

**Understanding the socio cultural perspectives of Osu Caste system in Umuosu community of Isiala-Ngwa north local government area of Abia State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

*This work attempts a philosophical indept study of socio-cultural perspectives on the Osu Caste in Isiala Ngwa community, The Osu Caste System is an ancient practice in Igbo land that discourages social interaction and participation with a group of people in the society called Osu (Igbo outcast).<sup>1</sup> The ancestors of Osu are believed to be dedicated to the deities and hence they and their generations are considered as inferior people, and are always separated from the Nwadiala or Diala (Igbo free born). They are met with discrimination, stigmatization, dominance, conflicts, battles, hatred, class division, abuse and social ostracism. This social separation forbids them from attaining political classes or from intermarrying with the diala. And this is one of the contemporary issues faced in Umuosu Community in Isi-ala Ngwa LGA, Abia state. Existing studies on the Osu Caste system have looked at the practice from the religious, spiritual, socio-cultural, historical and economic, however, less or no study has been carried out on the philosophical evaluation of the Osu caste system in Umuosu community, Isi-Ala Ngwa North; assessing the past approach on the Osu caste system and its current dispositions. Again the findings appraised other philosophical theories; epistemology, Christian ethics and human rights, which all refuted the stand of inhuman approaches, subordination, hierarchy and discrimination that is posed by the Osu caste system in Umuosu. This study therefore poses as a remedy towards restructuring and reforming the socio-cultural agenda of the Osu caste system, as it presents proposition of structural agendas for change toward the system.*

**Keywords:** Osu Caste System, Diala, Umuosu Community, Philosophy

**Introduction**

The Umuosu Community like every other Igbo community in Nigeria has certain traditions, customs, cultures, beliefs and worldviews, which constitute their dos and don'ts. Most of these traditions are handed over to them from one generation to the other from their great grandfathers. The violation to these beliefs and traditions are seen by most of them as a great abomination (Aru). In this chapter, our main focus and emphasis will basically be on viewing of

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<sup>1</sup> G. T. Basden, *Among the Igbos of Southern Nigeria*. (London: Frank and Cass, 1966), 56.



Umuosu community and the Osu Caste System from several viewpoints so as to expose some of its implications and locus in the community. Also, this chapter will deliberate the interface between Osu caste system and outcastes in Biblical context.

### Westernization and Osu Caste System

Before the arrival of the 'white man' and Christianity, the discriminatory relationship that existed between *Osu* and *Diala* was perceived as normal. Things are gradually changing; the world is beginning to perceive the *Osu* caste system as a form of discrimination. However, the *Osu* fulfilled their lives in the communities by serving the deities. In return, they obtained a reasonable livelihood from proceeds of offerings that pour steadily into the premises of the deities that they served. The coming of the Europeans led to a process of social change and some of the customs of the indigenous Igbo society were beginning to be seen as going contrary to the beliefs of the Europeans. In the past, the tradition of some of the Igbo states, such as Ossomari and Arondizuogu, engaged in communal wars with the intention of procuring captives and slaves. Communities tended to punish their criminals by selling them into slavery.<sup>2</sup>

In some cases, parents were forced by "poverty and hunger" to sell their never-do-well children. During this stone-aged era human sacrifice was common, and slaves were often used for this purpose. According to Isiechi, the dead rulers of Igbo Ukwu were buried together with several slaves as sacrifices. However, the trans-Atlantic slave trade contributed to the frequency of inter-clan wars, which often resulted in neighboring communities raiding each other for slaves and other booties. The *Osu* were forbidden to be combatants in warfare for fear of spilling their blood, which could unleash the wrath of the deities. Some defenseless small communities were often compelled to seek refuge in the premises of nearby shrines in order to avert impending doom when under sudden attack from superior invading forces. Once the deity's high priest acknowledged and granted them protection from attack and harm to the refugees, they were automatically converted to the *Osu* status.<sup>3</sup>

In some circumstances, prisoners captured during inter-communal wars were sold off, and their new owners could elect to enlist some of them to *Osu* status by giving them away as gestures of and placation to a local deity. Other captives could be sold as slaves or become objects of ritual murder, which occurred mostly upon the death of powerful chieftains. However, some war captives preferred the *Osu* status rather than being sold far away to distant lands as slaves. Thus, the population of the *Osu* increased. Evidence suggests that the *Osu* were originally regarded with "respect and honor" apparently because they belonged to the gods. This show of respect for those who attended to the shrines, unfortunately, transformed into social ostracism. The *Osu* were not many in number, however, in the nineteenth century, "their numbers expanded

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<sup>2</sup>Onwubuariri, *Appraising The Osu Caste System In Igbo Land Within The Context Of Complementary Reflection*, 29

<sup>3</sup>Onwubuariri, *Appraising The Osu Caste System In Igbo Land Within The Context Of Complementary Reflection*, 29

and their status deteriorated dramatically, so that they became outcasts, feared and despised” or even abhorred.<sup>4</sup>

With the abolition of slave trade in the nineteenth century (1807) the loss of external outlets for the sale of slaves led to an unprecedented escalation of the practice of using human beings for sacrifice. It was reported that forty slaves were killed and used for sacrifice at the death of Obi Ossai of Aboh, in 1845. As mentioned earlier, there is a strong Igbo belief that the spirits of one’s ancestors keep a constant vigil over him/her. And traditional religion was highly practiced by the traditionalists; thus, the spirits of the all-important ancestors were worshipped through the gods or deities. In addition, the cessation of trans-Atlantic slave trade (and the inculcation of new values from the Europeans), the respect accorded to the *Osu* (because of their role as servants of powerful deities) began to wane.<sup>5</sup>

As noted earlier, the European missionaries began to perceive the ways of the indigenous religious practices as impediments to their mission of spreading the Christian faith. Thus, assault on the Igbo indigenous religious practices was fierce and multi-faceted. Children were effectively indoctrinated in the emerging school system to reject their parents’ traditional way of life, which was characterized as both primitive and barbaric. The children in schools were used effectively as conduits for transforming the rest of the family.<sup>6</sup>

In most cases, parents opted to join their children by converting to Christianity in order to avert major internal family crises. Where such was not the case, the aging parents were simply allowed to die away with their indigenous religious and cultural belief system. The converts to the new faith were used by early missionaries as effective tools for the destruction of cultural artifacts and religious objects like shrines, traditional sculptures and a host of other valuable indigenous artwork. Test of the new converts’ faith in Christianity was usually their ability to destroy any relics of the past within their reach. But the whole of Igbo culture did not lie only in its artistic, cultural and religious artifacts. In spite of all the destruction, the average Igbo person retained the core values of his cultural heritage. Many people became churchgoers on Sundays, but remained loyal to the indigenous culture.<sup>7</sup>

The interest of the British in Nigeria was purely economic; and this took precedence over everything else. The *Osu* caste system, a dynamic offshoot of Igbo indigenous religious practice, remains alive today as the British and their converts could not obliterate the belief system. And as those entrapped in the caste system could not be helped by system of their new Christian faith, they became disillusioned. One of the factors that enabled early Christian missionaries to establish a foothold quickly in the Igbo heartland was their promise to new converts (mostly the *Osu*) that the new order would guarantee equality of rights and opportunities to everyone. But disillusionment (as earlier noted), soon dampened their enthusiasm when it gradually became clear that

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<sup>4</sup> G. T. Basden, *Niger Igbo* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968)

<sup>5</sup> Basden, *Niger Igbo*

<sup>6</sup> Basden, *Niger Igbo*

<sup>7</sup> Basden, *Niger Igbo*

even the “Whiteman’s church” was not powerful enough to stop the discriminatory treatment meted out to them. The *Osu*, at the time in review, were known to have pursued Western education in large numbers. In addition, many joined the new Christian mission as priests and teachers. In spite of these accomplishments, the *Osu*’ right to equal treatment remained unfulfilled, because neither the Christian missionaries nor the sketchy colonial administration in place had what it took to change the attitude of the people at the grassroots level where the *Osu* practice predominates.<sup>8</sup>

Presently, the *Osu* are like refugees who have been abandoned to wonder in the wilderness after being dislodged from their comfortable places as the servers of the deities. The respect and dignity that the *Osu* experienced because of their role within the indigenous religion has now been replaced with a de facto social ostracism from which escape is extremely difficult. Another story has a different version of how the *Osu* system came to be in Igbo-land community. The story had it that an old man told some children who were gathered with him around a camp fire during a cold harmattan morning how a group of traditional elders ganged up to give up one of their own to the gods of the land. (The harmattan is a cold and dry wind blowing down from the north). The storyteller reported that his father told him that there was an agreement among the persons that were gathered for a ritual that one person from the village would be sacrificed to the gods, which would be made to appease the gods of the land that were terrorizing the community. Everyone at the meeting swore in the name of the gods and on the *ofor* (the *ofor* is the bible for those who hold traditional Igbo beliefs) that nobody would disagree with their decisions.<sup>9</sup>

The powerful gods would be made happy so that they would desist from wreaking havoc on the community. The man who was later chosen to attend to the shrines did not know that he was the person that would be selected to perform the task of serving the gods., when the man who was a party to the decision was unanimously selected (to be offered in sacrifice to the deities), he jumped up from his chair and cried, as he knew what his social status would be in the community. After a series of intense rituals were undertaken, the man was transformed and labeled an *Osu* of the land. And his descendants have since inherited his status. The community had to build a hut for him at a market square of the town, as the gods are usually located near a market place in many communities in Igbo-land. Thus, the *Osu* system finds rationalization in Igbo religious beliefs and dogma.<sup>10</sup>

Each time these stories are recounted, it would be easy for any rational person to figure out that they are colored by misconception. It is the opinion of this author that the *Osu* caste system, which has caused a lot misery to many people in Igbo land, originated out of ancient beliefs. All these stories about the *Osu* caste system precede the Chinua Achebe’s popular *Things Fall Apart*, in which the plights of the *Osu* or outcast in Igbo land were vividly, described. No matter

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<sup>8</sup>Basden, *Niger Igbo*

<sup>9</sup>Onwubuariri, *Appraising The Osu Caste System In Igbo Land Within The Context Of Complementary Reflection*, 29

<sup>10</sup>Onwubuariri, *Appraising The Osu Caste System In Igbo Land Within The Context Of Complementary Reflection*, 30

how the *Osu* caste system originated in Igbo land, and no matter its apparent past benefits, it is now the feeling of many peace-loving individuals that the ancient institution, which is an internal apartheid in Igbo land, has outlived its usefulness. To redeem the *Osu* and Igbo society (which practice the obnoxious *Osu* caste system) one should revisit the past so as to explain the rationale behind the once vibrant *Osu* caste culture. The *Osu* caste system remains a sad reminder of the historical past of the Igbo nation. The only way to put those sad memories to rest is to find the ways and means to terminate the discriminatory practices of the *Osu* caste system as it exists today. And with the co-operation of everyone in the Igbo nation, this task can be accomplished.

### **Juxtapositions between *Osu* Caste System and Biblical Outcasts**

One of the major implications of *Osu* Caste that was discussed in the subsequent sections of this work is the social implication; which deals with the social locus ascribed to the *Osu* in the Igbo community and their inter-relationship with the people of the society. As asserted in the previous chapter, the *Osu* are treated as inferior human beings in a state of permanent and irreversible disability and are subjected to various forms of abuse and discrimination. They are made to live separately, from the free born. They reside in most cases, very close to shrines and market places. In extreme cases they are not allowed to dance, drink, hold hands, associate or have sexual relations with *Nwadiala*. Further, they are not allowed to break *Kola* nuts (an offering of peace) at meetings. At the level of spirituality, an *Osu* cannot be allowed to pour libation or pray to the gods on behalf of a freeborn at a community gathering. It is believed that such prayers will bring calamity and misfortune. An *Osu* may find it difficult fulfilling a desire to occupy political position in Igbo-land particularly, where a *Diala* has indicated interest. These discriminatory approaches towards the *Osu* helms on the fact that they have been dedicated to the gods and are considered a property of a god.

Evidence of discrimination against the *Osu* also includes: disinheritance (in a situation where a freeborn marries *Osu*); Ostracism, organized attack, heaping harvest offering separately in churches, denial of membership in social clubs, violent disruption of marriage ceremonies, denial of chieftaincy titles, deprivation of property and expulsion of wives, etc. The discriminations are more pronounced in the area of marriage. An *Osu* cannot marry a freeborn. The belief is that any freeborn that marries an *Osu* defiles the family. Furthermore, we shall be looking at the relationship that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. Similarly to the *Osu* caste system in *Umuosu* community, the concept of social outcaste is predominant in the bible as seen in the underlying historical dichotomy which existed between the Jews (*Diala*) and the Samaritans (who can be said to be considered as *Osu* in this context).

The historical ostracism account between the Jews and the Samaritans presents a corresponding analogy with the *Osu* caste system in Igbo land. This history could be traced towards the time of David and Solomon when the two nations were one (Jews and Samaria). Although the period of David and Solomon as kings of Israel has often grasped the imagination of Bible readers down through the ages. It was a period during which Israel had one king who ruled over both its parts, (Israel in the north and Judah in the south). This was brief when

compared to the following period in which Israel (Samaria) and Judah were each ruled by their kings. At the beginning of the reign of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, the division of the kingdom threatened in 1 Kings 11 actually occurred, according to 1 Kings 12 and 2 Chronicles 10. Rehoboam went to Shechem so that he could be crowned king by "all Israel," but things did not go Rehoboam's way, however.

A man called Jeroboam and the tribal leaders made certain demands to Rehoboam, to which he was not prepared to accede, preferring to listen to the advice of younger contemporaries than to the counsel of older and wiser heads. The assembly for the coronation of Solomon's successor, Rehoboam, was called at Shechem, the one sacredly historic city within the territory of the Ten Tribes. Before the coronation took place, the assembly requested certain reforms in the policy followed by Rehoboam's father, Solomon. The reforms requested would materially reduce the royal exchequer and hence its power to continue the magnificence of Solomon's court. The older men counseled Rehoboam at least to speak to the people in a civil manner (it is not clear whether they counseled him to accept the demands). However, the new king sought the advice from the young men he had grown up with, who advised the king to show no weakness to the people, and to tax them even more, which Rehoboam did.

Although the ostensible reason was the heavy burden laid upon Israel because of Solomon's great outlay for buildings and for the luxury of all kinds, the other reasons include the historical opposition between the north and the south. The two sections had acted independently until David, by his victories, succeeded in uniting all the tribes, though the Ephraimitic jealousy was ever ready to develop into open revolt. Religious considerations were also operative. Mario Liverani states that Jeroboam and the people rebelled, with the ten northern tribes breaking away and forming a separate kingdom. The new breakaway kingdom continued to be called Kingdom of Israel, and was also known as Samaria, or Ephraim or the northern kingdom. The realm Rehoboam was left with was called Kingdom of Judah.

Whatever the case, this schism fuelled Jeroboam's attempt to rival the Jerusalem cult and also involved the building of a temple in Bethel (lit., "house of high places") with its own altar and priesthood as seen in 1 Kgs. 12:31-32. The creation of a new central religious festival, probably intended to rival the Feast of Tabernacles (12:32-33, 1 Kgs. 8:2; Lev. 23:33-43); and the extension of his new cult beyond Bethel and Dan into the rest of his kingdom (1 Kgs. 13:33). Be that as it may, Jeroboam at some point appears to have moved his royal residence from Shechem to Tirzah, a few miles to the northeast (1 Kgs. 14: 17). No doubt this situation is partly connected with the fact that Israel and Judah, according to the authors of Kings, were in a continual state of strife throughout the period immediately after the schism (1 Kgs. 14:30; 15:32). We are also still reminded, however, of the ongoing state of war between north and south. Rehoboam went to war against the new Kingdom of Israel with a force of 180,000 soldiers. However, he was advised against fighting his brethren, and so returned to Jerusalem. The narrative reports that Israel and Judah were in a state of war throughout his 17-year reign. Thus, the kingdoms of 'Israel' and 'Judah' (as they now come to be known) began their separate existences, which continued until first Samaria (the capital of Israel for most of this period) and

then Jerusalem (the capital of Judah) were conquered by invading imperial armies from Assyria and Babylon, respectively.

Samaria was conquered in 724 BCE by the Assyrians; The Assyrian king came up against the whole land and came up against Samaria, besieging it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea's reign, the Assyrian king captured Samaria and exiled Israel to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, by the [River] Habur, [by] the River Gozan, and [among] the cities of the Medes. (2 Kgs 17:5-6) With the population of Samaria and its vicinity deported, the region was settled anew and placed beneath an Assyrian governor. Already diminished in size, the kingdom of Israel was no longer a kingdom at all but rather an Assyrian province, denominated Samaria (Samaritan) according to the city.

After the fall of Samaria in 724 B.C.E., the Assyrian conquerors sent much of the population into exile to be resettled in various parts in the Assyrian empire. The king of Assyria brought pagans into Samaria to settle there (1 Kings 17:24). Interestingly enough, 1 Kings 17:30-31 tells us there were five groups that settled there, each worshipping their own pagan gods: The Babylonians worshipped Marduk; the men of Cuth worshipped Nergal; the men of Avva worshipped Nibhaz and Tartak; the men of Sepharvaim worshipped their city gods; and King Hadad worshipped Anath.

In travelling through this historical lane of the Jews, it is realized that this woman was half Jew, so many of the customs were not applicable to the Samaritans. Remember, as mentioned above, five different nations were dropped off in Samaria, as seen in 2 Kings 17:24, who knew nothing of God, in verse 33, they (Samaritans) feared the Lord but yet "served" their own gods. According to DejiAyegboyin, when the Judeans, who were also deported from the Southern Kingdom to Babylon returned, they looked down upon the Samaritans, whom they regarded as mixed population and therefore could not be regarded as true Hebrews. In 520 B.C, when the Samaritans made an offer of assisting in the rebuilding of temple in Jerusalem, they firmly rebuffed by the Judeans. In retaliation the Samaritans stirred up trouble by getting Persians officials to question the authority of the attempt to rebuild the temple.

Later, the Samaritans also built a temple of their own on mount Gerizim to rival the Jerusalem Temple. In 109 B.C, a Jewish general and leader, John Hyrcanus, destroyed the Samaritans Temple. Even in the time of Jesus, the Jews could not use vessels with the Samaritan because they held that the ceremonial purity of Samaritans could not be relied on. Even when the Samaritans did not receive Him, he rebuked His disciples who asked Him to call down fire on a Samaritan town. He cleansed the grateful leper and made a Samaritan the hero of one of His notable parables.

### **Political Implication of the Osu Caste in Umuosu**

Titles and title taking as an integral component of the socio-political life of the Umuosu people which carry a lot of aura, honor, dignity and recognition in the community. This situation accounts for the desire of many people to be members of the Ozo-title system. Ozo title taking is one of the most important

political institutions in Umuosu-land.<sup>11</sup> The important thing that should be emphasized about Ozo title is the varied kinds of its various stages and modes of acquiring them, and the ceremonies or rituals connected with them.<sup>12</sup> Bosah states emphatically that the ozo title is the highest cultural ambition of the average Umuosu man because it confers on the recipient the traditional order of priesthood and the highest degree of social standing in the community.<sup>13</sup> Egbo described the Ozo title holders as; occupying a position in Umuosu-land comparable to the Peerage in English society, with the same social prestige of 'lord' in the society, as indicated in the new title name the man is given at the successful end of the title taking.<sup>14</sup>

Up till date, many people still go for the title taking in spite of all that Christianity has against it. They see the stages of the title-taking as unchristian hence, the condemnation by the church especially at the arrival of Christianity.<sup>15</sup> One of the enormous social segregation between an *Osu* and the free-borns is prevalent in the case of making an *Osu* a chief or king over the freeborn in Umuosu. It is a sheer abomination in Umuosu community till date to coronate an *Osu* or to crown any untouchable or slaves a king that will rule over the free-born even if the person is the most eligible person for the seat in the community or land. The people would rather choose a mediocre or an unqualified person to rule them instead of seeing them being ruled by a known slave of the gods (*Osu*).

The ill implication of this is that it can easily lead to the wrong selection of leaders in the community. Because the people in the bid of rejecting the qualified *Osu* may enthrone the wrong candidate who in most cases lead them to an unanticipated doom. MaziChinyereUkabuzo in an interview made the following assertions "I witness a situation where a well-educated man was acceded to the traditional chieftaincy title of this community, this man is overtly overflowing with benevolence, integrity, dynamism, thus, he was very popular. But some people protested, claiming that he was said to be an *osu* and as such should not rule over the freeborn. They therefore chose a less qualified and unqualified illiterate as the rightful candidate"<sup>16</sup>

The issue of coronating an *Osu* a king in Igbo land is among the social segregative issues in *Osu* caste system that has lingered and devoured any possible solution till date. But these views do not stop an *osu* from being the chief or king in any *Osu* kingdom as it does not stop them also from becoming

<sup>11</sup> I. Ogbukagu, Traditional Igbo Beliefs and Practices. A case study on cultural people of Adazi-Mnukwu, (Owerri: Novelty Industrial Enterprises Ltd, 1993) 63

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 30

<sup>13</sup> R.T. Bosah, A Ground work of the History and culture of Onitsha, Onitsha: Ifechukwu Lodge, 1988, 153

<sup>14</sup> E. O. Egbo, Conflict between Tradition Religion and Christianity in Igbo land-Southern Nigeria. West African Religion, (Nsukka: University Press. 1971) 13

<sup>15</sup> Paul OkeyEnwonwu, Christianity And Socio-Cultural Practices In Onitsha Contemporary Society, University Of Nigeria Research Publications; Social Sciences, Religion; PG/Ph.D/03/34177; June, 2007

<sup>16</sup> MaziChinyereUkabuzo, An officer in Ministry of Tourism, Abia State, Interview by the researcher, Aba, 25<sup>th</sup> December 2021



leaders of association like churches, clubs, institutions and so forth. From the issue of making an *osu* a chief, also comes the issue of showing or giving cola nut to the *osu*. Due to the high esteem which the Igbo's held cola nut, it becomes a misdeed for a person to show cola nut to an *osu* in the presence of visitors or to give a cola nut to an *osu* who visited a freeborn. According to Elder D. O. Arungwa, "the reason for this discrimination is because there is never a time an *Osu* is welcomed in the house of a *Diala*. In many social gatherings, by the time cola nuts are broken and eaten, an *Osu* is made to be aware that he is a stranger being manly tolerated".<sup>17</sup>

*Osu* as at this time are regarded as inferior beings and as such should not be given a cola nut by the freeborn nor is it pertinent for an *Osu* to give cola nut to the freeborn in Umuosu community and even Igbo land at large. Meanwhile, it will be germane to bear in mind that there are other issues of social segregation between the world of the *Osu* and the world of the freeborn like the issue of belonging to the same age grade and age group, cultural dancing going to the same market, and so forth. Most of these practices have been dead and buried. However, Mr. C. O. Drueke writing in the Sunday Times newspaper in June 13, 1985 made a seemingly summary of the whole issue of social segregation of *Osu* from the freeborn when he said thus: the *Osu* in Umuosu community were sequestered from the society and as such suffered total ostracism.<sup>18</sup>

They could not sleep under the same roof with the so-called freeborn citizens called *Diala*. They neither ate from the same pots nor drank with the same cup with the citizens. Marriage between the two groups in Umuosu was and is still a taboo. Children of the free born are forbidden to see the corpse of an *Osu* in Umuosu community. An *Osu* could not be chief of any village in Umuosu. If the corpse of an *Osu* was to be carried through the village of a *Diala*, palm frond was placed everywhere to warn the people that evil was in the air and a bad event was to happen. If an *Osu* had a sexual intercourse with a *Diala* woman in Umuosu community, the offending woman was to be dragged to the *Osu* to marry for free. Under no circumstances would a *Diala* run into the compound of an *Osu* even if it was raining or he was being chased with gun or machete, if one did so, he or she automatically becomes *Osu* in Umuosu community."<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, these segregations in the social interactions between an *Osu* and the *Diala* has attracted a whole lot of ill social implications and repercussion. For instance, the segregation can easily lead to marital problems as well as wrong selection of one's life partner. There is a story of a young man and woman in Umuosu community, who become friends from their cradles only to find out that they cannot marry each other because one of them is an *Osu* branded person. This forcefully made them to live each other and marry different persons whom they do not only hate but whose life styles were different from theirs. This in turn led to marital problems because people are

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<sup>17</sup> Elder D. O. Arungwa, Former Principal of Adventist Secondary Technical College (ASTE) Owerri, Interview by researcher, Aba, 25<sup>th</sup> December 2021

<sup>18</sup> C. O. Durueke, "Notes on the *Osu* System Among the Igbos of Owerri, Nigeria, Africa," in Sunday Time Newspaper. June 13, 1985.

<sup>19</sup> Durueke, "Notes on the *Osu* System Among the Igbos of Owerri, Nigeria, Africa,"

not allowed to marry a person of their choice. More so, there is another case of a couple who married for more than ten years with children, only to divorce each other immediately one of them found out that the other person is an *Osu*.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, apart from the fact that it can lead to the wrong selection of a community leader or chief, it can bring about an age long hatred. What is meant here is that *Osu* having seen themselves as inferior beings because of their *Osu* stigma, may in turn see the freeborn as devils and external enemies which may even lead to killing the freeborn or do any other harm to them especially when they are reminded of their stigma or when they are called by the name by the Dialas. It is from this antecedent that one does not easily mention or call anybody by the name anyhow.

Besides, the social segregation of the *Osu* from the freeborn may lead to political apathy in Umuosu community. Like in the case of the blacks in South Africa as well as the black Americans in those days, the *Osu* having been seen as the rejects of the Umuosu society may in most cases loose interest in the political or the politics of the Land, because they may think that since they are unrecognized and ineligible citizens, they cannot be elected into any political position or seat nor can they elect anybody in any political seat in the society. Thus, for them it is pointless to involve themselves in the political affairs of the society. This no doubt will go a very long way in causing a lot of political and social upheavals and mishaps in the society.<sup>21</sup>

More so, in most cases, the segregation of the *Osu* from the freeborn socially can hinder the socioeconomic wellbeing of the society, because the *Osu* having being segregated from the freeborn, or having been seen as turds, may refuse to bring in their own quota both in the social and economic spheres of the societal development and this to a very large extent will hinder development, improvement in the society both economically and otherwise.<sup>22</sup>

#### **A philosophical appraisal of Osu caste system in Umuosu:**

As the crux of the matter, in this chapter, we shall appraise or justify the fore going Osu Caste by using or from the point of view of complementary reflection and some of its intrinsic tenets and concepts like, Christian ethics, philosophical assessment and the human right. What this simply means is that in this chapter, we shall know as well as unveil the significant role played or that can be played by the concept of ethical complementary reflection to ensure the eradication of class division, segregation and so forth, which are intrinsic dimensions of Osu caste system.

#### **Christian Ethics and Osu Caste System**

A high view of human beings is central to the Christian worldview. According to John Witte, the Western intellectual tradition owes much to

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<sup>20</sup>Durueke, "Notes on the Osu System Among the Igbos of Owerri, Nigeria, Africa,"

<sup>21</sup>Onwubuariri, *Appraising The Osu Caste System In Igbo Land Within The Context Of Complementary Reflection*, 27

<sup>22</sup>Onwubuariri, *Appraising The Osu Caste System In Igbo Land Within The Context Of Complementary Reflection*, 29

the historical influence of Christianity, including the development of rights theories.<sup>23</sup> These initial rights theories were based in 'natural law' that is, the prescriptive law of God which is written in our hearts and minds (our conscience), so that we may follow God's commands (Romans 2:14-15).

Christianity teaches that man is a special creation of God and has been blessed with certain natural (or human) rights. Human beings have a certain dignity and were given dominion over the rest of creation (Genesis 1:26), because we are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). God made human beings in His own image, and as God's image-bearers, human beings are personal, moral, and spiritual beings. We have volition, freedom of choice, self-consciousness, self-transcendence, self-determination, and rationality. Moreover, we have an innate capacity for relationships that characterize the image of the triune God. Thus, the image of God includes all facets of the human being; spiritual, psychological, moral, emotional, physical and relational. As the Nigerian founding fathers expressed in their Declaration of Independence (1960): 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.'<sup>24</sup>

The Bible teaches that all human beings, because of their conscience, are capable of doing the right thing even though they are not practicing Christians and despite having little or no knowledge of Christian morality and ethics (Romans 2:14-15). Similarly, the Bible also teaches that all human beings have an inherent sense of what is morally wrong, but we often suppress this knowledge despite divine general revelation and natural law (Romans 1:18-23). Thus, according to the Christian point of view, natural law imposes behavior and character standards on all human beings in accordance with God's will as revealed in the teachings of the Bible. According to the Bible and Biblical Christian theology, unlike animals, all human beings; past, present and future are special creations of God, made in His image (Genesis 1:26-27). Therefore, all human beings have innate worth and dignity, and are equally precious and valuable. It is on this basis that human beings are deserving of special protections in the form of human rights. Christian ethics also brings freedom. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) capture the very essence of the Christian ethic. These commands are either prohibitions (e.g. "You shall not murder") or very specific commands (e.g. "Honor your father and mother"). The same can be said for all the other ethical and ceremonial laws in the Torah. Apart from these constraining laws, we are free to do as we please through the exercise of our reason and conscience.

The word 'discrimination' in Christian sense carries many negative connotations. However, according to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary, its

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<sup>23</sup> John Witte, Jr. and Justin J. Latterell, Christianity And Human Rights: Past Contributions And Future Challenges Source, *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (October, 2015), pp. 353-385 (Cambridge University Press)

<sup>24</sup> Andrew S Kulikovsky, Christianity And Human Rights, *The Western Australian Jurist*, Vol 9, No 6, 185

primary meaning is “to recognize a distinction.” In all areas of life, human beings discriminate on daily basis. The issue here with respect to the Christian ethics is whether the subject of discrimination is justified. The Apostle Paul taught that there is “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Elsewhere he stated: “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Colossians 3:11). In Christianity, when it comes to our human dignity and innate worth, there is no racial or ethnic discrimination, no social discrimination, and no sexual discrimination. Genesis 1:27 also indicates that the true expression of God’s image is reflected in both the male and the female, together.<sup>25</sup>

Biblical Christianity teaches that all humanity came from Adam and Eve, the first man and the first woman. Thus, racism should be seen as truly scandalous. All human beings are related to one another and all are image bearers of God regardless of their skin color or physical characteristics.<sup>38</sup> In fact, the Bible never talks about ‘races.’ It refers to ‘families,’ ‘clans,’ ‘tribes’ and ‘nations’ (cf. Genesis 12:2; Joshua 7:14). The variation in human characteristics and skin color presently observed is merely a result of ‘genetic drift’ and/or loss of genetic information brought about by environmental pressure and/or genetic concentration as a result of population isolation. In addition, the Bible teaches that God does not show favoritism (Acts 10:34) and neither should we (James 2:1-4).

#### **Philosophical Assessment of Osu Caste System**

This section assesses the philosophy of *Osu* Caste system, using the existential theory. Existentialism was the most influential contemporary philosophy in the post-world war II. It was very influential for many reasons. First, it is concerned primarily with human existence and experience. Second, it was very influential because philosophers of this school did not limit themselves to technical philosophical wittings. Third, it gained popularity immediately after the World war II; after the war most people began to talk about the fatality of war and about human existence. The man who is considered as the father of modern existentialism is Soren Kierkegaard. It was Kierkegaard who gave a peculiar meaning to the word existence.<sup>26</sup>

Existentialists believe that philosophy should be derived from personal experience and that philosophers should be part of his philosophy; he should see himself mirror in his own philosophy. It is worthy to note that existentialism is different from the traditional philosophy. While traditional philosophy concerns itself with objectivity, existentialism dwells on subjectivism. Also, while traditional philosophy is concerned with abstract thinking, existentialism deals with the concrete thinking; traditional philosophy

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<sup>25</sup> Jeff Myers, *Understanding the Culture: A Survey of Social Engagement* (U.S.A: Summit Press, 2017) 81-85.

<sup>26</sup>G. A. Oshitelu, *Religion, God and Evil: Issues in Philosophy and Religion*, (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2010), 140

is incline towards reason, rational aspect of man while existentialism focuses on the affective and emotional aspect of life.<sup>27</sup>

In existentialism, stone, tree, God do not exist but only human being exists. This shows that existence has a peculiar meaning. To exist for the existentialist is to be conscious of one's freedom and of one's life. The two key works of existentialism are individual freedom and personal responsibility.<sup>28</sup>

To properly understand this theory, it should be noted that firstly, existentialism is a revolt against the impersonal nature of the modern industrial or technological age, against the mass movement of our time. Industrial society subjugated man toward rigid labor and in place of machine, man toils and writhes in place of mechanical tools. Hence, existentialism acts as a revolt against dehumanization of man. Secondly, existentialism is concerned with man's predicament. Thirdly, it stresses the awareness of being of existence. For the existentialist, the value of living occurs through recognition of the individual; the "I" rather than the "it". Fourthly, existentialism believes that man is not driven. He creates his own life and therefore, man is totally responsible for his choices.<sup>29</sup>

Using the framework of the above theory, the concept of *Osu* caste is rationally driven and not focused on emotion. It theoretically engrossed rather than subjectivity inclination. In other words, the system is shaped with the hypothetical concept of socio-cultural settings and has no fixation for the existence of human being, hence, the subordination. Similarly, this study views the *Osu* caste system from the epistemological lens which is a branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, particularly its foundations, scope and validity. Using epistemological approach, the study probe the nature, foundation, the method, the validity, the extent and limits of man about his knowledge of God. One of the areas of focus of epistemology in relation to religion is the problem of demarcating the distinction between beliefs in God from knowledge of God.<sup>30</sup> For example, the distinction between "*I believe in God*" and "*I know that God exists*" These are two different things because what makes something a belief is different from what makes it a piece of knowledge. From the above theory, one terms to probe the knowledge, attitude and practices of the Umuosu community towards the existence of God. The implication of this is manufactured in a probable hypothesis, which will imply that their theological beliefs is either built on falsehood or they lie on the bedrock of religious ignorance. According to St. Augustine's epistemological argument on theodicy, he notes that religion depends solely on the existence of a supreme being who sees nothing less than equality among his creature. St. Augustine notes that man can never err or go contrary to these rules except through ignorance.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Oshitelu, *Religion, God and Evil*, 141

<sup>28</sup>Oshitelu, *Religion, God and Evil*, 141

<sup>29</sup>Oshitelu, *Religion, God and Evil*, 142

<sup>30</sup>Jacob Kehinde Ayanayo, *Rudiment of Research and Research in Religious Studies*, Ibadan: Samprint and Graphic and Co, (2015), 174-175

<sup>31</sup>Oshitelu, *Religion, God and Evil*, 156

Therefore, in assessing epistemological approach of the *Osu* caste system in Umuosu, it is viable to conclude that the socio-cultural dispositions of *Osu* caste system is a subject to theological ignorance or fib socio-religious dispensations

### **The Osu Caste System and Legal Human Rights**

By virtue of section 42 sub-sections 1 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria:

1. A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion, or political opinion, shall not, by reason only that he is such a person:
  - a. be subjected either expressly by, or in the practical application of any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government, to disabilities or restrictions to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, place of origin, sex, religion, or political opinion are not made subject, or
  - b. be accorded either expressly by, or in the practical application of any law in force in Nigeria or any such executive or administrative action, any privilege or advantage that is not accorded to citizens of Nigeria or other communities, ethnic group, place of origin, sex or political opinion.
2. No citizen of Nigeria shall be subjected to any disability or deprivation merely by reason of the circumstances of his birth.

The Nigerian Constitution should be the Supreme Law of the land, legally meaning that any other norm, rule or even precedent to the contrary, to such extent is null.<sup>32</sup> The aforesaid section 42, sub-section 1 and 2 prohibits all forms of discrimination in its entirety. It further goes in depth to forbid any “practical application of any law in force in Nigeria in relation thereto. These provisions put any policy or rule, be it executive or administration at a great legal difficulty. Legally, the real intendment of the Constitution is to abolish any shed of discrimination in accordance with norms of international law, permitting of no exception that is not in the living spirit of the law.

The section 42 provision is doubly padded. On the one pad, it prohibits “disabilities or restrictions” that any citizen may be subjected to. It proactively protects any disadvantage a citizen may suffer on grounds of ethnic groups, place of origin, sex, religion, or political opinion. On the other pad, it abhors “any privilege or advantage” that may unduly accrue to a citizen that is not spread across board to other Nigerians, but are rather based on ethnic groups, place of origin, sex or political opinion.

Any gain that is unjustly awarded and any deprivation that is unjustly suffered are abhorred by the supreme law of the land. Also, Article 2 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights provides:

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<sup>32</sup>The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria is merely an addendum to Decree 24 of 1999 of a departing dictatorial military regime and is not a product of “We the People of Nigeria”.

*Every individual shall be entitled to the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms recognized and guaranteed in the present Charter without distinction of any kind such as race, ethnic group, color, sex, language, religion, political or any other opinion, national or social origin, fortune, birth or other status.*<sup>33</sup>

This provision has a wider reach, it includes “fortune”, “language”, “any other opinion,” and “other status.” Since Nigeria has domesticated this instrument, it has become part of its laws though its status in the hierarchy of laws is yet to be firmly determined. But the combined effect of s.42 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria and Article 2 of the African Charter is to exclusively prohibit without exception any form of discrimination on any citizen of Nigeria.<sup>34</sup>

It is a pivotal principle of international human rights law that no one shall be subjected to undue discrimination i.e., a right must not be vouchsafed or denied by reference to distinction “of any kind such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” This provision which prohibits “property” as a ground of discrimination is found in Article 2 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, 1948. Same prohibition is found in Article 7 of the instrument when it provides that “all are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.”<sup>35</sup>

Again, the principle is endorsed in the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Article 3 binds states parties “to ensure the equal rights of men and women” to the enjoyment of all its civil and political rights. Most importantly, this provision is found enacted in the UN Charter, the third purpose of the organization being defined to include “promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Proposition of Structural Agendas for Change toward the Osu Caste System**

The crucial step of trying to find solution to the Osu issue in Igbo land should start with the society recognizing that the problem exists and then muster the will to tackle it. If the society fails to see the problem, then it cannot confront it. And without effecting some positive changes in the mentality of those who are in support of the system, no ‘sermon on the mount’ or institutional sledgehammer would solve this longstanding social problem in Igbo land. The

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<sup>33</sup>The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria is merely an addendum to Decree 24 of 1999 of a departing dictatorial military regime and is not a product of “We the People of Nigeria”.

<sup>34</sup>O. W. Igwe and G. O. Akolokwu, The Scar that Has Resisted Erasal: The Discrimination of Osu of Igboland, Nigeria-Assessing the Human Rights Implications, *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* Vol. 4 No. 1; (January 2014), 281

<sup>35</sup>Igwe and Akolokwu, The Scar that Has Resisted Erasal, 281

<sup>36</sup>Igwe and Akolokwu, The Scar that Has Resisted Erasal, 281

Igbos can move away from this primitive aspect of their good culture, if they have the resolve to deal with the problem. The agenda for change proposed here reflects a serious assessment of the *Osu* caste challenge in Nigeria's social progress. This paper therefore recommends the following seven requirements that would enable Nigeria, and the Igbos in particular, to progress in the 21st Century. They are, in addition to legislative mandates, education of the masses, mass media campaigns, involvement of religious institutions, genuine contact and dialogue, individual therapy, and enforcement of the law.

**Education:** One of the steps towards eradicating the *Osu* caste problem is education. The main purpose of education is to remedy ignorance. Education will involve a transformation of the citizenry, and making them aware of their rights and duties in the society. They should understand their own rights and the rights of other citizens, so as to recognize when their rights and those of the others are violated. They should also be educated on how to operate and behave in a democracy. The majority of those who support the *Osu* system reside in the villages. Since the village remains the bastion of strong habits regarding the *Osu*, the campaign must start there. They should be the main targets of this enlightenment campaign, which if properly done, would help to eradicate prejudice and discrimination in the society.

If you educate the people, you create awareness, reduce ignorance, and in turn increase social interaction. The *Osu* caste system has its roots in attitudes and behaviors that are widely shared among some of the people in Igbo land. It is true that old habits are hard to break. But there is need for the campaign to be consistent and continuous. Respect for people's rights begins from the institutions that an individual is exposed to during the person's formative years (the home, school, church, etc). Planting the right ideas in the minds of the youths would help to destroy the stereotypes that surround the *Osu*. In other words, it would help them to develop friendly attitudes towards this group. The more educated the society is, the easier and quicker it would be to find solutions to this social cankerworm. However, the teachers should not be left alone to perform this important task of educating the youths.

The government (federal, state and local) should also take part in this crusade. It should create an enabling environment (good policies and implementations) which would empower the oppressed and enhance their ability to legally challenge the ancient *Osu* caste tradition. With appropriate legislation and good court systems, the people could seek redress in court if their rights are violated. People have the choice to cry out for solutions to the teething social problems, or remain as they have been. Life is full of making choices and *differentiating among optional actions, precisely on value grounds*.

### Legislation

Another step to eradicating the *Osu* culture in Igbo land is through appropriate legislation. The legislators are elected to make laws for the benefit of all in the society. And the elected officials at the federal, state and local levels have important role to play in the form of enacting appropriate and enforceable laws to protect those facing discrimination in the society. There is a considerable



difference between a law on the book and a law in action; any law is dead if it is not implemented.

Review of the Nigerian political history shows that in the mid-50s, the then Eastern Nigerian Colonial Legislative Council under the leadership of the late Owelle of Onitsha, Dr. NnamdiAzikiwe, passed a legislation that outlawed the *Osu* caste system. The law made it a criminal offense to discriminate against anyone on the basis of the *Osu* caste system. But the law, like other laws in Nigeria, was rendered impotent, as it was not enforced.<sup>37</sup> But that was in the 1950's. Although Nigeria faces many problems today, the country is now more advanced than the Nigeria of the 1950s. The law was not enforced, apparently for many reasons:

- i).The society was not then very conscious of human rights issues, as the society was still battling with colonialism and its hangovers;
- ii) The enforcers could see the law as going contrary to Igbo culture (in some areas - as in Igbo land - the culture/public pressure could be strong enough to restrain the officials from implementing the law); and
- iii) Partly because those who are discriminated against could not complain to the authorities; this is because, sometimes it is easier to walk away when you are being discriminated against.<sup>38</sup>

However, that the law was unenforceable then does not mean that better legislated and enforceable laws against the *Osu* system would not be effective in this 21st century. This author would recommend that States from the former Eastern Region should re-visit the *Osu* caste law crafted in the 1950's and make it enforceable. Alternatively the present National Assembly should adopt bills that would outlaw any form of discrimination in Nigeria, and in particular the *Osu* caste system in Igbo land. The bills should include penalties for violation. For instance, any person who discriminates against any other person based on the *Osu* caste issue should pay a fine and serve a jail term, as may be prescribed by the people. Strict and enforceable penalties could deter violators of the law. And the nation should work harder to re-establish her ethical, moral capacity, and credibility by opposing bad policies. Without good policies the society would not progress. Legal prods are necessary to solve the *Osu* caste issue in Igboland. And the time is now.

### **The Mass Media**

Curiously, the mass media seems willing to overlook this difficult, but controversial *Osu* issue. But for anything to be possible in this campaign against the system, the mass media has an important and active role to play. It could do it in the form of disseminating appropriate information to the public. The mass media should lead the grassroots enlightenment campaign against the *Osu* practice in the society and educate the people on how to obey the laws of the land. They should educate both the victims – the ascribed *Osu* and the oppressor – the *Diala*, of their civil and human rights and what they should do when their

<sup>37</sup>Okenwa R Nwosu.,; “*Osu Caste System: A Cultural Albatross for the Igbo Society*” Online publication: [www.nigeriaworld.com](http://www.nigeriaworld.com) (Accessed January 19, 2022).

<sup>38</sup>Nwosu.,; “*Osu Caste System: A Cultural Albatross for the Igbo Society*”

rights are violated (for example, seeking legal redress). The society, which has long been under the claws of the military, has a long way to go in learning how to respect the civil and human rights of the people, and to obey the rule of law. It is the responsibility of the mass media to report cases of human rights abuses to the appropriate quarters for necessary investigations and prosecution. This would help to promote and protect the civil and human rights of the citizenry.

### **Religion**

The role of religion in every society is paradoxical. It seems make and unmake prejudice and discrimination. Many political leaders, commentators, scholars, and the general public are now viewing religious elements in public discourse as a tool to divide society. But any effort to banish religion in public affairs for politics sake would lead the nation astray because religious education could help the society in many ways. Religion matters to people and it matters a lot. A truly religious faithful is a good individual. Religious teaching can make a difference on how to tackle the *Osu* system, as religion could have some influence on people's behavior. It can change the mentality of the people and the way they perceive the *Osu* system. The question is, if individuals seek God's blessing in their undertaking why would they wish others evil? As noted earlier, if you hate and discriminate against any person, you are definitely not wishing the person well. Thus, the good morality of yesteryears is gradually eroding. The love for one another should be the moral foundation on which to build the nation. Religious organizations could affect some positive changes in the people if they are consistent in the campaign for the re-education of the Nigerian population. They used to be very important moral forces in human affairs. Presently, the moral messages from religious institutions have been less forceful than what they used to be. The churches should begin again to teach the youths that hate and discrimination are wrong. They should condemn the *Osu* caste system in Igbo land without reservation.

### **Contact and Dialogue**

Social contact and dialogue, which will develop once the social re-education has been made, can make a lot of difference. The society should work together to ensure that the recommendations listed here are implemented. Does any person who is not a member of the *Osu* group have knowledge of the pain and agony the ascribed *Osu* group go through daily? Some people would admit to holding a variety of unpleasant *Osu* stereotypes: that the *Osu* is dishonest, dirty, has body odor, lazy, aggressive, etc. How then can one destroy these stereotypes without interacting with them? Most of the stereotypes held by the *Diala* are due to loss of contact with this rejected *Osu* group. For this, social contacts are good steps to erasing the ugly stereotypes. Social programs that encourage contacts with rejected groups are necessary to eradicate the prevailing stereotypes about them.

Contacts and acquaintances make for friendliness. When people dismantle the social barriers to relationship and find out that they have everything in common, discrimination would disappear. The government (federal, state, and local) should sponsor programs that would encourage interaction and understanding among groups. Communication could help to break up barriers with groups that are quarantined and socially imprisoned. Dialogue between

the Diala and those wrongly branded *Osu* (second class citizens or sub-human beings) could help in understanding one another better. Obviously, people cannot understand each other unless they interact with one another amicably.

### **Individual Therapy**

Those who have problems respecting the civil and human rights of their fellow human beings should consider seeking some individual therapy. Individual therapy is said to be foreign in Africa, apparently because Africans do not want strangers to know their personal problems. The government should set up counseling centers where those who could not afford private therapy should go for some mental re-adjustment and get some education on the importance of respecting other people's human and civil rights. They should be informed that the *Osu* caste system is a form of discrimination. The counseling centers could be operated by religious organizations. The preaching and counseling in the centers could help to change the mentality and attitude of the ignorant and illiterate population who are propagating the *Osu* caste system. This idea may look impracticable from the surface. But a closer look would show that the minds of the die-hards and those who are sitting on the fence could be altered through education and therapy, before they could appreciate the havoc their negative belief and the caste discrimination has caused those who are subjected to it.

### **The Court and the Law Enforcement**

The Nigerian judicial system, like every other system in parts of the society, is known to be corrupt. Consequently, corruption, crime, and human and civil rights violations continue with impunity. Government often appoints supposedly high-powered judicial commissions to probe notorious cases of public corruption or misconduct, but reports of such investigations will either not be made public, or a watered-down version of the report would be released "in the form of a government white paper". Thus, many advertised steps for combating corruption in Nigeria are deceptive and symbolic.

The legal institutions should be restructured and equipped to handle corruption and discrimination cases, particularly those that involve the *Osu* caste issue. Above all, only people of probity should be allowed on the bench to enforce the laws of the land. No law in the book is useful if it is not implemented. In conclusion, the golden rule should be, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The ancient, dehumanizing, anti-social, anti-democracy and superstitious *Osu* caste system in Igbo society should be discarded. And every God-fearing individual should join hands in this campaign.

### **Conclusion**

From the outset of this discussion, it has become clear that the *Osu* caste system, as one of the ancient Igbo land's religious practices, has a slew of inherent problems and negative consequences, as this paper has attempted to demonstrate in the various chapters above. The challenges caused by the *Osu*

caste system have existed from the beginning of time. Several people, both scholars and non-scholars, have attempted to solve the dilemma, but the saddest part is that the more they strive to answer the problem, the more difficult it becomes. The issues that are being discussed here are preventing *Osu* from marrying freeborn and vice versa, as well as making an *Osu* a chief or king over the freeborn. These two problems have resulted in a million plus other social issues such as social segregation, stigmatization, dehumanization, wars, enmity, and so on, which not only impede socio-economic, socio-cultural, and socio-political growth, but also almost every other aspect of social development in the areas where they are practiced.

As a result, this study proposes that in order to alleviate the problem of the *Osu* caste system, there should be structural agendas for change toward the *Osu* Caste System. It is worthy to note that everyone is significant, and that everyone's initiative, whether positive or bad, is required for the attainment of the society *summumbonum*, which may be defined as everyone's pleasure and societal growth.

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