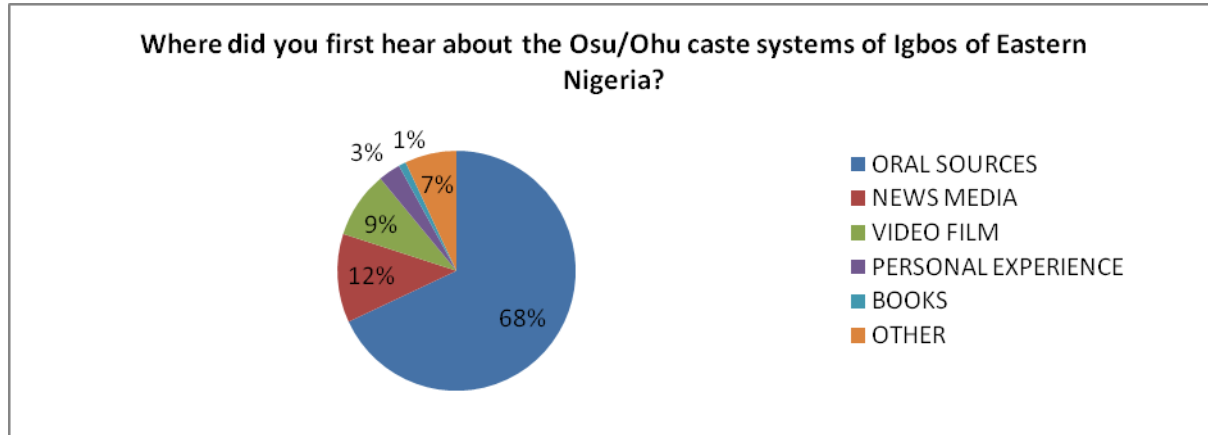
who is a clergyman, hoping to find solace and support. And as the clergyman told him, “Do what your parents said;” Udoji rejected the entire family and kinsmen and married his wife, but he can no longer return home with her.⁴³²

Undoubtedly, and as in the case studies described above, discrimination against the caste groups has continued to manifest itself within certain social structures that have rarely changed, at least in rural Igboland. The role of parents, peers, friends and extended families, for instance, continues to be fundamental in initiating the young into the community and preparing them for active integration in the life of the village group. As one expects, this integration portrays elders as supreme, therefore disobedience in any manner is not tolerated. Where Igbo children grow up in an atmosphere where the opinion of their parents and kinsmen is made to count in important decisions like marriage or friendship, it becomes difficult to disassociate the younger people from the ways of older folks who have continually lived with the tradition of discrimination against caste groups. Igbo society continues to bequeath these old norms to a new generation. In fact, to underscore and demonstrate the importance of these traditional modes of knowledge transfer regarding Igbo caste practices we moved to ascertain the sources of respondents’ first time knowledge on Igbo caste practices. Amongst 117 randomly selected individuals who participated in this survey, 94% were aware of the practice and, interestingly, as indicated in figure 7.1, over 68% of our sample first heard of the practice by word of mouth, either from their parents, grandparents or relations in their villages. Even amongst nine

⁴³² Chima Amadi, Private Discussion, May 2009. Amadi is a civil rights campaigner against Igbo caste practices in the USA.

undergraduates that participated in our video film FGD, eight first learnt of the practice via oral sources.⁴³³ See Figure 7.1 below.

Figure 7.1: Sources of First Time Knowledge of Igbo Caste Practices



⁴³³ Note that this analysis is for first time knowledge of the practice because like us, most of our respondents went on to hear about these practices in video films like *Taboo* after hearing about it from oral sources. Some respondents also confessed to having read of the practice in books like *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*, while others continuously read about it in newspapers and on the internet. Besides, as we observed from a cross-section of adults in the field, there was some sort of confusion regarding the distinction between the *osu* and the *ohu*. For instance, when we visited three local markets at Nnobi, Onitsha and Enugu to collect video films on Igbo caste practices, the film sellers found it difficult to distinguish between both groups – the *osu* and the *ohu*; for some, both meant the same thing. This occasional mix-up can be attributed to the varying differences and definitions of these groups across Igboland, because as we indicated in previous chapters, an *ohu* in Nnobi is not dreaded as the *ohu* in Onitsha or Nkanu, so individuals more familiar with the *osu* in Nnobi may just call the *ohus* in Onitsha ‘*osu*’ since they suffer similar discrimination as the *osu* in most Igbo villages. Moreover, 63% of the respondents from our survey knew that the *osu* groups were offered to deities. Interestingly enough, 9% thought they were either cursed, spirits, or witches; affirming the state of fear expressed in some quarters by people who still believe that the *osu* people should be dreaded and not touched in any manner. Our field experiences also indicate that more people seem to think that first-generation *osus* were dedicated to the deities for their transgression. The remaining few recognize that there were other reasons for their dedication to deities such as for protection sake as we indicated in Chapter I, 1.4. 11% however, likened the *osu* groups to just ‘slaves’; 4% believed they were evildoers while some of about 6% supposed they were migrants. Additionally, amongst 93 respondents that replied the question on the status *ohu*, 34%, which was the majority, denied knowledge of the *ohu* groups. The unpopularity of the *ohu* discourse within the media may explain this; because as our review of newspapers and video films revealed, the *ohu* case is not as common as the *osu*. Nevertheless, 29% of respondents knew the *ohus* were domestic slaves while 11% were unsure of what it really meant. Last but not least, 26% of our respondents thought the *ohu* was the same as *osu*. This occasional mix up may also be attributed to the fact that all caste groups in Igboland are generically referred to as *osu*.

Note is taken here of the informality of communicating this knowledge which depends largely on parents, friends and peers, and extended family or groups whose roles remain prominent in the daily life of individuals. It is the interactions on this plane that have gone on to influence the proliferation of publications on Igbo caste discourse in newspapers, the internet and on video films. As a filmmaker, Tchidi Chikere, noted,

My film on the *osu* caste was inspired by the daily prejudices the caste groups face in Igbo villages and it is the experiences I have witnessed by going to these villages and conversing with the people in these local areas that I have managed to build a realistic plot that depict the situation as it really is today.⁴³⁴

Even Leo Igwe, a prolific commentator on the *osu* discourse within the newspapers, told us that his continuous commentaries on newspaper pages are a result of the

stigmatization of the poor people in eastern Nigeria who have more often than not complained to me of their prejudicial experiences in the hands of the freeborn which is unfortunately a problem bequeathed to them by their forbears.⁴³⁵

Hence, just like the media, the discourse is sustained by daily interactions and processes within village groups as the practice continues to be embedded in the people's lives – in marriages, kingship, social mingling, rumour mongering, etc. Consequently, it is important to examine these modes of interaction because as discussed in the previous chapters, the print and electronic media are not very popular forums for discussions because they are not readily available to the majority of the people in the region – particularly those in rural Igboland. Even where the media have managed to penetrate, older forms of social interaction continue to maintain their validity. Besides, modern media facilities may not have as much impact in these

⁴³⁴ Tchidi Chikere is a filmmaker and the director of *Soul of a Maiden* which we discussed in the previous chapter. See Chapter VI, 6.2.3. Private Discussions, May 2009.

⁴³⁵ Leo Igwe is the executive secretary of the Nigerian Humanist Movement. He has written several articles and letters of complaints concerning the plight of the Igbo caste groups within the media. Private Discussion, March 2009.

areas since they are not contextualized in the local settings of the people. Furthermore, the population in these communities where modern media may completely or partially be non-existent are non-literate, poor and have little or no access to radio, television, film, newspaper or the internet. Even when they may afford these luxuries, electricity becomes a problem.⁴³⁶ Notwithstanding, information is shared amongst the people in other fast and simple means as interaction happens in countless informal settings. At Nnobi, for example, the news of a marriage between a freeborn and an *osu* in the early hours of the afternoon may be heard by nearly the entire village before sunset. Information like this is not necessarily shared in the pages of newspapers but normally distributed orally – usually by gossip.

This chapter sets out to consider, by way of ethnographic description, the manner in which Igbo caste practices are continually entwined in the daily life of the people. It gives a snapshot of how Igbos represent caste ideologies as relevant to their lives. As these conversations took place in rural settings, particularly during fieldwork in 2007, special attention is given to the way in which events regarding the caste tradition informed debate in the Igbo rural communication context. Mostly, the events at the rural areas go on to affect decisions of extended families in the townships. This chapter aims to contribute to previous chapters evidence about the persistence of caste practices in oral narratives by examining three questions. First, what structures continue to provoke discrimination against caste groups? Second, what common patterns do these prejudices take within these structures? And, third, who are the actors that sustain the discourse within the same structures?

⁴³⁶ The problems of power outages in eastern Nigeria like in other regions, makes the portable radio a common means of getting information as well since people are able to buy cheap batteries to power the radio. From our survey of alternative means in the absence of power, more people seem to rely on this medium for national news especially.

7.1 The Family

The family setting is the most intimate social and political membership unit in Igboland and it is the centre of social interaction of any individual. It is within the family that morals are formed and individuals are nurtured into understanding and building relationships between larger groups. Beliefs are inculcated within the family and attitudes are moulded here as well. An individual learns various aspects of tradition in the family and develops until he/she can start a new family of his/her own. The father, who is traditionally the head of the family and in most cases is the eldest member, determines a lot in a child's life, including what religion, aspects of culture, or other things are communicated and taught at different stages. He exercises moral and administrative authority within the family and children are nurtured to respect parents and elders.⁴³⁷ Children are considered young even when they have grown up. A visit to some families at Nnobi makes one convinced that the father is the dominant force and pacesetter in family affairs. It is common to hear elderly men refer to a middle-aged man as *nwatakiri* – a little child.⁴³⁸ Conflicts that arise from association and marriages are settled within the family. Thus, approval for marriages, even between a freeborn and an *osu*, is obtained here and, normally, it is the father, whose attitude is informed by personal experiences, religious doctrines or political and social affiliations, who has the final say. Most of the video films we discussed in the previous chapter depict this fact. This father-oriented set up in Igboland has important political consequences. Firstly, society is shaped by power as elsewhere. But in Igbo villages, power

⁴³⁷ The family in Igboland may live in a compound with other family members as uncles and aunts. The compound may also comprise of many houses fenced together. Most families still live in family compounds in the area today while some have started demarcating houses to prevent family disputes and disagreements amongst wives.

⁴³⁸ At a traditional marriage ceremony at Nnobi, it was fascinating to hear a group of elders refer to one Chief Okwudili Obieze as *nwatakiri*. He was definitely in his mid-forties then in 2007, but as the elders laughed and supposed, a child does not cease to be a child in the eyes of his fathers. He is still a *nwatakiri*, they giggled and said.

derives from wisdom; and wisdom belongs to age. Secondly, even when a child grows to maturity he/she is expected to accept decisions that affect him/her directly, even though he/she may not have actively participated in the decision-making. Igbo society relegates the child to the background even in circumstances where decisions that affect him/her directly are to be taken. The location of power is unambiguously with the head of the family.⁴³⁹ And as a result, parents usually reject whatever kind of relationship exists between their freeborn children and an *osu*. Dozie Ikedife of Nnewi makes a significant revelation on the matter. "Quote me today," he said, "if I know that somebody is an *osu* I will not marry that person and I won't let any of my children marry that person. No apologies."⁴⁴⁰ Another reliable source, a father of nine, gives a similar report:

I have given out all my daughters in marriage to freeborn men, all Igbos. But my three sons are yet to be married. However, I know none of them will come forward with an outcast because they know without being told that it is totally unacceptable here, not to me, not to my kinsmen. We won't allow such nonsense.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ Agbasiere even notes in her book, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, that the "Relations between father and child are usually cordial, although the child is taught from an early age to act with greater deference towards the father than the mother. This deference is expected to be extended to any relative designated 'father'." "The general concept of 'father'," she notes, "is of remote figure, a symbol of physical strength and a harsh, even if occasional, disciplinarian. That of the 'mother', on the other hand, is of a pervading presence, a symbol of quiet strength and guidance." "In matters of discipline," she continues, "the father usually plays the role of 'briefed disciplinarian'; that is, he relies on reports of the culprit's behaviour from the mother or other senior members of the family." See Joseph Therese Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 84-85.

⁴⁴⁰ Dozie Ikedife, FGD, July 26, 2007.

⁴⁴¹ Emma Obidike of Ozubulu; Private Discussion, 2007.

Okpalaeke explains the rationale behind the father's dominance on this issue. He says:

We reject them [*osu* and *ohu*] in marriage not because they are not human beings but because culture has it that way. Status symbols are important here in Igboland and no father wants to soil his name in any way.⁴⁴²

On the one hand, the father's dominance, which is undisputed in most families, makes it tough or even impossible for a freeborn child to ignore the opposition from the family when he or she is interested in marrying from the caste groups. A banker at Nnobi has put it very well:

I was to be married to a man last year until we discovered he was *osu*. I was confused. He is a good Christian, hardworking and educated. But when my family rejected the affair I was torn between love for the man and respect for my family, after all, I'm in my thirties; well ripe for marriage. I refused the man's proposal. I don't have the muscle to fight my family. More men will come, but I have just one family.⁴⁴³

On the other hand, one gets the feeling of change amongst some young adults, particularly those groomed outside Igboland. In fact, most of them express willingness to shun the consequences of disobeying their family by marrying whoever they love, not minding the status. An informant, for instance, who participated in our FGD recounted:

If I'm in love with an *osu* I'll marry her. Even though some people believe marrying them can cause some sort of misfortune I don't see anything wrong with it. I can imagine the only problem that will arise will come from my parents and I suspect if that happens I will fight any member of my family that attempts to come in my way because as far as I remember it's me getting hitched and not them.⁴⁴⁴

Another respondent in his twenties remarked similarly:

⁴⁴² Anthony Ifeanyichukwu Okpalaeke who gave this view at an interview in July 19, 2007, is a Journalist/Barrister and a community leader at Awka-Etiti in Anambra State.

⁴⁴³ Chedo Umuagu, Private Discussion, 2007.

⁴⁴⁴ Onyekachi Umah, FGD, July 27, 2007.

I'm tired of hearing all these nonsense about *osu*. In short, the moment I find a wife and Nnobi people say she is *osu* that I'm forbidden from marrying her, I will ignore whatever nonsense they have to say – family or not, and continue with my plans.⁴⁴⁵

Again, the father's power stands out even where a child decides to disobey his wishes, such as in the case of Uju at Igbo-Ukwu, who was disinherited by her parents, rejected by her kinsmen and banned from joining and participating in the activities of local groups within her village because she married an *osu*. Her case was narrated by her cousin, Ada, whose father prohibited her from communicating with Uju in whatever manner. According to her:

Uju knew nothing about the *osu* tradition until she was about to be married to a young man she had met in Lagos and loved for over four years. Our family rejected the union straightaway. According to my father who is the head of our extended family it was a taboo. She went ahead to marry the man notwithstanding, and her actions earned her more than she bargained for. The entire family here in Lagos banned her from attending meetings both here and at the village. The kindred refused to recognize the union; her immediate family disinherited her. Even the women group she was supposed to automatically belong to after marriage turned away from her. She no longer visits Igbo-Ukwu. She cannot visit us here in Lagos. We no longer communicate with her.⁴⁴⁶

Usually, extended families and other groups are involved in Igbo marriage rites.⁴⁴⁷ And to a great extent, the role of extended families in performing these rites is as important as that of the father who must first give his consent before informing his kinsmen. As in Uju's case, if the father disapproves, all the groups he and his wife belongs to – his kinsmen, kingship associations, women groups, market associations, etc, reject the child and refuse to recognize the marriage. An individual's life practically revolves around these structures and it is within them that much of social interaction takes place. In short, it is difficult and rare for one to totally disconnect oneself from these groups. They play a role in many aspects of life. For instance, no

⁴⁴⁵ Gozie Chidera, Private Discussion, August 2008.

⁴⁴⁶ Ada Uka, Private Discussion, April 2008.

⁴⁴⁷ Refer to Introduction.

man goes to take a wife without his kinsmen, if so, he is not taken seriously. In the case of a woman, it is her kinsmen that accept her bride wealth in concert with her father. The kinsmen must be involved in the settlement of the bride wealth. Marriages in Igboland are in fact, between both lineages. The kinsmen and other groups play significant roles in other ceremonies such as child naming, funerals, chieftaincy, etc. Because of all these ties that bind every member of the kindred up to the village group, it becomes difficult to defy group norms by associating with an *osu*.⁴⁴⁸ Ilogu alluded to this fact when he wrote, “group life is very strong, and the ties of relationship far spread, and the pattern of life is communalistic.”⁴⁴⁹

7.2 Local Associations

Igbo social and political life is conducted by numerous other groups that are often larger than the kindred – extended families. Because the Igbo political system is democratic and tends to involve a “representative principle,”⁴⁵⁰ various groups that draw memberships from all ages and classes – including caste groups in some areas – participate in decision making that affect the family. Igbo associations have affected caste groups in varying ways from time immemorial because many of their struggles for emancipation, like those enumerated in Chapter II, largely

⁴⁴⁸ An instance of the influence a family - nuclear and extended - could wield in an individual's life was portrayed in a Nigeria video film that depicted a young Igboman (Kenneth Okonkwo) who was disowned by his father for marrying an *osu*. This decision affected the young man's affiliations to the larger society. Firstly, the town union group which he belonged in Lagos barred him from their meetings. The age grade associations and his kindred automatically denied him membership. He ignored all their moves; after all he was educated and rich. Unfortunately, he realized the importance of these groups when he lost his father, then he was expected to come home to bury the old man in a village he rejected and had not been for several years. He travelled with his wife, but encountered numerous problems there. First, funeral in Igboland is not just a nuclear family affair. Just as the kindred must be involved, age groups as well play roles – from digging of graves, transporting coffins, etcetera. In addition, the associations that the deceased belonged take part in the ceremony. If he was an *ozo* titled man for instance, his fellow red cap chiefs must be involved. But in this situation the man was forced to dig the grave himself. He was even made to carry the coffin on his head. All these acts were to make him realize the importance of these institutions.

⁴⁴⁹ Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Ibo Culture*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974, p. 24.

⁴⁵⁰ Victor C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, p. 44.

dwelt on the fact that they were denied membership to most of these groups.⁴⁵¹ And in many areas to date, caste groups are barred from participating in the activities of several groups in their local communities. This has made the discourse prominent and even persistent within these groups. Below, we examine two prominent examples of institutions where the discourse has manifested over the years.⁴⁵²

7.2.1 Kingship Institutions

The kingship institution is prominent throughout Igboland, not only because it confers status on an individual but also because it is a symbol of character as well as of success. Every village group in Igboland is headed by a traditional ruler who must govern with a council of chiefs and elders – individuals who must represent every village in the village group or in some quarters, particular families.⁴⁵³ While most village groups like Nnobi, Nnokwa and Onitsha appoint their traditional rulers on the basis of achievement, very few others like Nnewi do so on hereditary grounds.⁴⁵⁴ Yet, in most areas in Igboland where members of caste groups have done well, they are denied the opportunity to become traditional rulers. Afigbo rightly commented on the rarity and difficulty of members of caste groups to hold such positions of authority when he said:

⁴⁵¹ Refer to Chapter II.

⁴⁵² These associations or groups cut across villages in Igboland but they may have little differences in name and function.

⁴⁵³ As we noted in our introduction, the political system in pre-colonial Igboland was decentralized. According to Nwaubani, before the British came into Igboland, “no individual or institution was paramount, in the sense of serving as the sole or exclusive source of all political authority.” Nwaubani points out in his article that all “political roles were diffuse.” (See Ebere Nwaubani, “Chieftaincy Among the Igbo: A Guest on the Centre-Stage,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1994, pp. 348-349). Even until now, Igbo kingship institutions are democratic and everyone (especially adult members of the community) participates in decision making. Also see Axel Harneit-Sievers, “Igbo ‘Traditional Rulers’: Chieftaincy and the State in Southeastern Nigeria,” *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 1998, pp. 55-79.

⁴⁵⁴ In most parts of Igboland traditional rulers are merely appointed based on their achievements in their personal endeavours. It is very rare to find traditional rulers who occupy such seat on hereditary grounds like Nnewi. However, Nnewi’s traditional ruler has been on the throne since 1963 and no one hopes to contest the throne with his family as he insists it must be occupied by a male child (usually the first) in the line of succession.

One man in fact tried to contest for Igweship in Owerri because he thought he had money. Everyone ignored him because these days you can't come out and openly call somebody an *osu*. But at the end of the day he was denied the position. An *osu* cannot be Igwe over a freeborn group. They are still barred from becoming *ozo* titled men in Owerri so how then can they go for the highest traditional office. It is rare and I don't believe it will happen even after many decades.⁴⁵⁵

In some villages where newly appointed traditional rulers are suspected of having *osu* lineages, they are immediately deposed as was reported in Naze in 1977 and in Owerri at the beginning of the 1980s, and then a freeborn is appointed.⁴⁵⁶ Only very few villages like Nnobi and Awka-Etiti have allowed members of caste groups into the Igwe's cabinet. But, the constitutions of these villages, particularly Nnobi, have stipulated since the 1970s, even after several amendments, that the traditional ruler position must at all times be occupied by a 'freeborn.' Another group within the Igbo social system is made up of those bearing the prestigious *ozo* title – a status symbol taken by those that can afford it or who have relations or friends willing to sponsor them. However, only men of proven integrity are allowed within this group. Most caste groups in Igboland are denied these titles. In fact, some of the local campaigns for abolition within the village groups were tied to their request to freely join this group.⁴⁵⁷ This worked for the castes in some areas. In Igbo-Ukwu for instance, after the traditional ruler abolished the caste system in the area, the freeborn groups refused to admit the caste groups into the *ozo* title association. Instead, the Igwe established a new *ozo* title association for the caste groups on the same day of the abolition, and to date, Igbo-Ukwu has two *ozo* title groups – one for the freeborn groups and the other for the caste groups. So far, other villages in the region

⁴⁵⁵ Adiele E. Afigbo, Interview, Abakaliki, August 29, 2007.

⁴⁵⁶ See Bayo Onanuga and Babafemi Ojudu, "Apartheid: A Nigerian Version: Laws of Nigeria Can't be pleaded against the System," *African Concord*, Lagos, June 30, 1987, p. 18; May E. Ezekiel, "Osu: The Untouchable Igbo Caste System," *Sunday Concord*, Lagos, June 12, 1983, p. Mag. V.

⁴⁵⁷ Refer to Chapter II, 2.4.2.

have either followed the Igbo-Ukwu pattern or disregarded the yearnings of the caste groups; for as Afigbo promptly adds after his previous remark:

I am not aware of an *osu* allowed to take *ozo* titles anywhere in Igboland. Such a thing cannot happen in Igboland. The *osu* may go to other villages and buy chieftaincy titles with money. But for the *ozo* title, it is a right they do not enjoy; it is still sacred.⁴⁵⁸

7.2.2 Town Unions

Town unions, or “improvement unions” as Uchendu calls them,⁴⁵⁹ are as important as Igbo kingship institutions and even more powerful than the traditional council of chiefs and elders in some areas like Nnobi. They primarily promote development for the townspeople and coordinate other political and social issues in the area. And because they have branches in several towns where their members reside and every adult indigene is a member, they appear to be the most democratic institution in Igboland. At Nnobi for instance, the Nnobi Welfare Organization which is headquartered at Nnobi coordinates the activities of its numerous branches in Onitsha, Lagos, Abuja and many other cities where they have many members. In short, Igbo town unions can be described as the congress or national assembly of the village group. They are charged above all with the responsibility of writing and upholding the village group’s constitution. After the legal abolition of Igbo caste practices at the East Regional Assembly in 1956, it was to the town unions and the council of elders that the caste groups in most village groups presented their case for emancipation. And, significantly, most abolitions that happened – like those of Nnobi, Awka-Etiti, Nnewi and Igbo-Ukwu, were approved by the town unions who of course had to re-write their constitutions to embrace the new status quo. Indeed, town unions have continued to discuss the *osu* topic, as they continue to settle disputes

⁴⁵⁸ Adiele E. Afigbo, Interview, Abakaliki, August 29, 2007.

⁴⁵⁹ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, p. 38.

regarding the daily prejudices against the caste groups. At a town's progressive union meeting in Anambra in 2007 where we were present, a member reported a case of discrimination against him by another member and the erring member was made to publicly apologize and pay a fine of N500. Even at another town's meeting in Abuja where we discussed our research, some individuals within the group raised eyebrows at the research because they belonged to the caste group. Some of them were offended by the mention of this subject; perhaps because it reminded everyone of their status. We were unaware of this, but after the meeting a freeborn confessed the anger of some of these individuals to us and advised that such discourses within an Igbo group or setting must be talked about in hushed tones, especially when one is not sure of the status of those around oneself.

In many localities, members of Igbo caste groups have since the local abolitions managed to join their town unions and even to occupy prominent positions within the associations. At Nnobi for instance, the president of the town union recounts:

Since we abolished the system here at Nnobi the *osu* people have all joined us. One of them is an Ichie [an adviser to the Igwe] and a member of the Igwe's cabinet. Another one was even the president of our town union in the mid 1980s. He was given the position which shows integration on our part.⁴⁶⁰

Nevertheless, Ajaghaku who had been involved in running the affairs of Nnobi's town union since the 1970s, when they abolished the caste practice, confessed the stalemate on the part of amending the village's constitution to allow all, irrespective of status, to vie for the position of traditional ruler. He implied that many people in the freeborn group may be opposed to it. According to him, the fact that they have admitted caste groups into the Igwe's cabinet and allowed them to hold positions in the town union is remarkable and should be commended. It is indeed remarkable, because several town unions in the Owerri region will not condone this

⁴⁶⁰ Ezeobianumba Ajaghaku, Interview, Nnobi, June 24, 2007.

degree of integration. One official of a town union around Mbaise area implied that his town union has not accommodated the caste groups because the freeborn still fear the caste groups will bring bad luck to the town. The official noted that

The *osu* can sit around us in the Church; after all we are there to serve God. But to hold positions in our town union or to become Igwe, we won't allow that. It is a taboo.⁴⁶¹

7.3 Public Meeting Spheres

Public gatherings are a regular means of entertainment, disseminating information and sharing ideas in Igboland. And, because these gatherings are occasional, happening more often than not, large numbers gather at unique meeting spots – some historic, for various activities such as storytelling, festivals, and mere conversing, etc. Extensive consultations are extended to these gatherings because of the consultative nature of Igbo local governance; thus, creating an avenue for individuals to express their views on variety of issues that affect them. However, the significance of these gatherings to our discourse lies in the fact that Igbo caste discourses have largely depended on oral modes of communication and from the past, all the narrations regarding the practice have involved gossip, rumour and conversations amongst groups in typical avenues such as these which we examine below with real instances to show how the discourse is sustained. Additionally, it should be noted above everything else that one of the difficulties freeborn groups have faced in associating with the caste groups in Igboland has been the consistent fear that those who see them may begin to suspect that they are involved in an intimate relationship; for as a respondent remarked: “I can eat with an *osu* within the house, but

⁴⁶¹ Fieldwork Notes, 2007.

doing so in public will be damaging to my name because those who see us will start spreading rumours that I have joined them, hence, I become one.”⁴⁶² And, as a reliable source points out:

If from the grapevine people think you have associated with an *osu*, you henceforth belong to the group. You may not be an *osu* directly but indirectly you are one because it is believed and suspected that you have communicated with an *osu* or you are having a very close relationship with one. Because, if you are seen just mingling with an *osu* at very odd times and at open places, then rumours may begin flying here and there that you belong to the group. Therefore, to be on the safe side, we immediately stop associating with the person who has been rumoured to have associated with the *osu*.⁴⁶³

7.3.1 Visits

All across Igboland, visits are a common activity and they happen especially in the evenings when people return from work or during the weekends when they come back from Church. It is normal to see friends and relations visit each other in their homes especially where they live on the same routes. During discussions with a visitor, even on contentious matters like the *osu* subject, it is usual for adult sons and nephews to come in, be introduced, and disappear again from the scene if the elders do not indicate that their presence is needed. At Nnobi in 2007, a visitor, one evening had visited a compound where we had gone to conduct an interview; his mission was to discuss the activities of the *osu* group in a nearby village that had started pushing for autonomy from their host village. While the discussion went on, more and more visitors came in and joined in the conversation and they did this for several hours while drinking palm wine and chewing kola nuts. Interestingly, names were mentioned and one Nneka who had come in to present these men with drinks heard bits and pieces of this conversation and she went on later to tell us that “I didn’t know Mr. A. is an *osu*.”⁴⁶⁴ This shows

⁴⁶² Joe, Video Film Questionnaire, 2009.

⁴⁶³ Anthony Ifeanyichukwu Okpalaeke, Interview, Awka-Etiti, July 19, 2007.

⁴⁶⁴ Fieldwork Notes, 2007.

us that the information about someone's caste status could be picked by passersby during formal conversations. And in that way, like in the case of Nneka, the information spreads.

Moreover, when a guest visits an Igbo household, the host is determined to serve him kola nuts – the symbol of Igbo hospitality. To do the presentation however, such a host follows certain principles that may be determined by either genealogical distance or, more frequently, social status.⁴⁶⁵ For instance, in Nnobi village group, which is made up of three villages (Ebenesi, Ngo and Awuda, in order of seniority), when kola nut is to be shared amongst male visitors from Ebenesi and Awuda, an individual from Ebenesi may break and bless the kola nut even if he is younger than the man from Awuda because he hails from the senior part of the town.⁴⁶⁶ Also, and more importantly, kola nut is shared based on the principle of status because a freeborn will only grudgingly allow an *osu* man to break kola nut in his presence, irrespective of age. John-Kamen of Ihembosi makes a significant revelation on the matter:

No *osu* is allowed to break kola in the presence of freeborns. Even if the freeborn present is a child and the *osu* man is over eighty years, the freeborn is accorded the right to break the kola nut. Though the *osu* is not told in clear words that he can't perform the ritual, the body language of those present is enough to tell him that it is forbidden.⁴⁶⁷

Simple signs and body languages are used when such gatherings as those described above are held involving freeborn groups and the *osu*. It is not rare to notice someone raising an eyebrow when the *osu* issue is brought up in public. In fact, statements like 'tufia' and 'God forbid' could arise in such circumstance like in the case of one Jacinta who we casually asked if she was

⁴⁶⁵ Victor C. Uchendu, "Ezi Na Ulo: The Extended Family in Igbo Civilization," The Ahiajoku Lecture, 1995.

⁴⁶⁶ Ebenesi was the eldest of Idemili sons.

⁴⁶⁷ Professor Anthony John-Kamen is the Onowu (traditional prime minister) of Ihembosi village, near Okija. He is the next in line to the traditional ruler and was once offered the position but declined because of his busy schedule at the university where he has lectured for 35 years. Interview, Ihembosi, June 22, 2007.

willing to marry an *osu* that she falls in love with; her response was 'God forbid!'⁴⁶⁸ Even when an *osu* walks through a gathering of freeborns it is normal to see them communicate with signs and gestures like looking away from the *osu* person to inform the others who may be unaware of the person's status that he belongs to the caste groups. Expressions like these may be followed by whistles, finger snapping, etc; signs or gestures that may not plainly spell out the message that an *osu* is around. All these expressions became common when the 1956 Abolition Law forbade individuals from referring to another as *osu*.⁴⁶⁹

7.3.2 The Church

Igboland is generally overwhelmed with Churches of all denominations and sizes where huge numbers gather on Saturdays and Sundays to worship. Today's sermons in these Churches, especially those around Owerri, often dwell on embracing the caste groups within the area. Most clergy in Igboland make it a priority to preach against discrimination from their pulpit as we witnessed at a small Church in Nnobi where the pastor later confessed that:

I wedded one of the *osus* here, in Nnobi. People questioned my action but before God we are all equal. I preach about it here and I can tell you we do not discriminate in this Church. In fact, if not because I'm married, I will marry an *osu*.⁴⁷⁰

We had earlier shown (see Chapter II) that the Church in the colonial era was the first agent in the region to embrace members of the caste groups in Igboland and the missionaries unremittingly preached against the discrimination the caste groups faced.⁴⁷¹ So far, the Church in Igboland has not stopped preaching against the practice. Lately, one Chidozie, a pastor at a Church in Enugu who "made an admission that virtually no Nigerian like him would be

⁴⁶⁸ Fieldwork Notes, Enugu, 2007.

⁴⁶⁹ Reverend Fr. Professor Anthony Ekwunife, Interview, Nsukka, August 22, 2007.

⁴⁷⁰ Reverend Sunday Iroabuchi Eze, Interview, Nnobi, July 18, 2007.

⁴⁷¹ Refer to Chapter II, 2.1.

prepared to make,” confessed that his “grandfather was an *osu*.” Chiedozie, who stood outside the Enugu Church with his bible open in his hands, confessed that the Church “saved him from being a marked man.” “Now I’ve been born again,” he noted, “I have rejected all that [*osu* connections], and my wife, she is born-again too, and doesn’t care about it either.”⁴⁷² As Chiedozie revealed, his freeborn in-laws rejected the tradition because of his born-again status, and did not object to their daughter’s marriage to him. Moreover, one Obumselu, a professor who once led the pan-Igbo organization, Ohaneze Ndigbo, noted that “Pentecostal Churches, like Mr Chiedozie’s, are having an effect and a growing population may also drown out the stigma of being *osu*.”⁴⁷³

Obumselu’s judgement however relied on the situation in Enugu. The case in Owerri may be entirely different; after all, Owerri has remained the centre of discriminatory practices over the years. A Catholic clergyman in the region told us that the Church annually organizes events for the sensitization of their congregation against the caste practices. Besides, he noted that discrimination has remained strong amongst his congregation – even inside the Church, and in the presence of the Bishop. The Church in Owerri is a breeding ground for the discourse as individuals within the freeborn and caste groups continue to fight for positions within Church associations. As the clergyman points out:

Sometime last year, we had a situation where a woman from the *osu* village wanted to contest for the presidency of the Catholic Women Organization. The other women refused. They will not tolerate it. In fact, their husbands came into it and rejected the woman’s candidacy. You know the position is an influential one here in Owerri; it was tough. At the end of the day, the *osu* woman didn’t get the position, even with the plea of the Archbishop. We preach about this thing day after day, but people

⁴⁷² See Andrew Walker’s article, “The Story of Nigeria’s ‘Untouchables’”, BBC News, Enugu, April 7, 2009; published and available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7977734.stm> (Accessed April 2009).

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

refuse to let it go. I tell you, every Sunday, even if you notice the sitting pattern, it is clear; the freeborn have refused to let it go.⁴⁷⁴

Another pastor in a Pentecostal Church at Owerri describes an incident that happened in 2002:

My cousin who is born-again had met this girl he wanted to marry when his parents refused because they say she is *osu*. He said no problem that there was nothing wrong with it. Before we knew it his parents took him to one Reverend Father in Port Harcourt who claims to perform some healing and miracles. You won't believe he was chained like an animal on the floor because they believed he was possessed by an evil spirit to want to marry an *osu*. They probably thought the girl charmed him. But, must someone become mad to marry an *osu*? The Reverend Father should have cautioned his parents. This is the sad problem today because we expect the Church to correct and teach us the right from the wrong instead it is the Church in some areas that promote the *osu* system. My cousin finally married his wife with our support and today both of us don't see his parents eye to eye.⁴⁷⁵

7.3.3 Women's Gatherings or 'August Meetings'

Women play a crucial role in describing and maintaining societal values in Igboland because they "possess a consultative voice" and are capable of exerting "significant political influence" in matters that concern them particularly. They are often "expected to perform the role of 'watchdogs' of public morality," as Agbasiere, whose thesis dwelt on Igbo women, points out.⁴⁷⁶ Women demonstrate their feelings in numerous ways and could exert influence on the men when they disapprove a situation.⁴⁷⁷ For instance, during the Aba women's riot discussed briefly in Chapter II, women were decked in attires such as palm leaves and grass to revolt against the imposition of tax on their families.⁴⁷⁸ When women cover their body with leaves or

⁴⁷⁴ Private discussion with Reverend Fr. Solomon of the Owerri Catholic Archdiocese, 2007.

⁴⁷⁵ Private Discussion, Owerri 2007.

⁴⁷⁶ Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, p. 39.

⁴⁷⁷ Chika Onu aptly portrayed the level of influences Igbo women could wield in domestic affairs like marriages in his film *Christian Marriage* (2002). *Christian Marriage* which is based on status and belonging, narrates the tale of women leaders in the Catholic and Anglican Church who discriminated against non members of their Church that had come to marry their children. And according to Chika Onu, this production is a true life story.

⁴⁷⁸ Refer to Chapter II, 2.3.

expose their breasts during public gatherings, they do so to oppose something they do not like. This is a symbolic language they use to tell the men folks especially that 'we disapprove this or that.'

All married women in Igboland gather annually at their villages in the month of August to discuss matters relating to the pursuit of community welfare and development and other issues that affect their families.⁴⁷⁹ The gathering is the largest congregation of women in Igboland and no matter where they assemble the meetings have the same meaning and appeal and it is often supported by the Church and the state governments. This tradition has continued since it started before the 1960s and it has become a jamboree of some sort – an occasion where women come to flaunt wealth and talk about their status in society.⁴⁸⁰ These women also settle disputes amongst their fellow women as Obika narrated. It was the case of an *osu* woman who had complained of discrimination against her:

In 2003, I remember at Abatete one woman came up with a discussion about this *osu* system because we have them [the *osu*] in our midst. They are free to join in our meetings these days since it's been abolished. In this woman's case, another woman's child had called her own child *osu* indirectly and she brought the matter to the women so the president will settle them. And, we did; it was settled.

⁴⁷⁹ These meetings usually take place in August as it is tagged 'August meeting' and the choice of August is because it is a resting period for most Igbos – especially farmers in the rural areas – since it comes just after the farming season and before the well celebrated new yam festival. Participation in the gathering is the exclusive reserve of married women from the village. Once married, a woman automatically belongs to the group so far as a dowry had been paid for her hand in marriage and every member is expected to pay regular dues and attend meetings (which is compulsory as defined in their constitution). These dues must be paid even though the member resides abroad. People normally nominate representatives who may be their mother or a close female relation when they are not available to attend. The annual ritual which lasts through four days often ends with a communiqué containing a project the group agrees to undertake during the year, and this could range from the construction of mere drainages to the erection of new schools, hospitals or civic centres.

⁴⁸⁰ There have been a lot of misunderstandings on the rationale for holding August meetings. This has been because of the fearsome nature the event has taken these days. Some women now see it as an avenue to display wealth and embarrass the poor in their midst. The video film industry has often portrayed these behaviours in films including the popular *August Meeting* where women displayed misdemeaning attitudes.

When matters of the *osu* come up, it is usually about people who report those that discriminate against them or others who come up to talk about starting campaigns to end it – things like that.⁴⁸¹

According to Obika, they do not settle such disputes by asking the guilty parties to pay fines, but they assign other women within the group to talk to them. It is only when such offences are repeated that the guilty ones are asked to pay a fine. Nevertheless, it is not unusual to find women groups who solve problems of discrimination but return to perform similar acts themselves, at least indirectly. Thus, our respondent added that women who belong to the caste groups have not been privileged to head the group. Another woman supposed: “such influential positions are reserved for freeborn women. It is a position of authority and cannot be handed to anyone just like that.”⁴⁸²

7.3.4 Market Place

One cannot travel around Igboland today and not understand the importance of market places to the people. In the region, an average individual may visit the market at least twice in one week to either buy or sell. The marketplace has not just become a place for buying and selling for the people; it serves as a meeting point for friends and relations to exchange ideas and in the case of women, talk about things they may not usually share with their husbands. Marketplaces in the region are genuine avenues for gossip and disseminating information to large crowds via varying means. At Nnobi central market for example, many activities take place at once. A woman comes to the market to plait her hair with her children and they sit around making friends and playing with the hairdresser’s children. Travellers from other villages journeying through Nnobi stop at the market to have a drink or buy some food. While at the market they receive loads of information from traders shouting to attract customers to their stalls or from

⁴⁸¹ Nkedilim Obika, Private Discussion, April 2008.

⁴⁸² Stella Okoye, Private Discussion/Interview, Enugu, May 31 & July 17, 2007.

people preaching with loudspeakers. What about the motorcycle or taxi driver who stops at the market to collect passengers? He is exposed to varying forms of information that could range from published posters displayed on the walls, written signs in white chalk and gossips amongst his passengers. Even the woman who sings local ballads while selling breadfruits transmits messages to those who hear her. In the old days, people were made to swear oaths at marketplaces. Criminals to date are burnt to death at marketplaces as well. This is largely due to the high number of people the market attracts daily – so oaths are taken in the presence of many witnesses and criminals are embarrassed and killed to warn their cohorts within the crowd.

However, because of the crowd marketplaces attract, it becomes a usual spot for rumour mongering and gossip – activities frequently used for conversations on Igbo caste groups. We had earlier noted the case of a young lady as Cyril Ike narrated, who travelled past the town market at Igbo-Ukwu on a motorbike ridden by an *osu*. A lot of people saw her and talked about her association with the driver in hushed tones. The gossip continued and rumours got to every end of the village that she had been seen with an *osu*. The lady has remained unmarried since the incident happened in the 1980s.⁴⁸³ Even if it is not true, the rumour itself is interesting as it tells us about local fears. Earlier in the thesis, we also gave a hint of a similar case at another market in Owerri where one woman publicly fought another woman and ended up calling her *osu* in the presence of a crowd. The woman who was referred to as *osu* remained so to date because the villagers had no way of confirming the accuracy of the accusation and opted for caution.⁴⁸⁴

Additionally, village squares, like marketplaces, which bring together huge crowds of people that converge for private, group or communal discussions, are also popular for hosting gossip

⁴⁸³ Cyril Ike, Interview, Igbo-Ukwu, June 24, 2007.

⁴⁸⁴ Refer to Chapter I, 1.4.1.

and rumour mongering, as it is usual to see people in the evening in clusters talking about issues like this and perhaps pointing fingers at members of the caste groups that come around the area. It is not rare to hear people refer to caste groups as *ndi ejiri goro ihe* – those who were sacrificed to deities – in these clusters. For instance, before we began fieldwork, we had toured Nnobi in the company of another villager who was to show us round the village. At the marketplace where we had gone to buy bread, our guide pointed to three individuals and said: “those people are from the *osu* village.”⁴⁸⁵ Then beside the town’s general hospital where people often gather in the evening, the villager performed a similar act. In short, the role of public places in sustaining Igbo caste practices is summarized in Onuorah’s words:

It is at public places – in the market square, town halls, even schools and during big ceremonies that rumours concerning this *osu* thing are likely to spread because it is at these locations that people catch freeborns who mingle freely with this people. And, when people catch you with the *osu* it is difficult to explain to them that it was just a mere thing. They’ll conclude on their own that there’s more to it. Then, you become *osu*.⁴⁸⁶

7.4 Conclusion

Many observers in Igboland, particularly those in areas where the caste groups exist, would recognize many elements of the situations described here – situations that have continued to repeat themselves day in day out. In 1983, a prominent Igbo politician reportedly said during a political campaign at Owerri that “An *osu* cannot rule us.”⁴⁸⁷ A newspaper in 1989 reported a case at Amafor where the freeborn groups in the area cut off trade with the *osu* groups and imposed a fine of N200 on any freeborn that was caught buying from or selling to the *osu*. In the same village, all freeborn associations were also prohibited from admitting members of the *osu*

⁴⁸⁵ Fieldwork Notes, 2007.

⁴⁸⁶ Emeka Onuorah, Private Discussion at Port Harcourt and Nnobi, 2007.

⁴⁸⁷ May E. Ezekiel, “Osu: The Untouchable Igbo Caste System,” *Sunday Concord*, Lagos, June 12, 1983, pp. Mag. I, V & XI.

groups; where they defied this order, they were fined up to N5,000 by the town union.⁴⁸⁸ At Umuode in 1996, freeborns were banned by their traditional ruler from attending a celebration that honoured an *ohu* professor who came from a village within the village group because he belonged to the caste groups.⁴⁸⁹ At Christmas in 2005, two lovebirds, Emeka and Chidinma, had gone to their village in Owerri to arrange their traditional marriage. It was the fourth anniversary of their relationship. But while interrogating Chidinma, Emeka's father – himself a Knight of the Anglican Church, discovered she was an *osu* and threatened to disinherit his son if he went further with the marriage plans. Emeka ignored his father for some time until he realized the entire village had turned against him. Then he broke it off immediately with the girl.⁴⁹⁰ Another young lady in Anambra was prevented by her family and kinsmen in 2007 from marrying a man she had loved for two years because he was an *osu*.⁴⁹¹ A story was even reported in 2009 of a freeborn man who called a member of Eziamma community *osu* in broad daylight. Both men fought each other in public and afterwards, the freeborn village attacked and burnt homes at Eziamma community, to punish them for beating up their son.⁴⁹² All these incidences were reported by witnesses in several newspapers.

There is a bitter irony of the situation in Igboland, because even while abolitions continue to multiply in village groups and caste groups are pronounced free, on the contrary, the social structures are sustained, and the processes of local life and the distribution of power in the communities continue to defy the purported new situation. The residential patterns in areas like

⁴⁸⁸ Louisa Aguiyi-Ironsi and Ben Edokpayi, "Children of Juju Messengers: Despite Education and the Gospel, the Osu Caste System Remains in Igboland," *Newswatch*, Lagos, January 2, 1989, pp. 34-36.

⁴⁸⁹ Tobs Agbaegbu, "Slavery in Igboland: The Osu take their Case against the Diala to the Human Rights Commission," *Newswatch*, Lagos, January 10, 2000, pp. 23-26.

⁴⁹⁰ Seni Durojaiye and Vivian Onyebukwa, "Osu Caste System: 21st Century absurdity in Igboland," *Independent Newspaper*, Lagos, Thursday, November 24, 2005, p. 57.

⁴⁹¹ Juliana Francis, "Does the Osu Caste System Still Exist?" *Sunday Sun*, Lagos, September 16, 2007, p. 43.

⁴⁹² Leo Igwe, "Letters: Gov. Ohakim, Come to the Aid of Eziamma Community," *The Guardian*, Lagos, Wednesday, February 25, 2009, p. 3.

Awka-Etiti, Nnobi, Nnewi, Igbo-Ukwu, Nkanu and most villages around Owerri still separate the freeborn from the caste groups even though they claim to have abolished all forms of the practice. To date, the freeborn groups in these areas avoid purchasing lands in the caste demarcation. Most villages around the Owerri region and Nkanu continue to have separate structures, including market places, Churches, even schools. Yet, they all make claims to abolition. In most Igbo families, irrespective of education and Christian background, parents and extended families still have to go to the field to confirm that their would-be in-laws are not from the caste groups. It is apparent in all these experiences that Igbo caste practices are embedded in the people's local life and all their activities revolve around tradition as marriage between a freeborn and an *osu* is forbidden; kingship is reserved for the freeborn; and the ritual of breaking kola nuts or pouring libations and participating in some local dances remain the reserve of freeborns. At present, it is almost impossible to avoid discrimination, especially as these traditional activities are cherished and passed on to the younger generation without modifications that take note of the abolitions. Thus, the structures are sustained by older folks who pass them on to their children and expect them to do the same to their children. And, for as long as the discourse persists within the local structure, articles about it will continue to multiply on the pages of newspapers and on the internet. In the same way, filmmakers will not stop making a case against the proliferation of discrimination against caste groups. But the effectiveness of these media in causing positive change and discouraging discrimination against the caste groups will continue to depend on the level of change they are able to cause on elders in the villages and in the townships. Because, where they manage to convince a child to not discriminate against the caste groups, the final decision concerning such child's marriage and association in local groups may still depend largely on the parents and the larger extended family.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis set out to show that caste practices in Igboland have continued to persist irrespective of all approaches that have been taken by different parties to bring the age-long tradition to an end. Some will argue that the practice has become an insignificant discourse in Igbo life and thought since the freeborn and caste groups in some areas have begun intermingling. However, our contribution has shown that the leniency of some village groups with regard to permitting association between caste and freeborn groups does not necessarily signal an end to the practice because the prohibition that was placed on associations was merely as a result of preventing the freeborn from harming the *osu* and thus, bringing upon misfortune or bad luck on the entire village group. As it stands today in most parts of Igboland, misfortunes concerning these practices are rarely targeted at an entire village group but directly to the individual so concerned. Thus, the prohibition has concentrated on marital relationships in all areas where the caste practices exist; and, on almost all forms of association in areas where the practice persists strongly. Certain aspects of chieftaincy (climbing the highest stools) have also remained no-go areas for the caste groups. We showed this by drawing on available evidence from cases in Nkanu, Owerri and parts of the Idemili area where the problem affects a significant minority.

Following on from this, we recounted the narrations of origins of Igbo caste practices at the beginning of this thesis to show that it is basically tied to slavery and Igbo traditional religion. This, we demonstrated, largely contributes to the persistence of the practice today because of the connection to much-feared deities. Though we argued that traditional religion is on the wane in the area, we indicated that its effects continue to manifest in the lives of the people irrespective of their religious background. However, by drawing on the observation and discussions with respondents on the field, we suggested some reasons for the persistence of this

practice in Igboland after the long struggles by the caste groups and other abolitionist groups to change the status quo. We noted, by highlighting the specific case of *Efuru*, which has not at all attracted detailed academic attention, that the caste practices have persisted largely because of the 'fear' of the wrath of deities or more often as it is today, the stigma. Also, the apathetic attitude of regimes to the practice has not helped reduce discrimination because regimes have preferred to 'sit and wait' for the practice to disappear and people who discriminate against the caste groups have rarely been punished. Besides, we also demonstrated that the practice is still embedded in Igbo life and thought; as a result, it is difficult to reconcile the abolition and the same 'life and thought' side by side. Because, when the government introduced legislation against the practice and some village groups followed, most town unions continued to fine freeborn individuals who mingled with the caste groups. Some areas like Igbo-Ukwu created a separate chieftaincy group for the caste groups on the same day they claimed to have abolished the practice. Some other village groups make it clear in their constitution that certain official positions are reserved for the 'freeborn'. As we showed, cases like this continue to clash with the expectations of the law and other abolitionists groups; thus ensuring that the practice persists.

We also posited that in the presence of persistence and all the moves to abolish the practice, the subject continues to attract public attention and contentious debates in the media. Hence, this research shows that most Igbo people are afraid of talking about the practice in the public especially when not in good faith, yet, the media and these folks practically sustain the discourse on mass media platforms. As we indicated, journalists have continued writing about it, filmmakers make films concerning it, bloggers regularly blog about it, and the public too, join the debates in all these mediums. While the news media in Nigeria have served as a platform

for Igbos in Nigeria to talk about this problem, we noted that cyberspace has largely served those in the Diaspora who use the internet for the same purpose as their counterparts in the news media. Moreover, we showed that the coming of video films in the region specifically created a new level of awareness for this subject. These findings suggest that in general the media set the agenda for public discourse on discrimination.

However, as a result of the intense debates in the media, there are some paradoxes connected to this research. First, while some arguments in the media show support for the discussion of these issues, others have suggested that the continuous debate or even mention of the issue in the media is detrimental to the caste groups themselves. The view of the last group is that 'popularizing' the debate increases discrimination against the caste groups since people who were not aware of the practice become aware and start asking questions that may even lead to pointing fingers to the caste groups. There is no doubt to the fact that some persons become interested in knowing who belongs to the caste groups after their first encounter with the information, but this is the peculiarity of this subject. Unlike other social stigmas where publicity campaigns reduce discrimination, the case of Igbo caste practices is different. Because, in order to campaign against the discrimination one has to publicize it and in doing so you also increase the problem. Then again, it is contagious for a freeborn to talk about the practice especially in support of the caste groups. Doing this simply suggests that such freeborn is *osu* because he/she sympathizes with them. And, as we made clear in this thesis, there is no way of disproving this since there are no clear demarcations between the freeborn and the caste groups. The implication of this besides making people silent on these issues is that it may have reduced the traffic of the discourse in the media. Also, this somewhat restricts the study to particular classes or groups.

Secondly, most respondents and contributors to the media think that Igbo caste practices are 'barbaric' and 'bad', yet, they were not willing to do anything about it or change their position on discriminating against the caste groups. As most of them rhetorically said, the problem now is 'who will bell the cat?' Both elderly respondents and younger adults expressed this view. And, the fear has continually been that if a freeborn courageously breaks the norm and marries from the caste groups, his/her peers will shun him/her. So nobody wants to take such a step even where all enabling laws have been put in place. One interpretation that was made of this attitude is the fact that when local and state regimes make laws concerning the practice they fail to realize that certain institutions and norms must be revised to also accommodate the new norm. For instance, we noted that a young freeborn adult may wish to disregard the practice and marry an *osu*; however, because the individual cannot be married without the parent's consent, this may never happen. Most parents will not approve such marriages. Even those who may wish to do so may be prevented by the extended family since the wider family participates fully in the marriage rites.

However, the general attitude in the media has been most interesting. We demonstrated that while critics argue that the practice is 'bad', 'barbaric' and mere hypocrisy on the side of the Igbos, others say it is part of the people's culture so it should not be tampered with or abused in any manner. This last group especially feel that the forebears of these caste groups had committed heinous crimes in the past so it is only right for their descendants to pay for their actions. Most Igbos in the Diaspora, who have mingled with western values, even shared similar views as we evidenced. Besides, it is the attitude of the latter that the media hopes to at least change. Filmmakers and bloggers particularly have brought this discourse to the table to generally change the attitudes of anti-abolitionists. The news media also has been at the

forefront of channelling the debate to the public since the 1960s. But the news media have been faced with its challenges. For instance, they have been careful not to appear to incite hatred on any group by either siding the caste groups or freeborn groups. However, the media generally have been largely helpful. The views of some respondents showed that they have been especially helpful in attracting sympathy and love to the caste groups, even though this may never really translate to a real action towards the group. Their reports and depiction of the discrimination against the caste groups on their media have at times generated goodwill or influenced regimes to act favourably to the caste groups.

But the level of media influence on the general attitude is tied to what happens at the local level – the village groups which are the primary area of concern for this practice. Hence, the media may be capable of changing attitudes with the persuasive nature of its content if the appropriate structures are put in place; in other words, if other practices and structures that encourage discrimination are reformed.

Implications for Research

This thesis has highlighted problems associated with conducting field research in this area. First of all, we were faced with problems of identity. We were perceived in the field as members of the caste group or one associated with the group. Without a doubt, this problem is immaterial when the researcher is not Igbo. But for an Igbo, it even places restrictions on where one can go. For instance, we made attempts to speak directly to several members of the caste groups in areas we were familiar with, in Idemili areas particularly. But it was difficult to walk up to a person and ask him if he is *osu*; doing so would have been insulting and might have incited hate or even physical attack. We approached and sought assistance from a clergyman in the area who is known for his strong position against this practice. We begged him to formally introduce

us to some members of the caste groups who were also members of his Church. However, the clergyman feared doing so, insisting that it would mean that he too discriminated against them and refused. We went through him because of the level of respect accorded to Church leaders in the area. But this did not work. Nevertheless, we reckoned that if the investigation was carried out by a non Igbo it may have been without these usual problems since such person will be perceived as being ignorant of the consequences. This did not though stop us from visiting village groups affected by this stigma, but it limited our interactions with these groups to a large extent. While we managed to speak to a handful of them in the field and via the internet, we relied more on observing the caste groups in the field and examining their debates in the media.

As a result of the foregoing, fieldwork on this practice must largely depend on keen observation and the researcher must practically participate in activities amongst the people to be able to get necessary information especially of attitudes. This thesis was also limited in getting actual attitudes to Igbo caste practices to some extent. Like we pointed out in Chapter IV especially, some respondents gave biased responses. A journalist for instance, told us that the caste practices had ceased to exist in Igboland because as a journalist, he supposed it was his duty to uphold the 1956 Abolition Law and speak as if such practices have ceased to exist from that date even in the light of obvious discriminations. The effect of responses like this is capable of producing imprecise results because if all respondents toe this line, facts will be far from reach. And if a research totally depends on questionnaires distributed in absentia, results may be totally flawed or different from what obtains. However, being Igbo at this instance is advantageous. Because we come from the area and had had personal interactions with some of these individuals it was not always difficult to sift the fact from the 'politics'. By probing further

with case studies respondents themselves are aware of we were able to get actual facts. Besides, the implications these experiences have on the media is that journalists may not be capable of getting accurate information on the field especially if they are known by their respondents to be journalists because we experienced a slight change in attitude each time we recorded an interview or discussion. People fear to be quoted as inciting hatred for the caste groups. Nevertheless, the journalist, like those who reported the cases we discussed in Chapter IV, must participate in activities within areas where the practices are dominant to be able to get more accurate and factual information.

But these handicaps notwithstanding, the thesis has several implications for research undertaken in the fields of religion, human rights law, sociology and anthropology, and also mass media studies. In religion, it contributes to discourse of syncretism in Igbo religion by underscoring some essential reasons for upholding two extremely contradictory faiths. Within the study of human rights law the thesis contributes to the proliferating literature of racial discrimination by contributing to the discourse of indigenous traditions that uphold 'untouchability', segregation, or similar practices, especially in Africa. Sociological and anthropological discourse definitely benefits from this discourse because it explains the social structure and social relationships amongst freeborn and caste individuals in Igboland. And for mass media studies, the thesis contributes to the discourse of the effects of the mass media on cultural attitudes, and in effect it demonstrates with examples, likely attitudes that could emerge from exposure to newspapers, the internet and video films. Accordingly, we have identified other associated areas that could be looked into by other researchers.

Areas for Further Research

This thesis has launched other areas which could be explored to determine and explain attitudes to Igbo caste practices. Two in particular are noteworthy. Firstly, we identified certain differences in attitudes amongst different Church groups to these caste practices. While we noticed that members of orthodox Churches like the Catholic and Anglican Communion were not totally inclined to shun these discriminatory practices, other denominations like the Pentecostal ones preached firmly on disregarding traditions and beliefs on *osu*. Though this was not a central concern to this inquiry, we observed that the Pentecostal congregation was less likely to syncretize religion or partake in certain cultural activities than members of the orthodox communions.

For instance, we observed in a local ceremony at Nnobi that members of a local Pentecostal Church did not fully participate in some traditional ceremonies as breaking kola nuts. They do not even permit the use of masquerades at the funerals of members. They say it is connected to juju and thus it is 'devilish'. In fact, we had a personal encounter with an indigene of Nnokwa whose family is of the Pentecostal denomination, particularly the Redeemed Christian Church of God. The head of the family had refused to take a traditional title that was to be conferred on him by the Igwe of the village because according to him such titles are 'demonic' and not in accord with the Christian religion. According to him, petty ceremonies like the breaking of kola nuts and pouring of libations should not at all be performed by a Christian as they are pagan acts. He was not alone on this. A local pastor of a small Pentecostal Church also agreed that Igbo should throw away these traditions that still bind them with the 'devil.' In his view, light and darkness cannot come together. From the narrations of this local pastor, it was clear that several freeborn members of his Church had been involved in marriages and other affairs with

the *osu* in these areas. Because he also evangelizes throughout eastern Nigeria, he was able to give us instances of cases that occurred in Enugu, Abia and then his current location, Anambra.

Thus, it may be essential for further research to systematically study and compare behaviours amongst these groups to determine if these observations concur with attitudes of the general population. It may lead to very significant changes because younger adults in these areas are largely attracted to the Pentecostal denominations and the denominations themselves are also beginning to grow, even larger than the orthodox communions. A research into these effects will also affect policy making in this regard and it will be useful also in mass media studies because as a result of televangelization the Pentecostal Church in Nigeria is a big market for the broadcast and print media. Hence, 'positive' change could be targeted at a huge population via these means.

Finally, another area this thesis identified for further research is that of migration. During fieldwork, we learnt that most caste groups were eager to leave their villages permanently since the freeborn groups had refused to embrace them as equals. The same problem was witnessed by the colonial administration in Nkanu in the 1920s and now in the present Enugu State. One respondent recounted the story of an *osu* man from the Owerri area who left his village in the early 1990s for northern Nigeria and is now married to a Hausa lady and has changed his name and everything that tied him to his former village. According to this source, the man now bears a Hausa name and even changed his religion. His case was not entirely new to us because we also learnt of many caste Igbos that fled their areas for Lagos, especially. Furthermore, external migrations have been known to occur as a result of these caste practices as well. A respondent in Enugu for instance, told us of a man who left his village in the 1980s for France never to return again. We also are aware of a few families in the US that have refused to visit Nigeria

because of their caste connections and the way they are treated in their villages. These are not just mere fiction as we were aware of these behaviours even before undertaking this research. Nevertheless, research into these areas could be essential because the attitude is not different from what applies today. One of our respondents from a caste village confessed that if he had a way of travelling abroad he would have ignored the ramblings of the freeborn a long time ago. Since he cannot run away, he insists, he has to be bold to fight for his rights. More people may have the same intentions, thus, these migrations may be looked into by anthropologists or even researchers in international relations willing to understand the process and the real 'whys'. Furthermore, this research will contribute largely in determining local measures that could be put in place to ensure less migration especially for these reasons.

Concluding Words

This thesis has sought to underline the persistence of Igbo caste practices today. We have noted that the degree of persistence may differ from place to place. We have not argued that the changes that have taken place over the years are not noteworthy, because the fact that some villages now tolerate freeborn and caste groups attending the same parties speak volumes of more changes one may expect in the future. But we have shown that most attitudes to the caste groups remain stiff and prejudiced. Thus, the nearness of this future when caste groups will become totally free depends on the extent of reform that can happen within Igbo socio-political life. As regards the position of those who suggest absolute inertia or waiting on 'time' as a remedy to quieten the practice, we argue in line with the commission of enquiry on *Efuru*, that

“As regards time, there is no doubt that time changes everything. But the efficacy of time in effecting change depends on the presence of factors on which time will operate.”⁴⁹³

⁴⁹³ Refer to Chapter III, 3.3. Also see Report of the “Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987,” Vol. I, p. 83-84.

Appendix I**Osu System Abolition Law of 1956***As Published in the***Supplement to the Eastern Regional Gazette, 1956****A 91**

No. 13**1956****Protectorate of Nigeria**

IN THE FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF

HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II**Sir CLEMENT JOHN PLEASS, K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., K.B.E.***Governor, Eastern Region***Title.**

A LAW FOR THE ABOLITION OF THE OSU SYSTEM, TO PRESCRIBE PUNISHMENT BOTH FOR THE PRACTICE THEREOF AND THE ENFORCEMENT OF ANY DISABILITY ARISING THEREFROM AND FOR PURPOSES CONNECTED THEREWITH.

Date of Commencement.

[10th May, 1956]

Enactment.

BE IT ENACTED by the Legislature of the Eastern Region of Nigeria as follows:-

Citation.

1. This Law may be cited as the Abolition of the Osu System Law, 1956.

A 92 E.R. No. 13 of 1956 *Abolition of the Osu System*

Definitions.**2. In this Law:-**

“Osu” includes an Oru or an Ohu or an Ume or an Omoni and also includes the descendants of an Osu, an Oru, an Ohu, an Ume, and an Omoni and any person subject to a legal or social disability or social stigma which is similar to or nearly similar to that borne by an Osu, an Oru, an Ohu, an Ume or an Omoni.

“Osu System” includes any system, status, institution, or practice which implies that any person is subject to a legal or social disability or social stigma which is similar to, or nearly similar to, that borne by an Osu.

Osu System abolished.

3. Notwithstanding any custom or usage, each and every person who on the date of the commencement of this Law is Osu shall from and after such date cease to be Osu and shall be free and discharged from any consequences thereof, and the children thereafter to be born to any such person and the offspring of such person shall not be Osu and the Osu System is hereby utterly and for ever abolished and declared unlawful.

Offences arising out of Osu System.**4. (1) Whoever –**

(a) prevents any person from exercising an right accruing to him by reason of the abolition of the Osu System; or

(b) molests, injures, annoys, obstructs, or causes or attempts to cause obstruction to any persons in the exercise of any such right, or molests, injures, annoys, or boycotts and person by reasons of his having exercised any such right; or

(c) by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations or otherwise, incites or encourages any persons or class of persons or public generally to practice the Osu System in any form whatsoever

is guilty of an offence and upon conviction shall be liable to a fine not exceeding fifty pounds or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.

(2) For the purpose of this section a person shall be deemed to boycott another person who –

(a) refuses to lease to such other person, or refuses to permit such other person to use or occupy, any house or land, or refuses to deal with, work for, hire for, or do business with, such other person or to render him or receive from him any customary service, or refuses to do any of the said things on the terms on which such things would be commonly done in the ordinary course of business; or

(b) abstains from such social, professional or business relations as he would ordinarily maintain with such other person.

Other offences arising out of Osu System.

5. Whoever, on the ground that a person –

(1) if this Law had not been passed, would have become Osu; or

(2) has refused to practice the Osu System; or

(3) has done any act in furtherance of the objects of this Law,

denies to any person belonging to his community or section thereof any right or privilege to which such person as a member of such community would be entitled, is guilty of an offence and upon conviction shall be liable to a fine not exceeding fifty pounds or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.

A 93 E.R. No. 13 of 1956 *Abolition of the Osu System*

Enforcement of disabilities.

6. Whosoever on the ground of the Osu System enforces against any person any disability whatsoever and in particular, but without prejudice to the generality of this section, with regard to –

(1) marriage; or

(2) the acquisition or inheritance of any property; or

(3) the joining of title societies; or

(4) the observance of any social custom, usage or ceremony,

is guilty of an offence and shall upon conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding fifty pounds or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.

Limitations of jurisdiction of courts.

7. (1) No court shall –

(a) entertain or continue any suit or proceeding; or

(b) shall pass any decree or order; or

(c) execute wholly or partially any decree or order;

if the claim involved in such suit or proceeding or if the passing of such decree or order or if such execution would in any way be contrary to the provisions of this Law.

(2) No court shall, in adjudicating any matter or executing any decree or order, recognize any custom or usage imposing any disability on any person on the ground of the Osu System.

Words imputing that person is Osu.

8. Words spoken and published which impute that a person is Osu shall not require special damage to render them actionable.

Offences by companies.

9. (1) If the person committing an offence under this Law is a company, every person who at the time of the offence was committed was in charge of, and was responsible to, the company for the conduct of the business of the company shall be deemed guilty of the offence and shall be liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly:

Provided that nothing contained in this subsection shall render any such person liable to any punishment if he proves that the offence was committed without his knowledge or that he exercised all due diligence to prevent the commission of such offence.

(2) (a) Notwithstanding anything contained in subsection (1), where an offence under this Law has been committed with the consent of any director or manager, secretary or other officer of the company, such director, manager, secretary or other officer shall also be deemed to be guilty of that offence and shall be liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.

(b) for the purposes of this section –

(i) “company” includes any body corporate, firm or other association of individuals; and

(ii) “director” in relation to a firm means a partner in the firm.

Abetment of offence.

10. Whoever abets the commission of an offence under this Law, whether the offence is actually committed or not, shall be deemed guilty of an offence under this Law and shall be liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding fifty pounds or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.

A 94 E.R. No. 13 of 1956 *Abolition of the Osu System*

Enhanced punishment on subsequent conviction.

11. Any person who, having already been convicted of an offence under this Law, or an abetment of an offence, is again convicted of any such offence or abetment, shall, on every such subsequent conviction, be liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding one hundred pounds or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.

This printed impression has been carefully compared by me with the Bill which has passed the Eastern House of Assembly, and is found by me to be true and correctly printed copy of the said Bill.

A. E. ERONINI

Clerk of the Eastern House of Assembly

Appendix II

Newspaper Publications in Eastern Nigeria – 2009

Name Of Medium	Type of Publication	Ownership	Publisher/Proprietor	Location
Afikpo Today	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Dr. Oko Okoro	Ebonyi State
Anambra News	Daily Newspaper	Private	Berth Ibe	Anambra State
Anglican Voice	Weekly Newspaper	Religious	Anglican Diocese of Owerri	Imo State
Anioma Essence	Monthly Magazine	Private	Organization for the Advancement of Anioma Culture (OFAAC), Asaba	Delta State
Anioma Voice	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Anioma Voice Newspapers, Asaba	Delta State
Announcer Express	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Announcer Newspapers, Owerri	Imo State
Anu Meka	Monthly Magazine	Private	Anu Meka Concepts, Port Harcourt	Rivers State
Citizens Advocate	Monthly Magazine	Religious	St Theresa's Catholic Cathedral, Abakaliki	Ebonyi State
Cream Magazine	Monthly Magazine	Private	Cream Magazine, Port Harcourt/Onome Okoroh	Rivers State
Daily Pointer	Daily Newspaper	State	Delta Publishing & Printing Co., Asaba	Delta State
Daily Star	Daily Newspaper	State	Enugu State Printing & Publishing Corp.	Enugu State
Ebonyi Records	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Equity Communication, Abakaliki	Ebonyi State
Ebonyi Voice	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Mosco Media Services, Abakaliki	Ebonyi State
Flashpoint	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Soas Communication, Asaba	Delta State
Diamond	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Kingdom Life Communication Network, Asaba	Delta State
Heroes & Legends	Monthly Magazine	Private	Heroes & Legends/ Ikechukwu Nwanze	Rivers State
Highlight	Daily Newspaper	Private	Mentors Media/Constance Meju	Rivers State
Independent Monitor	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Independent Monitor, Port Harcourt	Rivers State

Independent Summit	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Independent Communications/Louis Onyia	Enugu State
Jesus Christ Today	Monthly Magazine	Religious	Jesus Christ Today/Evangelist Lilly I. Briggs	Rivers State
Lumen	Weekly Newspaper	Religious	Catholic Diocese of Umuahia, Umuahia	Abia State
National Ambassador	Daily Newspaper	State	Abia Newspaper & Publishing Co., Umuahia	Abia State
National Guide	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Ell Ems Stephen	Ebonyi State
National Light	Daily Newspaper	State	Anambra Newspapers & Printing Corp., Awka	Anambra State
National Network	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Network Printing & Publishing Co., PH.	Rivers State
National Question	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Legacy Infortech Limited, Owerri	Imo State
New Republic	Weekly Newspaper	Private	New Republic Publications, Amaigbo	Imo State
Niger Delta Standard	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Mark Ross Company/Emmanuel Mrakpra	Rivers State
Niger Delta Today	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Cowries Communication/Solomon Parakon	Rivers State
Nigeria Newspoint	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Newspoint Communications, Owerri	Imo State
Nigerian Patriot	Daily Newspaper	State	Ebonyi State Newspapers & Printing Corp.	Ebonyi State
Nigerian Voice	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Mosco Media Services, Abakaliki	Ebonyi State
Ohiafia Forum	Monthly Magazine	Private	Ronkal Press Services	Abia State
Outcome	Weekly Magazine	Private	Alvess Limited/Chief Senibo Princewill	Rivers State
Popular View	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Knotstar Limited/Dr. Wofuru Ogasile Okparaolu	Rivers State
Port Harcourt Sunrise	Daily Newspaper	Private	Ihuorie Communication Services/Loveday Ihua	Rivers State
The Advert	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Advert Manager Limited, Port Harcourt	Rivers State
The Argus	Weekly Newspaper	Private	The Argus News Company/Ebimo O. Amungo	Rivers State
The Beacon	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Gorinda Press Limited/Minere Amakiri	Rivers State

The Beam	Weekly Newspaper	Private	The Beam Productions Limited/Oby C. Ndukwe	Rivers State
The Choice	Weekly Newspaper	Religious	The Choice Newspaper, Ezzangbo	Ebonyi State
The Flame	Weekly Newspaper	Religious	Catholic Diocese of Enugu	Enugu State
The Gist	Monthly Magazine	Private	Toby Jug Media & Promotions/Sotty Fulton	Rivers State
The Good Knight	Monthly Magazine	Private	Jonia Global Communication, Asaba	Delta State
The Hidden Knowledge	Monthly Magazine	Private	WEHERE Foundation/Esotericist M. Wehere	Rivers State
The Mirror	Daily Newspaper	Private	Providence Communication, Port Harcourt	Rivers State
The Moonlight	Daily Newspaper	Private	Emmanuel Odungwe	Rivers State
The Nigeria News Man	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Equity Communication, Abakaliki	Ebonyi State
The Nigerian Post	Daily Newspaper	Private	Onuoha Kalu Emeaba	Abia State
The Pilgrim	Weekly Newspaper	Religious	Our Saviour Press, Enugu	Enugu State
The Port Harcourt Spectator	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Bewura Communications/Parry Saroh Benson	Rivers State
The Port Harcourt Telegraph	Daily Newspaper	Private	Fourth Realm Publications/Ogbonna Nwuke	Rivers State
The Public Express	Daily Newspaper	Private	Zhimeyo Communications, Port Harcourt	Rivers State
The Republican	Weekly Newspaper	Private	The Republican Communication	Enugu State
The Statesman	Daily Newspaper	State	Imo State Newspapers Limited, Owerri	Imo State
The Tide	Daily Newspaper	State	Rivers State Newspaper Corp., Port Harcourt	Rivers State
The Verite	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Verite Company/ Jose Pere Jeremiah	Rivers State
Unique	Monthly Magazine	Private	Sidney Brown Books, Port Harcourt	Rivers State
Weekend Niger Delta	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Niger Delta Standard Press, Port Harcourt	Rivers State
Weekly Star	Weekly Newspaper	Private	Spider Press/ Owei Kobina Sikpi	Rivers State

Source: Fieldwork Notes

Bibliographical References

Published Books and Articles

Achebe, Chinua (1958), *Things Fall Apart*, London: Penguin.

_____. (1960), *No Longer At Ease*, London: Heinemann.

Adejunmobi, Moradewun (2002), "English and the Audience of an African Popular Culture: The Case of Nigerian Video Film," *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 50, pp. 74-103.

Adesanya, Afolabi (2000), "From Film to Video" in Jonathan Haynes, *Nigerian Video Films*, Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies.

Afigbo, Adiele E. (1973), "The Calabar Mission and the Aro Expedition of 1901-1902," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 5, Fasc. 2, pp. 94-106.

_____. (1981), *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*, Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1981.

_____. (1983), "Traditions of Igbo Origins: A Comment," *History in Africa*, Vol. 10, 1983, pp. 1-11.

_____. (2003), "Britain and the Hydra in the Bight of Benin: Towards a History of the Abolition of Internal Slave Trade in the Oil Rivers and its Hinterland, C. 1885- C. 1943," *African Economic History*, No. 31, pp. 1-18.

_____. (2006), *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

Agbasiere, Joseph Therese (2000), *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, London: Routledge.

Akpabio, Eno (2004), "Nigerian Home Video Films as a Catalyst for National Development," *Journal of Sustainable Development*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 8 (pp. 5-10).

_____. (2007), "Attitude of Audience Members to Nollywood Films," *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 90-100.

Allen, Judith Van (1976), "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women," in Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (eds.), *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Amadi, Elechi (1973), *Sunset in Biafra: A Civil War Diary*, London: Heinemann.

Amadiume, Ifi (1987), *Afrikan Matriarchal Foundations: The Igbo Case*, London: Karnak House.

_____. (1987), *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, London: Zed Books.

_____. (2000), *Daughters of the Goddess, Daughters of Imperialism: African Women Struggle for Culture, Power and Democracy*, London: Zed Books.

Amucheazi, E. (2002), "Politics and Pressure Groups in the Igbo Political System," in G. E. K. Ofomata, *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, Onitsha: African First Publishers.

Arinze, Francis A. (1970), *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

Arunsi, S. Ibiam and Ugoji, J. U. (1993), "The Traditional Political System of the Edda -Igbo," in U. D. Anyanwu and J. C. U. Aguwa (eds.), *The Igbo and the Tradition of Politics*, Enugu: Forth Dimension.

Basden, G. T. (1966), *Niger Ibos: A Description of the Primitive Life, Customs and Animistic Beliefs, and of the Ibo People of Nigeria by one who for Thirty-Five Years, Enjoyed the Privilege of their Intimate Confidence and Friendship*, London: Frank Cass & Co.

_____. (1983), *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, Ibadan: University Publishing.

Berger, Arthur Asa (1995), *Essentials of Mass Communication Theory*, California: Sage.

Brown, Carolyn A. (1996), "Testing the Boundaries of Marginality: Twentieth-Century Slavery and Emancipation Struggles in Nkanu, Northern Igboland, 1920-1929," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 51-80.

_____. (2003), *"We Were All Slaves": African Miners, Culture, and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery*, Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Chubb, L. T. (1961), *Ibo Land Tenure*, Second Edition, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

Chuku, Gloria Ifeoma (1999), "From Petty Traders to International Merchants: A Historical Account of Three Igbo Women of Nigeria in Trade and Commerce, 1886 to 1970," *African Economic History*, No. 27, pp. 1-22.

Cole, Herbert M. (1982), *Mbari: Art and Life Among the Owerri Igbo*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Crowther, S. and Taylor, J. C. (1859), *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger 1857-1859*, London.

Dike, Onwuka and Ekejiuba, Felicia (1990), *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria 1650-1980*, Ibadan: University Press.

- Dike, Victor E. (2002), *The Osu Caste System in Igboland: A Challenge for Nigerian Democracy*, Kearney: Morris Publishing.
- Dorward, D. C. (1983), *The Igbo Women's War of 1929: Documents Relating to the Aba Riots in Eastern Nigeria*, Wakefield: East Ardsley.
- Edelman, Charles (ed.) (2002), *The Merchant of Venice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Egekonke, Uzodinma (1999), *Osus: The Victims of Igbo Culture*, Jos: Trinity Graphics.
- Ekechi, F. K. (1971), *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, London: Frank Cass.
- _____. (1971), "Colonialism and Christianity in West Africa: The Igbo Case, 1900-1915," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 103-115.
- _____. (1981), "Aspects of Palm Oil Trade at Oguta (Easter Nigeria), 1900-1950," *African Economic History*, No. 10, pp. 35-65.
- _____. (1989), *Tradition and Transformation in Eastern Nigeria: A Sociopolitical History of Owerri and Its Hinterland, 1902-1947*, Kent: The Kent State University Press.
- _____. (2003), "Pawnship in Igbo Society," in Paul E. Lovejoy and Toyin Falola (eds.), *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*, Trenton: African World Press.
- Ekwe-Ekwe, Herbert (1991), *The Biafra War: Nigeria and the Aftermath*, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen.
- Ekwelie, S. A (1985), "Evolution of the Print Medium: The African Experience," in Onuora E. Nwuneli, *Mass Communication in Nigeria: A Book of Reading*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Ekwuazi, Hyginus Ozo (2000), "The Igbo Video Film: A Glimpse into the Cult of the Individual," in Jonathan Haynes (ed.), *Nigerian Video Films*, Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Emelonye, Uchenna (2005), *Inter-Generational Inequality: Osu Caste Practice in South-East Nigeria*, Owerri: Rights Access Network.
- Enekwe, Onuora Ossie (1987), *Igbo Masks: The Oneness of Ritual and Theatre*, Lagos: Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Information and Culture.
- Ezeala, J. O. L. (1991), *Can the Ighoman Be a Christian in View of the Osu Caste System?* Orlu: B. I. Nnaji & Sons Press.

- Ezeanya, S. N. (1967), "The Osu (Cult-Slave) System in Igboland," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 1, Fasc. 1, p. 35-45.
- Ezeokoli, E. C. (1990), *The Liberty of Man and Other Essays*, Obosi: Pacific Publishers.
- Ezikeojiaku, Ichie P. A. (1998), "Eradication of Osu Caste Practice in Igbo Culture Area," A Lead Paper at the Conference on Osu Caste Practice in Igbo Race Organised by the Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), Nigeria, on August 6th at Rapour Hotel, Amakohi, Owerri.
- Fox, A. J. (1964), *Uzuakoli: A Short History*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Gailey, Harry A. (1971), *The Road to Aba: A Study of British Administrative Policy in Eastern Nigeria*, London: University of London.
- Green, M. M. (1964), *Igbo Village Affairs: Chiefly with reference to the Village of Umueke Aghaja*, London: Frank Cass & Co.
- Hackett, Rosalind I. J. (1998), "Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 258-277.
- Harneit-Sievers, Axel (1998), "Igbo 'Traditional Rulers': Chieftaincy and the State in Southeastern Nigeria," *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 59-79.
- _____. (2002), "Igbo Local Histories: Constructing Community in Southeastern Nigeria," in Axel Harneit-Sievers (ed.), *A Place in the World: New Local Historiographies from Africa and South-Asia*, Leiden: Brill.
- _____. (2006), *Constructions of Belonging: Igbo Communities and the Nigerian State in the Twentieth Century*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press.
- Harris, J. S. (1942), "Some Aspects of Slavery in Southeastern Nigeria," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Jan., pp. 37-54.
- Haynes, Jonathan (1995), "Nigerian Cinema: Structural Adjustments," *Research in African Literatures*, Austin: Fall, Vol. 26, No. 3, p. 97-119.
- _____. (2000), "Introduction" in Jonathan Haynes (ed.), *Nigerian Video Films*, Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies.
- _____. (2006), "Political Critique in Nigerian Video Films," *African Affairs*, Vol. 105, No. 421, Oct., pp. 511-533.
- Haynes, Jonathan and Okome, Onookome (1998), "Evolving Popular Media: Nigeria Video Films," *Research in African Literatures*, Austin: Fall, Vol. 29, No. 3, p. 106-128.

- Henderson, Richard N. (1972), *The King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Horton, W. R. G. (1954), "The Ohu System of Slavery in a Northern Ibo Village-Group," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Oct., pp. 311-336.
- Idika, Mba (1998), "Osu" in E. A. Ade Adegbola, *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, Ibadan: Sefer.
- Igbafe, Philip A. (1971), "Western Ibo Society and its Resistance to British Rule: The Ekumeku Movement 1898-1911," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 441-459.
- Ihenacho, David Asonye (2004), *African Christianity Rises: A Critical Study of the Catholicism of the Igbo People of Nigeria*, Volume One, New York: iUniverse.
- Ijoma, J. O. (2002), "Igboland: A Historical Perspective" in G. E. K. Ofomata (ed.), *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, Ibadan: Africana First Publishers.
- Ilogu, Edmund (1973), "Worship in Ibo Traditional Religion," *Numen*, Vol. 20, Fasc. 3, Dec. pp. 229-238.
- _____. (1974), *Christianity and Ibo Culture*, Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Isichei, Elizabeth (1970), "Seven Varieties of Ambiguity: Some Patterns of Igbo Response to Christian Missions," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 3, Fasc. 2, pp. 209-227.
- _____. (1973), *The Ibo People and the Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship - to 1906*, London: Faber and Faber.
- _____. (1976), *A History of the Igbo People*, London: Macmillan.
- James, Adeola (1997), "Producers Face Challenges of New Direction on Film Content," *The Classifier*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 4-8.
- Jeffreys, M. D. W. (1956), "The Umundri Tradition of Origin," *African Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, p. 119-131.
- Kalu, Ogbu U. (1986), "Primitive Methodists on the Railroad Junctions of Igboland, 1910-1931," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 16, Fasc. 1, Feb., pp. 44-66.
- Kalu, Ogbu U. (2003), "Poverty and its Alleviation in Colonial Nigeria" in Adebayo Oyeade (ed.), *The Foundations of Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola*, US: African World Press Inc.
- Kirk-Greene, A. H. M. (1971), *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969, Vol. I, January 1966-July 1967*, London: Oxford University Press.

- _____. (1971), *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969, Vol. II, July 1967-January 1970*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Korieh, Chima J. (2000), "The Nineteenth Century Commercial Transition in West Africa: The Case of the Biafra Hinterland," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3, Special Issue: On Slavery and Islam in African History: A Tribute to Martin Klein, pp. 588-615.
- Kumar, Harish (2006), "Folk Media and Rural Development," *Indian Media Studies Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, July-December, 93-98.
- Larkin, Brian (2000), "Hausa Dramas and the Rise of Video Culture in Nigeria" in Jonathan Haynes (ed.), *Nigerian Video Films*, Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies.
- Law, Robin (1985), "Human Sacrifice in Pre-Colonial West Africa," *African Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 334, pp. 53-87.
- Leith-Ross, S. (1937), "Notes on the Osu System Among the Ibo of Owerri Province, Nigeria," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April, pp. 206-220.
- _____. (1965), *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Leonard, A. G. (1906), *The Lower Niger and its Peoples*, London: Frank Cass & Co.
- MacBride Commission, The (2004), *Many Voices, One World: Towards a New, More Just, and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Maduka, R. O. E. (1993), "Age Grade Factor in Igbo Tradition of Politics," in U. D. Anyanwu and J. C. U. Aguwa (eds.), *The Igbo and the Tradition of Politics*, Enugu: Forth Dimension.
- Mba, Nina Emma (1982), *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*, Berkeley: University of California.
- Mbonu, W. C. (1982), "Slavery and Derived Status in Igboland," in Nwanna Nzewunwa, *Essays in African History – Being Proceedings of the 27th Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Held at the University of Port Harcourt, April 13-17*.
- McCombs, Maxwell E. and Shaw, Donald L. (1972), "The Agenda-setting function of Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 35, pp. 176-187.
- _____. (1976), "Setting the Political Agenda: Structuring the "Unseen Environment"," *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 18-22.
- McQuail, Denis (1994), *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*, Third Edition, London: Sage Publication.

- Meek, C. K. (1937), *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study of Indirect Rule*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Metuh, Emefie Ikenga (1981), *God and Man in African Religion: A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria*, London, Geoffrey Chapman.
- Mgbobukwa, Jude C. (1996), *Alusi, Osu and Ohu in Igbo Religion and Social Life*, Nsukka: Fulladu Publishing.
- Nafziger, E. Wayne (1972), "The Economic Impact of The Nigerian Civil War," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 10, No.2, July, pp. 223-245.
- Nkpa, Nwokocha K. U. (1977), "Rumours of Mass Poisoning in Biafra," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3, Autumn, pp. 332-346.
- Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth (1981), "Mass Media and Social Change in Developed Societies," in Elihu Katz and Tamas Szecsko (eds.), *Mass Media and Social Change*, London: Sage Publication, pp. 137-166.
- Northrup, David (1972), "The Growth of Trade Among the Igbo Before 1800," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 217-236.
- Nwaguru, J. E. N. (1973), *Aba and British Rule: The Evolution and Administrative Developments of the Old Aba Division of Igboland 1896-1960*, Enugu: Santana Press.
- Nwaka, Geoffrey I. (1985), "The Civil Rights Movement in Colonial Igboland," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 473-485.
- Nwabuani, Ebere (1994), "Chieftaincy Among the Igbo: A Guest on the Centre-Stage," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 347-371.
- Nwauwa, A. O. (1990), "The Dating of the Aro Chieftdom: A Synthesis of Correlated Genealogies," *History in Africa*, Vol. 17, pp. 227-245.
- _____. (1991), "Integrating Arochukwu into the Regional Chronological Structure," *History in Africa*, Vol. 18, pp. 297-310.
- _____. (1992), "On Aro Colonial Primary Source Material: A Critique of the Historiography," *History in Africa*, Vol. 19, pp. 377-385.
- Nwokeji, G. Ugo (1998), "The Slave Emancipation Problematic: Igbo Society and the Colonial Equation," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 40, No. 2, Apr., pp. 318-355.

- _____. (2000), "The Atlantic Slave Trade and Population Density: A Historical Demography of the Biafran Hinterland," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3, Special Issue: On Slavery and Islam in African History: A Tribute to Martin Klein, pp. 616-655.
- _____. (2000), "Caste, Slavery, and Postslavery in Igboland," Conference Paper, German African Studies Association 17th Biennial Conference, Leipzig, March 31- April 1.
- Nzimiro, Ikenna (1972), *Studies in Ibo Political Systems: Chieftaincy and Politics in Four Niger States*, London: Frank Cass.
- Obi, Sebastian M. (1994), *The Osu Problem*, Owerri: Agape Education Resources.
- Offiong, Daniel A. (1985), "The Status of Slaves in Igbo and Ibibio of Nigeria," *Phylon* (1960), Vol. 46, No. 1, 1st Qtr., pp. 49-57.
- Ogbalu, F. Chidozie (1974), *Standard Igbo: Path to its Development*, Onitsha: University Publishing Company.
- Oguagha, P. A. (1984), "The Beginnings of Igbo- Igala Relations Up to C. 1650 A.D.," *Nigerian Magazine*, No. 149, pp. 47-60.
- Ohadike, Don (1988), "The Decline of Slavery among the Igbo People," in Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- _____. (1994), *Anioma: A Social History of the Western Igbo People*, Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Ojobor, Ifeanyi John (2002), "Mass Communication Theories," in Chinyere S. Okunna (ed.), *Teaching Mass Communication: A Multi-Dimensional Approach*, Enugu: New Generation Books.
- Okafor, Clementina (2002), "History of Nigerian Print Media" in Chinyere S. Okunna (ed.), *Teaching Mass Communication: A Multi Dimensional Approach*, Enugu: New Generation Books.
- Okeke, Igwebuike R. (1986), *The Osu Concept in Igbo Land: A Study of the Types of Slavery in Igbo-Speaking Areas of Nigeria*, Enugu: Access Publishers.
- _____. (1989), "The Beliefs and Practices of 'Osu' and the Need for Its Abolition" in C. S. Momoh, M. S. Zahradeen and S. O. Abogurin, *Nigerian Studies in Religious Tolerance: Religions and Their Doctrines*, Volume 1, Enugu: Access Publishers.

- Okenwa, S. Nnamdi (1993), "The Growth of the Nigerian Press" in Chinyere S. Okunna, Chudi Amafil and Nnamdi Okenwa (eds.), *Theory and Practice of Mass Communication*, Enugu: ABIC Publishers.
- Olisa, M. S. O. (2002), "Igbo Traditional Socio-Political System," in G. E. K. Ofomata (ed.), *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, Onitsha: Africana First Publishers.
- Omenka, Nicholas Ibeawuchi (1989), *The School in the Service of Evangelization: Catholic Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria, 1886-1950* (Studies of Religion in Africa), Leiden: Brill.
- Omu, Fred (1967), "Iwe Irohin: 1859-1867," *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. IV, No. 1, pp. 35-44.
- Onwubiko, Oliver (1993), *Facing the Osu Issue in the African Synod: A Personal Response*, Enugu: Snaap Press.
- Onwuejeogwu, M. Angulu (1981), *An Igbo Civilization: Nri Kingdom and Hegemony*, London: Ethiope Publishing.
- Onwumechili, Cyril Agodi (2000), "Igbo Enwe Eze: The Igbos Have No Kings," Ahiajoku Lecture.
- Orji, John N. (1994), *Traditions of Igbo Origin: A Study of Pre-Colonial Population Movements in Africa*, New York: Peter Lang.
- Osei-Hwere, Enyonam and Osei-Hwere, Patrick (2008), "Nollywood: A Multilevel Analysis of the International Flow of Nigerian Video Films," A Paper submitted to the 2008 Conference of the International Communication Association, Montreal, Canada, May 22-26.
- Ottenberg, Simon (1958), "Ibo Oracles and Intergroup Relations," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Autumn, pp. 295-317.
- _____. (1971), *Double Descent in an African Society: The Afikpo Village-Group*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- _____. (1971), *Leadership and Authority in an African Society: The Afikpo Village-Group*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Perham, Margery (1937), *Native Administration in Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Pratten, David (2007), *The Man-Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Sobowale, Idowu (1985), "Influence of Ownership on Nigerian Newspaper Coverage on National Issues," in Onuora E. Nwuneli (ed.), *Mass Communication in Nigeria: A Book of Reading*, Enugu; Fourth Dimension.
- _____. (1985), "The Historical Development of the Nigerian Press," in Frank Ugboajah (ed.), *Mass Communication, Culture and Society in West Africa*, London: Hans Zell Publishers.
- St. Jorre, John De (1972), *The Nigerian Civil War*, London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Stremlau, John J. (1977), *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Talbot, P. Amaury (1969), *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages with an Abstract of the 1921 Census, Volume II*, London: Frank Cass & Co.
- Tamuno, T. N. (1972), *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: The Southern Phase, 1898-1914*, London: Longman.
- Thomas, Northcote W. (1913), *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria: Part I – Law and Custom of the Ibo of the Awka Neighbourhood, South Nigeria*, New York: Negro Universities Press.
- _____. (1969), *Anthropological Report on Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria, Part 4, Law and Custom of the Ibo of the Asaba District*, New York: Negro University Press.
- Ubah, C. N. (1988), "Religious Change Among the Igbo during the Colonial Period," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 18, Fasc. 1, Feb., pp. 71-91.
- Uchendu, Egodi (2007), "Woman-Woman Marriage in Igboland," in Ada Uzoamaka Azodo and Maureen Ngozi Eke (eds.), *Gender and Sexuality in African Literature and Film*, Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc.
- Uchendu, Victor C. (1965), *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- _____. (1977), "Slaves and Slavery in Igboland, Nigeria," in Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (eds.), *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Udosen, William (1976), *Nigerian Art – Tradition, Change and the Future*, a paper presented at the Symposium of Contemporary Nigerian art, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 21st -24th March.
- Ugboajah, Frank (1985), "'Oramedia' in Africa" in Frank Ugboajah (ed.), *Mass Communication, Culture and Society in West Africa*, London: Hans Zell Publishers.

Uka, N. (1985), "A Note on the "Abam" Warriors of Igboland," *Ikenga: Journal of African studies*, Nsukka: University of Nigeria, Vol. 7, No. 1 & 2, pp. 76-81.

Ukah, Asonzeh F. K. (2003), "Advertising God: Nigerian Christian Video-Films and the Power of Consumer Culture," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 203-231.

Uzokwu, E. Elochukwu (1985), *Church and Inculturation: A Century of Roman Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria*, Obosi: Pacific College Press.

_____. (1997), *Worship as Body Language- Introduction to Christian Worship; An African Orientation*, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press.

Weis, Rene (ed.) (1993), *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition*, Essex: Longman.

Unpublished Theses

Akpu, Paulus Belonwu (1979), "An Anthropologico- Theological Investigation into the Caste (Osu) System in Igboland," BA (Divinity) Dissertation, Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu.

Chikata, George (1989), "'Man's Inhumanity to Man" - The Osu System Among Christians in Igboland: A Socio-Theological Investigation," Bachelors of Theology Dissertation, Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu.

Eze, Udochukwu (1979), "Shrines Dedicated to the Minor Divinities Among the Igbos of the Anambra State of Nigeria", MA Thesis, Department of Religion, Nsukka: University of Nigeria.

Ezeh, Patrick C. (1977), "Caste Practices in Igboland: Osu in Adazi-Ani," BSc (Sociology/Anthropology) Dissertation, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Wariboko, Waibinte Elekima (1991), "New Calabar and the Forces of Change ca 1850-1945," PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham.

Newspaper and Magazine Articles

Abdul-Kadiri, Umoru (1987), "Letters: Osu Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos, Monday, August 24, p. 4.

Achilike, Mascot (1975), "The Osu System," *Sunday Renaissance*, Enugu, July 6, p. 13.

Agbaegbu, Tobs (2000), "Slavery in Igboland: The Osu take their Case against the Diala to the Human Rights Commission," *Newswatch*, Lagos, January 10, pp. 23-26.

_____. (2000), "Moves to Stop Slavery in Igboland," *Newswatch*, Lagos, February 7, pp. 16-17.

- Aguiyi-Ironsi, Louisa and Edokpayi, Ben (1989), "Children of Juju Messengers: Despite Education and the Gospel, the Osu Caste System Remains in Igboland," *Newswatch*, Lagos, January 2, pp. 34-36.
- Akunebum, Alexander (1987), "Letters: Osu Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos, Monday, August 24, p. 5.
- Alozie, Victor (1989), "MAMSER to Dislodge 'Osu' Caste," *Daily Champion*, Lagos, Thursday, January 5, p. 1.
- Amadife, Cletus (1976), "Culture that Must Die," *The Sunday Times*, Lagos, May 16.
- Anyanwu, Godwin (1981), "'Osu' Abolished in Nnokwa," *Daily Star*, Enugu, July 29, p. 5.
- Arinze, Michael (1987), "Letters: Osu Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos, Monday, August 24, p. 4.
- Azuonwu, Okey Franklin (1987), "Letters: Osu Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos, Monday, August 24, p. 4.
- Champion, Daily (1989), "Community Scraps Osu, Ume Castes," *Daily Champion*, Lagos, Saturday, April 8, pp. 1 & 3.
- _____. (2006), "Editorial: The Osu Caste," *Daily Champion*, Lagos, Tuesday, January 10, p. 3.
- Chukwuma, T. N. (1989), "Time to Bury the 'Osu' Caste System," *Daily Star*, Enugu, Monday, February 13, p. 3.
- Independent, Daily (2009), "Group Seeks Abolition of Osu Caste System," *Daily Independent*, Lagos, Thursday, January 22, p. 5.
- Dureke, C. O. (1985), "Persistence of Osu Caste System in Igboland," *Sunday Times*, Lagos, January 13, p. 5.
- Durojaiye, Seni and Onyebukwa, Vivian (2005), "Osu Caste System: 21st Century Absurdity in Igboland," *Daily Independent*, Lagos, Thursday, November 24, p. 57.
- Egwunwoke, Onu (1987), "Legislation Can't Wipe Out 'Osu'," *Sunday Times*, Lagos, December 27, p. 4.
- Ekwenchi, E. E. (1988), "A More Realistic Way to end 'Osu' System," *Daily Star*, Enugu, Wednesday, April 20, p. 11.
- Eze, Tony (2007), Letter to Juliana Francis, "Crazy Osu Caste: Reactions," *Sunday Sun*, Lagos, September 23, p. 43.

- Ezekiel, May E. (1983), "Osu: The Untouchable Igbo Caste System," *Sunday Concord*, Lagos, June 12, pp. Mag. I, V & XI.
- Ezenwa, Vincent (1978), "Our Social Apartheid," *Daily Star*, Enugu, Thursday, December 21, p. 8.
- _____. (1980), "The Igbo Social Lepers," *Daily Star*, Enugu, Thursday, December 17, p. 8.
- Ezigbo, Maduakona P. (1989), "MAMSER and the 'Osu' Caste," *Daily Star*, Enugu, Wednesday, February 8, p. 11.
- Francis, Juliana (2007), "Does the Osu Caste System Still Exist?" *Sunday Sun*, Lagos, September 16, p. 43.
- _____. (2007), "To Hell with the Osu Caste System!" *Sunday Sun*, Lagos, September 30, p. 43.
- Godwin, Anyanwu (1981), "'Osu' Abolished in Nnokwa," *Daily Star*, Enugu, Wednesday, July 29, p. 5.
- Ifeadigo, John (1973), "Is the Osu System Dying Fast?" *The Renaissance*, Enugu, Sunday, November 18, p. 10.
- Igbokwe, G. G. (1975), "Bringing An End To 'Osu' System," *The Renaissance*, Enugu, Saturday, June 21, p. 3.
- Igwe, Leo (2008), "The Osu Caste in Igboland," *The Guardian*, Lagos, Friday, October 24, p. 9.
- _____. (2009), "Letters: Gov. Ohakim, Come to the Aid of Eziamma Community," *The Guardian*, Lagos, Wednesday, February 25, p. 3.
- Ihemeukaesu, Ugo-Luchie (2008), "The Eze Igbo Institution," *Daily Sun*, Lagos, Monday, September 15, p. 16.
- Ijioma, U. I. (2008), "Re: The Osu Caste in Igboland," *Daily Sun*, Lagos, Wednesday, October 8, p. 42.
- Ikemefuna, Chuks G. (1975), "The Osu Caste System: A Rejoinder," *The Renaissance*, Enugu, Tuesday, April 22, p. 10.
- Lot, Joe (1987), "The Other Side of Osu Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos, August 4, p. 25.
- Mbaeri, Chris (1987), "Letters: Osu Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos, Monday, August 24, p. 4.
- New Nigerian, (1987), "Legislation Can't Wipe Out 'Osu'," *Sunday New Nigerian*, Lagos, December 27, p.4.

- Nkwopara, Chidi (2006), "Owerri Catholic Archdiocese marks Abolition of Osu Caste," *Vanguard*, Lagos, Thursday, May 11, 2006, p. 15.
- Nnani (2007), Letter to Juliana Francis, "Crazy Osu Caste: Reactions," *Sunday Sun*, Lagos, September 23, p. 43.
- Nwachukwu, J. O. (1985), "Tyranny over a Helpless Minority," *Sunday Times*, Lagos, Sunday, March 10, p. 9.
- Nwachukwu, S. J. (2008), "The Osu Caste in Igboland," *Daily Sun*, Lagos, Friday, September 19, p. 48.
- Nwaizu, Joe (1981), "Dehumanizing Effects of the Social Evil," *Daily Times*, Lagos, Tuesday, April 21, p. 7.
- Nwegbo, Chris (1988), "Scrap Osu Caste System - Maryam," *Daily Times*, Lagos, Tuesday, January 26, p. 2.
- Nweke, Anayo (1981), "The Igbo Social Lepers - A Rejoinder," *Daily Star*, Enugu, Thursday, April 23, p. 5.
- Nwosu, Nnabike (1987), "Letters: Osu Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos, Monday, August 24, p. 4.
- Nwosu, Okenwa (1985), "Controversy Over Osu Caste System: Laws Can't Terminate That Social Cancer," *Lagos, Sunday Times*, May 10, 1985, p. 9.
- Obasi, Ely; Edem, Akpa; Mba, Janet and Smith, Sam (1989), "The Gods Are to Blame," *Newswatch*, Lagos, September 18, pp. 14-19.
- Obayi, Ugwu A. (1986), "The Menace of the Caste System," *Weekly Star*, Enugu, Sunday, April 20, p. 11.
- Obumse, Mbanugo (1975), "The Osu Caste System: We Are All Equal Before God," *The Renaissance*, Enugu, Thursday, March 27, pp. 11 & 13.
- Ogbu, Chijama (1989), "Osu: An Anti-Social System in Igbo Land," *Daily Star*, Enugu, Monday, December 4, p. 11.
- Ogbuibe, Theresa (1981), "The Osu Caste System in Igboland," *Daily Times*, Lagos, Thursday, April 21, p. 7.
- Oguamanam, Boyd (1975), "The Osu Caste System," *The Renaissance*, Enugu, Friday, February 28, p. 11.
- Okey, Udeagwu C. (1987), "Letters: Osu Caste," *African Concord*, Lagos, Monday, August 24, p. 5.

- Okonjo, Luke O. (1976), "Osu Caste: A Challenge to the Church," *Daily Star*, Enugu, Friday, June 4, p. 10.
- Okoro, Chinaka (1997), "The Nothingness of Osu Caste System," *Saturday Champion*, Lagos, January 4, p. 10.
- Okoronta, Iheanyi (2001), "Osu, Civilization and Christianity," *Daily Champion*, Lagos, Monday, December 10, p. 11.
- Okoye, Cletus U. (1985), "Osu Caste System – Nothing But a Suppressionist Design," *Daily Star*, Enugu, Thursday, April 11, p. 11.
- Okpii, L. A. (1976), "The Osu System: Tragedy of the Igbo Culture," *Daily Star*, Enugu, Saturday, July 24, p. 10.
- Omoregie, Victor (2009), "Osu – Dying Stigma of Igbo 'Untouchables'," *Vanguard*, Lagos, Saturday, April 11, p. 5.
- Onanuga, Bayo and Ojudu, Babafemi (1987), "Apartheid: A Nigerian Version: Laws of Nigeria Can't be pleaded against the System," *African Concord*, Lagos, June 30, pp.14-23.
- Onyiliagha, Victor (2008), "Twilight of the Osu Caste System," *The Guardian*, Lagos, Monday, November 17, p. 4.
- Samuel, Ejiofor (1986), "The Caste System and Social Justice," *Daily Star*, Enugu, Friday, December 5, p. 9.
- Soriwei, Fidelis (2006), "Community Abolishes Osu," *The Punch*, Lagos, Friday, April 28, 2006, p. 17.
- Tide News (2009), "Atulomah Criticizes Osu Caste System," *The Tide*, Port Harcourt, Wednesday, January 21, p. 13.
- Tonye (2007), Letter to Juliana Francis, "Crazy Osu Caste: Reactions," *Sunday Sun*, Lagos, September 23, p. 43.
- Uchella, Ejike (1987), "Discard Osu Caste System – Governor Tells Ibos," *The Statesman*, Enugu, Monday, June 1, p. 9.
- Uzoukwu, Livy (1987), "Osu System and Denial of Fundamental Rights (2)," *Sunday Statesman*, Enugu, July 5, p. 13.
- Xrydz-Eyutcha, C. (1976), "Osu System in Igboland," *Weekly Star*, Enugu, Sunday, June 6, p. 3.
- _____. (1976), "Crying Wolf When there is no Wolf," *Weekly Star*, Enugu, Sunday, July 18, p. 4.

Archival Sources

National Archives of Nigeria, Enugu Branch (NAE)

Aba District Office (ABADIST):

ABADIST 7/1/1, "Long Juju of Arochukwu – Revival of the Worship and Invocation by Aros Resident in the Okigwe District."

ABADIST 13/4/54, "Long Juju of Aro and Okonko Society (1920)."

Afikpo District Office (AFIDIST):

Conf. C4/45 – AFIDIST 6/6/5, D. S. Cook, "Slave Dealing," Asst. D. O., Agwu to Resident, Owerri Province, 23 May, 1927.

Aro Divisional Office (ARODIV):

ARODIV 20/1/15, "Anthropologists Papers on Aro Origin, Discussion and the Basis of the widespread Aro Influence."

Calabar Provincial Office (CALPROF):

CALPROF 4/10/31, "Re: Revival of Long-Juju (1921-1922)."

Civil Secretariat Enugu (CSE):

CSE 1/85/2924, "International Slavery Convention," Vol. I.

CSE 1/85/2925, "International Slavery Convention," Vol. II.

CSE 1/85/2926, "International Slavery Convention," Vol. III.

CSE 1/85/4510, Jeffreys, M. D. W., "Ozo and Eze Nri Titles in the Awka Division," Onitsha Province.

CSE/1/85/5537, "Dedication of Children to Juju Priests (1935)."

CSE 1/85/7875, "Human Sacrifices and Destruction of Twin Children, Nsukka District, Onitsha Province."

CSE 1/85/9575, Angulama-Nom-Awo Juju, "Prohibition of Angulama-nom-awo."

CSE 1/85/9575, Angulama-Nom-Awo Juju, "Native Authority Ordinance."

CSE 1/86/91, "Proposal by Mr. Chamley for the Suppression of Aro Long Juju (1911)."

Onitsha District Office (ONDIST):

ONDIST 12/1/137, "Restoration of Agbara Ude Juju to the People of Obunka-Awka Division – Petition Re."

ONDIST 12/1/1244, "Human Sacrifices and Destruction of Twin Children."

ONDIST 12/1/1987, "Position of Slaves and Free Born (1928-1950)."

ONDIST 19/6/1, "Annual Report – Nwa-Chukwu (Juju)."

OP 1322 ONDIST, "Osu System: Dedication of Children to Juju Priests: Legislation Against."

Onitsha Provincial Office (ONPROF):

ONPROF 7/14/62, "Report on Ofo in the Owerri Division," 1927.

Orlu District Office (ORLDIST):

ORLDIST 8/1/136, "Anyiam Anyadoh and others to Senior Resident, Owerri Province," April 17, 1939.

Udi Divisional Office (UDDIV):

UDDIV 4/1/13, "Ukana-Ebe Jujus."

Eastern House of Assembly

Eastern House of Assembly Debates, Third Session, First Meeting, Vol. 1, 5th to 19th of March, 1956.

Supplement to the Eastern Regional Gazette, (1956) - A Bill for the Abolition of the Osu System, to Prescribe Punishment Both for the Practice Thereof and the Enforcement of any Disability Arising Therefrom and for Purposes Connected Therewith.

Supplement to the Eastern Regional Gazette, (1956) - A Law for the Abolition of the Osu System, to Prescribe Punishment Both for the Practice Thereof and the Enforcement of any Disability Arising Therefrom and for Purposes Connected Therewith.

Church Missionary Society Archives, University of Birmingham

Basden, G. T. (1907), "Fifty Years Work Among the Ibos of Nigeria," *Church Missionary Reviews*, pp. 139-148.

_____. (1915) "Denationalizing a Primitive People", *The Church Missionary Review*, Vol. LXVI, London: Church Missionary Society, pp. 597-603, 726-732.

Church Missionary Intelligence, 1879.

Niger Mission, Official Correspondence:

C A3/025/1, Langley, Rev. Francis, "Letter," 1862.

C A3/025/4, "Annual Letter," 1872.

C A3/0 37/57, Taylor II, Rev. John Christopher, "A 'Report on the Political and Spiritual State of Onitsha' 1864."

C A3/037/58.

G 3/A3 0/1930, "The Church and Native Customs," in Appendix 5 (Miscellaneous) No. 67.

Reports and Other Official Documents

Awuda-Ebenesi Land Case, 1907-1935: Court Proceedings and Decisions.

Report of the Political Bureau - Directorate for Social Mobilisation, March 1987.

Report of the "Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987," Volume I, Main Report, Anambra State Government, November 1987.

Report of the "Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987," Volume II, Oral Evidence, Anambra State Government, November 1987.

Report of the "Worship of Efuru Deity Judicial Commission of Inquiry, 1987," Volume III, Memoranda and Other Documents, Anambra State Government, November 1987.

The Amended Constitution of Nnobi Town, 1998.

The Constitution of Nze Na Ozo Nnobi, Revised 2001.

Electronic Sources

Aboyade, Funke (2008), "How Sam Edem Story Mirrors the Nigerian Tragedy," Lagos: *Thisday*, August 11, available at <http://www.thisdayonline.com/nview.php?id=119428>. (Accessed August 2008).

BBC News (2005), "Why are Nigerian Movies Popular?" Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4524458.stm> (Accessed May 2009).

Dike, K. Onwuka (1962), "Origins of the Niger Mission 1841-1891: A Paper read at the Centenary of the Mission at Christ Church, Onitsha, on 13 November 1957," Ibadan: Published for the CMS Niger Mission by the Ibadan University Press; this paper is available online at - http://anglicanhistory.org/africa/ng/dike_origins1957.html. (Accessed July 2008).

Dike, Victor E. (1999), "The 'Caste System' in Nigeria, Democratization and Culture: Socio-political and Civil Rights Implications," available at <http://www.afbis.com/analysis/caste.htm> (Accessed February 2009).

_____. (2002), *The Osu Caste System in Igboland: Discrimination Based on Descent*, e-Book available at http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/oarticles/osu_caste_system_in_igboland%20D.htm (Accessed May 2008).

_____. (2007), "Osu Caste System in Igboland," *Nigerian Tribune*, March 24, 2007. Available at: http://www.tribune.com.ng/24032007/igbo_cul.html (Accessed May 2008).

Human Rights Watch (2001), "Caste Discrimination: A Global Concern" available at - <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/globalcaste/index.htm#TopOfPage> (Accessed July 2008).

_____. (2002), "The Bakassi Boys: The Legitimization of Murder and Torture," Vol. 14, No. 5, May, and available at <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2002/nigeria2/> (Accessed April 2009).

Ihejirika, Walter "Media and Fundamentalism in Nigeria," The World Association of Christian Comm., http://www.wacc.org.uk/wacc/publications/media_development/2005_2/media_and_fundamentalism_in_nigeria (Accessed August 2008)

Manson, Katrina (2009), "Africa Must Learn from Nigeria's 'Microwave' Movies," available at http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20090306/film_nm/us_africa_film_nollywood (Accessed March 2009).

National Population Commission, Nigeria - <http://www.population.gov.ng/> (Accessed May 2008).

Nwosu, Okenwa (1999), "The 'Caste System' in Nigeria, Democratization and Culture: Socio-political and Civil Rights Implications," June 13; available at http://www.kwenu.com/igbo/igbowebpages/Igbo.dir/Culture/osu_caste_system_is_a_cultural_.htm (Accessed February 2009).

_____. (1999), "Osu Caste System: A Cultural Albatross for the Igbo Society," June 19; also available at http://www.kwenu.com/igbo/igbowebpages/Igbo.dir/Culture/osu_caste_system_is_a_cultural_.htm (Accessed February 2009).

Owens-Ibie, Nosa (2004), "How Video Films Developed in Nigeria," *The Guardian*, March 24, available at <http://www.waccglobal.org/lang-de/publications/media-development/84-1998-1/902-How-video-films-developed-in-Nigeria-.html> (Accessed January 29, 2009).

Ugwoke, Francis (2009), "Ten Feared Dead in Enugu Communal Crisis," Lagos, *Thisday*, Friday, January 30. Available at: <http://www.thisdayonline.com/nview.php?id=134349> (Accessed February 2009).

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2009), Press Release: Nollywood rivals Bollywood in Film/Video Production, May 5, available at http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=7650_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC (Accessed May 2009).

Vasagar, Jeevan (2006), "Welcome to Nollywood," *The Guardian*, March 23. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2006/mar/23/world.features>. (Accessed May 2008).

Walker, Andrew (2009), "The Story of Nigeria's 'Untouchables'," Enugu: BBC News, April 7; available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7977734.stm> (Accessed April 2009).

<http://www.davidoyedepoministries.org/about/mandate> (Accessed August 2008).

<http://groups.google.com/group/USAAfricaDialogue>.

<http://www.iheu.org/node/2452>. (Accessed August 2008).

International Telecommunication Union, at <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm> (Accessed May, 2009).

Internet World Stats, available at: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/af/ng.htm> (Accessed May, 2009).

<http://www.mountainoffire.org/mfmstart.htm> (Accessed August 2008).

http://www.mukto-mona.com/Articles/Leo_Igwe/index.htm (Accessed May 2009).

<http://naijablog.blogspot.com/2008/10/on-osu.html> (Accessed October 2008).

<http://www.nairaland.com> (Accessed January 2009).

<http://www.stop-osu.com> (Accessed January 2009).

<http://www.trem.org/missionstatement.html> (Accessed August 2008).

Filmography

Christian Marriage I & II (2002), Director: Chika Onu, Producer: Valentine Nwabulu. English, Valseco Industries Limited.

Kingdom against Kingdom I & II (2008), Director: Ugo Ugbor, Producer: Kenneth Okonkwo and Ugo Ugbor. English, Global Pictures Update.

Never Ever (1998), Director: Ndubuisi Oko, Producer: Amos Onwe. English, I. G. Best Movie Industry Limited and E. Onwe Movie Industry Limited.

Royal Palace, I, II & III (2005), Director: Andy Amenechi, Producer: Valentine Nwabulu. English, Valseco Industries Limited.

Soul of a Maiden I & II (2008), Director: Tchidi Chikere, Producer: Obi Madubogwu. English, Ojika Amaka Industries Limited.

Taboo (1994), Director: Vic Mordi, Producers: Tony White Meribe and Daniel Oluigbo. Igbo, Sage Production Inc.

World of Tears I & II (2008), Director: Ikechukwu Onyeka, Producer: Chinedu Nwani. English, Get Rich Productions Limited.

Interviews

Achi, Mr. Monday C. (Utagba-Uno, Ndokwa West LG, Delta State; interviewed August 22, 2007). Born 1979; Researcher at the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Afigbo, Professor Adiele E. (Ihube, Okigwe LG, Imo State; August 29, 2007). Born November 22, 1937; Professor of History, particularly Igbo history and the history of southeastern Nigeria. Afigbo was a professor at the University of Nigeria since 1972 and moved to the Ebonyi State University after retirement where he continued to lecture until his death in 2009.

Ezeobianumba, Chief Ajaghaku (Nnobi, Idemili South LG, Anambra State; June 24, 2007). Born 1948; school principal and community leader; President, Nnobi Welfare Organization.

Chukwudi, Mr. Chidiebere (Isiogbo Nara, Nkanu LG, Enugu State; August 9, 2007). Born 1978; musician, teacher and choreographer; Chukwudi is from the *ohu* village in Enugu and his grandfather participated actively in their struggle for freedom in the 1920s.

Edochie, Chief Pete, MON (Nteje, Oyi LG, Anambra State; August 21, 2007). Born 1947; broadcaster and film actor since 1967. Edochie has featured in over 100 films including playing the lead role of Okonkwo in an NTA adaptation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

Ejim, Miss Mary (Ogbuebullu, Ikwuano LG, Abia State; July 22, 2007). Born 1984; broadcaster and public relations practitioner since 2004; pioneer staff of Cosmo FM in Enugu.

- Ekwunife, Rev. Fr. Professor Anthony (Abba, Njikoka LG, Anambra State; August 22, 2007). Born 1939; Catholic priest and professor of African traditional religion and sociology of religion at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; belongs to the religious Missionary Congregation of the Holy Spirit (C.S.Sp).
- Emeh, Mr. Benechukwu B. O. (Nnobi, Idemili South LG, Anambra State; June 16, 2007). Born 1925; politician, community leader and business man; worked as a teacher with the Christian Missions in Nigeria and later joined the civil service of the former Eastern Nigeria Government to retire in 1976; presently commissioner of the National Population Commission.
- Eze, Reverend Sunday I. (Ndi-Obu Ozuitem, Bende LG, Abia State; July 18, 2007). Born 1954; pastor of The Redeemed Evangelical Mission (TREM) stationed at Nnobi.
- Ezeagu, HRH Igwe Christopher Okonkwo (Nnokwa, Idemili South LG, Anambra State; June 15, 2007). Born 1933; former trader, traditional ruler and Igwe of Nnokwa.
- Ezeike, Mr. Godwin (Nnobi, Idemili LG, Anambra State; June 15, 2007). Born 1937; retired head teacher and community/Church leader.
- Ike, Mr. Cyril O. (Igbo-Ukwu, Anambra State; June 24, 2007). Born 1927; retired principal and historian.
- Irobi, Mr. Joseph (Obazu-Mbieri, Mbaitoli LG, Imo State; August 7, 2007). Born 1952; chief librarian, Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- John-Kamen, Professor Anthony (Ihembosi, Anambra State; June 22, 2007). Born 1933; former professor of mass communication at the University of Lagos; currently professor at Madonna University, Anambra State, and traditional prime minister of Ihembosi.
- Nnaji, HRH Igwe Julius U. (Umuenwene, Iji, Nike-Uno, Enugu East, Enugu State; July 23, 2007). Born 1948; Barrister; Chairman of Enugu East LGA 1994-96; traditional ruler and Igwe of Enugu.
- Ojukwu, HRH Igwe Dr. Tony, JP (Ogui Nike, Enugu North LG, Enugu State; July 23, 2007). Born 1945; journalist, graduated in Ghana 1973, worked for *Ghanaian Times* and Ghana News Agency; later for various newspapers in eastern Nigeria – in 1988 general manager of *Daily Star*, 1991-92 founded Documentary Nigeria Limited; became traditional ruler and Igwe of Enugu Urban in 1997.
- Okigbo, Mr. John (Nnobi, Idemili LG, Anambra State; June 24, 2007). Born 1939; retired head teacher.
- Okoye, Mrs. Stella (Igbo-Ukwu, Anambra State; July 17, 2007). Born 1946; retired nurse and housewife.
- Okpala, Barrister Emeka (Anambra State; August 21, 2007). Born 1962; barrister and broadcaster; manager of news at the Nigerian Television Authority and senior lecturer of mass communication at Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Anambra State Polytechnic and Madonna University, Anambra State.

Okpalaeke, Barrister Anthony I. I. (Awka-Etiti, Idemili South LG, Anambra State; July 19, 2007). Born 1948; barrister and broadcaster; director of legal affairs at the Anambra Broadcasting Service.

Osuagwu; Mr. Chidi E. (Bende, Bende LG, Abia State; August 6, 2007). Born 1958; lecturer and historian at the Abia State University, Uturu.

Umeh, Professor John A. (Nnobi, Idemili LG, Anambra State; July 22, 2007). Born in the 1930s; traditional religion practitioner and emeritus professor at the University of Nigeria, Enugu campus where he was formerly deputy vice chancellor.

Uzokwe, Nnayi Moses (Nnobi, Idemili LG, Anambra State; July 26, 2007) Born 1890; traditional chief priest and native doctor; currently chief priest of Idemili shrine at Nnobi.

Informal Discussions

Please note that some respondents have either remained anonymous or referred to with first names because we promised to keep their responses confidential. However, we had informal discussions and conversations with, among other people:

Mr. Victor Alozie; Mr. Julius Agwu; Mr. Chima Amadi; Mr. Andy Amenechi; Mr. Segun Arinze; Mr. Asoluka; Mr. Gozie Chidera; Mr. Tchidi Chikere; Mr. Nonso Diobi; Miss Sylvia Duru; Miss. Chinwe Durunna; Mrs. Omotola Jalade Ekeinde; Miss. Nneoma Ezeocha; Reverend Fr. Obiesie L. Chinedu; Mr. Chiweta; Mr. Leo Igwe; Mr. Remy Chukwukaodinaka Ilona; Mr. Jude; Mr. Ndolue; Mr. Anthony Njoku; Mr. Ramsey Noah; Mrs. Nwafor; Mrs. Ukamaka Obiagwu; Mr. Emma Obidike; Mrs. Nkedilim Obika; Miss. Chichi Okolo; Chief Emmanuel Okwelume; Chief Onwuzulike Okwelume; Mr. Chidi Omenka; Mr. Emeka Onuorah; Miss Serah Donald Onyeachor; Mr. Onyeka; Mr. Ikechukwu Onyeka; Mr. Victor Onyiliagha; Miss Rose; Reverend Fr. Solomon; Mr. Emmanuel Ehumadu Totolos; Miss Ada Uka; Miss Chiemenam Umeh; Miss Chedo Umuagu; and Dr. Jeremy Weate.

Focus Group Discussions

Amaesi, Miss Esther (Umuozu, Isiala Mbano LG, Imo State; July 21, 2007). Born 1986; undergraduate student at Madonna University, Anambra State.

Chukwuma, Mr. John (Eziora Ozubulu, Ekwusigo LG, Anambra State; July 21, 2007). Born 1979; undergraduate student at Madonna University, Anambra State.

Duru, Miss Olivia (Umuoyo Irete, Owerri West LG, Imo State; July 21, 2007). Born 1985; undergraduate student at Madonna University, Anambra State.

Ikedife, Dr. Dozie (Nnewi, Nnewi North LG, Anambra State; June 18, 2007). Born 1932; gynaecologist, community leader and president-general, Ohaneze Ndigbo (apex Igbo socio-cultural organization); also member of Nnewi's traditional cabinet.

Irozuru, Mr. Chibuzo (Oboro-Ndoru, Ikwuano LG, Abia State; July 21, 2007). Born 1983; undergraduate student at Madonna University, Anambra State.

Nwoha; Miss Ifunanya (Umudugba, Isu LG, Imo State; July 21, 2007). Born 1985; undergraduate student at Madonna University, Anambra State.

Nwosu, Prince Anene (Otolu, Nnewi; June 18, 2007). Born 1940s; retired civil servant and federal permanent secretary; member, Nnewi traditional cabinet.

Onyerika, Miss Lydia (Umuochameze Umunneji Autonomous Community, Umuomumu Mberi, Mbaitoli LGA, Imo State; July 21, 2007). Born 1983; undergraduate student at Madonna University, Anambra State.

Orizu, HRH Igwe Kenneth III, CON (Otolu, Nnewi; June 18, 2007). Born 1925; retired journalist and business man; traditional ruler and Igwe of Nnewi since 1963; chairman, Anambra State Council of Traditional Rulers.

Umah; Mr. Onyekachi (Mgbowo, Agu LG, Enugu State; July 21, 2007). Born 1986; undergraduate student at Madonna University, Anambra State.