

## The Past Is Still With Us: Slavery and Social Conflict in Twenty-First Century Igboland, Nigeria

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### Abstract

Scholarly accounts of slavery and its associated trade indicate that the Igbo were major players either as slave merchants, articles of the trade or slave keepers. During the inglorious days of slavery, there were several accounts among the Igbo indicating that they never took kindly to being regarded and treated as slaves. However, even after the abolition and subsequent legislations in support of abolition in eastern Nigeria to which the Igbo belong, the old notion of slavery and the practices associated with the institution refused to fizzle away. Consequent on the entrenched notions about slavery, many Igbo communities even in the present century are enmeshed in antagonistic relations between those assumed to be of slave ancestry and those not of slave descent. That such crisis exists even in the face of law raises serious concerns albeit; what is the bone of contention among the opposing parties in such crisis-ridden communities and how could they be resolved? This article which is a result of extensive field investigation is intended to provide answers to the questions using specific examples from some Igbo communities with a view to recommending ways of minimising the rancour and acrimony among the groups (ex-slaves and non-slaves).

**Keywords:** Slave, Slavery, Igboland, *Osu*, *Ohu*, *Amadi*, Conflict

### Introduction

The Bight of Biafra attained the reputation of being unquestionably the utmost suppliers of slaves in West Africa, Africa and indeed the world over (Brown & Lovejoy, 2011; Chambers, 2013). It is within this locality that the Igbo, an ethnic group within Nigeria, are found. Among the Igbo, the original perception of a slave and one under slavery is completely like chalk and cheese from that of the Western World. The West always made a distinction between “clientship” and “pawnsip”. They perceive or saw a ‘client’ as someone who willingly becomes reliant on another person and different from the slave because he can choose to quit the relationship. A ‘pawn’ in their view is a person given as a collateral on a loan and regained his freedom when the loan was repaid, only that during the time of his pawnsip, his labour served as interest on the loan. These forms of servitude they regard not to be slavery (Uchendu, 1977). This contrasts with the Igbo perception of a slave as a person who poverty or any other circumstance forced into or had reduced to being his neighbour’s servant for life or for a period of time provided he was not paid for his services. Hence the saying among the Igbo that *ohu bu odibo n’enweghi ugwo ohu Onye nwe ya ji n’usoro iwu* - a slave is a servant that his master is not under any legal obligation to pay for his services- even as there was room for manumission. However, with the increased commoditization and commercialization of humans as articles of trade consequent on the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, this notion changed (Opata & Opata, 2011). Chattel slavery as existed in the West became institutionalised among the Igbo. With this change came a whole lot of adjustments, permutations, restructuring, and redefinition of what the status of the slave in society should be. The slave (*ohu*) was seen and perceived as a person without freedom and at the same time must be serving another person since he was either bought, stolen, kidnapped, or captured as spoils of war (Osakwe, 2011). Implicit in this conception is the notion that the slave is a human property of his master who reserves the right to treat him as he wants because the *ohu* is economical, politically, socially and culturally deprived. The latter changes became more pronounced after the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade as some of the slaves either caught or could not be sold or those who bought their freedom from their masters began to exert some new form of authority and freedom unknown before the abolition. To make for stability in the polity, many Igbo communities gave specific roles to these ex-slaves in line with what obtained when their progeny was not yet freed which have continued to thrive. These roles as examined in this study are reproduced by symbolic cultural practices. They equally have repercussions

in contemporary local politics: at times in latent ways; in others in openly conflictive or even violent forms (Harneit-Sievers, 2011). Within the Igbo traditional political system, there is a class structure: slaves (*Ohu*) and non-slaves (*Amadi or Amu*). The roles assigned to each in the traditional political structure were determined by their membership of each class. In the Igbo political system, political roles were determined by eligibility. According to Olisa (2002), the criteria for eligibility with regard to role recruitment to political offices among the Igbo are divided into three. First, is eligibility based on sex; second, on membership and third, on lineage. It is in role eligibility based on membership that this class distinction is made manifest. This observer noted of the Igbo political system that role eligibility based on membership refers to whether individuals or groups are slaves and non-slaves, stranger or non-strangers. He states that political roles are centred on first, the traditional legitimacy of the functionaries, and the measure of success which role performers attain in establishing cordial relations between the community and supernatural powers, thereby creating favourable conditions for the pursuit of material needs of life (Olisa, 2002, p.226). In as much as this is true of most Igbo societies, minor exceptions exist. Eligibility based on sex has to do with the interplay of gender in the social and political milieu. Some roles strictly speaking are meant for either of the sexes. In the study area, even among the sexes, there are further distinctions based on status (age, birth, position in the family, marriage, etc).

The second role eligibility appears to be however intertwined with the third and involves membership and lineage as one cannot associate with a lineage with a view to enjoying all rights and privileges except if one is a member of the lineage by birth and not by conscription or adoption. Such privileges are based on the understanding that those who enjoy it are citizens of such lineage on the ground that there is a genealogical bond. This presupposes that slaves co-habiting the same polity with their masters were not regarded as bonafide members of such polity. Igbo society, like most societies, contain a multiplicity of relationships of the command-obedience kind, the same individual being, in turn, a giver and a follower of others not only by virtue of the hierarchy inbuilt in intricate organisations but also by virtue of the array of social systems to which each person belong (Conant, 1978, p.103). It is within this social system that the dynamics of relationships are embedded as is evident in the observation of Ojiakor and Obiakor (2015, p.307-320) that:

Although slaves were admitted into the society, they were not allowed to enjoy all the privileges accorded the free born. This has sustained the existence of the servile groups within these communities, which gave rise to a form of social stratification where distinction is made between the slaves (*Ohu*) and the free-born (*nwammadu*).

As early as 1935, the colonial office, Southern Nigeria wrote the Resident of Onitsha Province pointing out that the issue of a slave born remains a disintegrating force causing great bitterness of feeling in certain parts and that it is a force causing divisions between villages, families, and individuals. Members of families the office observed were divided owing to some being regarded as free born while some are *Osu/Ohu* (NAE, 1935). Possibly to reduce if not eradicate the acrimonious relations between the two groups, the government of the defunct Eastern Region, Nigeria in 1956 came up with a legislation against this ugly institution and its practice. Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe fought fervently against the *Osu* caste system. He told members of the out of use Eastern House of Assembly on March 20, 1956, that: "it is devilish and most uncharitable to brand any human being with a label of inferiority, due to the accidents of history". While seconding the motion for the second reading of the abolition of the *Osu* caste system, Azikiwe (1956) submitted that:

The objects and reasons for the bill are humanitarian and altruistic. The bill seeks to abolish the *Osu* system and its allied practices including the *Oru*, or *Ohu* system; to prescribe punishment for their continued practice, and to remove certain social disabilities caused by the enforcement of the *Osu* and its allied system. I will not join in the encouragement of a system of society where one stratum can superciliously claim to be descended from the best

brain and would, therefore, consign the others to a scrap heap of their own invention and ostracise them socially.

Even in the face of this legislation and other that came after it, the stigmatisation and ostracization of the *Ohu* and *Osu* remain strong in twenty-first century Igboland (Apeh & Opata, 2009). Giving credence to the continued existence of discrimination against people of slave origin after the 1956 legislation, Basden (1966, p.248) noted that,

many of the civilised, educated men will not share “kola” with a man of slave descent though, in other respect, he be a friend and an equal, or even superior in wealth and employment. In some areas, it is not permissible for slaves to be buried in the same cemetery where free-born folk are laid to rest... It will probably be a long time before all traces of slavery disappear from the minds of the people. Even if a man redeems himself he does not, thereby, get rid of the stigma; he has merely emancipated himself. His fellow-townsmen may extend a superficial recognition of his changed status, but they do not appreciably alter their attitude towards him.

This puts a big question mark on the human rights mantra espoused by the government of states in Igboland through their various legislations as people of slave descent are denied their human rights by subjecting them to illegal segregation and malevolent historicization.

### **Dynamics of relations between descendants of slaves and the *amadi* in Igboland: Echoes from the Twenty-first century**

The unhealthy relations between people of slave ancestry and those not of slave descent in Igboland was one of the key issues that ended the 20<sup>th</sup> century and opened the 21<sup>st</sup> in that part of the globe. In 1990/91, a decade before the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Oruku and Umuode communities in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu state, Nigeria were at war with each other over the propriety or not of using a contested constitution to elect their traditional ruler. It should be apposite to state that these communities were living together harmoniously before colonial rule. However, during the colonial period, precisely in 1916, one Ede Nwangene of Umuode - a slave-born serf, in the household of Warrant Chief Nnamene Nwogbu, the then warrant chief of Oruku, disagreed with the Warrant Chief, his master, over the motive behind the task they were sent to by Oruku Community. They were ordered to lobby the Paramount Chief of Nkanu, Chief Chukwuani Nwangwu of Ozalla to intensify pressure on the colonial authority to rescind the abolition law or in the alternative shelve its implementation in Nkanu land with a huge sum of money. This mission if actualized would mean that the Umuode would remain slaves even in the face of the planned emancipation. Ede Nwangene and his party on their way absconded to Ihuokpara where they alerted Chief Avu Nwede Ani, who was also alleged to be of slave origin, of the plot to stop midstream the abolition of slavery in Nkanu. In a quick reaction, Chief Avu Nwede Ani, who even though of slave origin, was made the warrant Chief of Ihuokpara community left to Udi where he intimidated the District Officer of the political development in Oruku. The District officer was furious and after rebuking the people, compelled both the *Amadi* (nonslaves) and *Ohu* (slaves) to embrace each other publicly as a mark of peaceful co-existence. From then to 1948 when Umuode was granted clanship by HRH Igwe Okenwa Adenyi, the warrant Chief who succeeded Chief Nnamene Nwogbu, and made the Umuode become a political group in Oruku, up till 1990/91, there was an atmosphere of tranquillity, cohesion, co-habitation, peace in Oruku town as both sides lived in peace (Adenyi, 2014, pp. 31-32).

However, this relative peace that existed had within it some pockets of grievances bottled-up in it. Both communities were under one traditional ruler and existed as one town until the military administration of Colonel Mike Torey in 1995 divided them into two autonomous communities. The division followed disagreement on which community produces the traditional ruler after the death of the one who ruled from 1976 to 1983. The Umuode clan insisted that it was their turn based on the

rotation clause in the communities' constitution. The Umuchiani clan that is of Oruku produced the first Igwe and also insisted that it will retain the position. The third clan Onogowo also of Oruku seemed to be neutral on the issue and the hostilities raged between Umuode and Umuchiani. Umuode clan was forced out of the union. Since then, the communities have been at loggerheads over their border demarcation. The Umuode on their own acquired an expanse of land from a neighbouring community of Akpugo at ₦30million. But the clashes that followed since their resettlement have resulted in the loss of lives and property. As a result, the Umuode people fled their new homeland in 1999 (Oji, 2017). The protest by Maurice Ede, a onetime Commissioner for Special Duties under the civilian administration of Governor Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu state earned him a sack because of his stand on the Umuode-Oruku crisis. Also sacked because of their stand on the matter was the Accountant-General of Enugu State, Chief Tony Ogbodo, Vice Chancellor, Enugu state University of Technology, Professor T.O.C. Nwodo, and Engineer Francis Agwu, who was the then General Manager of Enugu State Water Corporation. The Governor, who incidentally is from Nkanu area of the state like the Oruku and Umuode in replacing these sacked officials of his cabinet replaced them with people who were not of slave ancestry as he reasoned that those sacked were members of the Nkanu Odenigbo Welfare Association (NOWA)' a body formed by ex-slaves to champion their course. They were replaced by other Nkanu people who belonged to Association of Nkanu Indigenes (ANI) meant for the *Amadi* of Nkanu extraction. To further annoy the exslaves of Nkanu, out of the eighteen political appointment slots meant for Nkanu, the ANI got fifteen while NOWA got only three (Agbaegbu, 2000; Osuji, 2009).

Consequent on the inability of the Umuode to consolidate their new settlement arrangement, it was alleged that they became restive to the extent that in 2000, two of Oruku leaders were alleged to have been killed near Iyama River by Umuode Youths on their way back from Enugu (Adenyi, 2014, p.7). Reappraisal attacks by the Oruku forced the Umuode to flee their homes; they were exiled for seven years. Probably to see if the government could help them take effective occupation of their settlement, the Umuode in 2001 brought a formal report of their maltreatment by their Oruku neighbours to the Human Rights Violation Investigation Commission set up by the Federal government headed by Justice Chukwudife Oputa. This body became synonymous with its chairman that it was popularly called Oputa Panel. Paul Anike of Umuode articulated the grievances of his people. In his petition, he alleged that the *Amadi* of Oruku through the perpetration of modern-day slavery had inflicted on them (the Umuode) many wounds, including loss of lives and property. The Umuode told the panel that the Oruku had been canvassing the notion that they (the Umuode) were of slave origin and regarded by the Oruku as mere chattel and as such are subject to their (Oruku) ownership. They pleaded with the panel to pressurise government to return them to their home and as well guarantee their safety afterwards (Apeh & Oputa, 2009, p.954).

It took several years after for the Umuode to return to their homes as they returned on December 8, 2007, following a peace accord brokered by the Governor of Enugu state, Barrister Sullivan Chime. However, on December 29, 2007, Umuode youths was accused of killing Ekene Okenwa of Oruku in his house and of kidnapping and killing Chief Felix Nwatu, who was the then, Chairman of Oruku Town Union/Development Committee. This episode forced the government to deploy a team of mobile police to the area to maintain peace. Unfortunately, from March 6, 2008, to March 30 of the same year, several clashes occurred between the two conflicting groups. In January 2009, the Enugu State Executive Council approved the Report of the B.C. Aneke Panel set up by the Governor directing Oruku people living at Aguefi to vacate there for Umuode people to occupy same on the ground that Abari land earlier proposed is not habitable. In defiance of government position, Oruku people instituted a charge at the Enugu State High Court (Suit No.E271/2009). A careful and unbiased analysis of the conflict would point to three issues as being the bone of contention; discrimination between ex-slaves and Freeborn, right to and ownership of land and traditional chieftaincy stool.

While I love my people with all my heart and with all my soul, I still have not found any reason why they still rejoice in a primitive, idiotic and sub-human practice that makes them see their fellow as a piece of shit. Funny enough, even the ones that live in Europe, America and other parts of the world that complain bitterly about racism in these continents and countries still endorse



and practice this even worse kind of discrimination against their fellow Igbo. You even read many on this blog feel good and superior by referring to others they don't even know as "osu". It tells you the state of mind and level of civilisation of any user of this abominable word... against his fellow Igbo, not even against an outsider. My people, isn't it time we ask ourselves a question as to how we can survive in an environment as destructive to us as Nigeria is if we are even far more wicked and horrible to ourselves? Who is going to save the Igbo from the Igbo before talking of saving the Igbo from Nigeria? What a self-destructive practice and people! (Vita in Diaspora, 2016).

The above lamentation is only a tip of the iceberg as it relates to slavery in Igboland as it concerns itself with one category of slaves, the *Osu* (those slaves dedicated to and owned by deities). However, the date and the circumstances that gave birth to the comment is the concern of this study. The statement was triggered by a protest by the people of Ugbene in Alor-Uno, Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria against marginalisation and stigmatisation by their Ejuona brothers who claim that they (Ugbene) are slaves. This protest took place on July 28, 2016 (Mamah & Ozor, 2016). However, the immediate cause of the protest began on February 6, 2016 with the attack on one Izuchukwu Ezema by some Alor-Uno citizens for violating one of the unwritten codes of the society; he passed through a road in Umuavuru Ani (also known as Umueze) village reserved only for the 'free-born' - those not of slave ancestry otherwise called *Amadi*. The non-slave elements on accosting Izuchukwu asked him if he was not aware that slaves were not allowed to use the said road. When Izuchukwu answered that he was not a slave, they under the leadership of one Chidi kneaded him into an inert jelly and subjected him to untold molestation. In his confessional statement before a Panel of Inquiry, Izuchukwu observed as follows;

I was still lying down in the pool of my own blood when he came and he used his shoes to march on me. He (Chidi) stood on top of me and asked why a slave like me should not be killed, for passing through a road reserved for non-slaves. "I called him "daddy" and said, 'but I am not a slave'. This infuriated him the more and he asked me to shut up. He was barking at me, saying that I should admit that I was a slave. He threatened that they would kill me if I failed to admit that I was a slave. At this point, they started again to beat and march on me. "As they were beating me, one of their members, a girl who matriculated that day at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, UNN, came out from the house and un-zipped my trousers. "She brought out my manhood and threatened to cut it because, according to her, slaves are not supposed to have it. Her colleagues, however, opposed her, saying that the government would not be happy if they cut my manhood. She then un-zipped her own trousers and started urinating on me (Mamah, 2016).

To press home their disenchantment with their Ejuona neighbours, the Ugbene people carried placards to welcome the state government delegation that came on a fact-finding mission to the community with a view to unravelling the cause of the conflict. The placards read in part as follows; "We are being discriminated against by the Ejuona lords who say we are slaves," "We are attacked on the roads; in our houses for nothing," "Gov. Ifeanyi Ugwanyi, save us from destruction by granting us autonomy," "We are meant to be seen and not heard in our own home and community" (Mamah, 2016).

As if the above episode was child's play, on May 6, 2017, at about 7.30pm, Ozoemena Ogbu, a barber was shot at his village, Agbaho in Ugbene quarter of Alor Uno by people suspected to be from Ejuona. He was later rushed to Faith Foundation Hospital Nsukka, where doctors removed the pellets after an operation. Desirous to make sure that their victim was eliminated from the face of the earth, the masterminds secretly trailed him to the hospital with the intention of killing him through food poisoning. This they hoped to achieve through a lady nurse from Ejuona who would pretend to be on an

unscheduled visit to see another nurse in the hospital. During this unholy visit, she was to hand over a loaf of bread that had been poisoned with a local rat killer called *otapiapia* which she would claim was meant for her imaginary friend (Onah, 2017). The ‘crime’ of the Barber was that he wanted to marry a girl named Ugwu Jacinta from Ejuona. The said girl was accused of being so emotionally attached to the barber that suspicion grew that she was bewitched by the barber who they accused of patronising traditional medicine men who are capable of hypnotising people (Interview with Assumpta Omeje, 13 May, 2017). Be that as it may, one wonders why the same Igbo *amadi* would pride himself in marrying an African American whose link with slavery is not in doubt but would oppose getting married to an ex-slave from within his Igbo locality. This may be because as Ojiakor and Obiakor (2009, p.314) observed, marriage was forbidden between the two groups and it was considered an abomination for *Nwammadu (Amadi)* to marry an *ohu*. Maybe, distance beclouds the mind of the *amadi* who are desirous to marry African-American women and men.

To appreciate the actions of both parties, one need to take a cursory look at the rate of marriage contracts between these groups before the conflict. Among the Igbo, there exist traditional and religious practices that categorise individuals into different classes that foster discrimination. In such societies, Marshall observed that the major dividing line between and within the group's centres around the rules of pollution; these affect commonalities, sharing and preparing of food, intermarriage and any other forms of social intercourse. Writing on the societal perception of intermarriages between these groups Achebe in *No Longer At Ease* quotes Obi's father as stating thus to Obi when he intended to break the code:

Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg you, my son not to bring the mark of shame and leprosy into the family. If you do, your children and your children's children into the third and fourth generation will curse your memory. It is not for myself I speak, my days are few. You will bring sorrow on your head and on the heads of your children. Who will marry your daughters? Whose daughters will your sons marry? Think of that, my son. We are Christians, but we cannot marry our own daughters (Achebe, 1960, p. 121).

From the remarks of this elder, one could deduce that Christianity as a religion was suspected as one of the agencies that promoted the divide among the *Ohu/Osu* and the *Amadi* with respect to marriage. In 2015, a Catholic priest was accused of frustrating the wedding ceremony of his own kinsman on the pretext that they came late for the church service (even when it was obvious that they would be late due to excessive rainfall), but he had before then called his kinsman to talk him into dumping the lady she is currently married to on the grounds that he was breaking the lineage code of conduct. In anger, the said man went to a Pentecostal church and consummated the marriage. The said priest also tried to convince the father of the bridegroom not to attend the wedding but did not succeed (*Interview with Philip Agbo on 12 July, 2015*). The actions of the said priest did not in any form or shape represent the vision and mission of the Catholic Church which he claims to represent.

One of the aims of early missionaries was to end slavery and slave trade in West Africa. As part of their strategy of evangelization, one of their leaders advised that they should “let missionaries and schoolmasters, the plough and the spade, go together and agriculture will flourish... and Christianity operate as the proximate cause of this happy change” (Ajayi, 1965, pp.10-11). As the precursor of colonial administration, the white man's religion, Christianity, got to Igboland before their government. The Church entered Igboland through Onitsha in 1857. However, a pertinent remark need to be made at this stage; a remark that would serve as an inroad into why most Igbo societies turned against Christianity, especially the Catholic Church at the initial stage, thus setting the stage for some early and later Christians to insist on the continued survival of the institution of slavery and its associated practices. When the first Catholic missionaries got to Onitsha in 1885, they took to a method commonly known as ‘the slave method’ of recruiting converts. The ‘slave system’ involved freeing of slaves by purchase and confining them in quasi-Christian ghettos. While in confinement, they were instructed in the tenets of the Christian faith; to be sure those tenets were at the cross with that of the people and the

new converts were made to have an overdose of their indoctrination. A list of those to be baptised in 1902 indicates that in Onitsha alone, five hundred slave converts made the list. Rev. Fr. León-Alexander Lejeune (1902) after evaluating the level of progress made by the Catholic Church in eastern Nigeria concluded that the preference of slaves as converts might result in unsavoury consequences for the developing church in eastern Nigeria. Lejeune remarked that even though this might seem a “good harvest”, the free-born, the Chiefs, the ruling class were not part of the congregation. More worrisome, as Lejeune observed was that the free-born and the upper class of the society looked down on an institution that gave refuge to their outcast, their criminals, and the accursed of their gods (Archives of the Spiritans, 1902). Also worrisome is the prevalent notion that the White slavers (who are from predominantly Christian nations) were cannibals who bought the slaves with the intention of fattening them and using the fattened slaves as a delicacy (Bosman, 1967, p.365). This mindset was one of the reasons that promoted slavery in northern Igboland as epitomised by one of the proverbs among the Nsukka Igbo which has it that *Ọbụrụ mgbe Nguru n’anwụ Ọbayi, eduru anyinya che isi Nkanu* (If it were the time Nguru people drank water from the Ọbayi ponds, the horses would have been headed to Nkanu). This is a euphemistic way of saying that had it been slavery was still in vogue, the slaves would be sold to those who know how to make the best use of them – including using them as a protein source. This proverb is complemented with a view to making it clearer by an adage that *Nguta bu anụ mee atụ ya bu anụ* (the dog is meat even as its genitals (female) is meat also). This implies that the dog (slave) is a source of protein even as its genital is meat equally). The latter implies that the female slaves were used as sex objects; implying that the slave was dehumanised in all ramifications (*Interview with Paulinus Ugwoke, 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2016*).

In Alor-Uno, there is sharp division in the membership of Christian denominations based on their belongingness to either the *ohu* or *Amadi*. Azubuike Ezugwu, a graduate of History and International Studies, the University of Nigeria Nsukka who is from Alor-Uno surmised that Ejuona people are predominantly Protestants while Ugbene people are predominantly Catholics. Anchoring their convictions on the notion that Catholics are pro-slavery and Protestants are silent on the issue, many people of slave ancestry in Alor-Uno took to the Catholic faith. Thus, the hope that Christianity would bridge the gulf between the two groups based on its teaching of, ‘equality of humanity is defeated. In Alor-Uno, there is a deity called Adoro. This deity is assumed by the Ejuona people to be the supreme deity as well as the territorial angel of Alor-Uno. The Ejuona also are of the opinion that should they allow the Ugbene the type of freedom they are clamouring for, it would amount to a disrespect for Adoro. However, they argue that Adoro stipulated the extent to which they would interact with the Ugbene people. The activities of the mastermind of these acts of salient segregation give credence to the view of Dennis Agbo that “the Ohu are not regarded as free born as they are seen as slaves who are more often than not treated as insignificant human beings by their masters (Agbo, 2017), otherwise called *amu, nwadiala or Amadi*” among the Igbo.

Another area where perpetuation of stigmatisation of people of slave descent still persists is in the traditional political front. For instance, in Lejja community, the village of Dunoka has the statutory role of producing the (Eze), king of the entire community. As a rule, the eldest man from Dunoka becomes the king of the entire Lejja. However, in 2004 following the death of Ugwu Nweze Nwobodo, the position of *Eze Lejja* became vacant. The next to Ugwu Nweze Nwobodo by age is Ugwokeja Okoro and would ordinarily have assumed the position of king of the community. However, a much younger person in the person of Ala Nwaidenyi (alias *Ekwurunti*) was chosen to take over from Ugwu Nweze Nwobodo on the excuse that Okoro was a stranger - a subtle way of linking his ancestry to slaves (*Interview with Onyebuchi Ugwele, 42, Chief Priest of Adada Diety, Lejja, interviewed on March 17, 2017 at Lejja*). However, the people would always justify their actions on the pretext that as a stranger, he was not supposed to offer sacrifices to the gods of the land since he had no ancestral link with such land. This they argue is supported by one of their proverbs that insinuate that *nwa mbunu agogu ndushi* (a stranger or sojourner do not offer sacrifices to the departed progenies of a community). To make matter worse, when in his presence kola nut was brought before the assembly of men (which he belongs marginally) the kola nut would not be shown to him, not to talk of his saying the prayers that accompany kola nut breaking as is customary among the Igbo (*Ugwoke Nwani, c.83, the eldest man of Ugwu Dunoka*

Lejja, interviewed on February 12, 2017 at his Lejja residence). Matters concerning this position became so controversial that the women council (*umuada*) of Dunoka that were supposed to transfer the symbol of authority to the new king from the house of the deceased king were sidelined by the men who in company of the then Catholic Bishop of Nsukka Diocese, who incidentally is from Dunoka village, had to replace the symbol (*aru*) with a crucifix blessed after church service by the Bishop who handed the cross over to Ala Nwaidenyi as the substantive king of Lejja (*Interview with Onyebuchi Ugwele*). This is a typical replay of what obtained in most parts of Igboland with respect to the level of respect accorded the *ohu* by the *amadi*. Citing information got from former slaves in Nkanu and Ezeagu areas of Enugu state, Nigeria observes that ‘the *ohu* could not aspire to a political post or lead a communal meeting. They could not take *ozo* titles nor could they associate with high-ranking title holders in the village’ (Osakwe, 2011, pp. 251-252).

As if to ensure that this old practice is kept alive, the *Amadi* seem to have vowed to distance themselves from the *Ohu* even after all legislations to the contrary. On March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2017, some citizens of Obuno Akpugo in Enugu West Senatorial Zone of Enugu state staged a protest in front of the government house alleging that their fellow citizens of Obuno had been discriminating against them; they see them as slaves. The foremost rationale that sparked the objection was the sudden discovery by a section of the society that out of the thirty kindred units in the area, nineteen were excluded from contesting for the traditional leadership position based on a constitution drafted by the community in 1976. The same constitution, even as discriminatory and exclusionary as it is, was used by a section of the community to convince the state government to appoint Chief Jack Nwatu as the traditional ruler of the community. The protesting group saw the purported election of Nwatu as an imposition. The marginalised group led by Prince Okwuduli Agbo, a contender for the same traditional stool lamented that the use of the said constitution has led his people to be under oppression for more than forty years (Agbo, 2017). Be that as it may, the Jack Nwatu group contend that they are the earliest inhabitants of the community and therefore have the right to produce the leaders of their community as Agbo and his group were late comers.

### Conclusion and recommendation

Igbo, just like most nations in the world has certain traditions, customs, cultures, beliefs and worldviews, which constitute determines their conducts. Most of these traditions are handed over to them from one generation to the other from their great grandfathers. The violation of these beliefs and traditions are seen by most of them as a great abomination (*Aru*), thus creating room for the propagation of some obnoxious practices in the name of tradition. The dichotomy between people of slave ancestry and those not of slave ancestry in Igboland is such that engender an atmosphere of an unending ‘cold war’ and in some instances, violent confrontations. Relations between the two groups have become a topical component of the debates on Igbo local conflict, spirituality, philosophy, social structure and hierarchy (Amadi & Obomanu, 2016). This phenomenon persists because the Igbo have failed to listen to the admonition of Ken Keyes to the effect that conflict resolution is difficult in a situation where the “self-versus-others” prevail in the mentalities of conflicting parties; such mindset creates a jungle of our civilized lives by continuing our “us versus them” mental habits (Keyes, cited in Osakwe, 2011). Until the Igbo discard the idea of asking contemptuously “who is who” and “who came from where”, and base their judgement of a man on his worth and mental alertness and capability and measure humans by their individual contributions to the growth of society, the old notion would persist.

It is an anathema that a people who made laws banning the slave trade and all its accompanying effects and institutions would resurrect the same idea which they legislated against when it comes to marriage, political leadership, taking of social titles and even mere use of roads. That this is happening in the twenty-first century is a testimony that the Igbo have no remorse for their past wrong deeds; an indication that the present crops of Igbo people are acting the script written by their forefathers. That this is a truism is evident in their proverb, *achy ewu n’ubi Q gba n’oba* when the goat is chased away from the farm, it jumps into the barn); a sure way of stating that the Igbo have a way of circumventing the law.



It would be apposite to state that in the relations between people of slave ancestry and those not of slave parentage among the Igbo, both the government and the ex-slaves help in upholding these divides to the advantage of the non-slave elements. For instance, when a former governor of Enugu state wanted to confer a traditional title on a professor of nuclear physics, who comes from Oruku in Nkanu but was at the time residing in the United States, the *amadi* protested the award on the grounds that the professor's origin were *ohu* and the ceremony was stopped (Osakwe, 2011, p.254). For a government that enacted a law prohibiting slavery to stop its own function on account of allegations that one of its awardees is of slave origin, is to say the least ridiculous; a show of lip service to the spirit of the law. This tend to promote social prejudice against ex-slaves as the Declaration of Human Rights does not apply to them since they according to Jean-Paul Sartre are, abandoned without protection to inhuman forces whose outcome produce two sorts of individuals- one for whom privilege and humanity are one, who becomes a human being through exercising his rights; and the other, for whom a denial of rights sanctions misery, chronic hunger, ignorance, or, in general "sub-humanity" (Memmi, 2010, pp.20-21). Hence, retrospection did not alter any of the old perspectives and conceptions of who a slave was. Little wonder Apeh and Oyata (2009, p.942) surmised that legal abolition has not meant effective emancipation in the Western sense of government-enforced civil rights.

As a guide towards eradicating the rancour generated by the nature of relations between the *amadi* and *ohu, osu*, the Igbo should take a cue from their proverbial wisdom. The Igbo proverb which admonishes those who think that human flesh would make delicious meat should pinch their skin to see how painful it feels, should readily come to mind as it preaches morality- do to others what ordinarily you would wish done to you. This moralising proverb has the potential of reducing suffering which falls on a lot of the ex-slaves in the course of nature, or by chance, or by fate as well as eliminating suffering inflicted on them by the *amadi* (Dike, 2002, pp. 9-11). For the *amadi*, they should be reminded of the admonition by Jean-Jacques Rousseau to the effect that; to conclude that the son [daughter] of a man [man-made] slave is born into slavery [and to die as a slave] is to conclude that he [she] is not born a man [woman] (Dike, 2002, p 78). In communities where the *amadi* and *ohu* are living together, the government should ensure balanced representation and security of both parties and even enthrone the principle of rotator leadership between them so as to avoid tussle for leadership on the excuse that one group is sidelined. Since one of the major concerns of the *ohu* is to have an independent settlement, yet they are constrained by their inability to have land to settle on, government before granting them autonomy should first of all map out an area where they are to relocate to avoid the type of rancour witnessed in Oruku/Umuode and Alor-Uno crisis. As for marriage between the groups, denying people the choice of a life partner on the grounds of human induced social stratifications is a tantamount to infringement on the rights of the citizen. On this note, people should be allowed to marry whomsoever the wish.

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